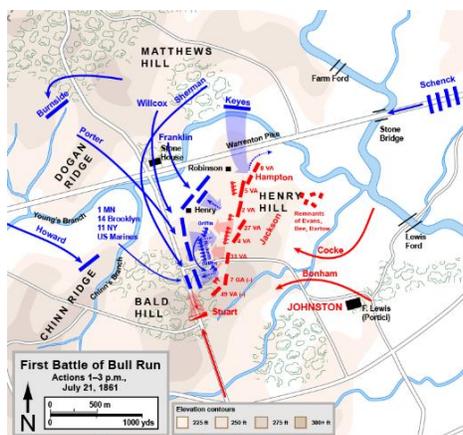


RAO

BULLETIN

15 July 2016



PDF Edition

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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.

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*** DoD ***



Transgender Troops ► Gender Change Policy | The New Rules

Transgender people can serve openly in the U.S. military, effective immediately. In an historic and controversial move, the Pentagon on Thursday lifted its longstanding ban on transgender troops and began outlining how the military will begin allowing — and paying for — service members to transition, medically and officially, from one gender to another. Now transgender troops will no longer be considered “medically unfit” for military service. By October, transgender troops may begin an official process to change gender in the military personnel management systems. The Pentagon will pay for health care support related to gender transition in cases where a military medical doctor determines that is necessary, according to the new policy.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced the new policy after a year of contentious debate inside the Pentagon as some senior military leaders questioned the impact on readiness. Carter firmly rejected those readiness concerns and said the change will ultimately improve the quality of the force. "The policies we're issuing today will allow us to access talent of transgender service members to strengthen accomplishment of our mission," Carter said at a Pentagon press briefing. “We have to have access to 100 percent of America’s population for our all-volunteer force to be able to recruit from among them the most highly qualified — and to retain them,” Carter said.

Many details remain unclear. Senior military leaders will have 90 days to draw up a detailed implementation plan that will address issues that include:

- How the military health system will provide care to transgender troops, to include medical support for gender transitions.

- When a transgender service member will begin adhering to a different gender's grooming standards and uniform-wear rules.
- How and when a transgender service member will transition to new physical fitness standards.
- When a commander should consider moving transgender soldiers into alternative barracks or berthing quarters.
- How unit-level commanders should address a range of issues related to deployments, job assignments and training that may arise among troops undergoing gender transition.
- How troops can undergo the bureaucratic process for changing their gender marker in the official Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, known as DEERS.

The intent of the policy is that troops will undergo most or all of the changes simultaneously, but commanders will have discretion to grant exemptions. For example, a commander might allow a transgender service member to wear an alternative uniform before the official "gender marker" is changed in the military personnel system. By early 2017, the services will begin conducting forcewide training about transgender service members for commanders, military doctors, recruiters and the rank-and-file force. The new policy sets a deadline of one year, or July 2017, for the military to begin allowing transgender recruits to enlist or be commissioned into the officer corps.

Under the policy, the services can continue to reject prospective recruits who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria — feeling that one's biological gender is the opposite of the one he or she identifies with emotionally and psychologically — unless a doctor certifies the individual has been treated and “stable” for at least 18 months and does not suffer from any significant distress or other impairment. Prospective recruits who have undergone medical treatment associated with gender transition such as gender reassignment surgery or hormone therapy will require a doctor's approval to certify they have been stable in their preferred gender for at least 18 months.

Many transgender individuals choose not to seek gender reassignment surgery so there is no requirement that official gender and physical genitalia match for troops or recruits. Defense officials estimate there are between 2,500 and 7,000 transgender troops in today's active-duty force of 1.3 million people. “Although relatively few in number, we're talking about talented and trained Americans who are serving their country with honor and distinction,” Carter said Thursday. “We invest hundreds of thousands of dollars to train and develop each individual, and we want to take the opportunity to retain people whose talent we've invested in and who have proven themselves,” Carter said.

A year of change. One year ago, Carter announced plans to study the issue of transgender service and to update the Pentagon's policy. Since then, dozens of transgender troops have revealed their condition to their commanders, knowing they were putting their careers at risk. “The reality is that we have transgender service members serving in uniform today, and I have a responsibility to them and their commanders to provide them both with clearer and more consistent guidance than is provided by current policies,” Carter said.

Minimal costs. Carter said the costs of the new policy would be minimal. He pointed to a recent study by the Rand Corp. that concluded there will be “minimal readiness impacts” and the health care costs would amount to “an exceedingly small proportion” of the overall military health care expenditures. The overall the cost of providing health care to treat gender dysphoria will probably run between \$40,000 and \$50,000 over the lifetime of an individual service members, defense official say. The Defense Department must weigh those costs against the costs of training individual service members, which often runs upward of \$200,000 depending on the career field. “Losing the benefit of that hundreds of thousands of dollars in training, for the savings of \$40,000 to \$50,000 in lifetime cost, it doesn't seem like a very good trade off to us,” said a senior defense official who asked not to be identified when speaking about the Pentagon's internal deliberations. In short, Carter is instructing the military health system to treat gender dysphoria like any other medical condition.

Transition plans. Transgender troops will have to have a personal transition plan approved by a military doctor, which is a standard requirement for major procedures for active-duty troops. “There is concern that if you work outside the [military health] system and you have people who are not subject to our regulations, somebody could be

venue shopping for doctors,” the defense official said. When questions arise about what is really a medical necessity, defense officials say that military doctors will be explicitly instructed to follow the standard practice in the civilian medical community.

The most common treatment for gender dysphoria is hormone therapy. “Breast implants may be medically necessary” for some individuals, said another defense official familiar with the medical aspects of transgender treatment. Cosmetic surgery for gender transition, however, would in most cases be considered an elective procedure and not be covered by the military health system, defense officials said. Many transgender individuals do not opt for a full sex-change operation to include “bottom” surgery that changes genitalia. “Particularly for female-to-male transgender people, they often times do not desire or medically need bottom surgery, so they may be stable and their medical needs are met by counseling” and hormones, said the defense official familiar with the medical aspects of the issue.

Rank-and-file opinion not sought. The Pentagon conducted no surveys to gauge the opinions of the rank-and-file force on this politically sensitive issue. “The secretary determined was that this was medical treatment and a medical issue and you’re not going to defer to the force as to whether or not we’re going to provide treatment,” said the defense official “We are relying on our doctors very heavily throughout this process,” he said. Commanders will have some say in the timing of medical treatment for transgender troops because transgender treatment is typically considered “medically necessary” but not “medically urgent.” For example, when a unit’s deployment is imminent, a commander can order treatment to be delayed until after the deployment.

Advocates for transgender troops applauded the policy change. “Transgender troops have to be held to the same standards as everyone else, and gender dysphoria has to be treated like every other medical condition. As long as the military gets those two things right, everything else will fall into place,” said Aaron Belkin, an advocate with the Palm Center in California.

[Source: Military Times | Andrew Tilghman | June 30, 2016 ++]



DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 34 ► Still Years Away

Military and Veterans Affairs officials are still years away from fully sharing patient health records, even after almost two decades of work and hundreds of millions of dollars in funding, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office released 13 JUL. But Defense Department officials said they’re confident the two bureaucracies will reach that goal in the next two years, citing recent improvements to the system and planned advances in coming years. The conflicting views frustrated members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, who called the ongoing issue an embarrassment for the country and an unnecessary hardship for troops and veterans. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., questioned whether lawmakers will be holding the same hearing with the same concerns in

In April, both Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense Department leaders certified that all medical data in their systems met national standards for sharing with public and private health care systems. Nine months earlier, the two bureaucracies announced a massive expansion of information being shared through their Joint Legacy Viewer tool, a major breakthrough in allowing physicians to compare different notes in their separate software systems. But GAO officials said those advances still leave significant work ahead for full medical record sharing, noting that key documents like X-ray images and CT scans aren't easily transferred between agencies. "In addition, VA's unsuccessful efforts over many years to modernize its VistA system raise concern about how the department can continue to justify the development and operation of an electronic health record system that is separate from the Defense Department's," their report states.

That has been a lingering point of contention between lawmakers and department officials since 2013, when VA and military leaders announced plans to abandon a \$564 million project on joint medical records software due to its expense and lengthy production time frame. VA and Defense Department leaders defended the decision again at Wednesday's hearing, saying the separate systems can be made fully interoperable faster and for less money than the effort building a new system would take. Committee members said they're skeptical. The VA is scheduled to adopt new, modernized electronic health records software in the next two years. Laverne Council, VA's assistant secretary for information and technology, said she is confident both departments are on the right path, acknowledging the frustration of many veterans. "We know that a veteran's complete health history is critical to providing seamless, high-quality integrated care and benefits," she told committee members. "And interoperability is the foundation of this capability."

Earlier this year, the committee included language in its draft of the annual VA budget plan restricting the use of nearly \$260 million in technology modernization funds until the departments can show more progress on the issue. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | July 13, 2016 +]

Arlington National Cemetery Update 60 ► Future Eligibility Requirements

The VFW attended a discussion in July about the future of Arlington National Cemetery. Currently, only one percent of those eligible choose to be buried or inured at Arlington, with the rest being interred at the VA's 134 national cemeteries or in state veterans cemeteries or elsewhere. Even so, based on its current pace, Arlington will run out of space sometime between the years 2050 and 2070, a timeframe that takes into consideration the 90,000 current available spaces, the 27,000 additional spaces from its millennium project, and the 45,000 to 50,000 spaces to be gained from a southern expansion into where the Navy Annex once stood. The question the Arlington advisory committee is pondering is whether changes could or should be made to eligibility requirements to extend the cemetery's lifespan. Right now, all active-duty deaths are eligible, as well as military retirees, those with qualifying medals, and those with honorable discharges. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | July 8, 2016 ++]

Selective Service System Update 20 ► Amendment to Bar Female Draft

The Republican-led House backed a measure 7 JUL that seeks to bar women from being required to register for a potential military draft, a victory for social conservatives who fear that forcing females to sign up is another step toward the blurring of gender lines. By a vote of 217 to 203, lawmakers approved an amendment that would block the Selective Service System from using any money to alter draft registration requirements that currently apply only to men between the ages of 18 and 25.

The amendment, sponsored by Rep. Warren Davidson (R-OH) was added to a financial services spending bill. The House also approved an amendment by Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) that would block any money in the bill from being used for sanctuary cities, a term for jurisdictions that resist turning over immigrants to federal authorities.

Davidson said much more study is necessary before such a significant, if largely symbolic, change to the draft is made. The U.S. has not had a military draft since 1973, in the waning years of the Vietnam War era, and the odds for another wide-scale draft are remote. Still, the draft registration requirement remains for men, and many lawmakers believe women should be included.

The House vote comes just a few weeks after the Senate passed an annual defense policy bill that mandates for the first time in history that young women sign up for a draft. That measure calls for women to sign up with the Selective Service within 30 days of turning 18, beginning in January 2018. The push in the Senate to lift the exclusion was triggered by the Pentagon's decision late last year to open all front-line combat jobs to women. After gender restrictions to military service were erased, the top uniformed officers in each of the military branches expressed support during congressional testimony for requiring women to register. At the same time, they said the all-volunteer force is working and they didn't want a return to conscription. Davidson said delaying the requirement gives lawmakers time "to talk with our families, talk with young women, and then take a more considered action."

The House didn't include a similar provision in its version of the annual defense policy bill. Instead there's a measure to study whether the Selective Service is even needed at a time when the armed forces get plenty of qualified volunteers, making the possibility of a draft remote. The House on 6 JUL rejected an amendment to put the Selective Service System out of business by denying the agency's \$23 million annual budget. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), who drafted the amendment, said the Selective Service is obsolete and archaic. But other lawmakers pushed back. Rep. Ander Crenshaw (R-FL) said the \$23 million is a "small price to pay for an agency that has the potential to avert a crisis should the draft ever need to be reinstated." [Source: Associated Press | Richard Lardner | July 7, 2016 ++]

TRICARE MTF Pilot ► Optional/Non-Optional Hospital Transfers

A new pilot program will give some TRICARE users who are admitted to a civilian hospital through the emergency room the option to transfer to a Military Treatment Facility. Active-duty patients, meanwhile, may be ordered to make the switch. The program, announced on 29 JUN, will start 25 JUL and run for up to two years in at 11 Army, Air Force and Navy locations nationwide. Officials want the moves to save both the TRICARE system and beneficiaries money by switching patients out of higher-cost civilian care and into the military system, according to policy documents.

Users who qualify for MTF care, including TRICARE for Life beneficiaries, will be offered a move to a military facility via an ambulance, the policy states -- but only if doctors both at the civilian hospital and the military facility agree that they are stable enough to move and if the latter has space. If the patient is an active-duty service member, he or she can be ordered to swap, while non-active duty patients will not be forced into moving, the documents state. While the pilot program seeks to save money, the policy also acknowledges the savings could be offset by the cost of moving patients from a civilian facility to the hospital via ambulance. Even so, big savings could be in store for TRICARE users who typically foot a cost share for visiting a civilian facility, such as TRICARE Standard users or TRICARE Reserve Select members. And although they will likely have to pay a cost share for any ambulance transport to the MTF, doing so is likely to be less than the cost share for any extended hospitalization, according to the documents.

Although many MTFs currently have patient transfer agreements with local civilian hospitals, the formal pilot program allows TRICARE's regional contractors to take a larger role in arranging the transfers, TRICARE officials said. The pilot was started at the request of the military services, they said. "The pilot project enables DoD to evaluate the operational and financial changes necessary to further the Military Health System's goals of supporting medical readiness, enhancing MTF provider proficiency and graduate medical education programs, saving taxpayer

dollars, reducing beneficiary costs and enhancing beneficiary satisfaction," Kevin Dwyer, a TRICARE spokesman, said in a statement.

The program will start 25 JUL 2016. Participating locations include Madigan Army Medical Center, Tacoma, Washington; Naval Hospital Bremerton, Washington; Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; San Antonio Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas; Navy Hospital Jacksonville, Florida; Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Virginia; Joint Base Langely-Eustis, Virginia; David Grant Medical Center, Travis Air Force Base, California; Mike O'Callaghan Federal Medical Center, Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada; Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; and Walter Reed National Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | June 28, 2016 ++]

TRICARE Fraud Suspicion Update 01 ► How to Report It

Fraud against TRICARE beneficiaries is in the news. Protecting your personal information is vital to your privacy, and prevents abuse of taxpayer funds. Be safe; don't share your military ID or other personal or family information with an unknown person. Fraudsters often target TRICARE beneficiaries, including active duty service members. Examples include fake surveys used to collect personal information or offering gift cards to get your information, then billing TRICARE for services you didn't need or never received.

If you think you are the victim of TRICARE related fraud, you can report it to the Defense Health Agency. Use their fraud and abuse report submission form at <http://www.health.mil/reportfraud>. You can also report cases where you think someone is trying to defraud TRICARE. For example, if your TRICARE explanation of benefits shows a bill for something you didn't get, tell your TRICARE Regional Contractor. Their contact information is available at <http://www.tricare.mil/About/Regions>.

TRICARE usually doesn't contact you asking for personal information, such as your military ID number or Social Security number. Only provide that information to a trusted entity, like your doctor, a claims processor, or your TRICARE regional contractor. Be wary of an unknown person offering a gift or reward in exchange for providing a health service. They may be trying to get your information to commit fraud. For more information about fraud, visit www.health.mil/fraud. [Source: Health.mil | July 1, 2016 ++]

TRICARE Special Needs Care ► Resources

TRICARE beneficiaries with special needs or a serious illness or injury have several resources available for help. Your care is best coordinated through your regional contractor. TRICARE rules require that if the care you need is available at a military hospital or clinic near you, and there is space available, you will be referred there first. However, if the care you need is not available, you will be referred to a network provider near you. It is important to call and remain in contact with your regional contractor. Your regional contractor will have the most current list of providers. If you contact a specialty care provider directly, you could be on a wait list instead of getting the care you or a family member needs.

When you get your referral, your regional contractor will send a letter with the name and location of your specialty provider. The letter will also tell you what care is authorized, the length of time you are authorized to receive that care, and the type and number of visits you are allowed before you need another referral. If you would like a provider that is different than the one provided in your letter, you must call your regional contractor. Family members with special needs require special considerations. There are resources and information available to help

you get the care your family needs. However, you must contact your regional contractor to make sure you have access to the most current list of providers and have the most current information about those providers.

You can reach your contractor by phone. Health Net is the north region contractor and can be reached at 1-877-874-2273. Human Military is the contractor for the south region and can be reached at 1-800-444-5445. The west region contractor is UnitedHealthcare. They can be reached at 1-877-988-9378. If you are in doubt as to which region you are located in refer to the following or visit the TRICARE website <http://www.tricare.mil/About/Regions>:

- **North Region:** Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa (Rock Island area), Kentucky (except Fort Campbell), Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri (St. Louis area), New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.
- **South Region:** Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (excluding El Paso area), and Fort Campbell, Kentucky
- **West Region:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa (excludes Rock Island arsenal area), Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri (except St. Louis area), Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas (southwestern corner including El Paso), Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

[Source: Health.mil | July 1, 2016 ++]

TRICARE Child Care ► New or Adopted Children

If you have a new baby or have adopted a child, take the necessary steps to give your child access to health care when they need it.

- **Step one;** Register your child, newborn or adoptee, in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System(DEERS).You don't have to wait the 2-6 months it may take for a formal state department birth certificate. When you are discharged from the hospital or birth center, you will receive a certificate of live birth or documents that validate the child's connection to their sponsor. If both parents are active duty, you must decide which parent will add the baby to their DEERS account. DEERS registration needs to be done in person, by an active duty service member.
- **Step two;** Enroll your child in Prime if you decide it is the best plan for your baby's health care needs. You can quickly enroll your child by calling your regional contractor or by submitting a Prime enrollment form. Newborns are covered under TRICARE Prime for 60 days after birth, as long as another family member is already enrolled in a Prime option. If you decide Prime is best for your family, you must take an additional step to enroll them, it is not automatic. After those first 60 days in Prime, the child's health coverage automatically transitions to TRICARE Standard.

Remember, Prime enrollees receive care mostly through military hospitals or clinics with no cost shares or deductibles. Standard beneficiaries receive care from their choice of provider with associated cost-shares and deductibles. If your family is growing with an adopted child, start the process as soon as you have the information to register them in DEERS. No matter which plan you chose, this is your first step. Be sure you have all required paperwork (refer to <http://www.tricare.mil/Plans/Eligibility/Children> to avoid unnecessary confusion or subsequent bills for co-payments and cost-shares. For more information, visit the Enroll or Purchase a Plan page on the TRICARE website at <http://www.tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll>. You can also find the nearest DEERS registration site online at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/appj/site>. [Source: Health.mil | July 1, 2016 ++]

DoD Overseas School Lunches ► August Price Increase

Prices for school lunches at most Defense Department schools outside the continental U.S. will go up in August, at the start of the new school year. Elementary school students will pay an extra 10 cents for each full-price meal, for a cost of \$2.50 per meal. Secondary students will pay an extra 20 cents, for a cost of \$2.75 per meal, according to an announcement from the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which provides the meals on a nonprofit, break-even basis on overseas Army and Air Force installations. Navy Exchange Service Command provides the lunches on Navy bases.



There will be no increase in cost of meals for families qualifying for the Free and Reduced Meal Program. According to federal guidelines, the cost of a reduced-price meal remains at 40 cents per meal. The price increase will not apply to Guam. As participants in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's meal program, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act requires DoDEA schools to raise paid student lunch prices to a level comparable to the rates for USDA reimbursement, which is expected to occur gradually over the next four years. "It's important for us to keep offering these nutritious meals and, in order to do so and to keep pace with the increasing food and operational costs, the school meal prices will increase for the first time in more than four years," said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Sean Applegate, AAFES' senior enlisted adviser. The last price increase, 35 cents per meal, was in 2012. [Source: Military Times | Karen Jowers | July 1, 2016 ++]

Commissary Privatization Update 02 ► Shortages | A Grim Forecast

Some residents of the remote Army Garrison Kwajalein Atoll have complained about a recent severe shortage of fresh fruits and vegetables at their contractor-operated grocery store — the only option for buying food on the island. "This is severe, and we are in dire straits. Morale is at an all-time low, and people are desperate," said Sharon Rice, an Army wife living on Kwajalein. Some people are even taking Space-A military flights to Honolulu to shop for produce and dairy items — about a five-hour flight each way.

That store, which the garrison commander describes as "our privatized commissary," is residents' only option for buying groceries — and some say their experience could foreshadow privatized remote commissaries of the future. Within two hours after the weekly produce delivery on June 21, the produce shelves were almost empty, Rice said. The recent produce problem "is not a contracting problem or funding problem. It's a supply chain problem," said Scott Malcom, spokesman for the Army Installation Management Command, noting that perishables have to be refrigerated for thousands of miles. "We are very aware of these concerns," Larsen said in an email.

The recent shortage issues are not new, Larsen said, adding that he's researched town hall archive videos and has seen former commanders addressing shortage concerns back in 1986. "In many cases, our shortages are simply a result of being remote and isolated in the center of the Pacific Ocean and being 5,000 miles from the mainland of the United States. To address the problem, Larsen said, "we have multiple ways of communicating with the contractor

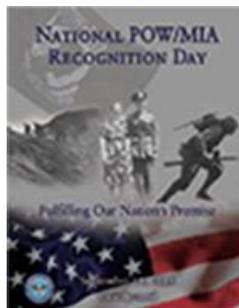
who manages the privatized commissary. We are using all of these tools to make sure that they continue to operate within the prescribed scope of work. The contractor is a competent and professional organization and has been successfully performing this task since 2003.” An official with the contractor, Kwajalein Range Services, referred questions to Army officials on Kwajalein. Army Installation Management Command officials said they are in the process of separating the Kwajalein logistics support contract into three separate contracts for fiscal 2018 — with a separate contract for base support, which includes the grocery store. By separating the functions, companies will be able to concentrate on a core competency, which may improve this situation, one official said.

Over the past year, talk about turning over commissaries to the private sector to operate has gained momentum, including two efforts in the Senate Armed Services Committee to require the Defense Department to test commissary privatization. Those attempts were defeated last year and this year. Among other concerns is whether private companies would be willing to operate commissaries in remote areas. DoD is still required to study the possibility of privatization, and officials have put out a request for information from companies and others who might have an interest in — and the ability to — privatize all or part of the commissary system, possibly saving some of the \$1.4 billion required to operate the stores each year. “This is a forecast of things that could happen elsewhere,” said Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association. [Source: Navy Times | Karen Jowers | July 6, 2016 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 1 thru 15 JUL 12016 | 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 are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,841), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/> and click on 'Our Missing'. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

- Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs
- Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420
- Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



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

Korea

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 2 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

June Chualas will never forget the day her brother left for war, more than 60 years ago. It was May 1950. June was a teenager, and her brother, **Charles A. White Jr.**, was 20 years old. He had enlisted in the U.S. Army in McConnellsville, after he was rejected in Columbus for flat feet. By September that year, he would be across the Pacific Ocean, fighting in the Korean War. And by December, he officially would be declared MIA. The day he left, he told June, "Don't worry about me. I'll make it back." Charles died in 1951 in a POW camp in North Korea. After the ceasefire, as part of Operation Glory, North Korea released the remains of a number of U.S. service members, many of whom were unidentified and eventually buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. Charles' family knew he had either been returned and buried in Hawaii or was still in a POW camp grave half a world away.

Because of his common name and because the military would not start using DNA tests for another several decades, officials told the family they could not confirm or deny if Charles had been returned. So, Charles, though known to be dead, remained missing. Until now. Through DNA tests, U.S. military officials have positively identified the remains of Cpl. Charles A. White Jr., and he's finally coming home. The identification came 66 years to the month since he enlisted. "I never thought it would happen," June said. "I never thought in 100 years he would make it home." June, born in 1933, and Charles, born in 1930, had always been close. They spent so much time outdoors, pretending to build coal mines and trapping the local wildlife in the country outside their hometown of New Lexington. "Every morning, before the school bus came, we'd have to go check the traps," June said.

They had an older brother whom they loved very much as well, but June and Charles had an exceptional bond. Charles quit high school to work, and he eventually owned his own trash collection business. He wrote on a mason jar in nail polish "keep out of this," and stored his cash inside. Once, he teased June with the amount of money he had saved. "He was just a great brother," June said. "We just got along great." She cried the day he left to join the Army. They wrote to each other, for months, until early December 1950, when Charles's family received a letter from the government stating he was missing. Their father read the letter first. June remembered him wordlessly handing the letter to her mother. "He couldn't even talk, he was so upset," she said.

Finally, June read the letter. "I went out on the porch and jumped up and down and started screaming," she said. "We just lost it." Christmas that year was miserable. June's father ordered a watch to be sent to Charles for Christmas, but the watch came back. "It was a terrible Christmas without him," she said. "It affected the whole family. We're still grieving." Gus Chualas, June's husband, also served in the Korean War, though he did not know Charles until he came home on furlough and met June. "It's hard to remember," he said. "I still cry." Years later, former Korean War POWs who knew Charles, and who were with him the day he died, located and visited June and Gus. The veterans told June and Gus what happened in the POW camp, and they said they were the ones who buried Charles after he died of malnutrition and dysentery. They buried him in his boots and raincoat, they said, and June took great comfort from the visit. "He was only 21 years old," she said.



June Chualas holds a picture of her brother, the late Corporal Charles A. White

Sharon Chuvalas, June and Gus' daughter and Charles' niece, has been working for years to find her uncle. In 2007, the family had a full burial ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery and a memorial stone erected for Charles. "For many years, his story kind of hung over the family," Sharon said. At one point, the family was able to get Charles' name added to a directory of American Ex-Prisoners of War, even though he was still missing. That decision, Sharon believes, is what finally opened the door for Army officials to identify his remains. Once his name was added to the directory, the family was contacted by military officials about donating blood samples for DNA testing, and several members complied. Six months ago, a nephew on the other side of Charles' family also offered a blood sample for more accurate DNA testing.

Major Natasha Waggoner, with the U.S. Air Force and spokesperson for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, said more than 7,800 Americans are missing from the Korean War. And of those still missing, 5,000 are believed to still be in North Korea, where the U.S. has no access to them. Now, every member of the military has DNA on file, Waggoner said, but many years ago, there was no such requirement. Her organization investigates missing service members from World War II, the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War and the Iraq Theater and other conflicts. Officers coordinate with still-living family members for DNA to identify as many missing service members as possible. But sometimes, Waggoner said, all they can offer is what happened to the service member, such as how and where they died. "It's a very humbling and rewarding experience," she said.

As DNA testing makes gains in technology, Waggoner said her organization repeatedly tests the same missing individuals each year, to see if a match can be made yet. For service members who fought in conflicts in southeast Asia, it can be a challenge because the soil in those places is much more acidic than in Europe, and the soil can eat the remains away. "We are constantly doing the recheck of remains," she said. And even when a match is found and remains are identified, occasionally, as questions are answered, more questions are raised. "For each family, (the process is) very subjective," Waggoner said.

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-- Army Chief Warrant Officer **Adolphus Nava**, of Queens, N.Y., was declared missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, while fighting in North Korea. It would be later learned he had been captured but died in a POW camp on May 31, 1951. He was assigned to Battery B, 38th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Burial details have yet to be announced.

Vietnam

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 0 U.S. serviceman who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 2 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

Navy Fire Controlman 1st Class **Paul A. Nash**, 26, of Carlisle, Indiana, will be buried July 9 in Sullivan, Indiana. On Dec. 7, 1941, Nash was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in 429 casualties, including Nash. From December 1941 to June 1944, Navy personnel recovered the remains of the deceased crew, which were subsequently interred in the Halawa and Nu'uaniu Cemeteries. In September 1947, tasked with recovering and identifying fallen U.S. personnel in the Pacific Theater, members of the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) disinterred the remains of U.S. casualties from the two cemeteries and transferred them to the Central Identification Laboratory at Schofield Barracks. The laboratory staff was only able to confirm the identifications of 35 men from the USS Oklahoma at

that time. The AGRS subsequently buried the unidentified remains in 46 plots at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP), known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu. In October 1949, a military board classified those who could not be identified as non-recoverable, including Nash.



In April 2015, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a policy memorandum directing the disinterment of unknowns associated with the USS Oklahoma. On June 15, 2015, DPAA personnel began exhuming the remains from the NMCP for analysis. To identify Nash's remains, scientists from DPAA and AFDIL used mitochondrial DNA, which matched a niece; as well as circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons, which matched Nash's records.

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The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains of Marine Corps Pvt. **Robert J. Carter**, 19, of Oklahoma City, who will be buried July 13 in Arlington National Cemetery. In November 1943, Carter was assigned to Company G, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Carter died on Nov. 20, 1943. The battle of Tarawa was a huge victory for the U.S. military because the Gilbert Islands provided the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet a platform from which to launch assaults on the Marshall and Caroline Islands to advance their Central Pacific Campaign against Japan. In the immediate aftermath of the fighting on Tarawa, U.S. service members who died in the battle were buried in a number of battlefield cemeteries on the island. In 1946 and 1947, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company conducted remains recovery operations on Betio Island, but Carter's remains were not recovered. On Feb. 10, 1949, a military review board declared Carter's remains non-recoverable.



In June 2015, a nongovernmental organization, History Flight, Inc., notified DPAA that they discovered a burial site on Betio Island and recovered the remains of what they believed were 35 U.S. Marines who fought during the battle in November 1943. The remains were turned over to DPAA in July 2015. To identify Carter's remains, scientists from DPAA used laboratory analysis, including dental analysis and chest radiographic comparison, which matched Carter's records, as well as circumstantial and material evidence. DPAA is grateful to History Flight, Inc. for this recovery mission. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | July 8, 2016 ++]

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | July 2016 ++]



VA Praised ► Something Positive for a Change

Veterans came to U.S. Rep. Dave Loebsack to praise, not pan, the federal Veterans Administration health care system in a meeting with the congressman 28 JUN. “I just want to say something positive about the VA,” Cathy Mrazek of Coralville, who was an Army military policewoman for 12 years. “There’s not enough credit give to the VA for everything they do for veterans,” she said at the Iowa City Democrat’s fifth annual “Serving Those Who Served” town hall meeting at a veterans’ memorial outside the Johnson County Administration Building. “If they don’t have an answer, they try to find one.”



U.S. Rep. Dave Loebsack

It’s been a rough couple of years for the Department of Veterans Affairs with allegations that officials falsified records to hide the length of time veterans waited for medical service and, in some cases veterans died while waiting for care. But that’s not what the 50 veterans who met with Loebsack wanted to talk about. They praised the care they had received in dealing with substance abuse and mental health issues. Loebsack criticized of the slow response to allegations in 2014 that the VA falsified records at a Phoenix medical center to hide the length of time veterans had to wait for appointments. That triggered similar reports from VA centers around the country. “There has not been enough people held accountable,” Loebsack said. “Not enough people have been fired.”

Loebsack, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, is doing a series of meetings around the Fourth of July with veterans to hear their concerns and to thank them for their service. “There aren’t many issues that folks on all sides can come together on,” he told the veterans. “If it weren’t folks that were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice we wouldn’t be celebrating the Fourth.” [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | June 27, 2016 ++]

VA Prosthetics Update 15 ► LUKE Arm Cleared By The FDA

The LUKE arm has been cleared by the FDA as the first prosthetic in the new product category of integrated prosthetic arms. According to the announcement, the LUKE arm offers flexibility, strength and dexterity “to provide greater independence for people with forearm through shoulder-level amputations.”



The LUKE Arm in the Shoulder Configuration.

Features include a powered shoulder which gives patients the capability to reach behind the back and overhead, a powered elbow with enough strength to lift a bag of groceries from the floor onto a table, and a powered, multi-movement wrist with which patients can lift a glass of water overhead or at waist level without spilling. The hand itself features four independent motors which offers the flexibility to hold a range of objects, such as a delicate egg or a heavy gallon of milk without the fear of the item slipping or breaking, the announcement explained. A grip-force sensor can detect how firmly the hand is grasping something and can communicate that information to the patient. The arm can be controlled in different ways which include electromyographic (EMG) electrodes and foot mounted inertial measurement sensors. The announcement also noted that the arm does have some protection from water and dust, making it easier to use in different environments.

The LUKE arm--which was developed by DEKA Research & Development Corp.--has been tested by almost 100 amputees for more than a collective 10,000 hours of use. Mobius is currently taking names for those who are interested in owning the prosthesis. "We developed the LUKE arm to change the game for amputees--creating an innovative, integrated system that offers greater functionality and independence to our wounded warriors and other amputees," explained Dean Kamen, president of DEKA, in the announcement. The LUKE arm was developed through the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency's (DARPA) Revolutionizing Prosthetics program. Additional funding came from the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command through the Army Research Office.

DEKA worked with DARPA and the Department of Veterans Affairs Rehabilitation Research and Development Service to conduct studies to best understand the intersection of biology and engineering, in an effort to advance prosthetic technologies. "Working one-on-one with the amputees and learning what they liked and didn't like about using prostheses proved invaluable to our product development process," Kamen expressed in the announcement. "Thanks to their insight and input, we have been able to construct the most advanced FDA-cleared design that the world of upper-limb prosthetics has seen to date." The LUKE arm will be manufactured by Universal Instruments Corporation in Binghamton, NY, with a launch currently set for late 2016. [Source: FierceBiotech | Alyssa Huntle | July 12, 2016 ++]

VA Benefits Eligibility Update 04 ► Bad Paper Discharges

More than 125,000 veterans who have served since 9/11 are denied access to basic services like health care by the Department of Veterans Affairs, according to a report by the [Veterans Legal Clinic](#) at the [Legal Services Center](#) of Harvard Law School. The report, "[Underserved](#)," presents new findings about how the VA's regulations exclude hundreds of thousands of veterans with "bad-paper" discharges, contrary to the text and intent of the 1944 G.I. Bill of Rights, which established the current VA eligibility standard. The clinic issued the report on behalf of two veterans advocacy organizations, Swords to Plowshares and the National Veterans Legal Services Program

(NVLSP). “Congress meant for the VA to provide basic services to nearly all the men and women who served in uniform,” said [Dana Montalto](#), an attorney and Liman Fellow in the Veterans Legal Clinic. “Yet, the VA’s regulations have operated to exclude more and more veterans from getting the care and support that they deserve.”

The Clinic found that 6.5 percent of veterans who have served since 9/11 are excluded from the VA — twice the rate for Vietnam era veterans and nearly four times the rate for World War II era veterans. Many of those veterans have mental or physical injuries because of their service, and many served in combat or other hardship conditions, but nevertheless cannot get health care, disability compensation, or other supportive services because of the VA’s regulations.



Clinical Professor Dan Nagin

“Since the Veterans Legal Clinic opened our doors in 2012, we have heard from scores of veterans who wrongfully or unjustly received less-than-honorable discharges,” said Clinical Professor [Dan Nagin](#), who directs the Veterans Legal Clinic. “There exists a dearth of legal resources for these veterans, and our students have represented many in correcting their discharges and gaining access to the basic services that they deserve.” Students in the clinic have represented an Iraq War veteran who was less-than-honorably discharged for one-time drug use on the night that he attempted to commit suicide, a post-9/11 veteran who was wrongfully discharged on the basis of an incorrect diagnosis of personality disorder, and a veteran discharged for his sexual orientation under the now-repealed Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy.

The clinic has been able to continue to expand its work in this area since the arrival of fellow Dana Montalto in 2014. In addition to providing representation to more veterans, she has established the Veterans Justice Pro Bono Partnership, which trains and supports private attorneys to represent veterans in discharge-upgrade petitions. Montalto has also spearheaded systemic reform initiatives, including writing the report “Underserved”. Other key findings of the report were:

- 3 out of 4 veterans with bad-paper discharge who served in combat and have post-traumatic stress disorder are denied recognition as “veterans” by the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.
- There are wide disparities in eligibility rates among the VA Regional Offices and among Veterans Law Judges at the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.
- Marine Corps veterans are nearly 10 times more likely to be excluded from the VA as Air Force veterans.

Based on these findings, the Veterans Legal Clinic filed a [Petition for Rulemaking](#) on behalf of Swords to Plowshares and NVLSP, with Latham & Watkins LLP. The petition asks the VA to adopt new regulations that accord with Congress’s law and sound policy. The proposed regulations would comply with the statutory standard by denying benefits only to those veterans who received or should have received a dishonorable discharge, and by taking into consideration whether positive or mitigating factors, such as combat service, hardship, or mental health conditions, outweigh any misconduct. The petition further asks the VA to cease requiring pre-eligibility reviews for most veterans who were administratively discharged so that veterans in need can quickly obtain health care and supportive services.

In response to the clinic's report, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson told the New York Times, "Where we can better advocate for and serve veterans within the law and regulation, we will look to do so as much as possible." He added, "I believe the report provides us, as a department, an opportunity to do a thorough review, take a fresh look this issue and make changes to help veterans." The VA recently informed the petitioners that it will initiate rulemaking proceedings to update and clarify its regulations. "We appreciate the VA's positive response to the petition," said Montalto. "We look forward to continuing to work with the VA in the coming months to develop regulations that better serve our veterans."

According to Nagin, "This report grows out of our individual representation and has the potential to impact hundreds of thousands veterans across the country. The VA's adoption of the Petition for Rulemaking's proposed regulations would help to ensure that no veterans are denied the care and support that our nation owes them." [Source: Harvard Law Today | July 12, 2016 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 55 ► 24,000 Vets Improperly Examined

Veterans Affairs officials aren't saying how 24,000 veterans were diagnosed with traumatic brain injury by VA physicians considered unqualified to make such a determination, but on Wednesday, told Congress the department is working to resolve related disability claims problems. Some veterans diagnosed with TBI from 2007 to 2015 were denied disability benefits because they were examined by a VA health provider considered to be unqualified under VA policy. After a media investigation by KARE 11 in Minneapolis found that as many as 300 veterans at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center were denied benefits as a result, the department announced it would review all cases involving veterans with improper exams.

In June, VA announced it would send letters to more than 24,000 affected veterans offering new exams. Dave McLenachen, deputy undersecretary for disability assistance at the Veterans Benefits Administration, told a House Veterans' Affairs panel Wednesday he was unable to "find a reason" why the exams were conducted in violation of VA policy at a number of VA facilities. "I don't know if it was a lack of capacity, whether that was an issue at the particular time, or to the extent whether there were enough of those specific specialists available at the time. I don't know the answer to that question," McLenachen said. The KARE 11 investigation found that at the Minneapolis VA only one of the 21 medical professionals who conducted initial TBI exams was a qualified specialist, defined as a physiatrist, psychiatrist, neurosurgeon or neurologist.

Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV) questioned whether sending a letter to an affected veteran was a sufficient response and she urged VA officials to conduct more outreach "Don't we need a public information campaign or work with the veterans service organization to ensure this is adequate?" Titus asked. McLenachen said VA officials decided to send letters rather than simply reschedule exams because some veterans may have received a higher disability rating for TBI from their initial exam than they would have gotten from a specialist. According to McLenachen, more than 14,000 affected veterans already are receiving disability compensation for service-connected TBI, "many at higher rates of evaluation." "It could be misleading to go out and tell them we are going to schedule an exam without their choice, might have a significant impact on their benefits," he said.

Minneapolis VA Medical Center is under fire for allegedly using unqualified medical professionals to perform brain injury exams. Hundreds of Minnesota veterans may have been denied benefits they earned. More than 327,000 troops were diagnosed with a brain injury from 2000 to 2015. Roughly 80 percent of those diagnoses were for mild TBI, or concussion. Roughly 170,000 veterans with TBI have filed disability compensation claims and 75,000 have been approved. Lawmakers said 13 JUL they are concerned over the disparities, which can't entirely be explained by the VA's failure to use specialists to diagnose veterans. "Committee staff has been trying to get to the bottom of what happened and who is responsible, but even after four separate briefings, the answers are not clear," chairman Rep. Ralph Abraham, R-La., said. "The only issue that is clear to me is that the Veterans Benefits

Administration and Veterans Health Administration created a royal mess by not communicating with each other ... and that senior VA employees once again failed to hold subordinates accountable." [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | July 14, 2016 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 155 ► Predicted Zero | Actual 70,000

More than 70,000 veterans disability claims are currently backlogged in Veterans Affairs processing centers, seven months after department officials missed their public goal of getting the number down to zero. VA Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy said that figure includes a substantial number of claims left open longer than four months intentionally to ensure veterans are receiving all of the payouts they deserve. But he acknowledged his agency needs to drive that number down further. "This is still a continuous improvement process for us," he said. "We are not satisfied with the number now, and we won't be satisfied until we are much closer to zero."

Roughly one in five benefits claims submitted to the Veterans Benefits Administration ends up taking longer than four months to process, the department's long-held promise for processing the cases. That does not include appeals cases, which follow a different process and often take years to resolve. That ratio and the total number of backlogged cases have remained steady since last fall, when department officials announced they would not reach the goal of zeroing out the backlog by the end of 2015. The goal of eliminating the backlog was announced by President Barack Obama and VA leaders in 2009, part of an ambitious push for service improvements. As recently as three years ago, the backlog total topped 610,000 cases, causing an outcry from veterans and lawmakers frustrated with waits in some instances topping a year.

New electronic records systems and mandatory overtime for claims processors drew down the backlog by almost 90 percent over two years, but pulling it down even further has proven difficult. Murphy said three years of mandatory overtime for processors ended in December, although voluntary overtime hours are still being used to keep daily workloads at between 4,500 and 5,200 cases a day. The department also recently launched a new national work queue which allows employees across the country to help regional offices seeing spikes in filings, electronically moving that extra work across state lines to more quickly process the case load. But department officials expect another record-breaking year for case filings in fiscal 2016, adding to the workload despite the processing improvements. "That's the new norm for us," Murphy said. "We're dealing with a volume and complexity of cases that's growing every year."

In the late 1990s, most veterans applying for claims received a disability rating around 30 percent. Today that number is close to 50 percent, reflecting the expanding list of illnesses and injuries eligible for compensation. The number of veterans receiving some form of disability compensation from VA rose from 2.3 million in 2001 to around 4.2 million last year. At least part of the remaining backlog is attributable to cases where veterans update their claim late in the process with new medical information or conditions, requiring extra processing time. Murphy could not give a specific breakdown, but said he believes a substantial amount of the roughly 70,000 remaining cases fall into that category of veterans who need more than 125 days to have their cases properly handled. Still, he said, "our challenge is to identify why some other [cases] do not finish in 125 days, and how do we address that." [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | July 10, 2016 ++]

VA Health Care Enrollment Update 07 ► Signature Requirement Change

The VA has announced it has eliminated paper signature requirements for veterans wishing to enroll in VA health care. Effective immediately, VA has amended its enrollment regulations to allow Veterans to complete enrollment applications for enrollment in VA health care by telephone without the need for a paper signature. This action also

accelerates VA's effort to enroll all Combat Veterans with pending enrollments as part of its ongoing Veterans Enrollment Rework Project (VERP). By adding this telephone application option to VA's regulations with this amendment, VA will now offer three ways to enroll under 38 CFR 17.36(d) (1). This option provides veterans a convenient third enrollment option in addition to the paper VA Form 10-10 EZ and the online health care application. To apply, call 1-877-222-VETS (8387), Mon-Fri between 8 am and 8 pm, EST. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update | July 8, 2016 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 44 ► CoC Report Released

On 6 JUL, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald released the following statement on the Commission on Care final report. The report is available at https://commissiononcare.sites.usa.gov/files/2016/07/Commission-on-Care_Final-Report_063016_FOR-WEB.pdf :

“On behalf of the Nation’s 22 million Veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs, I thank the members of the Commission on Care for their hard work over the past year. The Commission has produced a wide-ranging set of recommendations on reforming the Veterans Health Administration, and VA looks forward to reviewing and considering these recommendations as we ensure that we remain true to our mission to serve and honor the men and women who are America’s Veterans.

“While we will examine the report closely over the coming weeks and respond in a more detailed fashion, I am pleased to see that many of their recommendations are in line with our MyVA efforts to transform the VA into a Veteran-centric organization. Necessary transformational progress has been under way for the past two years, increasing access to health care and improving the Veteran experience of VA. This past March, VA set a new record for completed appointments: 5.3 million inside VA, 730,000 more than in March 2014. We also issued twice as many authorizations for care in the community than in March 2014. Clinical workload is up 11 percent in the past two years. Nearly 97 percent of appointments are now completed within 30 days of the Veteran’s preferred date; 22 percent are same-day appointments; average wait times are five days for primary care, six days for specialty care, and two days for mental health care. Nearly 90 percent of Veterans surveyed say they are “satisfied or completely satisfied” with the timeliness of their appointments.

“However, until all Veterans say they are satisfied, I won’t be satisfied. Nobody at VA will be satisfied. But our progress so far proves that VA’s current leadership, direction, and momentum can produce the necessary transformation, as VA has already demonstrated in reducing the backlog of disability compensation claims by 90 percent since 2013.

“We know we can’t complete the job without help from our partners. For that reason, I look forward to continuing to work with Congress, Veteran advocates, and Veterans themselves to identify further ways to improve VA.

“There are some things that can be done right now to help us continue our progress. Congress must act on our proposals to consolidate our Community Care programs, modernize and reform the claims appeals process, and pass the bi-partisan Veterans First Act. The window of opportunity is closing fast, but if Congress acts before leaving town this month, 2016 will be the year the nation turned the corner for Veterans.

“In the meantime, as we review the recommendations of the Commission, we will continue to look for other ways to build on the progress we’ve made to date and ensure we are doing everything possible to faithfully serve those who have served this country.”

[Source: VA News Release | July 6, 2016 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 45 ► CoC Conclusions/Recommendations

The commission tasked by Congress with trying to fix the troubled Veterans Health Administration has just concluded a damning report, finding that "many profound deficiencies" at the troubled agency "require urgent reform." The commissioners conclude, "America's veterans deserve a better organized, high-performing health care system." The report indicates the billions pumped into the VA since the wait-list scandal erupted two years ago have failed to relieve many of the problems in delivering health care to veterans. In some cases, the report points out where so-called improvements to the VA system may have actually made things worse. To read the report refer to http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2016/images/07/05/commission-on-care_final-report_063016_1815-3-1.pdf

The 15-member Commission on Care, made up of mostly health care professionals and veterans' organization leaders, outlined a strategy for transforming the agency in a final report submitted to President Barack Obama. The commission was established by Congress after a CNN investigation and watchdog reports revealed VA staffers manipulated data to hide systemic health care delays. The report highlights a variety of "deficiencies" that contribute to health care issues within the agency, including flawed governance, insufficient staffing, inadequate facilities, antiquated IT systems and inefficient use of employees. The commission also criticized changes that have been implemented since the scandal became known, including the VA's Choice Program. The system was set up in 2014 to alleviate wait times by enabling veterans experiencing month-long delays or more to seek private care. The report states the program has only "aggravated wait times and frustrated veterans" due to confusing eligibility requirements and conflicting processes for coordinating with private health care providers. As a solution:

- The commission recommends establishing a "**VHA Care System**," which would function as a network of VA, Department of Defense and VA-approved private healthcare providers available to all enrolled veterans. Currently, a veteran must wait more than 30 days or live more than 40 miles from a VA facility in order to obtain private care through the VA. That requirement would be scrapped under the Commission's proposal; instead, veterans could choose from all primary-care providers in the system. Veterans could also choose from specialty-care providers in the system but would need a referral from their primary doctor. The commission is also recommending that this system be overseen by a new board of directors responsible for implementing the changes and setting a long-term strategy for streamlining VA care.
- The report cites need for improved leadership due to what it describes as an overall lack of "strategic direction" within the department. "VHA must institute a far-reaching transformation of both its care delivery system and the management processes supporting it," the commission concluded. Despite calls for sweeping transformation, the report states VHA health care is "comparable or better in clinical quality" to care in the private sector, though inconsistent from facility to facility.

The report has received mixed reactions from members of Congress, veterans' service organizations and some of the commissioners themselves.

- Commissioners Stewart Hickey, formerly of AMVETS, and Darin Selnick of Concerned Veterans for America wrote a letter of dissent, arguing that the report's recommendations do not go far enough to fundamentally transform the agency. "The central problem is that these recommendations focus primarily on fixing the existing VHA provider operations, rather than boldly transforming the overall veterans' health care system," the letter states, arguing that veterans should be given even more private options than the report recommends.
- Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, agrees that the VA needs significant restructuring but he has not yet endorsed the commission's specific proposals and said he needs time to review the report. "While the Commission on Care's nearly 300-page report will take time to completely review and digest, the document makes it abundantly clear that the problems plaguing

Department of Veterans Affairs medical care are severe. Fixing them will require dramatic changes in how VA does business," Miller said in a statement.

- The American Legion cautioned against some of the commission's recommendations on increased access to private care through the VA. "These 'choices' also come with additional expenses to the veteran. Converting VA health care to an insurance payer will increase out-of-pocket expenses for veterans who rely solely on VA for all of their health care needs," the organization said in a statement.
- VA Secretary Bob McDonald said the commission's recommendations overlap with some of the strategies the VA has already begun implementing to improve health care. Without directly addressing many of the deficiencies described in the report, McDonald said veteran's access to appointments had improved in the past two years. "As we review the recommendations of the Commission, we will continue to look for other ways to build on the progress we've made to date and ensure we are doing everything possible to faithfully serve those who have served this country," McDonald said in a statement.

[Source: CNN | Curt Devine & Drew Griffin | July 6, 2016 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 46 ► CVA Unhappy with CoC Report

A veterans group is criticizing as inadequate the work of a congressional commission that concluded the Veterans Affairs Department still has "profound deficiencies" in delivering health care. The Concerned Veterans for America (CVA), an Arlington, Virginia-based organization that advocates for greater choice in veteran health care providers, described the panel -- of which it was a part -- as "broken," in part for failing to vote on its own recommendations. "Basically we ... have a broken commission, and because of a broken commission we have a broken report," said Darin Selnick, senior veterans affairs adviser for organization, which hosted a teleconference on 6 JUL after the release of the panel's report.

Selnick, who served on the commission, participated in the teleconference with Stewart Hickey, a fellow commissioner and former executive director for AMVETS, and Dan Caldwell, vice president for political action at the Concerned Veterans for America. The report includes some recommendations that Selnick and Hickey said they could support, such as creating a board of directors to oversee the Veterans Health Administration, eliminating the 30-day and 40-mile restrictions on using the Choice Act for non-VA care, and adopting a BRAC-like system to shut down unneeded VA facilities. But they panned the overall package as continuing the status quo. They also criticized the commission for not putting each recommendation to a vote -- something that the chairmen of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs committees had wanted -- and for not publishing on the commission's website a letter dissenting from the recommendations.

Selnick specifically accused Nancy Schlichting, the panel's chairwoman, of preventing substantive changes, and commission member Phillip Longman, senior editor of The Washington Monthly, of using his magazine to smear members such as himself for pressing for reforms to give veterans greater private-sector choices. "[Schlichting] had her own agenda. She felt that veterans were broken, were old, felt veterans couldn't take care of themselves, so the VHA had to be the one to take care of it," he said, referring to the Veterans Health Administration. "She focused and derailed any efforts that went against her perceived support of the status quo and fixing of the existing choice program."

Caldwell, CVA's political action head, slammed "left-wing news outlets and the Washington-based leadership of certain veterans' organizations" for making false claims that some commission members would profit from reforms that would increase private health care options for veterans. He singled out Longman for a Washington Monthly report that the libertarian billionaires David and Charles Koch were funding his organization and using it to push for

privatization of VA health care. The group's ties to the Koch brothers have long been known and reported on. Military.com was unable to reach Longman for comment, though Schlichting rejected the idea that she or anyone else on the commission steered its recommendations. "I can't even understand how anyone can come to that conclusion. We had 12 commissioners," she told Military.com. "It was a consensus to create those recommendations." "It's a very comprehensive," she said of the review. "It's everyone's work. I chaired the commission but I had no more vote than anyone else."

Hickey is a retired Marine Corps officer, former chief executive officer for Hyndman Area Health Center in Pennsylvania and former national head of AMVETS. He blamed organized labor and veterans service organizations -- in particular the Disabled American Veterans -- for influencing the commission in a way that harmed veterans. "I just felt that during this whole period, we spent more time listening to the government employee union, [and] veterans service organizations, who represent five or six million veterans out of 22 or 23 million veterans ... and they had undue influence over the results that were achieved," he said. Hickey said he would like to have seen the commission recommend VA health care administered by a non-profit government corporation and run like Amtrak or the U.S. Postal Service, "where we're not getting politics into the mix." "But once again lobbyists -- which for veterans are the VSOs in DC, worked with some of the commission members and tried to thwart the efforts of those who wanted to see really VA reform," he added.

Two of the leading veteran service organizations -- the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans -- were by and large supportive of the recommendations. But they also had concerns about some of them. Both organizations said they had reservations about a board of directors overseeing Veterans Health Administration. The Disabled American Veterans said the board would be less answerable to the president than a VA secretary, who is a political appointee and cabinet officer. Garry Augustine, DAV's executive director, dismissed Hickey's talk of VSO influence as sour grapes. "As far as our influence on the commission, it's nice to give us the credit but they're just frustrated they didn't get what they wanted," he said.

Concerned Veterans of America has been viewed skeptically by some of the longtime veterans' organizations for some time, though any ill feelings that veterans service organizations had for the Koch-linked group were kept below the surface until recently. Last month, the American Legion -- without identifying Concerned Veterans for America by name -- called it a "mouthpiece" for special interests looking to privatize VA health care. [Source: Military.com | Bryant Jordan | July 06, 2016 ++]

VA VISTA Update 11 ► GAO Asked to Examine Efforts to Modernize

The Government Accountability Office has been asked to examine VA's efforts to modernize VistA, its electronic health records (EHR) system. The bipartisan request to the GAO came in a letter from two leaders of the House Committee on Oversight Reform's Subcommittee on Information Technology: Chairman Rep. William Hurd (R-TX) and the subcommittee's ranking minority member Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL). The legislators requested information about both VA's current plans to modernize VistA and the "history of VA's efforts to modernize VistA."

The request was made, "given the significance of VA's electronic health record information system to the performance of its health care mission, and in light of VA's repeated attempts to modernize VistA," according to the document. "Over the past 15 years, VA has taken various initiatives to modernize or replace VistA, starting in 2001 with a program referred to as HealthVet. This initiative was followed by a 2011 joint effort with DoD to develop the interoperable electronic health record (iEHR) followed by a 2013 effort with VistA Evolution," the letter recounted. The efforts, however, "have not produced the kind of modern systems and capabilities that Congress mandated," the subcommittee leaders wrote. The letter also noted that "VA has recently indicated that it may be pursuing yet another modernization initiative."

The request for the GAO study comes after VA officials testified earlier this year that the agency is considering moving to a new, state-of-the-art EHR system that would better meet its needs. LaVerne Council, the agency's assistant secretary for Information and Technology and chief information officer, told lawmakers at a hearing this spring that VHA Under Secretary for Health David Shulkin, MD, is evaluating a recommendation she has made for "the state-of-the-art, world-class system." VA would complete the next iteration of the VistA Evolution Program during fiscal year FY 2018, which he said would bring improvements in efficiency and interoperability, Shulkin told lawmakers at the time. He also said that the VA wanted "to be certain that continuous modernization of a 40-year-old electronic record is an appropriate decision." "Is this 40-year EHR going to be the system that VA should stick with for the next 20 years?" Shulkin said of VistA.

When it comes to its EHR, DoD announced earlier this year that a new system, MHS GENESIS, will begin rollout in the Pacific Northwest at the end of 2016 and will be completed over a several-year period. That timeline has been called into question, however, by a DoD Office of Inspector General audit dated 31 MAY that was partially released to the public. It noted that DoD Healthcare Management System Modernization (DHMSM) program execution schedule "may not be realistic for meeting the required initial operational capability date of December 2016." "It is still at risk for obtaining an EHR system by the December 2016 initial operational capability date because of the risks and potential delays involved in developing and testing the interfaces needed to interact with legacy systems, ensuring the system is secure against cyber-attacks, and ensuring the fielded system works correctly and that users are properly trained," the audit stated.

OIG recommended the Program Executive Officer for Defense Healthcare Management Systems "perform a schedule analysis to determine whether the December 2016 initial operational capability deadline is achievable," although it added that the official "neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendation to perform a schedule analysis to determine whether the December 2016 initial operational capability deadline was achievable." The program office "is confident that it will achieve initial operational capability later this year in accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act," according to the audit.

Meanwhile, lawmakers have expressed frustration in recent months by what they believe has been slow progress to create interoperability between the VA and DoD's EHRs. Another congressional hearing was scheduled this month by a Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee to review VistA and progress toward interoperability with DoD's electronic health record. Lawmakers also have expressed their concern through recent legislation. Although DoD and VA did finally certify that it had met key interoperability requirements set forth in the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act, lawmakers still passed a bill in May that restricted the use of \$260 million for the modernization of the VA's EHR system until VA certified interoperability of the system with DoD. The Senate also was considering a similar provision. "It is high time that the VA and Department of Defense have an entirely interoperable electronic record system, and it's this committee's goal to see that through to fruition, so help us God," House Committee on Appropriations Chairman Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY) said during the bill's markup. [Source: U.S. Medicine | Sandra Basu | July 2016 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 42 ► New Form Removes Barriers

World-class health care is not much good to those who can't access it and accessing VA health care has not always been easy. Actually, it's been very frustrating for a large number of Veterans over the years, but enrollment is about to get easier for Veterans seeking eligibility. "In order to improve access to care, we reviewed many of the steps Veterans must take to receive that care and found that improvements needed to be made in the initial application to improve the Veteran experience and remove barriers that hinder access," said VA Deputy Secretary Sloan D.

Gibson. “I am happy to announce that VA will soon be launching the new online health care application on vets.gov.”



VA Deputy Secretary Sloan D. Gibson

As of June 30, 2016, Veterans applying for health care will be directed to health care application on vets.gov. Unlike the online 10-10EZ and previous applications, this form does not require special software to open, nor does it need to be printed by the Veteran or VA staff to be processed. “Veterans could previously apply for health care online, but the user experience was often frustrating, and the process required VA employees to generate paper applications that were manually entered into our eligibility verification and enrollment processing systems,” Gibson said. “The application is a HTML form on vets.gov that requires nothing more than an internet connection and 15-45 minutes of your time depending on the complexity of the application. The application can also be submitted without a login. We believe it is important to make this process as easy as possible. A log-in option will be added later this year, allowing Veterans to save their application and to update their information, but it won’t be required to apply for health care.” If at least one of the following applies to you, you probably qualify for VA health care:

- You receive financial compensation (pay) from the VA for a service-connected disability.
- You were discharged for a disability that happened or was made worse in the line of duty.
- You are a recently discharged Combat Veteran.
- You receive a VA pension.
- You are a former Prisoner of War.
- You have received a Purple Heart.
- You receive (or are eligible for) Medicaid benefits.
- You served in Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.
- You served in SW Asia during the Gulf War between August 2, 1990 and November 11, 1998.
- You served at least 30 days at Camp Lejeune between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987.
- If none of the above apply to you, you may still qualify for care based on your income. You can learn more about how the amount of money your family makes (income threshold) can affect your eligibility for VA benefits at <http://nationalincomelimits.vaftl.us> . Your most recent tax return will have most of information you need to qualify based on your income.

The new application is for Veterans who have not previously applied for VA health care. The 10-10EZ (paper form) will still be in the forms database, so Veterans and third parties serving Veterans can access the form to print it out. However, the expectation is that anyone seeking to apply for care eligibility online will use the online application, or call the number listed on vets.gov. “Providing health care to our nation’s Veterans is one of the most vital services we provide at the Department of Veterans Affairs,” said Gibson. “Through the MyVA transformation,

we are working to rebuild trust with Veterans and the American people, improve service delivery and set the course for long-term VA excellence and reform, all while continuing to deliver better access to high-quality care.”

The new health care application form is available at <https://www.vets.gov/healthcare/apply> and, is a starting point for any Veteran interested in applying for health care eligibility. For additional information, please visit the Health Benefits Application website <http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/index.asp>. [Source: VAntage Point Blog | June 30, 2016 ++]

VA Cemetery Memorials Update 01 ► Walks, Sections, and Walls

Function. The function of a Memorial Walk is to provide a path for visitor access to a Memorial Section where veterans organizations and other groups may place memorial plaques mounted on stones or monuments to commemorate certain groups, units, campaigns or other military events on walls designated for that purpose. A donations area for these donated memorial monuments may be located here and may be the location of the secondary flagpole for display of the POW/MIA flag.

The donated memorials are typically 18 inches deep x 24 inches wide x 24 inches high, with granite bases or natural boulders, and are placed in small cleared areas adjacent to a path. The Memorial Walk or donations area (Memorial Section) must appear complete as a feature in its own right, even without any donated memorials. As with all cemetery features, the Memorial Walk/Donations Area must be relatively flat or with a gentle slope and accessible to disabled persons without using sidewalks and ramps for wheelchairs.

Components. A Memorial Section for headstones memorializing those whose remains are unavailable for burial may be located in areas of a cemetery not suitable for casketed interments, because of soils, terrain or landscape features. The size and layout of the Memorial Section will depend on the site layout, size of the individual memorial site, and the demand at a particular cemetery for memorial sites. A memorial site is 3 feet x 3 feet marked with a flat or upright marker of granite or bronze, except that bronze memorial plaques may be mounted on walls designated for that purpose, in lieu of placement of a marker in a memorial section. The walls may be portions of other features such as retaining walls, terraces, etc., which are appropriate for memorial purposes.

Design Requirements. A Memorial Walk shall have appropriate locations designated along the path for donated memorials, plaques, and benches. It consists of an asphalt path leading to a Memorial Section or donations area. If designed as a woodland path it will minimize the visual impact of the paved surfaces. The site turf should be maintained, cut and trimmed along the Memorial Walk. Landscape features may be grouped nearby depending on the project. The walk costs approximately \$20 per linear foot.

[Source: http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/grants/memorial_walk.asp | June 30, 2016++]



VA Medical Marijuana Update 23 ► Dropped from VA Funding Bill

A provision that would have made it legal for Veterans Affairs doctors to discuss medical marijuana with their patients in some states disappeared mysteriously from the final VA funding bill in mid-JUNE, just before the House approved the legislation by a 239-171 vote. But the measure is not completely dead, as a failure by the Senate on 28 JUN to forward the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill for a vote provides an opportunity for the marijuana provision to be put back in. The failure in the Senate to pass a procedural vote over a dispute involving funding to fight the Zika virus means the bill can be reconsidered after the Independence Day break.

Supporters of the medical marijuana provision hope they can get the measure, which would have allowed VA doctors to recommend medical marijuana in states where it is legal, returned to and passed in the final bill. Eleven legislators, including 10 Democrats and one Republican, on 28 JUN wrote a letter to House and Senate leaders urging them to reinstate the provision. Lawmakers said the medical marijuana provision had “broad bipartisan support” and “should have been nonnegotiable.” “We feel the failure of the conferees to include either [the House or Senate] provision is a drastic misfortune for veterans and contrary to the will of both chambers,” wrote Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT), Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and others.

Last month (MAY), a medical marijuana amendment offered by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) passed the House in a 233-189 vote and was voted on a second time as part of the larger Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill, passed by a 295-129 vote. The Senate also included a similar medical marijuana measure in its version of the VA funding bill, which was approved in an 89-8 vote. But on 23 JUN, as the House Democrats’ sit-in on gun control continued into the wee hours of the morning, House Republicans brought the negotiated version of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill up for a vote. That bill was missing a number of provisions that had been previously decided, including the medical marijuana issue as well as a ban on flying the Confederate battle flag in national cemeteries.

The House Appropriations Committee has not revealed who on the conference committee was responsible for removing either provision. But of the eight House members who served on the panel that negotiated the bill, five had voted against Blumenauer’s amendment, including Republicans Tom Cole of Oklahoma, Charles Dent of Pennsylvania, Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska, Martha Roby of Alabama and David Valadao of California. During debate on the measure in May, Dent said medical experts and the Food and Drug Administration should weigh in on the matter. “I’m uncomfortable in trying to dictate policy on medical marijuana without input from the FDA and National Institutes of Health,” Dent said.

The letter to Speaker of the House Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), Minority Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Majority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and Minority Leader Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) was signed by Daines, Merkley, Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Ron Wyden (D-OR) as well as Blumenauer and Reps. Jared Polis (D-CO), Dina Titus (D-NV), and Ruben Gallego (D-AZ).

Marijuana has been approved to treat some medical conditions in 26 states and the District of Columbia. Sixteen states also have passed laws that allow for medical use of compounds derived from cannabis plants. Marijuana is illegal under federal law. Currently, veterans who live in states where medical marijuana is legal are not barred from using it, but their VA physicians cannot recommend it or fill out the paperwork needed for a patient to receive a medical marijuana card. A veteran who is found to use medical marijuana cannot lose his or her access to health care or disability compensation. VA doctors, however, reserve the right to decide whether to continue prescribing some medications if a veteran is found to use marijuana. The proposed legislation would not require the VA to cover the cost of medical marijuana for patients. [Source: Military Times | June 28, 2016 ++]

VA Benefits in Jail Update 03 ► Vets Over Paid \$104.1M in Last 7-yrs

The government improperly shelled out \$104.1 million in disability compensation and pension payments over seven years to veterans in prison, according to a new watchdog report. The Veterans Benefits Administration failed to slash benefits given to vets incarcerated in federal, state and local correctional facilities between 2008 and 2015 in thousands of cases, the Veterans Affairs Department inspector general found, primarily because the agency was more focused on eliminating the disability claims backlog, which had ballooned to an all-time high in 2013.

Federal law requires the department to reduce disability compensation and discontinue pension payments for veterans serving more than 60 days in federal, state, or local correctional institutions for a felony, and in some cases, a misdemeanor. For vets with a service-connected disability rating of 20 percent or more, the government reduces disability compensation to a 10 percent rate while they are in prison; for those with a 10 percent rating, the VBA cuts the benefit payment in half for the duration of incarceration. Because those adjustments do not require VA staff to attribute disability ratings to individual cases, they are not considered part of the department's disability claims backlog. So, the VBA didn't prioritize processing them, the watchdog discovered during its two-year audit, which meant millions of taxpayer dollars were wasted.

In one case, the watchdog found that VBA already had overpaid a veteran -- who started serving a 151-month sentence in federal prison in 2012 -- \$107,000 in vets' benefits as of Oct. 1, 2015. Overall, the inattention led to \$59.9 million in overpayments to vets in federal prison, and \$44.2 million in erroneous payments for those veterans housed in state and local correctional facilities. Because the workload was not a high priority for VA, data-sharing between VBA, the Justice Department's Bureau of Prisons, and the Social Security Administration fell by the wayside resulting in significant processing delays, the inspector general found.

For example, after a computer-matching agreement between VBA and BOP expired, "VBA did not receive data from BOP on federal incarcerations from July 2008 through May 2015 -- a total of 83 months," according to the watchdog report. In 3,800 cases involving vets in state and local correctional facilities (out of 21,600 cases that the IG looked at), VBA failed to thoroughly process adjustments to benefits after it had received data from SSA, leading to significant delays. "The longer the incarceration adjustment remains unaddressed, the larger the overpayment will be to the veteran. It took VBA an average of about 300 days to process state and local incarceration notifications received from March 2013 to August 2014," the watchdog said. The IG looked at data for federal incarcerations between 2008 and 2015, and SSA notifications between 2013 and 2014 related to state and local incarcerations.

If VBA doesn't get a handle on the problem, the improper payments could spike to \$307.9 million by fiscal 2020, the IG estimated. In its response, the VBA said its staff has to do "additional, time-consuming research to determine the date of conviction" for the veteran because currently BOP does not provide that information. "VBA will continue to work with FBOP and SSA to obtain the needed data and identify additional ways to streamline the process," said former VBA Acting Undersecretary for Benefits Danny Pummill in an April response to the IG report. The agency also noted that it continues to receive more "non-rating" claims, as it characterizes adjustments to the benefits of incarcerated vets, similar to the uptick in new disability compensation claims. "In fiscal year 2015, VBA completed a record 3.1 million non-rating claims, a 15 percent increase over fiscal year 2014," Pummill wrote.

VBA agreed with all the IG's recommendations, including making changes to the benefits of incarcerated vets a priority, and recouping any outstanding improper payments on the books. The agency also pledged to renew and improve its existing data-sharing agreements with BOP and SSA. VA spokesman James Hutton said VBA is also working to "support future automation of the process to minimize benefit overpayments" and that "veterans who become indebted as a result of adjustments to their benefit awards have the right to request a waiver of the overpayment or to establish a repayment plan to help ease the financial burden upon release." [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | June 29, 2016 ++]

VA Crises Hotline Update 06 ► Situation Worse than Previously Noted

Four months after Veterans Affairs officials announced leadership changes at the agency's suicide hotline — and praised employees following a scandal over dropped calls — the line's director has resigned and some staff members still answer as few as one call a day. Documents obtained by Military Times indicate that Veterans Crisis Line Director Gregory Hughes, hired in January to lead the troubled call center after reports that callers were placed on hold or sent to a voicemail system, resigned effective 17 JUN. Hughes' departure for family obligations comes as a government watchdog agency reported that the service needs improvement, including its text message response system, which appears to be in disarray.

According to a Government Accountability Office report released 27 JUN, 73 percent of calls made to the crisis line during a two-month period in 2015 were answered within the VA's standard of 30 seconds — a response time that ensures the call is answered in the VA's Canandaigua, New York, call center and not routed to a backup center. But emails from Hughes to his staff in early May 2016 indicate that matters only got worse — roughly half the calls received at the Crisis Line rolled over to the backup centers because they weren't answered within 30 seconds. By late May, those figures had improved, to between 35 percent and 40 percent, but still were above the GAO estimate of 27 percent, according to the emails. "If we continue to rollover calls because we have staff that are not making an honest effort, then we are failing at our mission," Hughes wrote.



The main call center for the Veterans Crisis Line is housed at VA facilities in Canandaigua, New York. The Crisis Line faces new charges that it is unresponsive to text messages and that many calls still go to backup centers.

As reported in Update 31 GAO also found that text messages to the center went unanswered. Four of 14 messages, or 28 percent, texted to the center in a test by GAO did not receive a response. Of the remaining 10 test text messages, eight received responses within two minutes and two within five minutes, according to the report. The agency also noted that VA does not routinely test its system and relies on its provider to track the information. The VA's goal is to answer 90 percent of crisis line calls at Canandaigua, because responders at the facility have access to veterans' medical records, addresses and contact information if the vets receive VA compensation or health care. The contracted backup call centers cannot access this information, and they do not always follow procedures established by the VA, according to GAO. A crisis line employee also told Military Times that VA is unable to follow up with a veteran after a call is routed to a backup center, nor can those backup centers pass information on the call back to VA. **"If a veteran commits suicide after being routed to a backup center, we have no way of knowing or tracking it,"** the employee said.

VA has implemented a number of improvements at the Crisis Line in the past year, to include upgrading communications equipment, hiring new employees, expanding office space and staggering shifts to ensure that employees always are available to take calls. But Hughes told staff that many calls were being routed to backup

centers because some staff members routinely leave before their shifts end, they refuse to go to the office building they are assigned to, and some responders take as few as one to five calls a day. "We have some truly outstanding staff here who are very committed to their positions. These staff are routinely handling 15 to 20 calls daily and the quality of their calls [is] excellent," Hughes wrote. "We have other staff that are taking 1-5 calls a day and this cannot continue ... what we have seen is that there are staff who spend very little time on the phone or engaged in assigned productive activity."

The VA employee Military Times spoke with said some staff members did not take calls within an hour of their shift ending as they didn't want to extend their work day. In February, the VA inspector general found that at least 23 calls from veterans, troops or family members in fiscal 2014 went to a voicemail system and were never returned. The investigation also found that employees at the backup centers were not trained properly or lacked the experience to help veterans in a mental health crisis. VA officials said the department had taken a number of measures to improve the line before the inspector general's report was published. The Veterans Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255, Press 1, has seen its volume swell from 164,000 calls in 2011 to 534,000 in 2015.

Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson traveled to the main call center in New York in February to express support for Crisis Line employees, whom he called heroes. "The simple fact of the matter is the operation at the Veterans Crisis Line today does not bear any resemblance to what happened then," he said. But both the GAO and internal memos indicate that problems persist. In an email that went to all VCL employees, Hughes chastised the under-performers. "Under our new leadership we are receiving significant additional resources of equipment, technology and personnel and we have an obligation to [our department] as well as veterans to make the most of these resources," he wrote.

The GAO recommended that VA monitor and test its text message system and develop performance standards for responding to texts. It also said VA should continue working with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that other suicide hotlines in the country respond appropriately to veterans. A VA spokeswoman said changes at the Crisis Line, including increased monitoring of employees and better technology allows VA to track incoming calls and counselors' work loads better than leadership could previously, including when the GAO examined the service. She added that that the line is adding several new employees this month, a move that will have more responders "taking calls than at any point in our history.

"Deputy Secretary Gibson has repeatedly said that we will make the Veterans Crisis Line a gold standard facility and that the [line] has traditionally been undermanaged," VA spokeswoman Victoria Dillon said. "Already we have made important organizational changes to better support our life-saving counselors." In their response to GAO, Veterans Health Administration officials said the VA is taking steps to resolve issues and is "making further improvements to the Veterans Crisis Line, ensuring veterans in crisis reach one of our trained responders in a timely manner." Hughes remains employed by VA. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | June 29, 2016 ++]

VA Congressional Oversight Update 05 ► 3 Things Needed

With about six months left until the start of the next administration, lawmakers are continuing to focus on the ever-popular topic of "burrowing in."

1. Political appointee to career employee Conversion - House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) wants details from the Office of Personnel Management, the agency in charge of reviewing an employee's appointment from political appointee to career federal employee. In a June 30 letter to acting OPM Director Beth Cobert, Chaffetz asked about the number of political appointees who have been converted to career employees between 1 SEP2015 to the present. He's looking for full sets of documents that explain who has been converted, which agencies and positions were involved and salary information for each conversion.

“The Office of Personnel Management and appointing agencies must ensure each conversion of a political appointee to a career position results from a fair and open competition,” Chaffetz wrote. “Hiring decisions must be free from political interference, legitimate and justified.” OPM has until July 14 to respond to the committee. Earlier this year, OPM reminded agencies of the existing procedures they must follow if they want to convert political appointees to career positions in the next administration. The policies date back to the Carter administration. OPM revised its requirements in 2010, opting to conduct pre-hiring reviews on a continual basis rather than during the year before a presidential transition.

2. Keeping Better Track of IG Recommendations - A new Senate bill aims to bring more transparency to inspector general recommendations and the actions agencies have — or haven’t — taken to meet them. Sens. James Lankford (R-OK) and Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND), the chairman and the ranking member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, introduced the bill. The **Inspector General Recommendation Transparency Act** would require agency inspectors general post their audit recommendations online. Lankford and Heitkamp said Congress has had a difficult time keeping track of these recommendations in the past. Posting them online will give Congress and the public a better view into the process agencies are taking to follow through on IG recommendations, they said in a statement. Agencies collectively have a little more than 700 open IG recommendations, Michael Horowitz, Justice Department IG and chairman of the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, told Lankford and Heitkamp at a subcommittee hearing last December.

3. New Hiring Procedures for VA Health Care Professionals - The Veterans Affairs Department has long lamented the thousands of vacancies — as many as 43,000 — that they’re attempting to fill at VA medical centers. Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-OH) introduced a bill that would let the VA secretary consider the private sector market, as well as the applicant’s experience and the complexity of the job or the hospital location before setting pay for a new medical professional. Other provisions would require the VA to create a single recruitment database for the entire department, as well as an executive management fellowship program. “I know this committee has focused heavily on accountability, and while I think it is of the utmost importance, it’s important that we also focus on the hiring and retention of high quality employees within the department so our veterans receive the best services possible,” House VA Subcommittee Chairman Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio) said, during a March 16 hearing on this topic. The bill cleared the House Veterans Affairs Committee and now awaits full consideration by the House. The legislation is similar to other proposals included in the Senate VA Committee’s omnibus, the Veterans First Act.

[Source: Federal News Radio | Nicole Ogrysk | July 1, 2016 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 32 ► Hotline Tied Up by 4 Repeat Callers

Troubled vets who are contemplating suicide are having trouble getting through to a VA crisis hotline because of four repeat callers who flood the lines to torment operators, VA officials said. The four callers aren't phoning the Veterans Crisis Line for help, but rather to berate the hotline workers with "abusive, vulgar and profane" comments, Department of Veterans Affairs deputy secretary Sloan Gibson said. In May alone, the quartet of callers phoned the Veterans Crisis Line a staggering 5,619 times, more than 4% of the 128,346 total calls received, according to VA numbers cited by USA Today. One of the callers dialed the crisis center a whopping 2,158 times in May.

Suicide rates among recent veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq are 41% higher than the general U.S. population — but some of them are left hanging on the other line because of the constant harassment. Farmers, lumberjacks and fishermen top U.S. suicide rates. VA officials say they’re working on weeding out the repeat callers so the crisis center can take calls from actual at-risk vets in need. "It's unacceptable that they would block that kind of access for other veterans and other active-duty service members that really need crisis help and so we're

working through this clinically now to address that, cause it's just wrong," Gibson said. "My bottom line was deal with it and deal with it quickly because we're not going to continue to have that happen."

The Veterans Crisis Line — whose life-saving work was captured in an Oscar-winning HBO short documentary — was established in 2007 in Canandaigua, N.Y., and has come under fire in recent months for failing to staff properly for a massive influx in crisis calls. A Veterans Affairs Department Inspector found that more than a third of distressed vets who called the 24-hour suicide hotline were ignored and rerouted to a voicemail system. VA officials told USA Today they are expanding hotline staff and will be “restricting” the four callers but “only after a consultation with clinicians at their local VA Medical Centers to ensure that these four veterans can be cared for appropriately, while at the same time freeing up staff at the Veterans Crisis Line for those veterans, servicemembers and family members who need to speak with crisis line counselors timely and thoroughly.” [Source: New York Daily News | Laura Bult | July 1, 2016 ++]

VA Cancer Treatment Update 05 ► Upcoming Cancer Elimination Role

The Department of Veterans Affairs could turn its entire medical system into a nationwide center for excellence for cancer treatment in the next few months. That’s the upshot of VA’s role within the White House’s “moonshot” to eliminate cancer, a \$1 billion attempt to bring about a decade’s worth of medical advances in half that time. While other agencies will focus on research and clinical trials, VA doctors will be putting those advances to work as soon as this fall, in hopes of saving more veterans' lives. “We’re essentially taking expertise that exists in our high-end centers and making sure that it is available in even our most rural centers,” said Dr. David Shulkin, VA’s undersecretary for health. “It’s going to result in different treatment options and better decisions, and making sure every veteran is getting world-class cancer care.”



Dr. David Shulkin

VA officials will team with the National Cancer Institute, the Prostate Cancer Foundation and a host of federal agencies to support a series of new innovations through the system. But the partnership drawing the most attention is one with IBM’s supercomputer Watson, whose genomics technology program will be made available to VA hospitals and doctors looking to pinpoint the best treatment options for veterans battling cancer. “What you’ll begin to start seeing is at your VA hospitals, you’ll now have access to the most advanced type of cancer diagnostics anywhere in the world,” Shulkin said. “IBM isn’t doing this with any other system on this scale.”

Department officials hopes to help at least 10,000 veterans with the targeted cancer therapies in the next few years. For some with the illness, individualized treatments could be compiled and processed by the supercomputer within a day of the diagnosis. “And almost every month, there is new discovery in this area,” Shulkin said. “So this is not only helping the patients we’ll see this year, but setting up VA to be the kind of system we all hope it should be for years to come.” Those types of offerings should be available to veterans starting this fall. Shulkin said he is

excited by the opportunities, especially given the aging population of veterans in America and the growing number of cancer cases VA doctors see each year. "This is one of our critical areas of focus," he said. "This is taking what we know is the most advanced, very best way to practice, and really making sure we're getting that to as many veterans as possible as quickly as possible." More information on the presidential cancer initiative is available on the White House website <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/28/fact-sheet-cancer-moonshot-summit-vice-president-biden-announces-new>. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | July 4, 2016 ++]

VA Prescription Policy Update 06 ► State Monitoring Database Use

The Veterans Affairs Department figures prominently in a new push by the Obama administration to curtail the nationwide opioid and heroin epidemic. President Obama called on Congress 6 JUL to spend \$1.1 billion to fund new efforts to stem prescription drug abuse and encourage patients to seek treatment, including a new policy at VA that will require doctors to check state prescription monitoring databases before prescribing a controlled substances to a patient. The policy, designed to keep patients from doctor shopping for painkillers, will require physicians to check the databases at least once a year and when a patient requires a refill.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 28,000 Americans died from opioid or heroin overdoses in 2014, and at least half the deaths involved prescription medication. The administration argues that new measures, to include expanding access to treatment and funding research, are needed to address the epidemic. "Every day that passes without congressional action to provide these additional resources is a missed opportunity to get treatment to those who want it, help prevent overdoses and support communities across the country impacted by this epidemic," White House officials said in a release.

A 2013 investigation by the Center for Investigative Reporting found that VA prescriptions for four opiates, including hydrocodone, oxycodone, methadone and morphine, increased 270 percent from 2001 to 2012. But after VA launched an opioid safety initiative in 2013, the number of prescriptions has dropped by more than 110,000. The limits placed on opioid prescriptions at VA, however, have been problematic for some veterans, according to veterans advocacy groups and lawmakers. They argue that while the limits have helped some addicted veterans get treatment, they have forced others to endure pain or turn to street drugs like heroin. The White House announcement also calls for the Defense Department to conclude an ongoing evaluation of the DoD's prescription drug monitoring program. A DoD report released in April noted that opioid abuse among active-duty personnel was 0.2 percent in 2015, down 29 percent from 2010. Opiate-positive drug tests among service members also declined by 42 percent from fiscal 2013 to fiscal 2014.

Some of the initiatives announced Wednesday by the White House are ongoing, to include the Drug Enforcement Administration's prescription drug take-back day in October, grants for states to expand tele medicine outreach and treatment in rural areas and Health and Human Services Department funded research on pain management, substance abuse and treatment. Other initiatives included in the White House announcement Wednesday include expanding the number of patients that a doctor can oversee for buprenorphine therapy from 100 to 275, and a requirement that the Indian Health Service check state prescription databases before prescribing or dispensing an opioid for more than seven days. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | July 6, 2016 ++]

Trump VA Plan ► 10-Step if Elected

On 11 JUL Donald J. Trump spoke at the Westin Virginia Beach Town Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Mr. Trump declared a commitment to upholding law and order in this country, and fighting to ensure that our veterans are served with the best medical care. His opinion is that the Clinton/Obama administration has betrayed our veterans' trust. Mr. Trump unveiled a 10-point plan to reform the VA and place veterans' healthcare as a top priority. Here is Trump's 10 step plan to ensure quality, timely care for every Veteran in America:

- 1.** I will appoint a Secretary of Veterans Affairs who will make it his or her personal mission to clean up the VA. The Secretary's sole mandate will be to serve our Veterans – not bureaucrats, not politicians, but Veterans. Amazingly, President Obama's VA Secretary recently downplayed concerns about waiting times by saying that people also wait in line at Disneyland.
- 2.** I am going to use every lawful authority to remove and discipline federal employees or managers who fail our Veterans or breach the public trust.
- 3.** I am going to ask Congress to pass legislation that ensures the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has the authority to remove or discipline any employee who risks the health, safety or well-being of any Veteran.
- 4.** I am going to appoint a commission to investigate all the wrongdoing at the VA and then present those findings to Congress as the basis for bold legislative reform.
- 5.** I am going to make sure the honest and dedicated people in the VA have their jobs protected, and are put in line for promotions.
- 6.** I will create a private White House Hotline – that is answered by a real person 24 hours a day – to ensure that no valid complaint about VA wrongdoing falls through the cracks. I will instruct my staff that if a valid complaint is not addressed that the issue be brought directly to me, and I will pick up the phone and fix it myself, if need be. That's a promise.
- 7.** We are going to stop giving bonuses to people for wasting money, and start giving bonuses to people for improving service, saving lives and cutting waste. If an employee finds a smart way to save a large amount of money that also creates better outcomes for our Veterans, then a small, responsible portion of the money saved will be given as a one-time bonus and the rest will be returned to taxpayers.
- 8.** We are going to reform our visa programs to ensure American Veterans are in the front, not back, of the line.
- 9.** We are going to increase the number of mental health care professionals, and increase outreach to Veterans outside of the system.
- 10.** We are going to ensure every Veteran in America has the choice to seek care at the VA, or to seek private medical care paid for by our government. Never again will we allow a Veteran to suffer or die waiting for the care they so richly deserve.

[Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | July 11, 2016 ++]

VA Security ► \$11M Spent on Weapons, Riot Gear, etc Over 9 Years

The Department of Veteran Affairs bought more than \$11 million worth of weapons, ammo and other security equipment between 2005 and 2014, according to a report released last month by a non-profit organization that tracks

spending across the federal government. The report, called The Militarization of America and published by OpenTheBooks, said the VA acquired a variety of pistols -- Berettas, Sig Sauers, Lugers -- and ammunition, as well as body armor, police batons, ballistic shields, riot shields and helmets, night gun sights, tactical equipment for crowd control and more.

The \$11.6 million in weapons and gear includes \$200,000 for night vision equipment, \$2.3 million on body armor, more than \$2 million on pistols and about \$3.6 million on ammunition, the report said. A chart included with the report also shows a variety of training weapons and a night gun scope. The department has 3,700 law enforcement officers guarding and securing VA medical centers. The VA didn't respond to Military.com's request for comment, though in a 17 FEB email to OpenTheBooks, the agency described its police officers as "the front line response forces for our facilities" and said its personnel "receive extensive training in active threat response. "While VA police work very closely with Federal, local and state law enforcement partners, VA police will be the first to have to deal with any active situation and are well trained accordingly," it stated.

The department is not the only federal agency that has been stockpiling weapons in recent years, presumably against mass shooters and other security threats. The report found that non-military federal agencies spent nearly \$1.5 billion on weapons and ammo from 2005 to 2014. The report states that the IRS spent \$10.7 million on guns, ammo and gear over the same period. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service spent \$4.7 million, the Social Security Administration \$417,000, and the Department of Education \$412,000. The Smithsonian Institution's arms purchases totaled just over \$309,000.

The arming of VA security personnel began in 1996 with a pilot program intended to extend firearms and arrest authority to the department's 2,393 officers, the report said. Two years later, only 262 department police officers had the authority to carry a weapon and make arrests. "However, by 2008, the VA officer corps grew to 3,175 and all were authorized to make arrests and carry firearms," OpenTheBooks' report found. Currently, it said, the VA has more than 3,700 personnel who may carry firearms and make arrests.

In a swipe at VA over its widely publicized problems with getting veterans in for appointments, the organization said it was "notable [that the arms and equipment] buildup occurred while the VA failed to provide critical care for thousands of veterans who would later on waiting lists." In its email to the group, the department said the gun purchases relate to a decision in 2008 to have VA police switch to a different firearm. It did not say what VA officers used before then. "This change has taken place over time in a phased approach. VA facilities began replacing the older pistol as funds became available and pistol service life limits are reached," the VA said. "Most of VA facilities have completed the transition to the new contracted firearm, with several still in that process." Night vision and other countermeasure equipment were acquired by field facilities to meet their local security and law enforcement needs, according to the department. The VA statement did not detail which facilities required the special gear. [Source: Military.com | Bryant Jordan | Jul 05, 2016 ++]

VA Accountability Update 35 ► H.R.5620 Makes it Easier to Fire/Demote

A new accountability bill aims to make it easier to fire and demote all Veterans Affairs employees, and would prevent department senior executives from receiving any bonuses over the next five years. The 2016 VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act is the latest effort by lawmakers to change the disciplinary process for VA employees and top career officials, essentially by reducing the time allotted for it to play out. The measure also would give the secretary clear authority to rescind bonuses, retirement benefits and relocation expenses from employees under certain circumstances. Additionally, the legislation would prohibit all VA senior executives from receiving awards or bonuses from fiscal 2017 through 2021.

Under the bill (H.R. 5620), rank-and-file employees who have been fired because of performance or misconduct, and appeal that decision to the Merit Systems Protection Board, would not receive pay, bonuses, or certain other benefits while the appeal is pending. Senior executives would no longer be able to appeal removals or demotions to MSPB; instead they could appeal to an internal Senior Executive Disciplinary Appeals Board. But the secretary could reverse that board's decision. "The biggest obstacle standing in the way of VA reform is the department's pervasive lack of accountability among employees at all levels," said the bill's sponsor, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL). "For too long, union bosses, administration officials and their enablers have used every trick in the book to help VA bureaucrats who can't or won't do their jobs remain firmly entrenched in the agency's bureaucracy."

Miller, one of the chief architects of the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act – the law which tried to make it easier to fire VA senior executives -- has introduced several measures over the last few years that incorporate many of the provisions in H.R. 5620. The Justice Department recently said it could not enforce a key accountability component of the 2014 law, prompting the VA to announce it would no longer use the Choice Act's expedited firing authority for senior executives. Miller's latest bill also attempts to strengthen whistleblower rights, and would withhold bonuses from managers who don't treat whistleblower complaints seriously, or who retaliate against such employees. H.R. 5620 also contains a section that aims to fix the lengthy and complicated disability claims process for veterans. The major employee accountability provisions in the bill would:

- Impose a shorter disciplinary process for rank-and-file employees who are fired or demoted. The entire process – from notification to the MSPB's decision on an appeal – would be limited to 77 days
- Give the VA secretary authority to strip pension benefits from VA senior executives who are convicted of a crime that influenced their job performance, and then fired. The bill also would prevent senior executives about to be fired because they were convicted of such a felony, but who instead retire, from receiving their full retirement benefits. The secretary would be allowed to take away the government contribution portion of the pension for the time period in which the employee was engaged in behavior warranting removal.
- Allow the VA secretary to recoup bonuses from VA employees when appropriate, with notification and an opportunity for appeal.
- Allow the VA secretary to recoup relocation expenses from VA employees who've engaged in misconduct, with notification and opportunity for appeal.

Miller's bill contains provisions that are similar to the Senate's Veterans First Act, most notably the elimination of MSPB appeal rights for senior executives. But the House legislation contains measures that target the pay and benefits of problem rank-and-file employees, not just senior executives. The Veterans First Act, which has stalled in the upper chamber, also would reduce the amount of time an employee has to respond to proposed disciplinary actions. But earlier versions of that bill contained some stronger accountability measures for the rank-and-file that didn't make it into the final legislation. The Senate bill also includes more hiring and pay flexibility for the VA to recruit health-care professionals, measures that are not in the House legislation.

Jason Briefel, interim president of the Senior Executives Association, said he needed to look more closely at H.R. 5620 to see if some of the group's previous recommendations on issues affecting VA senior executives made it into the bill. "We're not just here to say 'no,'" Briefel said. "We are here to work with the Congress, and we do want to help find good policy for employees writ large," whether they are senior executives or not, Briefel added. Briefel said lawmakers need to ask themselves whether or not "a sticks-only approach" to personnel ultimately will result in the type of leadership that VA needs to succeed. "Part of what we hope to continue doing is educating members of Congress about what the real facts are."

The American Federation of Government Employees, which represents a large portion of the VA workforce, said keeping the department accountable called for stronger, not weaker, due process rights for employees. "Real accountability at the VA comes when front-line employees are empowered to speak out about issues with veterans' health care and benefits," said AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. "Chipping away at vital due process rights

leaves these employees more exposed to retaliatory acts, cutting off a vital feedback channel for improving veterans' care." Cox added that "whistleblower protections can only do so much to right these wrongs." AFGE supports the Senate's Veterans First Act.[Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney| July 6, 2016++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 JUL 2016



Eight Mile, AL — A Navy veteran told investigators he believed the “U.S. government had wronged” him when asked why he had taken thousands of dollars in undue compensation from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. **Arthur McCants**, III, a 68-year-old resident of Eight Mile, was convicted and sentenced recently for what authorities described as a four-year scheme to “pad” his travel voucher claim forms in order to claim undue mileage. McCants, who served in the U.S. Navy as a communications officer from 1972-1977, was officially charged and convicted of theft of government funds. As a veteran, McCants is entitled to travel benefits during his visits to the Veterans Health Administration. However, federal prosecutors say McCants used a fake address to falsely claim \$43,580.34 in additional mileage compensation, filing nearly 1,000 fictitious travel claims between January 3, 2011 and January 9, 2015.



According to McCants' statements to authorities, “he knew what he was doing was wrong, but he felt that the U.S. Government had wronged him, also.” U.S. District Court Judge William E. Steele sentenced McCants to time served on 29 JUN — bringing his total time in custody to just under four months. McCants will also serve a three-year term of supervised release and will additionally be required to make full restitution to the VA. Though defrauding the VA was McCants first charge under federal law, he's seen several arrests locally for cocaine possession, theft and other drug-related charges. The most recent of those was recorded in 2009, according to the Mobile Metro Jail. [Source: Ladniappe Weekly | Jason Johnson | June 30, 2016 ++]

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Asheville, NC — Sixteen veterans face federal charges for submitting fake travel vouchers for reimbursement to the Asheville VAMC. Court documents allege the defendants submitted vouchers overstating the distance they traveled for medical appointments or to from medical treatment. Under certain circumstances, veterans with service-connected disabilities are reimbursed for travel expenses to and from their residence and the VA. A federal grand

jury returned federal indictments on 7 JUN against three people, charging each defendant separately with one count of making a false claim for travel benefits from the VA, for allegedly submitting multiple fraudulent travel vouchers over a period of months or years. The charge levies a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The three indicted are:

- **Arlan M. Land**, 53, of Nolanville, TX, was indicted for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$18,839.10 in fraudulent claims.
- **David B. Wright**, 56, of Asheville, is facing federal charges for allegedly obtaining approximately \$15,391.52 from the VA.
- **Pamela L. Smith**, 55, of Asheville, has been indicted for allegedly defrauding the VA of approximately \$5,318.96.

The following 13 people are each charged with one count of stealing money from the VA, a charge that levies a potential maximum prison term of one year and a \$100,000 fine. The loss amount associated with each case is less than \$5,000.

- **Harris Hamilton**, 60, of Chesnee, S.C., is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$2,662 in fraudulent claims.
- **Marcus McEachin**, 45, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$4,029 in fraudulent claims.
- **Michael Tate**, 55, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$2,919 in fraudulent claims.
- **Christopher Miller**, 52, of Spartanburg, S.C., is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$3,411 in fraudulent claims.
- **Tommie Borders**, 62, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$1,426 in fraudulent claims.
- **Ruben Dixon**, 59, of Lenoir, N.C., is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$1,234 in fraudulent claims.
- **Jeffrey Franklin**, 58, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$3,486 in fraudulent claims.
- **Violet McKinney**, 53, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$4,737 in fraudulent claims.
- **Guy Stivender**, 57, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$1,534 in fraudulent claims.
- **TC Littlejohn**, 56, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$1,514 in fraudulent claims.
- **Kevin Simms** of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$ 4,348 in fraudulent claims.
- **Marshall Dukes**, 61, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$3,780 in fraudulent claims.
- **Kenneth Pickens**, 47, of Asheville, is charged for allegedly obtaining from the VA approximately \$2,480 in fraudulent claims.

[Source: ABC-13 WLOS | Krystyna Biassou | June 30, 2016] ++]

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Deschutes County, PR — A former employee of the Deschutes County District Attorney’s Office and the Oregon Department of Justice appeared in federal court this week and admitted to stealing more than \$55,000 from the Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. **Bruce A. Endicott**, 34, pled guilty to theft of government funds before U.S. District Court Judge Robert E. Jones on Tuesday, and admitted he committed the theft over a course of more than three years. According to court

records, Endicott began receiving service-connected disability benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2005. In June 2012, Endicott filed an additional claim with the VA for Individual Unemployability benefits, claiming he was unemployed and unable to be employed due to his service-connected disabilities that included physical and mental impairments. Endicott also submitted a statement to the VA in February 2013 that stated he had not worked within the past 12 months. In fact, Endicott was currently working at the Oregon Department of Justice under a second Social Security number that he had not disclosed to the VA. Based on Endicott's false statements and concealments, the VA awarded him additional benefits and advised him to notify the VA immediately if he became employed. Endicott left the Oregon Department of Justice in December of 2013 and began working for the Deschutes County District Attorney's Office, and again failed to notify the VA he was working.

After Endicott left the District Attorney's Office in May 2014, he applied for welfare benefits through the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), using the second Social Security number, and claimed to have no income. Endicott failed to disclose to DHS that he was receiving approximately \$2,700 per month in VA benefits. Based on Endicott's false statements and concealments, DHS awarded him Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly known as food stamps) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Family (TANF) benefits. In February 2015, Endicott submitted a statement to the VA regarding his Individual Unemployability (IU) claim, in which he failed to disclose his former employment with the Deschutes County District Attorney's Office, and asserted that he had not worked in the past 12 months. As a result of his false statements and concealments, the VA continued to pay his IU benefits. Between June 2012 and October 2015, Endicott received approximately \$47,947 in IU benefits, \$5,996 in SNAP benefits, and \$2,770 in TANF benefits to which he was not entitled. According to the plea agreement, the government will be seeking a 30-day term of imprisonment. The actual sentence will be determined by Judge Jones at Endicott's sentencing hearing which is scheduled for October 5, 2016. [Source: DoJ Dist of OR | U.S Attorney's Office | June 30, 2016 ++]

VAMC Aurora CO Update 16 ► Over-Budget Hospital Lavish Features Cut

Imported Brazilian wood has been scratched from the budget-busting design for a veterans hospital under construction outside Denver, eliminated to save money. A planned \$10 million landscaping scheme has been slashed to \$2 million, and subcontractors who find a way to reduce costs get to keep 30 percent of the savings, according to the Army Corps of Engineers, which took over management of the project after the cost nearly tripled. Corps officials said 29 JUN they've been looking for ways to save money since taking over construction management from the Veterans Affairs Department last year. But Col. John Henderson, commander of the Corps' Omaha, Nebraska, district — which includes Denver — said it's too soon to know whether the builders can finish for less than the nearly \$1.7 billion contract cost because some other expenses are rising. "It would be creating a false expectation," Henderson said while leading Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman and others on a tour of the suburban Aurora site. Coffman's district includes the hospital.

The hospital complex has about a dozen buildings and parking garages strung out along a long, narrow parcel of land. Most of the buildings branch off from a 1,100-foot-long central concourse with glass and steel walls soaring as high as 70 feet. "It seems like a pretty exotic design," Coffman said. "It's not typical of a military hospital," Henderson replied. But he was careful not to criticize the VA, saying the department was a key partner in the project. "We inherited the design. Now we're looking for efficiencies," he said. Henderson and Ted Streckfuss, the Corps' deputy district engineer, said those efficiencies include a faster, simplified process for approving minor changes in the plans.

In the seven months since the Corps took over, change orders have cost a total of \$1.7 million, Streckfuss said. Before that, they were costing about \$2 million each month, he said. The huge drop was partly because changes are

more likely to crop up in the early stages of construction, Streckfuss said. He declined to speculate on other reasons. The hospital is about 70 percent complete, and construction is expected to be finished in early 2018. The VA hasn't set an opening date, citing the difficulties of starting up a new hospital. It will replace an old, crowded facility operating in Denver. Coffman has been a vocal critic of the VA, both for mismanaging the project and for failing to fire anyone involved in the mistakes. The VA has repeatedly taken responsibility for the massive cost overrun but said anyone who might have been fired had left the department, some by retirement. The agency has refused to make public the results of an internal investigation into what went wrong. [Source: The Associated Press | Dan Elliott | June 30, 2016 ++]

VAMC Aurora CO Update 17 ► Still No Explanation on Cost Overruns

More than a year has passed since the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs admitted the cost of a new hospital in Aurora had exceeded its budget by more than \$1 billion. But even now, it's hard to get an official explanation from the VA or its internal watchdog on why the hospital's cost skyrocketed from about \$604 million in 2011 to about \$1.7 billion in 2015. The VA is refusing to make public its own review of what went wrong. And a second investigation by the VA Office of Inspector General — once set to be released in mid-June — now is not expected until after Labor Day. "The release of the audit on the Aurora, CO hospital is delayed because OIG has new review processes. At this time we anticipate the audit results being available to the public in the fall," wrote Michael Nacincik, a spokesman for the VA Inspector General, in response Monday to questions about the report's release.



The VA Inspector General acts as the agency's independent auditor and investigator. Both dead-ends have frustrated members of Colorado's congressional delegation, who spent much of 2015 trying to convince skeptical colleagues to fund the facility in the face of widespread anger at the veterans agency. U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Aurora, has been one of the VA's most vocal critics. Last week, Coffman sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert McDonald asking that he make public the review the VA already has completed — as well as the supporting documents that led its investigators to conclude in March that no new punishments were necessary for the cost overrun. "I urge you, again and hopefully for the last time, to release the complete Administrative Investigation Board (AIB) report on the Aurora, Colorado Replacement Medical Center construction project to all members of Congress and the American people," wrote Coffman in a letter dated 7 JUL.

Coffman noted the VA had released a summary of its findings to Congress in March, but in doing so omitted 71 exhibits that comprised "thousands of pages, on which the AIB's conclusions were based." Now he wants those, too.

“Congress and the public always have a right to know how tax dollars are being spent,” he wrote. “But especially in this case, given the gross magnitude of waste and mismanagement, transparency is crucial.”

Asked about the reports, a VA spokesman said the agency welcomed Coffman’s interest but then pointed to a previous statement by VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson as to why the VA didn’t want to release the AIB investigation. “As soon as you start making the material from those AIBs public, you wind up killing the whole investigative process,” Gibson said. “So by doing that, we wind up jeopardizing the future of that device as a means of getting at the ground truth, and I’m not going to do that.” An investigation by The Denver Post last year traced the hospital’s cost overrun to widespread VA mismanagement and poor federal oversight. [Source: The Denver Post | Mark Matthews | July 11, 2016 ++]

*** Vets ***



National Park Passports Update 06 ► Lifetime Access Pass

A free, lifetime pass is available to U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States that have been medically determined to have a permanent disability (does not have to be a 100% disability). It provides access to more than 2,000 recreation sites managed by five Federal agencies. At many sites the Access Pass provides the pass owner a discount on Expanded Amenity Fees (such as camping, swimming, boat launching, and guided tours). The Access Pass admits pass owner/s and passengers in a non-commercial vehicle at per-vehicle fee areas and pass owner + 3 adults, not to exceed 4 adults, where per-person fees are charged. (Children under 16 are always admitted free.) Photo identification will be requested to verify pass ownership. One pass covers the vehicle at sites that charge "per vehicle". At "per person" sites, the applicable fee will be charged for each additional person

Holders of the lifetime Golden Age Passports need not obtain the new access pass until their physically wear out or a replacement is needed. You can obtain at <http://store.usgs.gov/pass/PassIssuanceList.pdf> an Access Pass in person, with proper documentation, from a participating Federal recreation site or office. Issue locations are identified at. Access Passes may also be obtained via mail order from USGS. Mail-order applicants for the Access Pass must submit a completed application (http://store.usgs.gov/pass/access_pass_application.pdf), proof of residency and documentation of permanent disability (does not have to be a 100% disability), and pay the document processing fee of \$10 to obtain a pass through the mail. Once the application package is received, the documentation will be verified and a pass, with the pass owner's name pre-printed on it, will be issued to the applicant. Access Pass applications are usually processed and shipped within 3-5 business days from the day they arrive at USGS. Transit time varies, and is dependent upon the service selected:

- USPS - typically 5-10 business days
- FedEx Ground - typically 3-5 business days
- FedEx 2nd day - typically 2 business days
- FedEx Overnight - typically 1 business day

Access Passes may be used for free entrance to areas under the management of The Forest Service, the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, USACE, and Bureau of Reclamation honor the Access Pass at sites where Entrance or Standard Amenity Fees (Day use fees) are charged. In addition, the Tennessee Valley Authority may honor the Access Pass for entrance or camping discounts.

- Bureau of Land Management <http://www.blm.gov>
- Bureau of Reclamation <http://www.usbr.gov>
- Fish and Wildlife Service <http://www.fws.gov>
- USDA Forest Service <http://www.fs.fed.us>
- National Park Service <http://www.nps.gov>
- US Corps of Engineers <http://www.usace.army.mil>

For more information refer to <http://store.usgs.gov/pass/access.html> [Source: NCOAdvocate | July 1, 2016 ++]

Vet Preference Update 12 ► NDAA Amendment | 1st Job Only

The federal government's practices for hiring veterans have emerged as a sticking point between the House and the Senate. An amendment in the House-passed fiscal 2017 financial services spending bill would prohibit funds from being used to change the current policy on veterans' preference in federal hiring. That measure is a direct response to a provision in the [Senate's fiscal 2017 Defense authorization legislation](#) that would limit the application of veterans' preference to a vet's first job in federal service. The Defense policy bill is now in conference committee; the House version of it does not contain the language on veterans' preference. Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), a veteran of the Iraq war, introduced the financial services amendment, saying that it wasn't the time to "dilute" a system that has successfully hired and promoted more vets in the federal government. "While this change might seem innocuous, it could have serious negative implications for the men and women who served our nation in uniform," Gallego said last week during remarks on the House floor.



Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., is leading a fight to maintain the current system

The Senate provision, which is new this year, would not allow veterans' preference – a confusing and often controversial factor in federal hiring – to be an advantage in any subsequent federal jobs for which an eligible employee applies. In other words, vets would receive the additional points that veterans' preference confers during the application process for their first jobs in federal government, but not for any future positions within the competitive service. The measure also would affect certain close relatives of veterans, including spouses and parents, who are eligible for veteran's preference under specific circumstances when applying for federal jobs. Gallego said that the provision was never the subject of a public hearing or debate. "I'm willing to bet the vast majority of our colleagues in the Senate had no idea this language was even in the bill," he said.

Many hiring managers, human resources specialists and veterans do not understand [how vets' preference works in federal hiring](#). It's played a role in complaints filed over whether the benefit -- designed to help former service members find jobs and increase diversity in government – was applied fairly. Veterans and non-veterans have complained about being shut out of government service because of it. The old "rule of three" in competitive service hiring required that eligible vets receive an extra 5 to 10 points during the application process. But since 2010,

agencies have used the “category rating” system, which splits candidates into different “qualified” categories, resulting in a list of the most qualified applicants that HR specialists send to hiring managers. So, if a veteran and a non-veteran are equally qualified for the job, the veteran will prevail because of vets’ preference. But not all applicants have the necessary basic qualifications for a job, and sometimes you might have two qualified vets competing against one another for a job that only one of them will get.

Jeff Neal, former chief human capital officer at the Homeland Security Department, said he doesn’t think the change to veterans’ preference will remain in the Defense policy bill -- and if it does, it could have unintended consequences. “If you’ve got a job where five veterans apply, and two of them work for the federal government already, and you knock them off of the list because of that, then you still have three veterans,” said Neal, who is senior vice president at ICF International and writes the blog ChiefHRP.com. “Some people might look at it and say, well, more veterans will get jobs, not less.” Neal also said he worried about how the change could affect disabled vets, many of whom currently work in the federal government. “I would hope that before you start doing things that would affect those folks, that you would examine some data, and be very careful about doing things that might actually harm the employment opportunities for disabled veterans.” Disabled veterans receive the most preference in federal hiring.

Veterans [made up about 31 percent of the federal workforce in fiscal 2014](#), according to the Office of Personnel Management. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | July 11, 2016 ++]

Los Angeles Vietnam War Memorial ► Defaced | \$30,000 Reward

Los Angeles County authorities have released a security camera image of a man suspected of defacing a Vietnam War memorial in the Venice area. City News Service reports 6 JUL that a sheriff’s graffiti investigator was able to identify some of the tags left by the vandal in May. Detectives suspect the man in the image is the tagger who calls himself NONER and is known to police around Los Angeles and San Francisco. Rewards totaling \$30,000 have been offered as the investigation continues. Extensive graffiti was spotted covering a large portion of the homespun memorial painted on a block-long wall of Pacific Avenue. The memorial lists the names of American service members missing in action or unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. Painted by a Vietnam veteran and dedicated in 1992, it declares, “You are not forgotten.” [Source: Associated Press | July 06, 2016 ++]



Vet Cemetery Caissons ► Policy & Availability

A Gypsy Vanner horse guided by Gregory Gorman and his wife, Debra Gray, stepped slowly as it pulled a caisson carrying the remains of Army veteran Eugene Jesensky II. Tranquility Country, a newly-formed nonprofit

organization, officially began 1 JUL providing a caisson for funerals at the Florida Cape Canaveral National Cemetery, making it one of only four national cemeteries, inclusive of Arlington, to offer such a service. The others are Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery and Camp Nelson National Cemetery. Tranquility Country will offer the service to all military and veterans, and they will accept donations for the upkeep and expenses. For more information regarding their offer call Debra Gray at (321) 507-7584 or go to www.TranquilityCountry.com.



Jesensky, 73, of Mims, a Vietnam veteran who attained the rank of corporal. served in the Army as a radio repairman with the 82nd Airborne Division, died 20 JUN. About three dozen friends gathered for the funeral under a shelter as a soldier, one of three from the 396th Transportation Company in Fort Stewart, Georgia, played Taps. The soldiers folded the American flag that had draped over the coffin and presented it to Jesensky's teenage daughter. The military honors detail usually consists of two or more uniformed military personnel. Veterans organizations also assist in providing military honors at national cemeteries. For Jesensky, Brevard Honor Guard, a group formed by veterans from American Legion Post 1 and 359, and Veterans of Foreign Wars 4228, rendered a 21-gun volley.

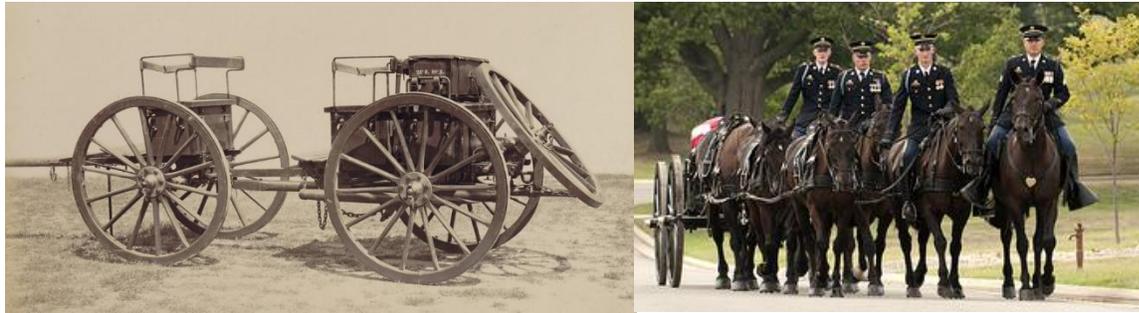
Born on an Army base in California, Jesensky, was drafted and served two years in the military including in the Vietnam War. After military service he became a cowboy, working on a ranch and later owning several horses. He later worked as a welder, owning a welding business. He also worked at Kennedy Space Center before going to work for Florida Department of Transportation, retiring in 2008. Jesensky had a stroke in March and told his friend Gorman, who had known him for many years, he only wanted to make sure that his 19-year-old daughter would be prepared to take care of herself. "He said, 'all I want is to make sure she graduates from high school,'" Gorman said. His daughter, Victorya Jesensky, graduated May 19 from Astronaut High School and plans to join the Army Reserves. Victorya said she was able to help her father after he became sick. "I liked taking care of my dad," she said. "He took care of me my whole life."

The Department of Defense is responsible for providing military funeral honors, to include folding and presenting the United States flag and the playing of Taps. At Arlington both "Standard" and "Full-Honors" funerals are available. Full-honors Funerals are authorized for certain deceased military veterans and include an escort platoon (size varies according to the rank of the deceased), a military band, a caisson, and a colors team. In the past "Full-honors Funerals" were provided to officers and senior enlisted soldiers only. However, the Army recently changed its policy at Arlington National Cemetery. The new policy provides that all service members who die from wounds received as a result of enemy action and are being interred, inurned, or memorialized at Arlington National Cemetery, are eligible to receive full military honors.

Additionally, officers and service members who have reached the senior Non-Commissioned Officer rank (pay grade of E-9) buried in Arlington Cemetery may have the use of the caisson, if available. Officers in the rank of colonel and above in the Army and the Marine Corps may be provided a caparisoned (riderless) horse, if available.



Caissons and limbers are two-wheel carts designed to transport artillery pieces and ammunition. Together, they have long been used to carry caskets for military funerals. Caissons are used to bear the caskets of the deceased in some state and military funerals. In certain western cultures, including the United States and United Kingdom. Horses or other draft animals were harnessed in single file to haul the limber which is attached to the caisson. The British developed this system of carriages, which was adopted by the French then copied from the French by the United States.



During the American Civil War, US Army equipment was identical to Confederate army equipment, essentially identical to French equipment, and similar to that of other nations. The song (When The Caissons Go Rolling Along) refer to these; the version adopted as the US Armies official song has, among other changes, replaced the words Caissons with Army. In addition to military funerals they are also used for State funerals for United States government dignitaries. This includes the President of the United States whose remains are transported by members of The Old Guard's Caisson Platoon (<http://www.oldguard.mdw.army.mil/specialty-platoons/caisson>). [Source: Florida Today | R. Norman Moody | July 1, 2016 ++]

Vet Cemetery Rhode Island Update 01 ► Tattered American Flags Trashed

The discovery of tattered American flags strewn among a pile of trash at Veteran's Memorial Cemetery in Rhode Island has residents outraged. Stan Snyzyk tells WLNE-TV he visits his father's grave at the Exeter cemetery each week and found the discarded flags 26 JUN. Snyzyk took photographs of the flags and posted them on Facebook. The post was shared by more than 5,000 people, with dozens commenting on the lack of respect shown for the American flag. State Veterans Affairs director Kasim Yarn says that by tossing the flags in a pile on the ground, his staff didn't follow protocol. U.S. code stipulates that flags no longer fit for display should be disposed of in a dignified way -- preferably by burning. The flags were burned in a formal ceremony 27 JUN.



In a previous report that made national news it was reported that residents considered it disrespectful that the cemetery was being used as a dog park. A bill was introduced to ban pets, except for service animals, from the cemetery in 2014 and 2015. Kim Ripoli, who oversaw the state's Division of Veterans Affairs, told lawmakers in 2014 said that it was horrible to witness a dog defecating on hallowed ground. The dogs didn't have lobbyists. The effort stalled over questions about how to enforce a ban, said Democratic Rep. Raymond Gallison, who sponsored the bills. The VA division was allegedly considering addressing the issue as it revises its cemetery rules. Reviewing <http://www.dhs.ri.gov/Regulations/RI%20Veterans%20Memorial%20Cemetery%20General%20Rules%20and%20Regulations.pdf> online revealed that the Rhode Island Memorial Cemetery General Rules& Regulations were last revised in DEC 2006 and Generals Rules Section 7 does not address the presence of pets in the Cemetery. [Source: WCVB-5 Boston | June 29, 2016 ++]

HIV/AIDS Update 02 ► Vet Denied Aquatic Therapy Sues

An Iraq War veteran claims in a federal lawsuit that she was unlawfully denied aquatic therapy at an orthopedic hospital in Pennsylvania because she has the virus that causes AIDS. The lawsuit against OSS Health in York Township seeks a declaratory judgment stating that the alleged denial constitutes discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The plaintiff is a 40-year-old York County resident identified only by a pseudonym. She says that a physical therapist recommended during a June 2015 visit that she receive aquatic therapy. She says when her medical records showed she was HIV-positive, she was turned away. Attorneys for OSS and two co-defendants, Drayer Physical Therapy Institute and the therapist, deny any wrongdoing. The lawsuit was filed in mid-JUN. [Source: The Associated Press | June 27, 2016 ++]

IDCO ► Online ID Card Services Available For Retirees

Retired Airmen can now complete tasks online that were normally done in person at an ID card office using IDCO, or ID Card Office Online. IDCO is a self-service application developed at the Defense Manpower Data Center that allows retirees to perform a myriad of tasks such as updating a family member's contact information and authorizing an ID card replacement. Retired sponsors with a valid Department of Defense self-service logon credential, called a DS Logon, may now perform all family member transactions using IDCO, including electronically signing the DD Form 1172-2, Application for Identification Card/DEERS Enrollment, for their family members online. Once electronically signed, the family member may visit his or her local ID card office and be issued an ID card without their sponsor present.

The ID Card Office Online web application is accessible from milConnect at <http://milconnect.dmdc.mil> . Retired Airmen may obtain a DS Logon account at an ID card facility during the ID card issuing process; online

anytime at <https://myaccess.dmdc.osd.mil> ; or by visiting a participating Veterans Affairs regional office. Click <http://benefits.va.gov/benefits> to locate the nearest VA regional office online. At <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rls> locations for the nearest ID card issuing facility can be found.

In addition to IDCO, DS Logon provides retirees access to more than 30 partner websites such as myPay, TRICARE Online and eBenefits. [Source: Afterburner | Vol. 58, No. 1 | January-June 2016 ++]

Vet Suicide Update 12 ► In Depth Analysis Indicates 20 a Day in 2014

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has undertaken the most comprehensive analysis of Veteran suicide rates in the U.S., examining over 55 million Veteran records from 1979 to 2014 from every state in the nation. The effort extends VA's knowledge from the previous report issued in 2010, which examined three million Veteran records from 20 states were available. Based on the data from 2010, VA estimated the number of Veteran deaths by suicide averaged 22 per day. The current analysis indicates that in 2014, an average of 20 Veterans a day died from suicide. "One Veteran suicide is one too many, and this collaborative effort provides both updated and comprehensive data that allows us to make better informed decisions on how to prevent this national tragedy," said VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. David J. Shulkin. "We as a nation must focus on bringing the number of Veteran suicides to zero." The final report will be publicly released later this month. Key findings of the analysis will include:

- 65% of all Veterans who died from suicide in 2014 were 50 years of age or older.
- Veterans accounted for 18% of all deaths from suicide among U.S. adults. This is a decrease from 22% in 2010.
- Since 2001, U.S. adult civilian suicides increased 23%, while Veteran suicides increased 32% in the same time period. After controlling for age and gender, this makes the risk of suicide 21% greater for Veterans.
- Since 2001, the rate of suicide among US Veterans who use VA services increased by 8.8%, while the rate of suicide among Veterans who do not use VA services increased by 38.6%.
 - In the same time period, the rate of suicide among male Veterans who use VA services increased 11%, while the rate of suicide increased 35% among male Veterans who do not use VA services.
 - In the same time period, the rate of suicide among female Veterans who use VA services increased 4.6%, while the rate of suicide increased 98% among female Veterans who do not use VA services.

VA is aggressively undertaking a number of new measures to prevent suicide, including:

- Ensuring same-day access for Veterans with urgent mental health needs at over 1,000 points of care by the end of calendar year 2016. In fiscal year 2015, more than 1.6 million Veterans received mental health treatment from VA, including at over 150 medical centers, 820 community-based outpatient clinics and 300 Vet Centers that provide readjustment counseling. Veterans also enter VA health care through the Veterans Crisis Line, VA staff on college and university campuses, or other outreach points.
- Using predictive modeling to determine which Veterans may be at highest risk of suicide, so providers can intervene early. Veterans in the top 0.1% of risk, who have a 43-fold increased risk of death from suicide within a month, can be identified before clinical signs of suicide are evident in order to save lives before a crisis occurs.
- Expanding telemental health care by establishing four new regional telemental health hubs across the VA healthcare system.
- Hiring over 60 new crisis intervention responders for the Veterans Crisis Line. Each responder receives intensive training on a wide variety of topics in crisis intervention, substance use disorders, screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment.

- Building new collaborations between Veteran programs in VA and those working in community settings, such as Give an Hour, Psych Armor Institute, University of Michigan’s Peer Advisors for Veterans Education Program (PAVE), and the Cohen Veterans Network.
- Creating stronger inter-agency (e.g. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health) and new public-private partnerships (e.g., Johnson & Johnson Healthcare System, Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation, Walgreen’s, and many more) focused on preventing suicide among Veterans.

Many of these efforts were catalyzed by VA’s February 2016 Preventing Veteran Suicide—A Call to Action summit, which focused on improving mental health care access for Veterans across the nation and increasing resources for the VA Suicide Prevention Program. Suicide is an issue that affects all Americans. Recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data reported in [April 2016](#) that from 1999 through 2014 (the most recent year with data available from CDC), suicide rates increased 24 % in the general population for both males and females. VA has implemented comprehensive, broad ranging suicide prevention initiatives, including a toll-free Veterans Crisis Line, placement of Suicide Prevention Coordinators at all VA Medical Centers and large outpatient facilities, and improvements in case management and tracking. Immediate help is available at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (press 1) or texting 838255.

- For guidance on safe ways to communicate, visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.Org.
- VA’s Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet is also recommended reading for all vets at www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/Suicide_Prevention_FactSheet_New_VA_Stats_070616_1400.pdf

[Source: Veteran News & Off The Base | Bobbie O’Brian | July 7, 2016 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 191 ► VA Application Process Tips

Applying to VA isn’t like your average job application process. There are specific procedures and documents to use and it can become a little confusing. Use these tips taken from our frequently asked questions and begin the VA application process with confidence.

Read the job announcement closely for instructions. Pay close attention to the section that addresses qualification requirements. The reviewer will be looking for your qualifications inside your application package as well as in other supplementary documents that you provide. Also, look at the job announcement closely for the job number, you will need this if you are filling out a printed application.

Know the difference between an online and a printed application. You may submit either an online application or a printed application. The online application is preferred, and you only need to fax supplementary documents. With the printed application you need to fill out the OPM Form 1203-FX and fax it with all other documents. You can access the online and complete it online at https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/opm1203fx.pdf.

Beginning the online application process. If you can apply online, you will use two software programs. First, you will create an account on USAJobs and indicate which job you are applying for. Then, you will be prompted from USAJobs to coete the application on Application Manager. You will also use Application Manager to check the status of your application. Click on the vacancy ID for the announcement, then Details. It will show the date your assessment was submitted and the date your resume and other supporting documents were received.

Fax your supplementary documents with your online application. If you have other supporting documents that are not digitized, you will need to fax those in separately with the fax cover sheet which can be downloaded at <http://www.vacareers.va.gov/assets/common/print/usascoversheet.pdf>. These supplemental forms and documents may include college transcripts, verification of Veterans’ preference, SF-50 – Notification of Personnel Action and other

certifications depending on the position. You will fax them to 1-478-757-3144 with a printed cover sheet available at <https://staffing.opm.gov/pdf/usascoversheet.pdf>.

How to fax a printed application

If you cannot apply online, print OPM Form 1203-FX Assessment Questionnaire. This is basically an answer sheet. You will need to follow the questions in the job announcement to fill out this form. You must submit all six pages (even if you don't answer any questions on the last page). Make sure you begin your fax with the cover sheet on top.

Extra tips

- Don't forget to fill out the top of each page with your social security number and vacancy ID number.
- Make sure to answer the narrative questions thoroughly on a separate piece of paper, preferably typed.
- Fax your entire packet, with the OPM Form 1203-FX on top (the first page is your cover page), to 1-478-757-3144 in the following order.
 - OPM Form 1203-FX (6 pages) (top)
 - Narrative responses
 - Resume
 - Veteran's preference documentation
 - Transcripts, if required (bottom)

Learn more about VA available positions by exploring VA Careers at <http://www.vacareers.va.gov>. [Source: VA Advantage Point Blog Update | July 7, 2016 ++

WWII Vets 112 ► Cipriano Guinto

He narrowly escaped the horror of the Bataan Death March, one of the most infamous atrocities of World War II, which left thousands dead and thousands more forced to suffer in Japanese prison camps. But Cipriano Guinto not only survived, he eluded the enemy — and almost certain death. And after the war went on to become a medical professional, a husband, a father of eight, and in 1985, an American citizen. Now 95 and living in Bakersfield, Guinto sat down with a reporter to look back at those dark days following the Japanese invasion of the Philippine Islands. It came just hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. And it changed millions of lives, including the life of Cipriano Guinto. “Japanese occupation was hard,” he remembered. “All military people were in hiding. Many had been executed. But we were able to survive.”



In the spring of 1942, after slowing the seemingly unstoppable Japanese advance in the Philippines — then a U.S. territory — Philippine and American troops defending the Bataan Peninsula were forced to surrender on 9 APR. But Guinto had no intention of handing himself over to the Japanese. “I formed a group to escape,” recalled

Guinto, who had enlisted in the U.S. Army Philippine Scouts in 1938. The small group of Scouts headed for higher ground, using thick jungle as cover. Others tried to do the same thing, but Japanese troops hunted them mercilessly, shooting many of them down “like pigs,” Guinto said, his eyes seeming to go back to another time. The small group of Filipino soldiers would either escape or die trying.

Eventually the men, exhausted and malnourished, made their way down to the coastline. “We were two weeks without food, without anything,” he said. Fortunately, Guinto had money. “We hired a boatman to carry us across Manila Bay,” he said. “My parents did not expect to see me still alive. They were surprised when I showed myself.” Many of his friends and relatives died during the death march, or later in the POW camps. But Guinto was able to elude capture until 1944, when Allied forces liberated the island nation. Looking back nearly three-quarters of a century, Guinto is proud of his service. His jacket is festooned with ribbons, including an American Defense Service Medal, an Asiatic Pacific Theater Medal, a Philippine Defense Ribbon, and others. According to “The Philippine Scouts in Bataan: Their Finest Hour,” by J. Michael Houlahan, the role played by the Philippine Scouts in the defense of Bataan is one of the best kept secrets of World War II. Nearly half the 12,000 Scouts did not survive the war.

The conquest of the Philippines, which the Japanese high command had predicted would take 50 days, had taken six months. “The valiant stand of the Philippine Scouts had bought enough time to save Australia and New Zealand from invasion,” Houlahan wrote. “These two countries would then become the staging point from which Gen. Douglas MacArthur would launch his island-hopping campaign leading to his wading ashore on a Leyte (Philippines) invasion beach in mid-October 1944, thereby making good on his famous ‘I shall return’ promise.” The heroism of the Philippine and American soldiers who defended Bataan is celebrated yearly on 9 APR in the Philippines. It is known as Araw ng Kagitingan, or Day of Valor.

Guinto would marry in 1944. Even as Japanese occupation was ending, he and his love, Emerencia, would begin their lives together. They would raise eight children, all of whom would follow in his footsteps and earn university degrees. The G.I. Bill, often credited for greatly expanding the American middle class following World War II, paid for Guinto’s education at National University in Manila. He opened a dental practice that was successful for decades. Guinto was elected president of his regional dental association in 1958. Education was among his highest ideals, and he and Emerencia made higher education a priority for their children, said Dr. Lilibeth Guinto-Miranda, a physician in Bakersfield and one of the couple’s daughters. “He sacrificed coming to the States for years,” she said. “He wanted all of his children to be educated first.” Indeed, the walls of his home office are decorated by the university degrees of each of his grown children. All eight. “I’m proud of them,” he said.

In 1976, he and Emerencia came to the States to attend Lilibeth’s wedding. After he was offered a job as an operating room technician at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, they decided to stay. “He reinvented himself,” his daughter said. In 1993, they moved to Bakersfield. They had their choice of various cities, but they liked Bakersfield. Guinto lost Emerencia in 1997, after more than 50 years together as husband and wife. Despite the struggle and loss that inevitably visit a life well-lived, Guinto may have one of the most optimistic outlooks of any 95-year-old one is likely to meet. His smile is infectious, and he has never been one to retire to a rocking chair.

The former combat soldier turned career dentist, medical tech, husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather has tentative plans to buy a new house. He didn’t say whether he would go for a 15- or 30-year mortgage. “He’s independent,” said Dr. Guinto-Miranda. “He loves to drive and he takes care of his health.” And he hopes to live as long as his mother, who lived to be 104. Guinto still plays the trumpet, loves investing and attending concerts. Even marriage isn’t out of the question. “I need someone to make me happy,” he said, that smile again lighting his face. “I want to live in a beautiful world,” he said. “I love music. It makes me feel young.” [Source: The Californian | Steven Mayer | May 21, 2016 ++]

Obit: Roscoe C. Brown Jr ► 2 JUL 2016

Dr. Roscoe C. Brown Jr., the New York City veteran who flew with the legendary Tuskegee Airmen in World War II, has died at the age of 94. He died Saturday 2, July at a hospital in the Bronx after breaking his hip in a recent fall, his granddaughter Lisa Bodine said. Mayor Bill de Blasio has ordered all flags to fly at half-staff until Saturday in Brown's honor. Brown flew 68 combat missions for the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African-American pilots in U.S. history. A nine-time New York City Marathon runner and lifelong Jets and Mets fan, [he told NBC 4 New York in May](#): "Fighter pilots are like athletes. And I was a pretty good pilot."



In 2007, he and five other airmen accepted the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen. President George W. Bush and Congress awarded the airmen with one of the nation's highest honors for fighting to defend their country even as they faced bigotry at home. Brown, who held a Ph.D. in education, also served 17 years as president of Bronx Community College. Brown later joined the CUNY Graduate Center as professor and director of the Center for Urban Education Policy. He also hosted "African American Legends," a public affairs show on CUNY TV. Brown fell critically ill over the winter and had a pacemaker installed at Montefiore Medical Center. His physician, Dr. Daniel Sims, told NBC 4 New York in May, "If he wasn't as healthy and in such great shape, he probably wouldn't have made it through this." "Most 94-year-olds are not this active, but Dr. Brown is just remarkable," he said.

Brown was trying to ease back into exercise when NBC 4 New York [caught up with him in May](#). "As I got older, I tried to do a lot more than my body would accept," he admitted. On March 15, 1945, Brown was part of the longest mission flown by the Air Force in World War II. He flew 1,500 miles from southern Italy to Berlin to take on a group of German jets. He shot down one of the German planes and he had a vivid memory of buzzing his home base as he and other pilots celebrated their triumph when they returned. "I was a kid, 23 years old," Brown [recalled to NBC 4 New York's Gabe Pressman in 2009](#), as he prepared to march in the Inauguration Day Parade for President Barack Obama. "And we were, like all pilots, a fun-loving, happy go lucky group."

Nearly 1,000 fighter pilots trained as a segregated Army Air Corps unit at the Tuskegee, Alabama, air base. Not allowed to practice or fight with their white counterparts, the Tuskegee Airmen distinguished themselves by painting the tails of their airplanes red, which led to them becoming known as the "Red Tails." Their story was told in a 2012 movie of the same name, on which Brown was an adviser. "Young people don't totally understand," Brown [told NBC 4 New York's Tracie Strahan in 2011](#), noting that The Civil War had only happened about 70 years before World War II. "I didn't understand the brutality of the Civil War, but when I was a Tuskegee Airman, I knew that I was good, I knew that I had to challenge the system, and I loved to fly." "My message to young people is to keep on

working," he continued. "You've got to be better, you've got to be disciplined, you've gotta believe. And if you believe you can overcome, you can overcome. That's the story of the Tuskegee Airmen." [Source: NBC New York | July 4, 2016 ++]

Obit: Steve Pisanos ▶ 6 JUN 2016

First his dreams took flight, and then he did, and when Steve Pisanos was done with his 30-year career as a military pilot, he had a chest full of medals, a head full of jaw-dropping stories and a memorable nickname: The Flying Greek. Pisanos was buried 30 JUN at California's Miramar National Cemetery. The longtime Rancho Bernardo resident died 6 JUN at age 96. "The thing everybody talked about was how great he was as a pilot," said Chuck Sweeney, a Vietnam-era flier and head of the San Diego-based Distinguished Flying Cross Society. Here's how great:



Pisanos downed 10 German planes during World War II, making him a double-ace. He earned five Distinguished Flying Crosses. When the engine of his P-51 quit over occupied France in 1944, he rode the plane to the ground, kneeling on one wing while steering it away from a barn. He was a test pilot with Chuck Yeager. Aircraft modelers made copies of his planes to sell to hobbyists. "His whole story is a 'wow' to me," said James Kidrick, president of the San Diego Air & Space Museum in Balboa Park and a former Navy pilot. "When he got in the cockpit, he understood what the mission was." As much pride as he took in his aerial exploits, Pisanos always believed his greatest achievement was making his way to the United States as an unauthorized immigrant — 18, virtually penniless, unable to speak English. "My life is the American dream," he liked to say.

One of six children, he was born Spiros Nicholas Pisanos in Athens on Nov. 10, 1919. His father was a subway motorman who expected his son to follow his career path. But Pisanos got drawn to a different kind of transportation. When he was a teenager, he saw biplanes doing aerobatics one day and ran to the airport after they landed. He was mesmerized. He told the pilots he wanted to fly, too, and they did what they could to bring him down to Earth. Flying was for the wealthy and the well-educated, they told him. Pisanos decided he'd have a better chance in the United States. He got a job on a freighter in 1938 and jumped ship in the Baltimore harbor, eventually making his way to New York City, where he overheard people speaking Greek. They helped him get settled. When he wasn't washing dishes in a bakery, he was teaching himself English by reading the New York Post and taking flying lessons.

By 1941 he had his license, and when the Nazis invaded Greece later that year, he joined the fight, enlisting with Great Britain's Royal Air Force two months before Pearl Harbor. He became part of the Eagle squadrons, populated by 244 American volunteers who flew Spitfires, bolstering the air defenses of a country besieged by the Luftwaffe. When the Eagle squadrons were absorbed by the U.S. Army Air Force, it looked like Pisanos, who wasn't an American citizen, might be forced out. His commanders intervened, taking advantage of a newly passed law that granted citizenship to immigrant service members.

On May 3, 1943, in a ceremony at the American embassy in London, Pisanos became what was reported to be the first person every naturalized as a U.S. citizen on foreign soil. The event was covered by the media, including Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, who became his friends. (Cronkite wrote the introduction for Pisanos' 2008 memoir, "The Flying Greek." It's being turned into a movie scheduled for release late next year.) Later that same month, flying in a P-47 Thunderbolt, Pisanos got his first aerial victory, downing a German FW-190 over Belgium. By the following January he was an ace, and two months after that a double-ace and a veteran of more than 100 missions. He named his planes "Miss Plainfield," an apparent nod to the city in New Jersey where lived before the war.

He was escorting B-17 bombers over France on March 5, 1944, when the engine quit and his plane headed toward a crash landing, according to an account on the American Air Museum in Britain website. He prepared to bail out at 2,000 feet, but a cord on his gear got caught in the cockpit. He worked himself free, stepped onto the wing and saw that his P-51 was going to hit a barn in a field just south of Le Havre. Kneeling on the wing, he reached in and pulled back on the stick. The plane narrowly missed the barn before hitting the ground and skidding. Pisanos was tossed clear and knocked unconscious. His left shoulder was dislocated. When he woke up, German soldiers were approaching the wreckage. He fled into the nearby woods, dodging machine-gun fire, and was eventually taken in by the French underground. He spent six months working with the Resistance in Paris before he was reunited with the military.

Sent to the United States — his bosses worried if he got shot down and captured, the Germans might force him to reveal what he knew about the Resistance — Pisanos became a test pilot, working with Yeager and others to help usher in the jet age. He worked for a couple of years as a pilot for TWA, which is when he met his wife, Sophie. They were married 66 years and had two children. She died in 2012. Pisanos rejoined the Air Force and spent another 20 years in various assignments, including a tour in Vietnam. He retired as a colonel in 1973 and moved to Rancho Bernardo in 1978. He's been inducted into various aviation halls of fame, including the one at the Air & Space Museum, where he was honored as a "Legend of Flight" in 2008. A year later, he was awarded the French Legion of Honor. He is survived by his son Jeffrey (Carol), his daughter Diane (Richard), two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Check out the video on his life at <https://youtu.be/S8yCXakKMoY>. [Source: San Diego Union-Tribune | John Wilkens | June 29, 2016 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 10 JUL 2016

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2016 is available at:

- HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf
- Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc

Note that this schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veternans related events such as town hall meetings, resource fairs, stand downs, etc. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. (NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or

DD214. "@" indicates event requires registration\RSVP.)For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

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

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

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | July 10, 2016 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 JUL thru 15 AUG 2016

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

Houston, TX - [Houston Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

July 16 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Montgomery, AL - [Montgomery Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

July 26 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Fort Indiantown Gap, PA - [Fort Indiantown Gap Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

July 28 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Atlanta, GA - [Atlanta Hiring Expo with Atlanta Braves](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

July 28 - 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

Arlington, VA - [JB Myer-Henderson Hall Senior Leader Networking Reception](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

July 28 - 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Fort Jackson, SC - [Columbia Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

August 2 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Lexington, KY - [Lexington Hiring Fair with the Lexington Legends](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

August 4 - 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm

McLean, VA - [McLean Military Spouse Networking Reception](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

August 8 - 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Washington, DC - [DC Hiring Expo with Washington Nationals](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

August 9 - 8:30 am to 1:00 pm

Omaha, NE - [Omaha Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

August 10 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Webinar - [Employer Best Practices](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

August 10 - 3:00 pm to 3:45 pm

[Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn July 14, 2016 ++]

[Veteran State Benefits & Discounts](#) ► **Colorado 2016**

The state of Colorado provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – CO**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below benefits refer to <http://vets.dmva.state.co.us>&<http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/colorado.html> :

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/colorado-state-veterans-benefits.html> July 2016 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



[VA Mustard Agent Care Update 04](#) ► **S.3023 | VA Opposes Widening Care**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pushed back 29 JUN against a proposal aimed at making it easier for World War II veterans intentionally exposed to mustard gas in U.S. military experiments to get medical benefits. The VA argues that the plan could unintentionally expand coverage to all WWII veterans. “We fully support delivering benefits to veterans and survivors as quickly as possible,” David McLenachen, deputy undersecretary for disability assistance, told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. But he said the bill at issue “would create presumption of full-bodied mustard gas exposure and resulting service connection for every World War II veteran who files a claim for related disability benefits.”

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) issued a report earlier this year saying that veterans exposed to mustard gas by the U.S. have been unfairly denied benefits and introduced legislation to combat the issue. Her bill would mandate a review of previously denied claims, lower the bar to get the benefits, revamp the VA’s application and adjudication process and mandate an investigation by the VA and Pentagon to determine what went wrong with the process. Specifically, the bill would mandate that during the review of previous claims, the VA must presume a veteran was exposed to mustard gas until proved otherwise.



During World War II, the military exposed about 60,000 service members to mustard gas and another chemical agent called lewisite in an effort to test protective equipment. The classified tests were unsealed in 1975. Still, veterans who were part of the tests were barred from seeking treatment because of an oath of secrecy. In 1991, the Veterans Affairs secretary announced new guidelines for compensating veterans who were exposed to mustard gas, effectively lifting the oath. **Just 40 veterans are receiving benefits for mustard gas exposure**, and up to 90 percent of the disability claims filed from 2005 to 2015 with the Department of Veterans Affairs have been denied, according to McCaskill’s report. “The VA established a burden of proof that is insurmountable to many impacted veterans,” she said Wednesday.

McCaskill pushed back against the notion that her bill (S. 3023: The Arla Harrell Act) would open the VA up to more claims, saying the burden of proof would only be flipped for those who have already filed a claim. “There’s less than 400 of these folks still alive,” she said. “So for 400 individuals who have already applied, it would flip the burden of proof, but it would not open up claims for anyone who has not previously applied. So it’s a very limited application.” While the VA opposes McCaskill’s bill, McLenachen said the claims are a “high priority” for the VA and pledged to continue working on them. “We will continue to fully and sympathetically develop and adjudicate every mustard gas claim that we receive,” he said. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | June 29, 2016 ++]

Vet Credit Scores ► H.R. 5693 | Protecting Veterans Credit Act of 2016

A bipartisan group of lawmakers is looking to protect veterans from suffering credit score mishaps at the hand of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In response to outcry over long wait times at VA clinics, the agency created a program in 2014 that covers veterans who seek outside medical treatment. But many have complained the VA is slow to make payments to their private doctors, which have in turn reported the medical debts to credit bureaus. The Protecting Veterans Credit Act, introduced by Reps. Randy Hultgren (R-IL) and John Delaney (D-MD) would provide a one-year grace period before medical bills through this program may be reported. The lawmakers say this will provide the VA with enough time to make the payments. “No veteran should have their credit rating hurt because of delayed [VA] payments,” Delaney said. “In many cases, veterans are already using the choice program because they’ve endured a long wait time to be treated. We shouldn’t destroy their finances on top of that.”

The lawmakers say this will protect veterans' credit scores, which affect everything from the interest rate they receive when purchasing a home or buying a car to whether they will be hired for a job. The measure is also backed by Reps. Jackie Walorski (R-IN) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) as well as a number of veterans groups. "Enough veterans have faced collateral damage from delays at the VA — their credit score shouldn't be another casualty of this bureaucracy," Hultgren said. "Veterans and their families deserve accurate and timely billing and reimbursements from the VA," he added. "They should not be held liable for the VA's problems. We need quick action on this legislation to ensure our veterans aren't held responsible for bureaucratic ineptitude. [Source: The Hill | Tim Devaney | June 29, 2016++]

Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress ► 160701 thru 160715

Refer to this Bulletin's "**House & Senate Veteran Legislation**" attachment for a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 114th Congress. The list contains the bill's number, name, and what it is intended to do, its sponsor, any related bills, and the committees it has been assigned to. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication of that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <https://beta.congress.gov> you can review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor/cosponsor of it by entering its number in the site's search engine. To determine what your Congressman has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on go to: <https://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22legislation%22%5D%7D>, Select the 'Sponsor' tab, and click on your congress person's name.

Grassroots lobbying is the most effective way to let your Congressional representatives know your wants and dislikes. If you are not sure who is your Congressman go to <https://beta.congress.gov/members>. Members of Congress are receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing cosponsorship support on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate their phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making at either:

- ✓ http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm or
- ✓ <http://www.house.gov/representatives>

FOLLOWING ARE THE 5 VETERAN RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

- **H.R.5588 : Veterans' Compensation COLA Act of 2016.** To increase, effective as of December 1, 2016, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes. [Rep. Abraham, Ralph Lee \[R-LA-5\]](#) (Introduced 06/28/2016)
- **H.R.5593 : Protecting Veterans Credit Act of 2016.** To amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act and the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act to delay the inclusion in consumer credit reports and to establish requirements for debt collectors with respect to medical debt information of veterans due to inappropriate or delayed Veterans Choice Program billing payments, and for other purposes. [Rep. Delaney, John K. \[D-MD-6\]](#) (Introduced 06/28/2016)

- **H.R.5600 : No Hero Left Untreated Act.** To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide access to magnetic EEG/EKG-guided resonance therapy technology to veterans. [Rep. Knight, Stephen \[R-CA-25\]](#) (Introduced 06/28/2016)
- **H.R.5620 : VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act of 2016.** To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the removal or demotion of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs based on performance or misconduct, and for other purposes. [Rep. Miller, Jeff \[R-FL-11\]](#) (Introduced 07/05/2016)
- **H.R.5655 : Addiction Prevention and Responsible Opioid Practices Act.** A bill to establish programs related to prevention of prescription opioid misuse, and for other purposes. [Rep. Cartwright, Matt \[D-PA-17\]](#) (Introduced 07/07/2016)

FOLLOWING ARE THE 3 VETERAN RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

- **S.3112 : Department of Veterans Affairs Bonus Transparency Act of 2016.** To amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit an annual report regarding performance awards and bonuses awarded to certain high-level employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. [Sen. Heller, Dean \[R-NV\]](#) (Introduced 06/29/2016)
- **S.3132 : Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act of 2016.** To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide service dogs to certain veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder. [Sen. Fischer, Deb \[R-NE\]](#) (Introduced 07/06/2016)
- **S.3141 : Establish VA Mental Health Grant Program.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to improve the monitoring of mental health and substance abuse treatment programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. [Sen. Rounds, Mike \[R-SD\]](#) (Introduced 07/07/2016)

[Source: <https://beta.congress.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> | July 15, 2016 ++]

*** Military ***



Military Base Access Update 01 ► Visitor Background Check Requirement

The Carlisle Barracks was scheduled to officially opened a new visitors center 1 AUG which will serve as the entry point for all non-Department of Defense card holders who are visiting the post. Starting Friday, all visitors will need to present photographic identification and fill out a form, which is required to submit to a background check. Visitors will do this at the new center, located at 870 Jim Thorpe Road. Visitors to the installation who are accompanied by a CAC or military ID holder will be allowed to enter without a background check. Background checks will be conducted using the National Crime Information Center Interstate Identification Index, an FBI

database that will provide criminal histories from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The checks take about 10 minutes.

The new policy will affect all U.S. military installations across the country. “For the soldier, family member or civilian who already have a common access card or military ID, it isn’t going to affect them,” said Bob Suskie, director of emergency services on post. “They’re still going to come through the gate showing that same card.” The visitors center will be open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. After hours and weekend visitors will be processed through the far right guard booths as visitors come around Jim Thorpe Road. Processing times may be delayed on weekends and after hours due to truck processing. Carlisle Barracks has a new website for the visitors center, which provides information, frequently asked questions and forms necessary to gain access to the installation. The forms can be completed prior to arrival.

A Carlisle Barracks Form 228 has been developed that will allow visitors to apply for access up to 30 days in advance. Each visitor pass will depend on the nature of the visit, the barracks said in a news release 29 JUN. For example, a family member visiting over the holidays may be able to obtain a pass that will be valid for a week or more. Those who will be on post for a regular basis, such as a spouse or family member who picks children up from day care, will be able to apply for a pass that will last one year.

A visitor can be denied access based on 11 factors, and all visitors will need a “valid reason” for coming onto the installation or will need a government sponsor. Disqualifying factors include arrest information on the background check that the installation commander deems makes the person a threat, unable to verify an identity, current arrest warrant regardless of offense, person is barred from entry to a federal installation or facility, child pornography or sexual assault conviction, conviction for espionage, being a registered sex offender, felony conviction in last 10 years, felony firearms or explosives violation, engagement in acts of anarchy and person is a suspected terrorist.

Suskie said Carlisle Barracks will still continue to try and accommodate as many visitors as possible. “There are different events that will allow us to do different things, so if the public is invited to come out for something, we still want them to come out,” he said. “These are areas where we may be able to do some mitigation to allow people to come out without a background check. Events like the post yard sale, weddings and other special events may allow for flexibility with the new policy.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | The Sentinel | June 29, 2016 ++]

Military Health Records Update 01 ► Civilian Health System Access

A new health records sharing program gives doctors in 10 civilian U.S. health systems access to Defense Department medical records, with more systems expected to join later this year. The Pentagon’s Health Information Exchange Initiative, launched 1 JUN, allows private physicians and some government organizations to view medical records held by military hospitals or clinics, if they are treating patients with such records. The program should ease the need to hand-carry military health records or lab results between health care providers participating in the exchange. “It allows our patients to have continuity of care by being able to give all of our providers — when needed — access to the information so patients can complete their episode of care in one meeting instead of a patient having to come back with their lab tests or X-rays or notes from a military treatment facility,” said Defense Health Agency director Navy Vice Adm. Raquel Bono.

Systems participating in the eHealth Exchange include Sentara, Hawaii Pacific Health, HealtheConnections, MedVirginia, Multicare Health Services, San Diego Health Services, Providence-Swedish Health, CORHIO, INOVA and Texas Health Resources. The Social Security Administration also has access. The Department of Veterans Affairs does not, however, because it shares medical records and information with the Pentagon through a different system, called the Joint Legacy Viewer, that gives doctors access to the records. DHA officials say 13 more

systems including Duke University, the Alaska e-Health Network and North Carolina Health Information Exchange will join this year.

While the eHealth Exchange system is designed to make it easier for military beneficiaries to move between providers, not all doctors who accept Tricare are in an approved network, and none of TRICARE’s regional contractors — United Health Military & Veterans, Humana Military and Health Net Federal Services — participate. But TRICARE providers who also are part of an approved exchange can view records. Bono said the system will most benefit patients leaving the military, those who switch providers when moving from TRICARE Prime to TRICARE Standard and retirees leaving the service. The system also will help military health facilities keep track of patients' visits to urgent care facilities and civilian emergency rooms.

According to Bono, participating facilities can access a patient’s records only if they are treating them. [Those who do not wish to have their health records shared also may opt out.](#) DHA officials say of the 9.4 million TRICARE beneficiaries with medical records, 130 patients have opted out. Bono said DHA will add more networks as they vet them for claims amount, volume and security. "The exchanges all certify their members but we have our own DoD standards for security and interoperability. We really big on the security piece," Bono said. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | July 12, 2016 ++]



Pentagon Bomb Squad ► DOHA Waives Member’s Overpayments

The Pentagon has decided that members of its civilian bomb squad will not be obligated to pay back up to \$173,000 that it says each of them was erroneously paid since the unit was established in 2008, a defense official said. The Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA) waived the debts “after completion of the normal waiver of debt process,” said Air Force Lt. Col. Eric Badger, a Pentagon spokesman. The decision was acknowledged late 29 JUN, a day after The Washington Post published a story that detailed how members of the bomb squad faced potential financial ruin after the Pentagon decided in 2015 that it had incorrectly paid them a 25 percent hazardous duty incentive for years.

The waivers were completed despite some members of the bomb squad expecting that their cases would not be heard for several more weeks. Badger said the approval of hazardous duty pay — promised in offer letters to the bomb technicians — was “an administrative error made in good faith, but with severe financial consequences for the employees.” “The pay was incorrectly authorized through no fault of the employees involved,” Badger said. “They could not have known it was paid in error, and we take this matter very seriously.” The case pitted nine members of the bomb squad — formally known as the Hazardous Devices Division of the Pentagon Force Protection Agency — against the Pentagon bureaucracy. One member of the squad, Axel Fernandez, committed suicide in April,

exacerbating the frustrations of those in the unit. According to emails and memos obtained by The Washington Post, the Pentagon told him he owed back in excess of \$136,000.



The decision to revoke the hazardous duty pay was made in January 2015 by a little-known office in the Defense Department known as Washington Headquarters Services (WHS), which provides administrative oversight to numerous Pentagon agencies. Senior officials in WHS promised afterward to assist bomb squad members in having their unexpected debts waived, but they were nonetheless referred to collection by Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) and had no guarantees that the appeals process would find in their favor. There doesn't appear to be any effort to restore the hazard pay. Badger said hazardous duty pay is granted only if dangerous work has not been taken into consideration during the final classification process for a job. "When authorized, hazardous duty pay is paid when an employee performs hazardous duty only for the duration of the hazard," Badger said. "Misapplication of this provision resulted in the squad members receiving the hazard pay differential during times of annual leave, training, and overtime."

The decision to waive all debts was made as Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-VA) pressed the Pentagon to quickly resolve the issue. In a letter sent 29 JUN to Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter, he said it was his understanding that three members of the bomb squad had so far had their debts waived, and he was concerned the others had not. Warner also asked for an explanation of how the Defense Department compensates employees, and whether it has faced similar issues in other cases in the past. "As this case highlights ... despite job announcements and offer letters that included promises of hazardous duty pay, the Department apparently can reduce such pay with little or no employee recourse," Warner wrote.

Badger said that within the Defense Department, pay can vary. For example, a member of the civilian bomb squad at the GS-12 grade level earned a base salary of \$62,101. Base pay for the same duties by an enlisted member of the military is about \$48,610, plus up to \$4,500 in annual explosive ordnance disposal pay, he said. However, active-duty members of the military serving as bomb technicians have often been eligible to collect reenlistment bonuses of up to \$90,000 due to the demand for the job. On the civilian side, other federal agencies also have hazardous duty pay, prompting some members of the Pentagon unit to leave since the decision to eliminate hazard pay there was made.[Source: The Washington Post | Dan Lamothe | June 30, 2016 +]

Army's Treasure Room ► Contains Spectacular Hidden Artifacts

Remember that ending scene out of Indiana Jones where the Ark of the Covenant is boxed up and wheeled through an endless government warehouse? Did you know that that place actually exists? It is called the Center of Military History. It is located 30 minutes outside Washington, D.C., at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. The building itself is very nondescript but behind a series of highly alarmed doors and long, cement, camera-laden hallways is the highly sophisticated, climate-controlled treasure room where the Army keeps its most precious artifacts. The facility was

built for \$24 million in 2010. The cavernous warehouse is typically shrouded in total darkness. Motion lights illuminate only the areas in which someone is walking.



Behind giant doors lie the Army’s historic collection of weaponry. The room consists of dozens of collapsible “hallways” filled with the richest American firearm collection on the planet. The collection is stacked with priceless items. The entire collection can be moved at the press of a button to create new endless hallways of historic firearms. Entire lineages of weapons are kept here for research as well as preservation purposes.



Another portion of the warehouse consists of endless rows of gigantic airtight lockers. This is called “3D storage.” Every meaningful artifact that has been worn on a military battlefield is stored here. Including Gen. Ulysses Grant’s Civil War cap, famous generals’ uniforms and Revolutionary War powder satchels, flags, canteens, and cannons. And the rows go on and on and on and on.



But the crown jewel of the collection is the 16,000 pieces of fine art the Army owns. The art is kept on giant rolling metal frames. The massive collection consists of donated and commissioned pieces. Much of the art was

painted by soldiers who experienced their subjects in real life. During World War I, the Army began commissioning artists to deploy into the war zone and paint the scenes they observed. This practice has continued to this day. Much of the museum's collection consists of these commissioned wartime pieces. The collection also keeps hold of valuable donated military art and historical pieces dating back to the Mexican American War. The art tells the story of America's wars through a soldier's unique perspective. Some works are just beautiful beyond words. Every aspect of war is captured in the collection. The collection also includes original Army propaganda art. Including beautiful Norman Rockwell originals that the Army commissioned in the 1940s that regularly fetch tens of millions of dollars at auction. Virtually every American conflict is represented from a first-hand soldier's perspective.



The collection also has a controversial side that has never been displayed. Unique art and artifacts that were seized from the Nazis after World War II are stored here. The painting below was filmed at the center for the 2006 documentary *The Rape of Europa*. Including watercolors painted by Hitler himself.



Not a single piece in this massive collection is open to the public. Why is it kept under lock and key in a blackened warehouse? Simple answer: Because there is no museum to house it. The entire collection could be made accessible to the public, if the funds for a museum could be raised. The Army Historical Foundation is in charge of raising the funds for the museum. However, there are major fundraising hurdles to jump before the museum can be built. The foundation's president recently told the *Washington Post* that it has raised \$76 million of the \$175 million required for the museum and predicts the museum could open in 2018. The plan is to build the museum at Fort Belvoir. Until then to view some of these treasures go to https://www.buzzfeed.com/bennyjohnson/inside-the-armys-spectacular-hidden-treasure-room?utm_term=.voG7EwqLo#.soMoYAw7J . [Source: Buzz Feed | Benny Johnson | June 24, 2016 ++]

Fresh Salad At Sea ► Gardens Aboard Subs Under Consideration

When a Navy submarine goes to sea on a month-long voyage, the lettuce, tomatoes and other fresh fruits and vegetables on board run out in a week or two, forcing the crew to rely on canned, frozen or dehydrated products. But what if subs had their own gardens where food could be grown under lights? The U.S. military is testing out the idea by growing plants hydroponically — that is, with nutrient solution instead of soil — inside a 40-foot shipping container on dry land at a laboratory outside Boston. Engineering technician Don Holman, who grew up on a farm in Michigan before serving 30 years in the Navy, is running the \$100,000 project at the Army's Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center.



Holman said sailors have been asking for more produce. "When you give someone something they want, it improves their morale. And they perform better when morale is up," said Holman, who will present a technical report in September so the Navy can decide whether to attempt gardening beneath the sea. This is the second phase of the testing. Holman first tried to grow 83 varieties of fruits and vegetables to see which ones did best. The leafy greens and green onions thrived. Root vegetables did fairly well. Strawberries and rhubarb grew but probably wouldn't produce enough to make it worthwhile, Holman said. The cucumbers, on the other hand, were a mess. The vines climbed everywhere. And the large leaves on the zucchini plants blocked the lights. The tomato plants grew but didn't produce fruit because the lighting wasn't bright enough and the temperature was too low. Holman replanted the varieties that did well. He is now tending to those seedlings to see how much they produce.

On the dirt- and insect-free "farm," as Holman calls it, the plants are growing in trays of peat moss plugs and will be transferred this week to more than 250 towers suspended from overhead tracks and filled with growing material made of recycled plastic. Strands of red and blue LED lights dangle from the ceiling. He said vegetables could be planted before a vessel went to sea so that they would be ready for harvesting during the mission. Retired Navy Capt. Ronald Steed, a former sub skipper, said it would be a real challenge to fit a garden on a submarine, where space is extremely tight, "but if they could do it, that would be awesome." The newest fast-attack submarines are nearly 400 feet long and carry a crew of about 130, while ballistic-missile subs stretch about 560 feet and can have a crew of 170. "I doubt that every meal could have fresh fruits and vegetables," Steed said, "but if you could do it from time to time, it takes something that's really essential to crew morale and makes it better."

The idea originated at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, a research and development lab in Newport, Rhode Island. A fast-attack sub has enough food on board for at least 90 days when it leaves for a deployment from the Navy base at Groton, Connecticut, said Lt. Cmdr. Christopher Shutt, supply officer for the waterfront. After about a week, the lettuce in the salad bar becomes slightly translucent, then runs out, and the fresh tomatoes, carrots and celery are gone, too. Thawed fruit, bean or pasta salad, and soups take their place at the salad bar. Pudding occasionally shows up when the fruit is gone. It's not this way the entire time — a submarine will get fresh food when it stops at a port or another ship delivers it.

Chief Culinary Specialist Brian Pearson, who serves on the submarine USS Missouri, admitted that nothing beats fresh ingredients but said the crew still really likes his spaghetti or lasagna, made with canned tomatoes, dehydrated onions and extra spices. For mashed potatoes, he said, he can transform dehydrated potato flakes with butter, garlic and sour cream. For his part, Steed allowed that the food aboard submarines is pretty good, considering what the cooks have to work with. "It's just kind of one of those things where you accept that you're not going to have fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs," he said, "and given that, they do a great job." [Source: Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | July 5, 2016 ++]

Explosives Detection ► Research on Locust Olfaction Funded

They say heat-generating "tattoos" will enable locust to be guided into dangerous or remote areas via remote control. Neural signals from the locust's brain will then be processed by an on-board low-power processing chip that will decode the information and send a wireless alert back to the authorities. And the result will appear on a simple LED: red for present, green for absent.

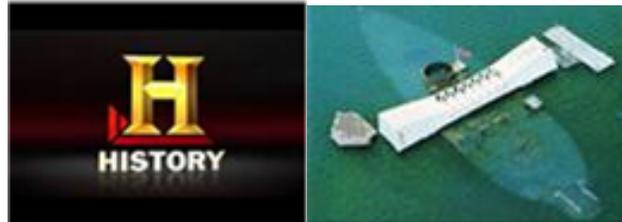


Baranidharan Raman, associate professor of biomedical engineering in the School of Engineering and Applied Science Washington University, has studied the way locusts smell for several years. And the Office of Naval Research in the US has now given him a \$750,000 (£565,000) grant to continue his research. Olfaction, better known as the ability to smell, is considered a primary sensory quality in insects whereas it is more of an aesthetic sense for humans, according to Prof Raman. But locusts have a similar sense of smell to humans in that they can identify a particular smell even when it is mixed in with other odours. Prof Raman said they had "robotic noses" that could be trained to pinpoint and recall a smell such as dangerous chemicals.

He told the BBC: "It took only a few hundred milliseconds for the locust's brain to begin tracking a novel odour introduced in its surroundings. The locusts are processing chemical cues in an extremely rapid fashion. "Even the state-of-the-art miniaturized chemical-sensing devices have a handful of sensors. On the other hand, if you look at the insect antennae, where their chemical sensors are located, there are several hundreds of thousands of sensors and of a variety of types," he said. Meanwhile, Srikanth Singamaneni, associate professor of materials science, who specializes in nanomaterials, will be creating a plasmonic "tattoo" made of a biocompatible silk that will be applied to the locusts' wings to generate mild heat and help steer them towards particular locations by remote control. The tattoos will also be able to collect samples of volatile organic compounds in their proximity for other testing methods.

Prof Raman estimates the prototype will be ready for rigorous testing in a year and if successful the locusts could be ready in less than two years. He also believes this new sensor technology could help to detect medical conditions in humans that are currently diagnosed by smell.[Source: BBC News | 4 July 2016++]

* Military History *



Operation Pastorius ► 1942 Sabotage Attempt on America

Normandy. Anzio. Guadalcanal. Okinawa. Those are some of the historic landing sites for World War II invasions, legendary names that should never be forgotten. But there were lesser landings, as well, such as at Amagansett, New York, and Ponte Verdra Beach, Florida. That's right. There were at least two mini-landings in America, engineered by Germans, of course, not Allies.

In the midst of World War II, two German submarines actually put men ashore at both of those locations. The invaders did not arrive with the intent of seizing and occupying territory, however. Their mission was sabotage. Their targets were some of the crown jewels of America's industrial might: major hydroelectric plants, important aluminum factories, critical railroad tracks, bridges and canals—and the water supply system of New York City. Well-trained and well-supplied, the saboteurs had good reason to be confident, but in the end they failed utterly. How and why that happened is a fascinating tale, partly because of what it reveals about the character of the two warring nations. To learn more about this sabotage attempt on American soil refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“WWII Operation Pastorius”**. [Source: <http://www.historynet.com/world-war-ii-german-saboteurs-invade-america-in-1942.htm> | June 2016 ++]

Military Trivia 125 ► Operation Babylift

On January 27, 1973, after years of strained negotiations, North Vietnam and the United States signed the Paris peace accords. As part of the agreement, the U.S. withdrew all of its combat units in the allotted 60 days. All that remained were 8,500 American civilians, embassy guards, and Defense Attach Office soldiers. For the next two years, North Vietnam steadily built its military into a superior force and in January 1975 - in total violation of the peace accords - began a powerful offensive against South Vietnam's military. Without the availability of American military support, the overstretched South Vietnamese military could not hold back the violent onslaught and began retreating toward Saigon. Although Nixon had given earlier assurances to the South Vietnamese government, no American air strikes came to aid the beleaguered ally's military.

Within a couple of months of bitter fighting, South Vietnam had suffered over 60,000 casualties. So demoralized by defeat and fearful of the NVA, numerous soldiers tore off their uniforms and mingled with refugees heading south. Those brave enough to fight faced death or capture as their positions were overrun by the NVA and VC. As

the Communists advanced into South Vietnam, rumors about what they would do were rampant. Many South Vietnamese were desperate to escape. Children fathered by American soldiers were rumored to be in particular danger. For a mother desperate to protect her mixed race child in the face of an advancing enemy, a chance to send the child to America was a ray of hope.

In the midst of the rapid defeat and retreat of South Vietnam's military, the U.S. government announced a plan to get thousands of displaced Vietnamese children (mostly Amerasian orphans) out of the country. Fearful of the looming discrimination or worse facing these children after American forces left the country, President Ford directed that money from a special foreign aid children's fund be made available to fly South Vietnamese orphans to the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia. It came to be known as Operation Babylift.



The first plane to leave as part of that mission took off on a sparkling late afternoon on April 4, 1975, just 26 days before the fall of Saigon. Twelve minutes after takeoff, there was what seemed to be an explosion as the lower rear fuselage was torn apart. The locks of the rear loading ramp had failed, causing the door to open and separate. A rapid decompression occurred. Two of the four hydraulic systems were out. The rudder and elevator control lines were severed, leaving only one aileron and the wing spoilers.

The pilot, Capt. Dennis "Bud" Traynor, wrestled at the controls, managing to keep control of the plane with changes in the engine power settings, and by using the one working aileron and wing spoilers. The aircraft descended to an altitude of 4,000 feet on a heading of 310 degrees in preparation for landing on Tan Son Nhut's runway 25L. About halfway through a turn to final approach, the rate of descent increased rapidly. Seeing they couldn't make the runway, full power was applied by Capt. Traynor to bring the nose up. The C-5A touched down in a rice paddy. Skidding for a quarter of a mile, the aircraft became airborne again for a half mile before hitting a dike and breaking into four parts, some of which caught fire. According to DIA figures, 138 people were killed in the crash, including 78 children and 35 Defense Attache Office Saigon personnel. Nurses, volunteers and crew aboard, many injured themselves, did all they could to save as many children as possible.



Aftermath of Capt. Traynor's C-5 crash

At the time of the crash, various groups had been working frantically to shuttle the infants out of the country before it fell to the invading NVA. With this tragedy, the mission was severely disrupted, but it continued. Reports differ, but in the 24 hours that followed, possibly some 1,200 children, including 40 of the crash survivors, were

evacuated on other planes. One American businessman alone, Robert Macauley, mortgaged his home, chartered a Boeing 747 from Pan Am, and flew 300 children to America when he heard of the crash. As the evacuation continued, the growing panic in the streets of Saigon and the constant rocket attacks turned the loading of the infants and children into a safety nightmare. Adult participants wondered if the plane they were boarding would get off the ground. And if it did, would it then be shot down?

The exact number for each lift was left up to the discretion of the individual pilot. The children were loaded aboard in any way possible, until the plane was full. Often, Vietnamese mothers with Amerasian children were still attempting to get their children aboard as the paratroop doors were closing, trusting their children to an uncertain fate. On some flights, the babies were put into the cargo bays of Air Force planes filled with temporary cribs and empty crates, lined up corner to corner inside the aircraft. When available, the babies' birth records were stowed with them for the flight, documenting their short histories. As for the older children, Babylift was the crucible that shaped their lives. Already they had seen more adversity in their short lives than most adults, and they seemed to be feeling a cloak of desolation settling around their shoulders. Some of the older children wanted to know when they could go back to Vietnam, possibly to grandmothers or foster parents who had been caring for them. Those who wanted these children to have a better future had taken them from the only life they had ever known.

Even though it was a force of goodwill that was propelling these children into an uncertain new life, the experts said that culture shock and conflicting identity would be normal for them. It was going to be up to their new parents to help them find a healthy identity, embracing cultures old and new. As they moved toward the unknown future, the children were intensely aware, while still too young to understand. Excitement mingled with fear. These children faced change the moment they were taken aboard the planes, and many more changes lay ahead. They would be gaining the security of unconditional love that would drive away their shadows, making something good rise from the ashes of war by finding a loving and understanding home.

For many children swept up in the evacuation from Vietnam, appropriate documentation was one of the casualties of Operation Babylift and its aftermath. According to a 1976 report recorded in the Des Moines Register: "A year after they arrived by planeload from embattled South Vietnam, hundreds of Operation Babylift children remain under murky legal status in this country. And, more important, the Americans who took the young refugees into their homes still are uncertain about whether the children are really theirs to keep and rear."

Operation Babylift saved more than 3,300 children but some Washington critics questioned the Ford administration's political motivation. Others criticized the government for assuming that the children would be better off in America. Still others wondered if many of the children were not orphans at all. A Bay Area attorney who became involved in litigation over the Babylift called it "One of the last desperate attempts to get sympathy for the war." A Congressional investigation suggested a total lack of planning by federal and private agencies. Newspaper headlines asked, "Babylift or baby snatch?" and "Orphans: Saved or Lost?" Some Americans asked whether fear made it right to take children from their homeland. Some felt guilt may have been the motivator. Actress Julie Andrews and her late husband, director Blake Edwards, adopted two airlifted Vietnamese infants in 1975. The late actor Yul Brynner and his wife, Jacqueline, adopted a baby girl who had survived the downed C-5A.

A few weeks after the final Babylift aircraft had taken off from Tan Son Nhut, advanced elements of the People's Army of North Vietnam (NVA) entered Saigon. The following day, April 30, 1975, the South Vietnamese government capitulated. In June 2005, World Airways, the primary civilian airline involved in evacuating the orphans from Vietnam, sponsored a 30th anniversary trip called Operation Babylift - Homeward Bound, in which 21 Babylift adoptees and their guests were flown to Vietnam. Once there, they were given a special greeting and tours inside the country of their birth. They found a country brimming with promise. For many, it was an extraordinary voyage to connect with their flesh and blood beginnings, their Asian ancestry. The long war in Vietnam had finally come to an end.



'Operation Babylift' was one of the defining events of the Vietnam War and its legacy will continue for many years. Al Jazeera's Cath Turner was one of those orphans and in a video she discusses what it was like growing up in Australia, returning to Vietnam several times in search of her birth mother. It is 49 minutes long but well worth the time. Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdPG5JqtHF0>. This 10 minute video follows two Vietnamese orphans as they return home to Vietnam <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAWUliBy3E>. [Source: Together We Served | May 2016 ++]

Military History ► **Gen. G.W. Custis Lee Capture | MOH Dispute**

Gen. Robert E. Lee's son, Maj. Gen. G.W. Custis Lee, purportedly refused to surrender to a private in the Union Army. But that doesn't mean a private didn't capture the Confederate during a vicious battle at Sailor's Creek on April 6, 1865. More than 151 years later, the descendants of this young private are fighting to honor their hero and convince the federal government the wrong man was awarded the Medal of Honor for capturing the elusive target and famous general's son. Pvt. **David Dannels White**, of the Massachusetts 37th Regiment, watched his lieutenant get shot as he tried to force Custis Lee to surrender. White then pursued Lee behind enemy lines and successfully captured him, according to an assemblage of research by his great- great- great-grandson Frank White. This descendant now has members of Congress sponsoring legislation to approve the Civil War vet's Medal of Honor. And Frank White also had a 10 JUN appointment with Pentagon brass to state his case.

Frank White, of Lebanon, New Jersey, wrote a book about the event called "Sailor's Creek: Maj. Gen. G.W. Custis Lee, Captured With Controversy" in 2008 after decades of research. He said feedback from historians convinced him to pursue a case with the Army. Initially, a Medal of Honor was presented to Cpl. Harris S. Hawthorne for capturing Lee. But White said evidence suggests Hawthorne merely re-captured Lee in chaos afterwards. "I wrote the book documenting the evidence as objectively as I could, even though I had a relative involved," said Frank White. "The physical evidence is overwhelmingly on (David) White's side." While he was rejected by the Pentagon once, he's made a good enough case for a second chance. Meanwhile his congressman, Leonard Lance (R-NJ) introduced legislation 26 MAY, to get Daniel White recognized with the nation's highest valor award. "*The White Family asked for my assistance, and I was happy to meet with them regarding their strong case,*" Lance said in a press release. "*The capture of Custis Lee was a turning point in the Civil War and proved a psychological blow to Robert E. Lee. I have reviewed the materials presented by the White Family and I am convinced that it has merit.*"

Blood at Sailor's Creek

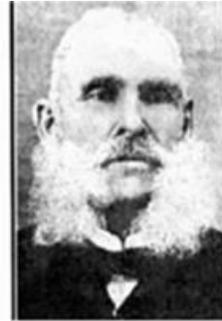
Three days before Lee surrendered to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, the Battle at Sailor's Creek, constituted the last major engagement of America's bloodiest war. With Grant having broken Confederate defenses of Petersburg days earlier, the Confederates were on their heels. The Confederates evacuated Petersburg and Richmond overnight on April 2-3, and began retreating in hopes of eventually linking up with larger numbers in North Carolina.



David Daniels White



George Washington Custis



Harris Hawthorn

The Union Army pursued and engaged in a series of battles known as the Appomattox Campaign. On April 6, about 25,000-36,000 Union forces met between 17,000-18,000 Confederate outside of Farmville, Virginia. What followed was one of the most brutal battles of the war, with shooting devolving into bayonet and hand-to-hand combat. There were even reports of soldiers biting one another. White saw his lieutenant confront a Confederate officer at gunpoint; he didn't know at the time that the man was none other than Robert E. Lee's son. The Confederate shot the Union officer in the chest (he would miraculously survive despite the bullet ricocheting through his body down toward his groin) and retreated. "There was a long battle line, with soldiers bayoneting and shooting each other," Frank White said. "Lee falls back from that line; White pursues him, halts him and gets the drop on him before he can pull out his revolver. He told him 'I'm going to shoot you dead' unless he surrendered." Lee apparently told White that he wasn't going to hand over his sword to a private, and demanded White summon an officer. White obliged, and Lee's revolver, sword, and personal effects were confiscated, according to Frank White's historical accounts.

The Controversy

So how did Hawthorne get all the credit? Frank White suspects Lee almost escaped at some point during the transfer of prisoners — keep in mind that there were 7,700 Confederates captured in this battle alone. Hawthorne likely caught Custis Lee during an attempted getaway, Frank White suspects. The Civil War and following decades were a messy time when it came to documenting awards like the Medal of Honor, an honor itself created during the war. Because the military had never had to deal with a valor awards process for such a vast war, many awards came long after-the-fact. Cpl. Hawthorne received his Medal of Honor for capturing Custis in 1894; ultimately it was one of 56 awarded for actions at Sailor's Creek. Based on White's research, the honor quickly created controversy, as White's regiment read about it in a newspaper and filed a protest in 1897. During that investigation, Hawthorne said in an affidavit that when he demanded Lee's weapons, Lee responded: "I don't have as much as a jackknife." (Frank White now reasons that's evidence he'd been captured before Hawthorne encountered him.)

After the 1897 investigation, then-Secretary of War Russell Alger asked for the medal back. But Alger lacked the authority to rescind it, and Hawthorne refused to return it. "He didn't know what to do," Frank White said of Alger. Ultimately it was ruled that year that the act of capturing Lee was not worthy of a Medal of Honor. In 1916, the government launched a Medal of Honor Review Board to look at awards given during the Civil War to add legitimacy to the honor. About a third of Medals of Honor from the war were rescinded, White said, for a variety of reasons (including the fact some were given to civilians.) But that review also determined that the capture of Lee was worthy of the award, allowing Hawthorne's to stand. This review did not examine whether someone else should have been recognized for that achievement instead.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Frank White discovered the story of his ancestor and Lee in the regiment's history while doing family research, and learned later of a Medal of Honor awarded to someone else for the same feat. That's what prompted him to take

a deep dive into the documentation. After writing his book and being told he was onto something, he put together a draft package for the Army to consider. White said Human Resources Command offered him some coaching, such as what kind of information and standard of evidence the Senior Army Decorations Board would want. But after submitting the packet, he got a letter back on March 8 of this year from Acting Secretary of the Army Patrick Murphy that said he and the SADB denied the award. Yet the logic, he said, didn't make sense: Murphy's grounds were that he had been denied in 1897 and again in 1916. So White pushed back, pointing out that the 1916 review restored the act to worthy of a Medal of Honor, and at the same time did not even consider whether to award White for the act as it had Hawthorne.

Aside from Congress and eventually Presidential sign-off on the award, he still needs the Army's approval—and he'll get his chance to make a case in person. On June 10 he will meet with G-1 (Personnel) leadership at the Pentagon, with leaders from Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, Kentucky, flying in as well. The meeting was organized by Lt. Gen James McConville, the G-1 boss, White said. [Source: Army Times | Kyle Jahner | May 31, 2016 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ▶ 16 thru 31 JUL

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 JUL**". [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | June 2016 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ▶ Beaudoin~Raymond O | WWII



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

RAYMOND O. BEAUDOIN

Rank and organization: First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, Company F, 119th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division

Place and date: Hamelin, Germany, 6 April 1945

Entered service: Holyoke, Mass. 15 December 1941

Born: Holyoke, Massachusetts, July 15, 1918

Citation

He was leading the 2d Platoon of Company F over flat, open terrain to Hamelin, Germany, when the enemy went into action with machineguns and automatic weapons, laying down a devastating curtain of fire which pinned his unit to the ground. By rotating men in firing positions he made it possible for his entire platoon to dig in, defying all the while the murderous enemy fire to encourage his men and to distribute ammunition. He then dug in himself at the most advanced position, where he kept up a steady fire, killing 6 hostile soldiers, and directing his men in inflicting heavy casualties on the numerically superior opposing force. Despite these defensive measures, however, the position of the platoon became more precarious, for the enemy had brought up strong reinforcements and was preparing a counterattack. Three men, sent back at intervals to obtain ammunition and reinforcements, were killed by sniper fire. To relieve his command from the desperate situation, 1st Lt. Beaudoin decided to make a 1-man attack on the most damaging enemy sniper nest 90 yards to the right flank, and thereby divert attention from the runner who would attempt to pierce the enemy's barrier of bullets and secure help. Crawling over completely exposed ground, he relentlessly advanced, undeterred by 8 rounds of bazooka fire which threw mud and stones over him or by rifle fire which ripped his uniform. Ten yards from the enemy position he stood up and charged. At point-blank range he shot and killed 2 occupants of the nest; a third, who tried to bayonet him, he overpowered and killed with the butt of his carbine; and the fourth adversary was cut down by the platoon's rifle fire as he attempted to flee. He continued his attack by running toward a dugout, but there he was struck and killed by a burst from a machinegun. By his intrepidity, great fighting skill, and supreme devotion to his responsibility for the well-being of his platoon, 1st Lt. Beaudoin single-handedly accomplished a mission that enabled a messenger to secure help which saved the stricken unit and made possible the decisive defeat of the German forces.



Raymond Beaudoin was the second of five brothers born to William Willis Beaudoin (1889 - 1961) and Emma Lapan Beaudoin(1889 - 1966). He is buried at Notre Dame Cemetery, South Hadley, Hampshire County Massachusetts, USA in Plot: Section C, Lot 307. The USNS Lt. Raymond O. Beaudoin (T-AP-189) troop transport ship was named in his honor.



[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh/wwII-a-f.html> July 2016 ++]

*** Health Care ***



PTSD Update 211 ► Illinois Judge Rules Eligible for Marijuana Treatment

Illinois must add post-traumatic stress disorder to the list of diseases eligible for medical marijuana treatment, a Cook County judge ordered 28 JUN in a sternly worded ruling that also said the state's public health director engaged in a "private investigation" that was "constitutionally inappropriate." In a lawsuit filed by an Iraq war veteran, Judge Neil Cohen ordered Illinois Department of Public Health Director Nirav Shah to add PTSD within 30 days. It's the first decision among eight lawsuits filed by patients disappointed with across-the-board rejections by Gov. Bruce Rauner's administration of recommendations from an advisory board on medical marijuana. The health department is reviewing the judge's order, department spokeswoman Melaney Arnold said.

Illinois law allows people to petition the state to add health conditions to the eligible list, but Rauner's administration has rejected all new conditions despite the advice of an expert panel that reviewed available medical evidence. In the case of PTSD, the advisory board voted unanimously to add it, but Shah, a Rauner appointee, conducted his own investigation and rejected PTSD applying a standard of medical evidence that "appears nowhere in the Act or the Department's rules," the judge wrote. Shah not only deprived the plaintiff of his right to due process but also "was contrary to the plain language of the Department's rules," Cohen wrote. Veteran Daniel Paul Jabs, who filed the lawsuit, "feels this decision gives him and other military veterans suffering from PTSD the respect they deserve from the state and the governor's office," attorney Michael Goldberg said Tuesday.

The ruling may help veterans with PTSD feel more comfortable trying marijuana to ease their symptoms and reduce their reliance on prescription drugs, said Michael Krawitz of Veterans for Medical Cannabis Access, a national nonprofit based in Virginia. Seven other plaintiffs have filed similar lawsuits seeking to add the following conditions to the Illinois program: chronic post-operative pain, migraines, irritable bowel syndrome, polycystic kidney disease, osteoarthritis, intractable pain and autism. Cohen is the judge in the chronic pain and osteoarthritis cases, while the others are before other judges.

Fifteen states and Washington, D.C., have medical marijuana laws that either specifically include PTSD or give doctors broad enough discretion to recommend marijuana for the condition, according to the Marijuana Policy Project, which seeks to end criminalization of the drug. Earlier this month, Ohio became the 25th state to legalize a comprehensive medical marijuana program, and it lists PTSD as a qualifying condition. Illinois' medical marijuana pilot program got its start under former Gov. Pat Quinn, a Democrat, and continued under Rauner, a Republican who for more than a year resisted expanding the program beyond the original 39 conditions and diseases listed in the law. Rauner now is considering signing a bill to extend the pilot program by 2½ years and adding PTSD and terminal illness to the list of qualifying conditions. [Source: The Associated Press | Carla K. Johnson | June 28, 2016 ++]

Zika Virus Update 01 ► 3 Ways You Can't Get it

Australia's Jason Day may be the world's best golfer, but you won't see him or many other top golfers play at Rio 2016 — even though this is the first time golf has been featured in the Olympic Games since 1904. Day is the latest golfer — and one of a growing list of world-class athletes — to withdraw from the Rio Olympics over fears about Zika, a mosquito-borne virus that causes flu-like symptoms in most cases, but has also been linked to serious birth defects. More than 26,000 cases of Zika have been reported in Rio de Janeiro so far this year, CNN reported.

“The reason for my decision is my concerns about the possible transmission of the Zika virus and the potential risks that it may present to my wife’s future pregnancies and to future members of our family,” Day said in a statement published on his Twitter page. “Medical experts have confirmed that while perhaps slight, a decision to compete in Rio absolutely comes with health risks to me and to my family. ... While it has always been a major goal to compete in the Olympics on behalf of my country, playing golf cannot take precedent over the safety of our family.”

Although the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Zika virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in February, the agency says there's a “very low risk” that holding the Olympics in Rio will further spread the disease because the Summer Games take place in August, which is Brazil's winter, when fewer mosquitoes are active. However, the WHO is advising pregnant women not to attend the Olympics. CNN says just 702 Zika cases were confirmed in Rio in May, a sharp decline from February's peak of 7,232 cases. Here in the United States, summer is in full swing, and with the warmer temperatures come mosquitoes. Still, there's no need to panic. According to Consumer Reports, here are three ways you can't get Zika:

- **Kissing:** Although the virus has been found in saliva, so far, CR says there are no reported cases of Zika transmission through kissing.
- **From a woman to a man during sex:** Men who have Zika can pass the virus to their sexual partners during intercourse. Zika can actually live two months or longer in semen. “So far, there have been 11 cases of sexual transmission in the U.S., all of them between men returned from Zika-affected countries and their sexual partners,” CR says. But so far, vaginal swabs of infected women have been Zika-free and there are no known cases of an infected woman passing the virus to a sexual partner.
- **Breast milk:** Although pregnant women can pass the virus to their baby in utero (congenital transmission) or “around the time of birth” (perinatal transmission), CR says there are no known cases of Zika passing from a mother to her baby through breast milk. New moms in Zika-affected countries are “still encouraged to breast-feed,” says CR.

You can Read more about Zika here on the WHO website at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/zika/en> or in this WHO Q & A about Zika at <http://www.who.int/features/qa/zika/en>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 30, 2016 ++]

Food Poisoning Update 01 ► Grilling

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 6 Americans get sick from eating contaminated food each year. TRICARE wants to help you practice food safety this summer. Food poisoning peaks in the summer months because warmer temperatures cause foodborne germs to grow. There are several things you can do to prevent illness in your family and friends.

- First, wash your hands often when handling raw meat. Dirty hands and surfaces used to prep your meat can carry germs. So keep your hands and your prep area clean.
- Next, clean your grill and your grilling utensils with a moist cloth or paper towel. If you use a wire bristle brush, check the grill after cleaning it. The brush bristles can come off and stick into food along with all the germs you thought you were cleaning off.
- Throw away all meat marinades and sauces and don't re-use them. Raw meat juices can spread germs to cooked food. Also, put cooked food on clean plates and store different food separately. Meats need to be kept hot until served but grilled veggies keep well once they have cooled.

Check out the CDC's website <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety> for more information on food safety when grilling. If you feel sick after eating grilled foods, contact your provider or visit your nearest urgent care center. [Source: TRICARE Communication | July 6, 2016 ++]

Health Risk | Raw Flour ► Avoid Eating Cookie Dough

It can be hard to resist plopping a glob of raw chocolate-chip cookie dough in your mouth when you're baking cookies. But unless you want to risk getting super sick, you should refrain from licking that spoon covered in raw dough or any other raw batter that contains flour. Although you may think it's the raw egg in dough that makes people sick — and indeed, consuming raw eggs carries a risk of salmonella — it's actually raw flour that's the latest concern. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, raw flour made by General Mills is to blame for a multi-state E. coli outbreak that started in December.



A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigation found that consuming or handling the contaminated raw flour was the common denominator in a Shiga toxin-producing E. coli O121 outbreak that has infected 38 people in 20 states, 10 of whom have been hospitalized. The symptoms of E. coli O121 are diarrhea (often bloody) and abdominal cramping. Severe cases of the illness can result in kidney failure. The CDC says flour produced at a General Mills facility in Kansas City, Missouri, was the “likely source” of the outbreak. As a result of the investigation, General Mills has recalled 10 million pounds of these flours sold under the following brand names: Gold Medal Flour, Signature Kitchen Flour and Gold Medal Wondra flour. **Warns the FDA:**

- “Flour is derived from a grain that comes directly from the field and typically is not treated to kill bacteria,” says Leslie Smoot, Ph.D., a senior advisor in FDA’s Office of Food Safety and a specialist in the microbiological safety of processed foods. So if an animal heeds the call of nature in the field, bacteria from the animal waste could contaminate the grain, which is then harvested and milled into flour.
- Common “kill steps” applied during food preparation and/or processing (so-called because they kill bacteria that cause infections) include boiling, baking, roasting, microwaving, and frying. But with raw dough, no kill step has been used.
- And don’t make homemade cookie dough ice cream either. If that’s your favorite flavor, buy commercially made products. Manufacturers should use ingredients that include treated flour and pasteurized eggs.

The FDA is also warning parents not to let their kids play with raw dough or baking mixes that contain flour because E. coli bacteria can be absorbed through their hands.[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 30, 2016 ++]

Sleep Update 02 ► Waking Up

When you wake up at the end of a sleep cycle, you initially feel rested and fresh. If you wake up before a sleep cycle finishes, you’ll probably feel groggy. However, you’ll still get the benefits of that sleep. Here’s how it works:

- There are 5 stages of brain activity in one sleep cycle. And each cycle lasts about 90–120 minutes. You fall asleep during the earlier stages.
- Next, you experience deep, restful sleep. Your heart rate and breathing slow down during these stages, while your body remains still.
- Your brain is most active during the final sleep stage. As you dream, your eyes move under your eyelids in rapid eye movement or REM.
- If you wake up during these later stages, you’ll likely feel groggy. You’ll feel more rested waking up at the end of a sleep cycle. Or you can feel refreshed waking up after a 20–30 minute nap, before you enter deep sleep.

Sleeping 8–9 hours every day is important—however it happens. And you can shake off any grogginess if you take 15–30 minutes to fully awaken. Standing upright and spending time in light—ideally daylight—can help! As long as you have enough time to fully overcome sleep inertia, you might find that the benefits of a little extra sleep are worth it. Don’t worry about getting enough deep sleep or REM sleep. Trust your body! It has an amazing ability to recuperate when you catch up on sleep. And it will quickly fall into whatever stage of sleep you need most. TRICARE covers sleep studies under certain circumstances. For more information, visit www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices. [Source: TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin | Lorraine Cwieka | July 8, 2016 ++]

* Finances *



SBP | Special Needs Children Update 01 ► How to Set Up Trust

The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2015 gives retirees the option of having Survivor Benefit Plan annuity payments go directly into a special-needs trust for a disabled child. This special-needs trust statute does not apply to disabled spouses. "This new option is the result of an amendment to the public law covering SBP and is a welcome change for parents of disabled dependent children," said Tammy Hern, the Air Force's SBP program manager. Basically, a special-needs trust is a legal tool specifically designed for managing money set aside for the benefit of a disabled person, according to Department of Defense officials. Unlike many other trusts, a special-needs trust is governed by state law.

Retirees who have SBP coverage for a disabled dependent child may now - or at any time -- have a special-needs trust created and elect to direct SBP annuity payments to the trust. This irrevocable decision may be made during the life of the retiree through a written statement that designates future SBP payments go into the special-needs trust. In situations where SBP payments are made to more than one dependent child, the special-needs trust will be treated as a dependent child for the purposes of determining the shares payable to each child. To irrevocably add a special-needs trust to existing child SBP coverage, retirees must submit a written statement requesting the annuity be paid to a trust. The statement must include the name and tax identification number of the trust. An attorney certification letter from an actively licensed attorney verifying that the trust is a special-needs trust created for the benefit of the disabled dependent child must also be submitted. Examples of both statements can be found at <http://www.retirees.af.mil/sbp>.

"It is vital that people wanting to create a special-needs trust exercise due diligence and consult with an attorney well-versed in this specialized and complex area of law," said Hern. In accordance with the SBP statute, a special-needs trust for a dependent disabled child must also meet federal statute, and once it is created, it is irrevocable. If officials determine the special-needs trust is invalid or otherwise faulty, then SBP annuity payments will revert back to being made directly to the dependent child. If this occurs, the dependent child's entitlement to other benefits such as Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid may be affected.

A special needs trust election can be added to child SBP coverage even after the retiree dies. "When the retiree dies, if SBP child coverage has been elected and the child is disabled, the dependent child's legal parent, grandparent or court-appointed legal guardian may irrevocably elect to have the SBP annuity payments made to a special-needs trust," said Hern. For more information or help with completing election statements, call 1- 877-353-6807 to contact the SBP or casualty assistance representative at the nearest military base. [Source: Afterburner | Tammy Cournoyer | JAN-JUN 2016 ++]

Social Security Statement ► Now At Your Fingertips

Have you ever received a *Social Security Statement* in the mail? You know, the one that shows all the earnings you've had each year and how much you could receive per month in Social Security benefits when you retire? The *Statement* contains crucial information workers need to plan for a comfortable retirement. Now, thanks to **my Social Security**, this information—and so much more—is only a few minutes away! Your personal *my* Social Security account is secure and gives you ready access to your earnings records, Social Security benefit estimates, and printable *Statements*. Those who already receive benefits can view their payment history, current status, and manage their benefits.

To open a personal *my* Social Security account, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount and select "Create an Account" to get started. You must be 18 years old, have a valid Social Security number, U.S. mailing address (or a military address if deployed overseas), and an email address. In some cases — like if there was reported credit card

fraud under your name or Social Security number — you may have to contact your local Social Security office to open a *my* Social Security account. Once registered, you can:

- Verify your earnings history;
- View estimated Social Security benefits based on your past earnings;
- View Social Security and Medicare taxes you've paid over your lifetime,
- Print your current *Social Security Statement*; and
- Request a replacement Social Security card (in some states)

If you're currently getting benefits, you can:

- View benefit payment information;
- Change your address and phone number;
- Start or change electronic payments;
- Get a replacement Medicare card;
- Get a replacement 1099 for tax season; and,
- Get a benefit verification letter.

When you sign up for a personal *my* Social Security account, a secure authentication process is used to protect the privacy of your identity and your *Social Security Statement* information. In addition to your unique username and password, you can also further protect your mySocial Security account with a secure code texted to your phone every time you log in. Learn more at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount. [Source: Social Security Blog | Doug Walker, Deputy Commissioner, Communications | July 7, 2016 ++]

Saving Money ► **Insurance | 10 Products That Are a Waste of Money**

Insurance, at its best, helps protect against events that could send your finances into a death spiral. Crucial products include insurance against a serious car crash, the loss of or damage to a home, and the loss of income due to death or disability. Other products? Many offer little value, or they're filled with exclusions and caveats. Following are some potentially dumb insurance buys:

1. **Identity theft insurance** - Federal law limits your liability from credit card fraud, so even if a thief uses your credit card, you're off the hook if you report theft promptly. Says the Federal Trade Commission: *Your liability for unauthorized use of your credit card is limited to \$50. If you report the loss to the credit card company before your credit card is used, you are not responsible for any unauthorized use.*

Most card companies go a step further and offer \$0 fraud liability. Report an ATM card missing within two business days after you realize it's gone, and you are liable for no more than \$50 in stolen money. Wait longer to report and you could be responsible for up to \$500 in purchases. If you let 60 days go by after your bank sends a statement with unauthorized purchases, you could face unlimited liability, the FTC says. In 2014, only 14 percent of identity theft victims paid \$1 or more out-of-pocket, says a U.S. Department of Justice report. "Of these victims, about half suffered losses of less than \$100," it says.

Repairing your credit and damage to your identity, on the other hand, can be time-consuming and costly. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners says:

Identity theft insurance provides coverage for the cost of reclaiming your financial identity, such as the costs of making phone calls, making copies, mailing documents, taking time off from work without pay (lost wages) and hiring an attorney. Identity theft insurance may cover those costs. Or it may not. Policies vary. Questions to ask: Can you recover lost wages from time away from work? What will the company do to reclaim your identity for you? Read the exclusions, limits and deductibles to decide if a policy is worth it. **Alternative:** Protect yourself before

you're hit. Monitor your bank and credit accounts regularly. Get three free annual credit reports. If you think your identity has been compromised, place a 90-day fraud alert on your credit file.

2. Credit life insurance - You may be offered credit life insurance when you obtain a car loan or a mortgage. It pays all or part of your loan balance if you die. The beneficiary is the lender, not your family. Occasionally, it is built into the loan and can't be declined. Most often, though, it is a separate and optional purchase. The Federal Trade Commission warns consumers to beware of lenders slipping it into a purchase without asking. That's illegal. The FTC advises borrowers to resist lenders' sales pressure. You can't be denied credit for declining optional credit insurance. If someone tries, report them to your state attorney general (find yours here) or state insurance commissioner (click your state on the map or select it from the drop-down menu). You may encounter other types of credit insurance:

- **Credit disability (or accident and health):** It covers loan payments if you can't work because you are sick, injured or disabled.
- **Involuntary unemployment (or loss of income):** It covers loan payments if you are out of work involuntarily — a layoff or termination, for instance.
- **Credit property:** It protects the property you used to secure the loan — your home, for example, in the case of a mortgage — against damage, loss in an accident, disaster or theft.

The value of these products depends on the price and your situation. Is your job insecure, for example? Is your health or mobility at risk? Also, does it really make all of your payments or only partial ones? **Alternative:** Compare the price of term life insurance. "Regular term life insurance is usually much cheaper in the long run," says Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson. Also, you likely get disability insurance through your workplace.

3. Travel insurance - Travel insurance can be confusing. There's protection against canceled trips, interrupted trips, medical expenses and many other risks. Policies vary in quality and in coverage. Some cover many eventualities; others insure against a single risk, like medical evacuation. The New York Times recommends a one-stop site, InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com>), for policies, articles and detailed information about what products cover. Travel Insured International is another site for comparison shopping, Forbes says. *Expect travel insurance to cost about 4 percent to 10 percent of the cost of the trip, with a more-comprehensive plan costing more, says The Simple Dollar. It recommends six companies and cautions readers to look for exclusions and loopholes in policies.* Travel insurance is a waste of money when:

- Your policy is riddled with exclusions.
- You choose a policy that doesn't cover the risks you are likely to encounter.
- You buy coverage for risks you aren't likely to encounter.
- You only stand to lose the cost of the airline ticket cancellation fee.

When is it worthwhile? Travel insurance makes sense if you anticipate unusual risks, beyond the broad fear that "anything could happen." You'll just sleep better knowing you're covered and are happy to pay for peace of mind. Examples:

- The traveler, or a family member back home, is in precarious health or elderly and fragile.
- The trip involves a bigger-than-usual possibility of a major disruption — traveling in the tropics in hurricane season, for example, or visiting a country prone to political unrest.
- A hitch in child care arrangements could force you to cut short or cancel the trip.
- Airline connections are tight and missing one of them could set you up for significant costs.
- Prepaid trips where a big deposit is on the line.

Medical and evacuation travel insurance - Medical insurance covers your care abroad when your medical plan doesn't. (Medicare, for one, does not cover Americans outside of the United States.) First, call your medical plan to find out what it does and doesn't cover. Emergency evacuation coverage flies you home if medically necessary — a good idea if your trip entails risky activities (climbing or trekking, for instance) or if your health is fragile. But

policies with lots of exceptions and exclusions may be a waste of money. **Alternatives:** You may already be covered through your homeowners, life, auto or health insurance. Credit cards may offer some forms of travel insurance, like lost luggage, theft and life coverage.

4. **Dental insurance** - If you have dental insurance through work, you're golden. Otherwise, a plan can run \$50 a month or more for benefits that top out at as little as \$1,000 a year. Don't buy it thinking you'll collect thousands of dollars' worth of implants or other complex treatments. Your policy might just pay 50 percent for oral surgery and restorative care. It may not cover cosmetic dentistry at all. The problem is the yearly cap on payouts. Dental plans haven't raised these maximum payouts over the years, even though the premiums keep growing.

Affordable Care Act dental coverage: The Affordable Care Act requires some health plans to include affordable dental care for children. Some states allow insurers to offer family dental plans too. Healthcare.gov (<https://www.healthcare.gov/can-i-get-dental-coverage-in-the-marketplace>) describes the ACA dental options.

Alternatives:

- Discount dental plan: NerdWallet says discount plans charge “an enrollment fee of about \$80 to \$120 each year to get discounts ranging from 10 percent to 60 percent on all of your dental visits and procedures.”
- Charitable clinics: Free or low-cost care is offered at community events for the uninsured at which local dentists volunteer their time. Check Dentistry From the Heart (www.dentistryfromtheheart.org), America's Dentists Care Foundation (www.adcfmom.org) or find your state's dental association online.
- Dental schools: Many dental schools give free or reduced-cost care. Accredited programs are listed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dental_schools_in_the_United_States.
- Preventative care: Dental disease can be largely prevented by brushing and flossing correctly and taking other measures (https://www.deltadentalins.com/oral_health/toc-preventive.html).
- Federally qualified health centers: These private clinics receive some government funding. Find clinics in cities and rural areas across the country on the federal Health Resources and Services Administration website <http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/index.html>.
- Medical travel: Some Americans travel long distances for dental care abroad, particularly in Mexico. They can often find care that's comparable in quality but considerably cheaper than at home. Medical travelers typically “need a lot of work, like 10 or 20 crowns,” Dr. Jessica Nitardy, who lives in El Paso, Texas, and practices in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, tells The Atlantic at <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2014/05/americans-are-going-juarez-cheap-dental-care/9037>.

5. **Children's life insurance** - Adults buy life insurance so their families will be cared for in case they die. Arguments in favor of life insurance for children include locking in insurance for them now in case it becomes impossible or too expensive to insure them later because of illness or playing high-risk sports, for a couple of examples. Some advocate coverage for possible funeral expenses and time off work for grieving. But unless the family depends on her or his income, there's no need to insure a child's life. **Alternatives:** Save for the child's education or open an investment account for him. If necessary, use those funds to pay his death expenses without giving a penny to insurers.

6. **Permanent life insurance** - Life insurance is valuable when people who depend on your income would be financially hurt if you die. But if you don't need to leave a pile of cash to pay off a mortgage or leave a bequest, skip it. There are two main types of life insurance:

- Term life insurance covers you for a specified period — 10, 20 or 30 years, for example. It's the cheaper option by far.
- Permanent insurance covers you for life. The insurance company takes part of the extra premium and invests it. That gives your policy a cash value, like a savings account. However, permanent life insurance comes with high premiums and high fees.

Alternative: If you're wealthy and need to leave a big chunk of money to pay your estate taxes, permanent insurance might be for you. Otherwise, it's a dumb insurance buy, says Stacy Johnson. He suggests term life insurance instead. Do your investing elsewhere, Stacy says.

7. **Collision coverage on an old car** - The collision portion of your auto insurance policy pays for repairing or replacing your car in a solo crash, no matter the cause. Older cars lose value fast. (Check values at Kelley Blue Book site <http://www.kbb.com/whats-my-car-worth>). Suppose your car is worth \$3,000 and the collision coverage alone runs \$500 per year. If you total the car — and it won't take a huge wreck to incur \$3,000 in repairs — the policy may pay even less than \$3,000. Ask yourself: Is \$500 a year worth it? In many cases, it is not. Do not, however, drop your auto liability insurance. If you hit someone else, you'll need it to pay the other guy's costs. **Alternative:** Put the amount of your premiums into savings to buy your next car.

8. **Flight accident insurance** - Flight accident insurance pays a lump sum benefit if you are killed or maimed in a plane crash. **Alternatives:** Term life insurance. Some credit cards include flight insurance coverage when you buy a plane ticket using the card.

9. **Critical Illness Insurance** - Roughly a third of workplaces offer critical illness insurance, which helps with high deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs of treatment for certain acute illness, says MarketWatch. Employers do not contribute to these plans. The payments for basic policies are modest, and so are the benefits. For added coverage, you'll pay more and have to pass medical screening. MarketWatch says: *Through a sample MetLife policy, a 50-year-old would pay \$25.80 for \$15,000 of coverage for cancer, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, major organ transplants, and 20-some additional diseases, including ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease (but excluding the very common diabetes).* The payout is a lump sum that you use for out-of-pocket medical costs or related expenses — medical travel, for example. The problem with these policies is that the insurer and you may not agree on what's a critical illness. Definitions are very specific, and exclusions can be hidden in the policy's fine print. Also, payout amounts shrink as you grow older. **Alternatives:** If you have a qualifying high-deductible medical plan and the discipline to save, open a health savings account. Your tax-free savings are available for many more types of medical care and there's no need to meet an insurer's definitions of illness. Or, buy disability insurance to cover 60 to 70 percent of your earnings. It's more expensive but covers many more eventualities.

10. **Rental car damage insurance**- If you have full coverage on a car of your own, you probably don't need rental car coverage, no matter what the gal behind the rental car counter says. Go ahead and waive it. **Alternatives:** Make certain you are covered under your own auto policy. Your credit card also may have coverage if you pay for the rental with the card. Finally, car rentals may be covered by an umbrella home-life-auto policy.

[Source: MponeyTalksNews| Marilyn Lewis | May 18, 2016 ++]

Ugly List Scam ► How It works

Instagram users are reporting a new scam called the "Ugly List" that leads to hacking. Instagram users are fooled into thinking a friend tagged them in a mean-spirited prank. However, it's really a phishing con.

How the Scam Works:

- You get an Instagram notification saying you've been tagged in a post. The catch? The post is called "Ugly List 2016," and it was a friend who tagged you. How mean!
- In the notification, there's a link to see the full post. You click on it, and it leads to a page that appears to be the Instagram log in. You need to enter your username and password before you can see the "Ugly List."

- Don't fall for it! The form is fake. It's a way for scammers to steal usernames and passwords. Once scammers have your account info, they will hack your Instagram and tag your followers in new "Ugly List" posts, perpetuating the con and stealing more information.

Tips to avoid this con:

- Do a quick search. Be wary of anything that is shocking or sensational on social media. If it seems suspicious, do an online search. If it's a scam, chances are that other victims have posted complaints and information online.
- Don't trust your friends' tastes online. It might not actually be them "liking" or sharing these scam posts. Their account may have been hacked.
- Hover over a link to see its true destination. Before you click, mouse over the link to see where it will take you. Don't click on links leading to unfamiliar websites.
- Report an Instagram scam. Check out at <https://help.instagram.com/165828726894770> Instagram's resources for reporting scams.
- If your account has been hacked, see at <https://help.instagram.com/368191326593075> Instagram's advice on securing your account and/or reporting the violation.

To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper (bbb.org/scam). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (bbb.org/scamtracker). [Source: BBB Scam alert | July 1, 2016 ++]



Tax Burden for Indiana Retired Vets ► As of JUL 2016

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Indiana:

Sales Taxes

- State Sales Tax:** 7% (food and prescription drugs exempt)
- Gasoline Tax:** 48.25 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)
- Diesel Fuel Tax:** 68.66 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)
- Cigarette Tax:** 99.5 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

- Tax Rate Range:** Flat rate of 3.3% of federal adjusted gross income for single are married. See tax info www.in.gov/dor/4748.htm & <http://www.in.gov/dor/4735.htm#military>.
- Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$1,000; Married – \$2,000; Dependents – \$1,500; \$1,000 is a base exemption. If dependents meet certain conditions, filers can take an additional \$1,500 exemption for each.
- Standard Deduction:** None
- Medical/Dental Deduction:** None
- Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None
- Retirement Income Taxes:** Social Security is exempt. Taxpayers 60 and older may exclude \$2,000 from military

pensions minus the amount of Social Security and Railroad Benefits received. Taxpayers age 62 and older may deduct from their adjusted gross income \$2,000 from a federal civil service annuity. Out-of-state pensions are fully taxed. Homeowners can deduct up to \$2,500 from their income taxes for property taxes on their residence. To view information for seniors, [click here](#).

Retired Military Pay: Military retirees who are age 60 are entitled to deduct up to \$5,000 of military or survivor benefits.

Active Duty or Reserve Military Pay: Military personnel (regardless of age) on active duty or in the reserves may deduct up to \$5,000 of taxable military pay if it is not already excluded or deducted from their adjusted gross income.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

Property taxes in Indiana are administered at the local level with oversight by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance. They are imposed on both real and personal property. Property, which is assessed at 100% of its true value, is subject to taxation by a variety of taxing units (schools, counties, townships, cities and towns, libraries, etc.) making the total tax rate the sum of the tax rates imposed by all of the taxing units in which the property is located. Homeowners are eligible for a credit against the property taxes that they pay on their homestead.

The amount of credit to which the individual is entitled equals 10% of the individual's property tax liability, which is attributable to the homestead during the calendar year. A taxpayer entitled to receive a homestead credit is also entitled to a standard deduction from the assessed value of the homestead. The deduction is the lesser of one-half of the assessed value of the real property or \$35,000.

Homeowners 65 and older who earn \$25,000 or less are eligible to receive a tax reduction on property with an assessed value of \$182,430 or less and the individual received no other property tax deductions except for mortgage, standard, and fertilizer storage deductions. [Click here](#) for details. A surviving spouse is entitled to the deduction if they are at least 60 years old. The amount of the deduction is the lesser of one-half of the assessed value of the real property or \$12,480. Call 317-232-3777 for details. Also [click here](#).

A **circuit breaker program** is aimed at helping residents by ensuring they don't pay more than 2% of their property value in taxes. The goal is to provide predictability in tax bills and equity among Hoosier taxpayers.

For more information on property tax deductions, [click here](#).

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The inheritance tax (Class A) ranges from 1% to 10% based on fair market value of property transferred at death. The estate tax is the amount by which federal credit exceeds inheritance taxes paid to all states. [Click for details](#).

For further information, visit the Indiana Department of Revenue site <http://www.in.gov/dor>. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-alabama-iowa#INDIANA> | Jul 2016 ++]



Notes of Interest ▶ 1 thru 15 JUL 2016

- **National AF Museum.** The U.S. Air Force has opened its new Museum hanger in Dayton Ohio. To see a shot clip on it go to <https://youtu.be/U6W2thap3Fw> .The museum features four sections: presidential, research and development, space, and global reach.
- **Afghanistan Vets.** Go to <https://www.facebook.com/nbcnightlynews/videos/10154362208083689> to see best friends from battlefield reunited.
- **Congress.** Summer recess runs July 15/16 thru 5/6 SEP, with many members running for re-election. This is a great opportunity for you to meet them face-to-face in their home districts and promote issues important to veterans. You can visit the websites of your Senators and Representatives to learn their schedules/events in your area.
- **Bye Bye American Pie.** Memories at <https://youtu.be/VhX3b1h7GQw>.
- **God Bless America.** More memories at <https://youtu.be/6OTGw03rTGs>
- **God Bless the USA.** <https://youtu.be/daqwGRdRIsk> .
- **50's/60's.** One more at <https://youtu.be/sDc0ID6PJeg> for those who grew up in this time period.
- **Vet Jobs.** The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans ticked to 4.4 percent in June, up from May's 4-percent mark. But the May unemployment rate was the lowest ever recorded since the Bureau of Labor Statistics started tracking the group in September 2008. And if this June's 4.4 percent rate had come out one year earlier, it would have been an all-time low at that time.
- **Military Approval Rating.** As an institution, the military holds a 73% approval rating, unchanged from a decade ago. Since 1975 when Gallup first began tracking such ratings, the military has averaged 67% approval. The majority of Americans surveyed expressed “some” confidence in all institutions but one: Congress. According to Gallup, “Congress has the ignominious distinction of being the only institution sparking little or no confidence in a majority of Americans.”
- **Jackie Coogan.**



Mosquitoes Update 02 ► 5 Reasons they Find You Irresistible

Some people say they can't spend more than 30 seconds outside right now before I get besieged by mosquitoes. They joke that they must smell better and have sweeter blood than people, who seems immune to the pesky bloodsuckers. As it turns out, there's some truth to that. James Logan, a medical entomologist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, told NPR that "the trait for being attractive or unattractive to mosquitoes is genetically controlled." Logan said different people "smell differently to mosquitoes." The bite-free folks who rarely find themselves with itchy mosquito bite welts almost seem to produce a "natural repellent," explains Logan. On the other hand, roughly 20 percent of people are mosquito magnets and are bitten more often on a consistent basis, according to Smithsonian at www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/why-do-mosquitoes-bite-some-people-more-than-others-10255934. Here are five reasons that mosquitoes may find you irresistible:



1. **You smell delicious:** Mosquitoes use an organ called a maxillary palp to detect carbon dioxide that's emitted when we breathe. "Mosquitoes find victims at closer range by smelling the lactic acid, uric acid, ammonia and other substances expelled via their sweat, and are also attracted to people with higher body temperatures," according to the Smithsonian report.
2. **Your blood and body type:** The Smithsonian says people with Type O blood are more attractive to mosquitoes. Studies have also shown that pregnant women attract twice as many mosquitoes as other people, which is likely due to amount of carbon dioxide they exhale (21 percent more than the average person) and their higher body temperature.
3. **Your clothes:** "If you dress in dark colors you stand out against the horizon and mosquitoes [can see you,]" Dr. Jonathan Day, a medical entomologist and mosquito expert at the University of Florida, told ABC News. He recommends that you avoid dressing in dark denim or other dark fabrics to better ward off mosquitoes.
4. **Your drink:** One small study found that tipping back a beer can make you more appealing to skeeters, although researchers aren't sure why that's the case. Still, it's something to think about before you grab a cold one and head outside.
5. **The weather:** Mosquitoes are typically the most active and hungry for blood at dawn and dusk, when the humidity goes up and the winds die down. So, you're putting yourself more at risk of mosquito bites if you're outside during those times. You can use a fan pointed at yourself to help keep the pesky insects at bay because "mosquitoes can't fly in a breeze faster than 1 mile per hour," Day told Time.

You can take steps to protect yourself from those pesky, potentially disease-carrying mosquitoes by using a repellent containing 30 to 95 percent DEET or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Learn about the "5 Best Repellents for Zika Virus Mosquitoes." [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 13, 2016 ++

Mine Detection ► African Pouched Rat Use Results

Throughout the world, places that have been involved in war and/or civil strife often have large minefields that still need clearing. In 2013, it was estimated that there was a global average of around nine mine-related deaths every day. The situation is especially dire in Africa. Typically, clearing a minefield involves men in body armor walking in very precise lines with metal detectors. Anything (from a rusty nail to an old ammo cartridge) that sets the detectors off must be investigated before moving on. A method of bomb detection using rats, however, is flipping this process on its head.

A Belgian NGO called APOPO has developed a way to train African pouched rats (named for the storage pouch in their cheeks) to sniff out bombs quickly and safely. They use this rat because it has an incredibly fine-tuned sense of smell and a long lifespan (8-9 years) to yield returns on the nine months of training they undergo. They're called Hero Rats, and NOT ONE has died in the line of duty since the program started in 1997. The average mine requires 5 kg (roughly 11 pounds) of weight to trigger an explosion, but even the biggest of these rats are only around 1.5 kg (3.3 pounds). Since they're trained to sniff out explosives exclusively, they aren't distracted by other metal objects the way human minesweepers are.



They can effectively search 200 square meters in less than 20 minutes. A team of humans would need around 25 hours to do the same job. Since they're in the African sun a lot, the Hero Rats get sunscreen to keep them cancer free. If a rat does get cancer, it receives full medical treatment. The rats are "paid" in avocados, peanuts, bananas and other healthy treats. After about 4-5 years on the job (or whenever they lose interest in working), they're allowed to retire. Retirement consist of eating all the tasty fruit their little hero's heart desires. To learn more please visit the APOPO website <https://www.apopo.org/en> , where you can also adopt a HeroRat for just \$7 per month or \$84 per year. [Source: <http://www.wimp.com> | ArchitTripathi | Jun 2, 2015 ++]

Paint Disposal ► What to Do

The problem most people have is what to do with the leftover paint. You can't just throw the cans in the trash if their is still paint in them — it's not allowed — so they keep accumulating. Using kitty litter is a godsend that will allow you to get rid of at least half of that mess quickly. Here's how it works:

- Collect all the cans of leftover latex (water-based) paint. (Latex is most commonly used on indoor projects, and it accounts for the majority of what accumulate in most households.)
- If the can is less than half full, stir in kitty litter until it absorbs the paint to the consistency of crumbly cookie dough and set it aside. The paint and kitty litter will bond and form a solid — and at that point it can be thrown into the regular trash. In this form, the paint will break down slowly, rather than leaching into the groundwater.
- If the can only has a tiny bit of paint in it, you can just leave it open to dry, and then throw the can away.

- If the cans are full or nearly full, you could still divide them into smaller containers and use the kitty-litter trick, but a better solution is to find a paint recycling center in your community. Typically, these facilities will sort, strain and reformulate the paint for reuse. It requires a little more effort on your part, but it's clearly more environmentally friendly.
- For a video on the forgoing refer to <https://youtu.be/ZJbe4LbDPu8>.

Note: All of the above apply only to latex paints. In most communities, oil-based paints and solvents such as turpentine need to be delivered to hazardous waste sites. You can find the closest one by checking with your public utilities provider.

[Source: Money Talks News | Kari Haus | July 11, 2016 ++]



Memories ► **Mealtimes In The Forties!**

- Pasta was an unknown term. It was called macaroni or spaghetti.
- Curry was someone's last name.
- Take-out was a math problem.
- Pizza? A leaning tower.
- Bananas and oranges? Only at Christmas time.
- All chips were plain.
- Rice was a milk pudding containing raisins and served as a desert.
- A Big Mac was what we wore with overshoes when there was a blizzard.
- Brown bread was only served with Boston Baked Beans.
- Oil was for lubricating, fat was for cooking.
- Tea was made in a teapot using tealeaves and never green.
- Cubed sugar was for the rich only.
- Chickens didn't have fingers in those days.
- None of us had ever heard of yogurt.
- Healthy food consisted of anything edible.
- Cooking outside was called camping.
- Seaweed was not a recognized food.
- 'Kebab' was not even a word let alone a food.
- Sugar enjoyed favorable media coverage and was regarded as being white gold.
- Stewed prunes were eaten when one was constipated.
- Surprisingly muesli was readily available. It was called cattle feed.
- Pineapples came in chunks in a tin; we had only ever seen a picture of a real one.

- Water came out of the tap. If someone had suggested bottling it and charging more than gasoline for it, they would have become a laughing stock.
- Watermelon was eaten off a plate using a knife & fork.
- Things we Never Ever had on or at our table in the fifties were forearms, hats and telephones!
- Children spoke only when spoken to by an adult!

Clothing Fixes ► 7 Simple Ones

Oh, no! A button just popped off of your favorite shirt. Do you pick up the button and put it aside to fix and then find it three years later? Or maybe you put it on the pile of stuff for the dry cleaners, knowing it will cost a few extra dollars. Or do you throw up your hands and toss the shirt, deciding it is easier to buy a new one? In our time-crunched day, it is sometimes easier to buy a new item than try to fix it, but it is always going to cost more money. With just a little know-how, you can accomplish these seven simple clothing fixes that will cost you little to no money, even if you don't sew!



1. **Replacing a button.** If you have the button, this is really easy to fix. Thread a needle with a matching color of thread and tie a double knot at the end. Then position the button in the correct spot and come from underneath, so the knot won't show. Simply crisscross the threads in the holes about six times and then tie a knot to secure it. Find a fun, two-minute video at https://youtu.be/hrSs_DiJ-ZA.
2. **You can't find the button.** Many items of clothing come with extra buttons attached to the tag. Keep these buttons, and when you lose one, you can find the exact match. Also, some shirts have extra buttons sewed into the hem or collar. You can also take an extra button from the cuff or a side button that won't show. What if you lose the button on your favorite pair of pants? An easy replacement could be at your local thrift store. Look for the same brand and then go for the cheapest pair.
3. **You notice the hem is loose on your skirt or pant leg.** You have no sewing skills whatsoever and no time. No problem! Buy some inexpensive hem tape. You just place between the garment and hem and iron it in place. It won't show and it will stay in place even through multiple washing.
4. **You snag your clothes on a nail and there is a tiny hole!** This is a more difficult sewing job, but you can fix it! Look for iron-on patches or an applique that would cover the hole and look decorative. You can add more on the other side to make it look like an intentional design.
5. **You find a stain that normal washing doesn't remove?** You can try a homemade paste of baking soda and Shout® or your regular detergent. Let it sit for a while and then gently rub with an old toothbrush. You can add a touch of bleach if it is white.
6. **You lose a lot of weight and your clothes don't fit anymore.** However, you don't want to replace your whole wardrobe? First of all, congratulations! You can take any skirt or pants down a size or two. This works best with elastic waists. Turn the garment inside out. Now sew a straight seam a few inches in from the existing seam, following the shape. You can cut off the excess fabric or leave it. Turn right-side out and your clothing will fit much better!

7. **You feel you can't fix your garment, but can't bear to part with it.** Call your drycleaners. They often offer sewing and alterations for a set price. It will still be cheaper than buying a whole new outfit, especially those one-of-a-kind pieces.

[Source: The Dollar Stretcher | Shaunna Privratsky | June 24, 2016 ++]

Political Quotations ► A Few to Ponder

With the upcoming elections here are a few quotes to reflect on:

John Adams

In my many years I have come to a conclusion that one useless man is a shame, two is a law firm and three or more is a government.

Mark Twain(1866)

- Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of government. But then I repeat myself.
- No man's life, liberty, or property is safe while the legislature is in session.
- If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed, if you do read the newspaper you are misinformed.
- The only difference between a tax man and a taxidermist is that the taxidermist leaves the skin.

Winston Churchill

I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle.

George Bernard Shaw

A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul.

Douglas Casey (Classmate of Bill Clinton at Georgetown University)

Foreign aid might be defined as a transfer of money from poor people in rich countries to rich people in poor countries.

P.J. O'Rourke (Civil Libertarian)

- Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.
- If you think health care is expensive now, wait until you see what it costs when it's free!

Frederic Bastiat (French economist 1801-1850)

Government is the great fiction, through which everybody endeavors to live at the expense of everybody else.

Will Rogers

I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts.

Voltaire (1764)

In general, the art of government consists of taking as much money as possible from one party of the citizens to give to the other.

Pericles (430 B.C.)

Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you!

Anonymous

Talk is cheap...except when government does it.

Ronald Reagan

The government is like a baby's alimentary canal, with a happy appetite at one end and no responsibility at the other.

Edward Langley (Artist 1928-1995)

What this country needs are more unemployed politicians.

Thomas Jefferson

A government big enough to give you everything you want, is strong enough to take everything you have.

Aesop (Ancient Greek fabulist 620-564 B.C.)

We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office.

[Source: Various | July 2016 ++]

Email Guidelines ► A Few Tips

There's no universal agreement what makes you look good and what doesn't in email, but thinking through your decisions before clicking send can help ensure you're presenting your best self. This might be old hat to many, but sometimes reexamining old assumptions can shed new light. Follow these tips:

Subject Line. Make your subject line informative Instead of a nondescript label such as "Hey" or "Important information," use words that indicate what your email is about, such as "Health benefits changing next year" or "Party this Friday." If the conversation veers off to a new subject, change the email's subject line to reflect the new subject matter.

Verify recipients. Before sending, double-check the names of recipients. The scenario of sending a flirty email intended for the cute girl or guy on your floor to your entire department has become a cliché, but it still happens. Verify before sending.

Cc | Bcc. Copy only necessary people when responding to a group email. Don't forward jokes or other irrelevant messages indiscriminately to others. When you're sending a group email and don't want everyone to see everyone else's email address, use the bcc field (for "blind carbon copy").

Opening. Opening an email with "Dear [Name]" is old school, and chances are, this quaint letter-writing practice will make you look fuddy-duddy. Use "Hello, [Name]" or "Hi, [Name]" or just get right to your point.

Body. In the body of your emails, place your most important information first to make sure it's read. Then expand upon it with supporting detail. This is sometimes called the "journalistic triangle."

Brevity. Keep emails, including material quoted from previous emails, short. When possible, restrict individual emails to a single request or theme. Quote previous messages only if you need to place what you say in context.

Grammar | Syntax. Think twice about typing in all lowercase, running sentences together, spelling words any which way, and using little-known jargon. This might save you time, but it will make it more time-consuming for recipients to understand what you're trying to say.

Content | Tone. Be careful about potentially offensive content and tone in an email, which easily can be forwarded to a third party. Better to be safe than sorry with jokes, political commentary, and overall snarkiness. Needless to say, avoid all sexist, racist, and other explosive subject matter that can get you fired. Many organizations have email policies that spell out appropriate use, but not all do.

Privacy. Regard email as public, particularly email sent at work. When you're using company equipment, company overseers have the legal right to see what you're saying. Organizations are required to retain email, so assume any email you send will last forever.

Response. Don't waste your and others' time by reflexively shooting back a response instead of considering whether a response is really needed. One-word replies such as "Thanks!" or "Great!" that are sent to the entire group that received the initial email just pull people away from other things they could be doing.

Follow Up. Don't email someone and immediately follow up with a text or phone call.

Closings. Closings generally are less formal than letter closings. You still can use as "Sincerely," which is better (but not by much) than "Dear" as an opening. Similarly, "Yours" and "Yours truly" almost never mean what they say. These letter-writing conventions are old-fashioned, coming from a time when people would write "I beseech you" in making simple requests. Better closings are "Best" and "Regards," though "Regards" or "Best regards" should be used only if you mean it. "Thank you" or "Thanks" can work if you're requesting something or filing a complaint. Or you can simply sign your first name or end with a more complete "sig" that includes your name and other identifying information.

[Source: MOAA News Exchange | Reid Goldsborough | July 6, 2016 ++]

Food Hacks Update 01 ► More Kitchen Tips

1. **Stop avocados going brown:** It's a well known fact that squeezing lemon or lime juice over the cut side of an avocado will keep it greener for longer. But The Family Cooks takes it one step further. Actually slice up a lemon and lay the slices over the cut avocado to keep it fresh, before wrapping it up. This way, you can unpack your salad and have bright-green avocado waiting for you at lunchtime.



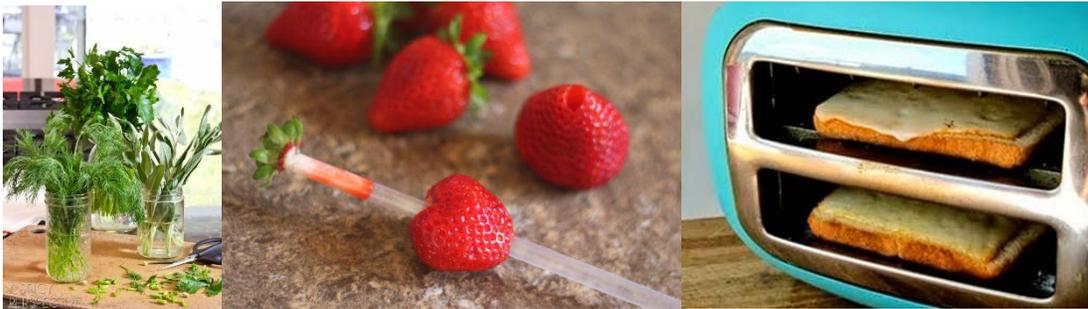
2. **Know when your steak is cooked:** You don't have to hack a steak to pieces in the pan to see how well it's cooked inside - thanks to this graphic, from The Paper Mama, you can give it a prod with a clean fingertip and compare it to which part of your hand it's most similar to as it cooks. You - and your non-stick pans - can be forever grateful.

3. **Peel and Grate Ginger.** Ginger is delicious in soups, stir fry, spicy wings and cookies, but peeling and grating the root can be a bear. View <https://www.yahoo.com/style/tagged/tipline> to make the job much simpler. One tip: After peeling it, pop the ginger in the freezer for 10 to 15 minutes before grating. This makes the root stiffer and easier to grate.

4. **Never cry again when cutting onions:** Here's a nifty trick for cutting onions without the need for swimming goggles, candles or a scuba mask. Just give your onions a quick chill in the fridge before you're ready to cut them. The cold temperature helps stop the chemical reaction that causes the fumes (and the crying).

5. **Replace eggs in baking with... bananas:** So you're making a cake. You've creamed your butter and sugar together and... where are the eggs? If you run out of eggs, don't panic. Just use mashed bananas. One mashed banana is about equal to one egg in a baking recipe. You can also use them for making pancakes, too - just make sure you don't run out of maple syrup, though.

6. **Keep fresh cut herbs fresh for longer:** Herbs can, if left in their plastic packets, turn black and soggy within a few days. Some of them, like basil, you can't even keep in the fridge at all. Want to get a few more days' wear out of your cut herbs? Then stand them up in a glass of water, just like you would a lovely bouquet of flowers. Have a look at this, and more ideas for keeping fresh herbs fresher on [A Spicy Perspective](#).



7. **Hull strawberries with a straw:** Still cutting off half the strawberry to get that tough core out? Then check this out. Just slide a straw up through the middle of the strawberry and the core - and the leafy green top - will be removed, with a minimum of waste. This idea's from Mary, at [BarefeetIn The Kitchen](#).

8. **Make a cheese toasted sandwich - with a toaster:** Well this changes everything. Thanks to Mackenzie at [Grilled Cheese Social](#), you don't even need a sandwich toaster to make a cheese toastie. Just a regular toaster flipped on its side. Check out the full instructions on her website.

9. **Freeze red wine in ice cubes for chucking into stews:** You just want to give that stew a little more richness. All you need is a little slosh of wine. But wait - don't go out and buy a whole bottle - just trickle the last of a bottle of wine into an ice cube tray and freeze. You'll have perfectly-portioned cubes of red wine that you can just drop into stews and sauces, whenever you need it - without buying a whole bottle every time.

10. **Use a whole biscuit as the base for individual cheesecakes:** I know, I know. Weighing biscuits and then smashing them up, melting butter, stirring it all together and pressing into a cake tin - all that and you haven't even started with the filling. To save time, use a whole biscuit as the base for individual cheesecakes set in muffin cases. [The Girl Who Ate Everything](#) has used an Oreo for these gorgeous little cheesecakes but you could try whatever biscuits you like.

11. **Turn unwanted sandwich crusts into fancy breadsticks:** Always cutting the crusts off sandwiches? Wish you weren't wasting so much bread? Then save them. Drizzle with a little olive oil, finely grate over some Parmesan, add a pinch of Italian herbs and a crushed garlic clove or two and bake for 15 minutes at 200°C/gas mark 6. Golden, toasty breadsticks.



12. **Peel a whole head of garlic in under 60 seconds:** Peeling garlic by hand is a bit fiddly. And smashing it with the side of a big, sharp knife just squeezes out all its juice. Bonnie at The Pin Junkie shared this idea for peeling a whole bulb of garlic in under one minute. Just drop it into a Tupperware tub and shake.

[Source: Various | July 2016 ++]

Food Marketing Terms ► Help in Making Healthier Choices

Each year brings a host of new food products and trendy terms and claims to describe them. Too often, however, blurry definitions and vague usage can lead to confusion. Learn which food marketing phrases can help you make healthier choices — and which terms won't make much of a difference to your diet.

"Natural".

Currently, no formal definition for the use of "natural" on food labels has been issued by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, "natural" claims have become common on new foods and beverages. According to their website, "FDA has not developed a definition for use of the term natural or its derivatives. However, the agency has not objected to the use of the term if the food does not contain added color, artificial flavors, or synthetic substances. USDA allows the use of the term "natural" to be used in meat and poultry labeling on products that contain no artificial ingredients or added color. The product also must be only minimally processed. The label must explain the use of the term natural — for example: "no added coloring, minimally processed."

"Processed" and "Unprocessed"

These terms are frequently misunderstood. Many people think of "processed" as unhealthy packaged foods with empty calories and loads of additives, and "unprocessed" as foods that are not canned, frozen or packaged. Neither of these beliefs is entirely correct. According to the USDA, "processed" refers to food that has undergone a "change of character." Some examples include raw nuts (unprocessed) vs. roasted nuts (processed); edamame (unprocessed) vs. tofu (processed); a head of spinach (unprocessed) vs. cut, pre-washed spinach (processed). [Learn more about processed food](http://www.eatright.org/resource/food/nutrition/nutrition-facts-and-food-labels/avoiding-processed-foods) at <http://www.eatright.org/resource/food/nutrition/nutrition-facts-and-food-labels/avoiding-processed-foods>.

"Local"

The local food movement refers to buying food that is grown close to where you live. This movement is connected to a broader philosophy of environmental sustainability and supporting the local economy. Still, even "local" can have a variety of nuances depending upon who you ask. The term "locovore" is used to describe someone who eats food grown or produced locally.

"Whole"

There is no regulatory definition of whole foods. "Whole foods" generally refer to foods that are not processed or refined and do not have any added ingredients. By most definitions, whole foods include fresh produce, dairy, whole grains, meat and fish; meaning any food that appears in its most pure form with minimal processing.

"Organic"

Of all these terms, "organic" has the most specific criteria and legal meaning. As defined by the USDA, organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic plant foods are produced without using most conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering or ionizing radiation. A government-approved certifier must inspect the farm to ensure these standards are met. In addition to organic farming, there are USDA standards for organic handling and processing. There are three levels of organic claims for food:

- *100-Percent Organic*: Products that are completely organic or made of only organic ingredients qualify for this claim and a USDA Organic seal.
- *Organic*: Products in which at least 95 percent of its ingredients are organic qualify for this claim and a USDA Organic seal.
- *Made with Organic Ingredients*: These are food products in which at least 70 percent of ingredients are certified organic. The USDA organic seal cannot be used but "made with organic ingredients" may appear ; on its packaging.

[Source: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics | June 13, 2016 ++]



Brain Teaser ► Cats in Spring

On a beautiful spring day in the park, there were five female cats walking together and gossiping about their humans. Up ahead, there were five males walking together bragging about their conquests. When the two groups met, there were five cupids flying through the air. Next thing ya know, there were five couples walking away in separate directions. The couples began talking and soon found that they had amazing things in common. Well, long story short, we all know what happens to cats that fall in love in the springtime, oh my what a racket! Can you figure out who the couples were, what treats they liked, what their favorite activity was and how many kittens each had in their litter?

- Male: Punkin, Batman, Billy, Jake, Dibii
- Female: Pepper, Sally, Ruby, Spot, Starbuck
- Snack: Chicken, Mice, Tuna, Ice Cream, Chips
- Activity: Laser, String, Sleep, Beat Up, Ball
- # in Litter: 1,3,5,7,9

1. The five males were: Jake, the one that liked tuna fish & had five kittens, the one that liked Spot, the one that liked to beat up other cats, and the one that loved ice cream.

2. The five females were: Starbuck, the one that had nine kittens, the one that liked to eat chicken & chase a ball, the one that liked to sleep, and the one that liked Punkin.

3. Dibii (who had three kittens) liked to chase the laser light but not mice. On the other hand, Sally loved to chase

mice but not string.

4. Batman didn't have a thing for Sally and he didn't have seven kittens. Billy, who thought of himself as very big & tough, had the most kittens & wasn't about to chase some stupid string around - what a waste of time!

5. Ruby loved to cuddle up to her male for a long afternoon nap in the sun but hated it when he ate his chips in bed. That may be the reason they didn't have the most kittens (they didn't have the least either).

6. Pepper & Punkin didn't have one kitten but they did like tuna fish.

Have You Heard? ► Deer Hunting || Why Golf Is Better Than Sex

It was Saturday morning as Jake, an avid hunter, woke up raring to go bag the first deer of the season.

He walks down to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee, and to his surprise he finds his wife, Erin, sitting there, fully dressed in camouflage.

Jake asks her, "What are you up to?"

Erin smiles, "I'm going hunting with you! The kids are with their granddad..."

Jake, though he had many reservations about this, reluctantly decides, To take her along.

Three hours later they arrive at a game preserve just outside of Malta, Montana. Jake sets his lovely wife safely up in the tree stand and tells her "If you see a deer, take careful aim on it and I'll come running back as soon as I hear the shot. He walks away with a smile on his face knowing that Erin couldn't bag an elephant - much less a deer.

Not 10 minutes pass when he is startled as he hears an array of gunshots. Quickly, Jake starts running back. As he gets closer to her stand, he hears Erin screaming, "Get the hell away from my deer!"

Confused and frightened, Jake races faster towards his screaming wife, and again he hears her yell, "Get the hell away from my deer!" followed by another volley of gunfire!

Now within sight of where he had left his wife, Jake is surprised to see a Montana game warden with his hands high in the air.

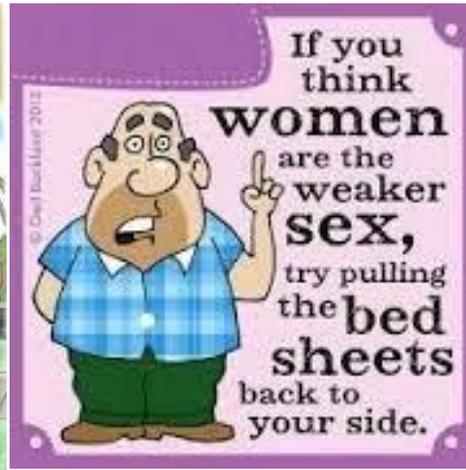
The game warden, obviously distraught, yelled, "Okay, lady! You can have your deer! Just let me get my saddle off it!"

-o-o-O-o-o-

David Letterman's Top Ten Reasons Why Golf Is Better Than Sex...

- #10... A below par performance is considered damn good.
- #09... You can stop in the middle and have a cheeseburger and a couple of beers.
- #08... It's much easier to find the sweet spot.
- #07... Foursomes are encouraged.
- #06... You can still make money doing it as a senior.
- #05... Three times a day is possible.
- #04... Your partner doesn't hire a lawyer if you play with someone else.
- #03... If you live in Florida, you can do it almost every day.
- #02... You don't have to cuddle with your partner when you're finished.

And the NUMBER ONE reason why golf is better than sex.....
#01... When your equipment gets old you can replace it!



Brain Teaser Answer ► Cats in Spring

Couple Treats Activity Kittens

- Punkin & Pepper – Tuna ----- String ----- 5
- Batman & Spot --- Chicken --- Ball -----1
- Billy & Sally ----- Mice -----Beat Up ---- 9
- Jak & Ruby ----- Chips ----- Sleep ----- 7
- Dibii & Starbuck - Ice Cream – Laser ----- 3

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Notes:

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's former size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we have notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,406 subscribers who responded to that notice. All others are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.
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7. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addressee raoemo@sbcglobal.net into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition), <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/retiree-assistance-office.html> (HTML Edition), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addressee from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

8. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. Provided at the end of each article is the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

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