



Veterans-For-Change Newsletter

A Voice of the Veterans

Week Ending Sunday, November 20, 2016
Volume 7, Issue 43

This-N-That

The holidays are getting closer and closer and while many are preparing for Thanksgiving and Christmas there are many others who are now beginning to suffer more and more from depression and even more are homeless.

In a perfect world, wouldn't it be great that no one felt pain and suffered from depression from their service, and no one who served was homeless?

Every so often I talk about adopting a dog or puppy from a local shelter, and I am reminding you again to please take this into serious consideration.

It might not be a service dog, but you would truly be amazed just how quickly a puppy or dog you've rescued and saved their life, just may very well do the same for you too! They can sense your mood, feelings, and help when you're on the edge and bring you back to reality.

Many shelters, if you tell them you're a Veteran will allow you to adopt at no cost, some even have special programs at this time of year so you can find your new buddy and won't charge you.

So please, consider this suggestion, and reach out to battle buddies when you can and stay in touch!

Temperatures are dropping now as we move into winter, and still we have thousands upon thousands of Veterans who have become homeless through no fault of their own.

Being denied for services and benefit, running out of savings from their time in the service leaves most with absolutely no options as local organizations and programs just aren't sufficient to meet the need and great demand.

So I ask you to reach out to local VFW, American Legion, VVA, etc and ask where they need help to get our homeless Veterans off the streets, to bring them home.

If you need ideas, suggestions, or even step by step instructions, please do let me know, we have a great program that has been adopted by many non-Veteran organizations, schools, churches and it's been working for several years now.

On behalf of our Volunteers nationwide and myself, we wish you and your family good health!

Respectfully,

Jim Davis

Founder

Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org

Appeals Reform Legislation Needs Action

Congress is back and has just a few weeks remaining this year to pass historic claims and appeals modernization legislation and we need your help to make sure they don't leave town without getting this done.

To address this issue, DAV, other VSOs and VA officials developed and agreed on a new framework for processing appeals that also included changes to the claims process. This new framework is contained within several pieces of legislation (S. 3170, S. 3328, H.R. 5083 and H.R. 5620) and Congress must pass one of these bills, or another bill containing the appeals modernization framework before they adjourn for the year.

This new appeals process would create multiple options for veterans to redress benefit decisions made by the Veterans Benefits Administration and reduce the amount of time a veteran must wait to receive a decision. If a veteran continuously pursues redress within one year of the last decision, either at the Regional Office (RO) level or at the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board), they would be able to preserve their earliest effective date. The legislation would let veterans file a formal appeal directly to the Board, allows the Board to consider evidence in the first instance in certain circumstances and retain hearing options before the Board or at the RO.

The new appeals process envisioned within and pending legislation would provide veterans with a more equitable and flexible claims and appeals process. There is rare bipartisan support in the House and Senate for claims and appeals modernization legislation as contained within these bills. Time in the 114th Congress is running out quickly and we need Congress to act on this legislation before they adjourn.

Currently, veterans are experiencing extreme delays waiting for decisions on their appeals. Over the past few years, the number of appeals awaiting decisions has risen dramatically to over 460,000 and the average time for an appeal decision is between three and five years, this delay is simply unacceptable.

A failure of Congress to act now will result in continued growth of the appeals backlog and veterans will have to wait longer and longer for decisions on their appeals. If faithfully implemented and fully funded by Congress, this legislation would enable veterans to get more timely and accurate decisions on their appeals. We have a unique moment in time with significant support from major VSOs, the Administration and both chambers of Congress for VA claims and appeals reform.

DAV needs its members and supporters to reach out to their Members of Congress and request their support for claims and appeals reform legislation contained within S. 3328, S. 3170, H.R. 5083 and H.R. 5620. Please use the prepared emails to contact your Senators and Representatives and ask them to take action to get the legislation enacted before the end of the 114th Congress.

As always, thank you for your support of DAV's legislative efforts. Your participation in DAV's Commander's Action Network makes us a more effective advocate to protect and enhance the interests of veterans who have sacrificed in service to our country.

Click [HERE](#) and send your message!

NDAAs Angling for Passage Before Christmas

"House and Senate negotiators putting the finishing touches on the new defense policy bill are ditching the controversial riders that could draw a presidential veto. The final version of the National Defense Authorization Act will not include provisions dealing with the greater sage grouse or workplace protections based on sexual orientation, according to sources familiar with the negotiations.

"The provisions were two of the major sticking points between the House and Senate versions of the bill and were part of the reason Armed Services leaders were unable to strike an accord in September. Committee aides and leaders cautioned that nothing was officially finalized until the entire bill was completed. But one House Armed Services member said they've been told negotiations on issues where the two chambers differed are all wrapped up. 'It's done,' the lawmaker said. 'There's no more negotiations, even on the small stuff.'"

Source: NAUS



Commander John Wells for Secretary of the VA

Thank you for your confidence. Yes I would like to head the VA. I will give you all three guesses which regulation gets rescinded by sundown on Day #1, But here are the main issues I would address.

Vision

- A nation that upholds President Lincoln's promise "To care for him [and her] who have borne the battle and for his [her] widow[er] and orphan."
- A nation where the rights of all veterans of the armed forces are protected.
- A nation where veterans receive their earned benefits without delay.

Mission

- Restructure the culture at the Department of Veterans Affairs to make it "veteran friendly" with an emphasis on service rather than bureaucracy.

- Emphasize outreach to veterans to ensure they are aware of their rights and benefits.
- Working in concert with the National Academy of Sciences become proactive in the identification of diseases and disabilities unique to or connected with military service.
- Work with Congress to ensure that funding is available to compensate and treat veterans who suffer disease or disability due to military service.

Specific Focus

- Exempt service connected mandatory benefits from the offset provisions of PAYGO (Pay as You Go Act of 2010).
- In concert with the Veterans Service Organizations conduct a baseline review of Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations to streamline the benefits program.
- Establish a Merit Systems Protection Board unit consisting of attorneys with MSPB litigation experience at the General Counsel's Office to manage employment termination decisions.
- Promulgate a disciplinary policy with consistent and specific guidelines for punishment.
- Establish a center of excellence to research effects of toxic exposure on vets and descendants. Investigate all issues concerning toxic exposure and contract as necessary for expert assistance. Retain on a permanent basis the Committee to Review the Health Effects in Vietnam Veterans of Exposure to Herbicides and expand its mandate to include all toxic exposures including but not limited to Gulf War disease and Burn Pit exposure.
- De-emphasize the use of standard forms within the VA and emphasize personal contact between the VA staff and the veterans they serve.
- Assign Ombudsmen, who are veterans, to each Regional Office.
- Revise job descriptions for VA raters to require military medical experience.
- Require that the VA maintain a centralized database at an existing facility to identify health trends among veterans and their descendants and refer them as appropriate to the National Academy of Sciences for further study.
- Immediately extend the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to veterans of the Blue Water Navy, Guam, Johnston Island, Panama and Korea during the time Agent Orange was present.
- Appoint a Chairperson of the Board of Veterans Appeals acceptable to the Veterans Service Organizations, the VA and the Congress. The BVA has been without a Chairperson for 5 years.
- Decertify Veterans Law Judges with an excessive controllable remand rate.
- Require all Veterans Law Judges to be Administrative Law Judges.
- Incorporate pre-hearing conferences and scheduling orders in consonance with the practice in the federal administrative adjudication system.
 - On an interim basis, contract with retired Military Judges, after training in VA law, to hold regional hearings on veterans appeals until the 450,000 person backlog is eliminated.
 - Reconstitute and expand the VA Inspector General program.
 - Adopt the Industry Standard "Epic" medical records program for both VA and DOD.
 - Digitalize all records and phase out the centralized mailing system in favor of a digitalized intake system which can be accessed by VSOs and veterans law practitioners.

You can help to get Commander Wells into the Secretary of the VA seat by sending a message to Donald Trumps Transitional Team:

Donald J. Trump Transitional Team
 1717 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
 Washington, D.C. 20006



Exchange Seeks Holiday Stories in \$1,000 Contest

Your holiday memories could be worth \$1,000 in the Army & Air Force Exchange Service's latest contest. Through Dec. 25, authorized shoppers 18 years old or older can submit an essay of 300 words or less about one of their favorite holiday memories. The winning entry will receive a \$1,000 Exchange gift card with second and third place receiving \$500 and \$300 gift cards, respectively. Essays can be sent to sweepstakes@aafes.com with "Storybook Essay" in the subject line and will be judged on creativity and the ability to inspire. Complete rules and details can be found on the [Exchange website](#).

IRS warns of a new tax bill scam

Seena Gressin, Attorney, Division of Consumer & Business Education, FTC

We certainly understand if the latest IRS imposter scam makes you queasy: it involves a fake IRS tax notice that claims you owe money as a result of the Affordable Care Act.

The IRS says the fake notices are designed to look like real IRS CP2000 notices, which the agency sends if information it receives about your income doesn't match the information reported on your tax return. The IRS says many people have gotten the bogus notices, which usually claim you owe money for the previous tax year under the Affordable Care Act.

It's one of many IRS imposter scams that have popped up. As tax season nears, we'll see more. The good news? There are red-flag warnings that can help you avoid becoming a victim. For example, the IRS will never:

- Initiate contact with you by email or through social media.
- Ask you to pay using a gift card, pre-paid debit card, or wire transfer.
- Request personal or financial information by email, texts, or social media.
- Threaten to immediately have you arrested or deported for not paying.

In the new scam, the fake CP2000 notices often arrive as an attachment to an email — a red-flag — or by U.S. mail. Other telltale signs of this fraud:

- There may be a "payment" link within the email. Scam emails can link you to sites that steal your personal information, take your money, or infect your computer with malware. Don't click on the link.

- The notices request that a check be made out to “I.R.S.” Real CP2000s ask taxpayers to make their checks out to “United States Treasury” if they agree they owe taxes.

In the version we saw, a payment voucher refers to letter number LTR0105C, and requests that checks be sent to the “Austin Processing Center” in Texas. But scammers are crafty. They could send messages with a variety of return addresses.

You can see an [image of a real CP2000 notice](#) on the IRS web page, [Understanding Your CP2000 Notice](#). If you get a scam IRS notice, forward it to phishing@irs.gov and then delete it from your email account. [Let the FTC know too.](#)

To Contact your Members of Congress

To Call your Representative: 202-225-2305

To call your Senator: 202-224-3841 or 202-224-3553

To call different members of Congress: 202-224-3121

Toll FREE Number: 866-272-6622

Fairness for Veterans Act Petition

Since 2001, more than 300,000 servicemembers have received less-than-honorable discharges. Many have no access to VA medical services. However, the reason for those discharges is often behavior linked to trauma-related injuries like post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) that was never considered with their discharges. The Fairness for Veterans Act bill, sponsored by Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) and Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO), would require the military to consider medical evidence of PTSD or TBI in the discharge review process. To sign the Fairness for Veterans Act Petition to Congress, visit WFAA.com.

“Cost-cutting proposals that squeeze men and women in uniform are unacceptable”

This week NAUS as a member of the *Coalition to Save Our Benefits* joined in a [Press Release](#) and letter to Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), and Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), ranking members of the SASC, expressing our concerns about ongoing efforts to cut the commissary benefit.

NAUS joins the Coalition in our concerns that proposed legislation may be moving too fast and could potentially result in a loss of a very important benefit that is especially valuable for younger members of the uniformed services and their families.

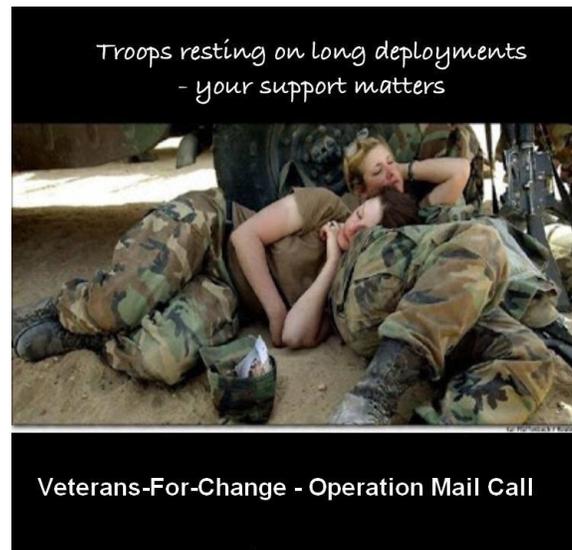
We advocated to at least wait for the results of the ongoing study by the GAO to analyze the benefit and its impact.

In the press release NAUS Legislative Director Rick Jones said we are very concerned about the potential loss of a highly prized benefit. “Sweeping changes, like privatizing commissaries,” Jones said, “pose a serious

threat to one of the military's most popular earned benefit. NAUS urges Congress and the Pentagon to refrain from drastic changes. Cost-cutting proposals that squeeze our men and women in uniform are unacceptable.”

Source: NAUS

Operation Mail Call



Operation Mail Call needs your help! We need cards and letters to send to our troops currently serving on foreign soil.

Our men and women in uniform often go months without hugging their children, walking through the park with a significant other or enjoying Mom's home-cooked Sunday dinners.

Ask them where they'd go if they had a free plane ticket anywhere in the world, and the overwhelming majority would say, "home."

Of course, we can't replace the hugs, the love or the secret family chili recipe – but with your help, we can provide them a connection to their fellow Americans who are grateful for their service.

Now, we're hoping you'll take your support to the next level by sending more cards and letters. Hand made cards by your children, or class mates are a terrific means of putting smiles on their faces even if only for a moment.

Cards and Letters of encouragement to help boost moral and let them know we sincerely appreciate the job they are doing and look forward to they day they are all brought home. Your card or letter will show your appreciation and help thousands more American heroes feel connected to the people they love and the country they serve.

Please help us to make a powerful expression of how much their fellow Americans care about them.

Thank you so much for all you're doing to show our service men and women they are appreciated missed and loved.

If you're a school teacher, please contact me at my E-Mail address at the top, our troops love to hear from kids too!

For more information, visit: <http://veterans-for-change.org/5439-operation-mail-call-2>

Some Veterans Improperly Screened for TBI

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has admitted that it improperly tested for traumatic brain injuries (TBI) from 2007 through 2015. This means nearly 25,000 veterans may have been misdiagnosed because they were examined by physicians that were not qualified to treat or diagnose TBI. VA policy requires TBI exams to be done by a physiologist, a psychiatrist, a neurologist, or a neurosurgeon. The VA sent letters to all veterans they believe may have had an improper screening. A list of the number of veterans who may have been impacted is available on WNCN.com. If you are a veteran who is concerned about your TBI exam, you can call 1-800-749-8387

Government Accountability Reports

Air Traffic Control: Experts' and Stakeholders' Views on Key Issues to Consider in a Potential Restructuring. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-131>

Corporate Shareholder Meetings: Proxy Advisory Firms' Role in Voting and Corporate Governance Practices. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-47>

Federal Reserve: Additional Actions Could Help Ensure the Achievement of Stress Test Goals. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-48>

Financial Audit: Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection's Fiscal Years 2016 and 2015 Financial Statements. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-138R>

Financial Audit: Federal Housing Finance Agency's Fiscal Years 2016 and 2015 Financial Statements. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-139R>

Financial Audit: Securities and Exchange Commission's Fiscal Years 2016 and 2015 Financial Statements. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-158R>

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Selected States' Planning Approaches for Serving Job Seekers and Employers. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-31>

Highlights of a Forum: Preventing Illicit Drug Use. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-146SP>

Army Pacific Pathways: Comprehensive Assessment and Planning Needed to Capture Benefits Relative to Costs and Enhance Value for Participating Units. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-126>

Asylum: Variation Exists in Outcomes of Applications Across Immigration Courts and Judges. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-72>

Defense Infrastructure: Actions Needed to Strengthen Utility Resilience Planning.

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-27>

Defense Infrastructure: DOD Efforts to Prevent and Mitigate Encroachment at Its Installations.

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-86>

Improper Payments: Strategy and Additional Actions Needed to Help Ensure Agencies Use the Do Not Pay Working System as Intended. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-15>

DOD Commissaries and Exchanges: Plan and Additional Information Needed on Cost Savings and Metrics for DOD Efforts to Achieve Budget Neutrality, [Reissued on November 14, 2016].

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-38>

Unemployment Insurance: Various Factors Affect Head Start and Other Early Childhood Teachers' Eligibility for Benefits. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-34>

Decennial Census: Progress Report on Preparations for 2020.

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-238T>

Information Technology: Uncertainty Remains about the Bureau's Readiness for a Key Decennial Census Test.

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-221T>

Certificated Expenditures: Executive Office of the President Fiscal Year 2015 Certificated Expenditures Were Spent for Authorized Purposes. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-116R>

Drug Compounding: FDA Has Taken Steps to Implement Compounding Law, but Some States and Stakeholders Reported Challenges. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-64>

Federal Housing Finance Agency: Objectives Needed for the Future of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac After Conservatorships. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-92>

Hazardous Materials Rail Shipments: Emergency Responders Receive Support, but DOT Could Improve Oversight of Information Sharing. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-91>

Indian Energy Development: Additional Actions by Federal Agencies Are Needed to Overcome Factors Hindering Development. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-43>

Next Generation Air Transportation System: Information on Expenditures, Schedule, and Cost Estimates, Fiscal Years 2004 -- 2030. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-241R>

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: More Information on Promising Practices Could Enhance States' Use of Data Matching for Eligibility. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-111>

Weapon System Requirements: Detailed Systems Engineering Prior to Product Development Positions Programs for Success. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-77>

Youth with Autism: Roundtable Views of Services Needed During the Transition into Adulthood.

<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-109>



Trump's VA Chief to Decide on New Agent Orange Ailments

Bob McDonald won't be the VA secretary to decide if thousands more Vietnam War veterans — those with bladder cancer, high blood pressure, hypothyroidism or Parkinson's-like symptoms — should be eligible for VA health care and disability pay because of research associating the ailments with possible exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides used in the war. The decision to add any of these ailments to the list of 17 conditions VA already presumes are tied to herbicides will be left for President Trump's VA Secretary, department officials told us Wednesday. For more details, see [this Military Advantage blog post](#).



Great American Smokeout

The Freedom Quitline is proud to support the American Cancer Society's annual Great American Smokeout on November 17. The Great American Smokeout challenges people across the nation to stop using tobacco for the day. Get ready by calling the Freedom Quitline at 1-844-I-AM-FREE (1-844-426-3733) Monday through Friday, 8:00 am -5:00 PM CDT. Participants receive four smoking cessation counseling sessions by phone along with eight weeks of free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). For more information, call 1-844-I-AM-FREE or visit the [Freedom Quitline website](#). Also, learn more about TRICARE-covered tobacco cessation services on the [TRICARE website](#).

Medicare Part B Increases

On October 18, 2016, the Social Security Administration announced that the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Social Security benefits will be 0.3 percent for 2017. Because of the low Social Security COLA, a statutory “hold harmless” provision designed to protect seniors, will largely prevent Part B premiums from increasing for about 70 percent of beneficiaries. Among this group, the average 2017 premium will be about \$109.00, compared to \$104.90 for the past four years.

For the remaining roughly 30 percent of beneficiaries, the standard monthly premium for Medicare Part B will be \$134.00 for 2017, a 10 percent increase from the 2016 premium of \$121.80. Because of the “hold harmless” provision covering the other 70 percent of beneficiaries, premiums for the remaining 30 percent must cover most of the increase in Medicare costs for 2017 for all beneficiaries.

This year, as in the past, the Secretary has exercised her statutory authority to mitigate projected premium increases for these beneficiaries, while continuing to maintain a prudent level of reserves to protect against unexpected costs. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will work with Congress as it explores budget-neutral solutions to challenges created by the “hold harmless” provision.

Medicare Part B beneficiaries not subject to the “hold harmless” provision include beneficiaries who do not receive Social Security benefits, those who enroll in Part B for the first time in 2017, those who are directly billed for their Part B premium, those who are dually eligible for Medicaid and have their premium paid by state Medicaid agencies, and those who pay an income-related premium. These groups represent approximately 30 percent of total Part B beneficiaries.

CMS also announced that the annual deductible for all Medicare Part B beneficiaries will be \$183 in 2017 (compared to \$166 in 2016). Premiums and deductibles for Medicare Advantage and prescription drug plans are already finalized and are unaffected by this announcement.

Source: NAUS

Veteran Crisis Resources

Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1
Military Crisis Line 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans
1-877-4AID-VET (424.3838)
VA Caregiver Support Line 1-855-260-3274

Memorial for War Dogs Planned

The planned War Dogs Memorial in Colorado Springs, Colo. would be located under the shadow of the Veterans Memorial at Memorial Park. A plot at Memorial Park has been approved, and the estimated cost for the memorial is \$200,000. War Dog Colorado has raised \$55,000 towards that goal. The memorial would

honor military and contract working dogs, which serve for patrol purposes, explosive detection and drug detection. War dogs are estimated to have saved tens of thousands of lives since World War II. For more information visit the [War Dogs Memorial website](#).

Veterans-For-Change Web Site

The Veterans-For-Change website has been under construction since day one back in 2009 and every day since then. The looks pretty much stay the same, but in the background constant improvement and change is being done to make our website the most user friendly "One-Stop-Shop" website to find almost everything you might have tried to find searching the internet.

Almost a hundred people have been involved; collecting web links to documents now houses on the VFC website, collecting thousands of web links for various issues, illnesses and benefits. Creating forums for all eras of service and two forums one just for men and one just for woman where you can go question, comment, share medical and personal concerns, what ever you'd like it to be.

We also have a forum with a licensed Mental Health Worker, again where you can seek help or just ask questions.

We average 1,700 hits per day, and downloads average 1,400 per day with a total **3,093,611** visitors as of Friday.

If you subscribe you will have full access to the entire website and best of all it's **FREE** of charge! You just need a valid E-mail address so the system can send you a confirmation E-Mail. Once received, click on the link to be authorized automatically.

www.veterans-for-change.org

- Documents Library with over 15,739 documents on-line (Updated: **11/09/16**)
- FAQ's with more than 1,600 FAQ's and answers (Updated: **02/20/16**)
- Multiple Forums
- Job Postings (Updated: **09/15/16**)
- Memorial Pages (Updated: **10/10/16**)
- News (Articles On-Line: **6,147**)
- Polls
- Web Links, more than 3,444, Added 1 New Links (Updated: **09/19/16**)

If you have a submission for the memorial pages, E-Mail: Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org

New Fisher House in California

The new 14,000 square-foot Fisher House at VA Long Beach (Calif.) Healthcare System will house up to 16 families a night. To build the house, a \$3 million goal was set and raised, and then matched by the Fisher

House Foundation, which has helped build 70 similar houses at other military and VA hospitals around the world. By the end of the year, the final payment will be made for the construction cost. The Fisher House program serves more than 25,000 families worldwide every year, and has provided more than 5.8 million days of free lodging to family members of veterans and servicemembers since the program started in 1990. For more information, read the [American Legion press release](#) and visit the [Fisher House Foundation website](#).

VA Updates Progress on MyVA

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released a major update on the MyVA transformation which is Secretary McDonald's effort to transform VA into the top customer service agency in the federal government.

This third edition of the program's semi-annual report shows progress serving veterans with more services, in better time.

Key results in the report include:

Veteran trust of VA is on the rise. In June 2016, nearly 60 percent of veterans said they trust VA to fulfill our country's commitment to Veterans – from 47 percent in December 2015.

VA is completing more appointments, faster. In FY 2016, VA completed nearly 58 million appointments – 1.2 million more than in FY 2015 and 3.2 million more than FY 2014. More of them are provided by a network of more than 350,000 community providers – a 45 percent increase in the number of providers since last year.

Processing of disability claims is faster and more accurate, too. The average wait time to complete a claim has dropped by 65 percent, to 123 days. VA has completed nearly 1.3 million claims in FY 2016, and reduced pending claims by almost 90 percent.

Wait times are down. By September 2016, the average wait time for a completed appointment was down to less than 5 days for primary care, less than 7 days for specialty care, and less than 3 days for mental health care.

Veteran homelessness has been cut in half; it's down 47 percent since 2010 nationwide, thanks in part to VA's work with nearly 4,000 public and private agencies.

Quality is improving. 82 percent of VA facilities improved quality overall since the fourth quarter of FY 2015.

The [report](#) details the changes and innovations, large and small, which produced these results. It also lays out a path forward for the agency – including an important role for Congress before the end of 2016.

Source: NAUS



<https://twitter.com/Veterans4Change>

VA Backlog in North Carolina

Roughly 7,400 veterans who use the Kernersville, Charlotte and Salisbury, North Carolina Veterans Affairs health care and medical centers are waiting on travel reimbursements, some of which were supposed to have been processed back in July. As of November 1st, the Salisbury VA offices now say they have begun processing travel vouchers for October. The vouchers will be processed in sequential date order. The VA allows only one person in the system at a time to process the travel reimbursements. Until recently, veterans were paid in cash at the medical center when they finished their appointments. But now, they have to wait for a check or a deposit into their bank accounts. For more details, [see this news article](#).

Links to Other Stories

- 1) [3 Years: The Time It Could Take To Cure Nearly Every Veteran With Hepatitis C](#)
- 2) [Commander John Wells for Secretary of the VA](#)
- 3) [Female Veterans face barriers to health care](#)
- 4) [Maine Veterans hope for stronger connection to VA under Trump](#)
- 5) [Many Jackson Veterans Support Donald Trump](#)
- 6) [Nurse Practitioners and Veterans Call on VA to Enact Proposed Rule](#)
- 7) [Opiate Addiction and Veterans: How to Get Help](#)
- 8) [President-elect Trump wants to reform the VA](#)
- 9) [Still Fighting: Vietnam Vets Seek Help for Rare Cancer](#)
- 10) [Study estimates the number of PTSD cases among military Veterans in 10 years](#)
- 11) [The VA Just Dealt a Big Blow to Transgender Veterans](#)
- 12) [Trapped: For some Veterans who attempt suicide, help feels out of reach](#)
- 13) [VA Backlog Could Swell To 10 Year Wait For Vets With Denied Disability Claims](#)
- 14) [Veterans Affairs Drops Sex Change Surgeries Plan](#)
- 15) [Veterans Affairs reviews prosthetics lab after complaints](#)
- 16) [Vietnam War Veterans attacked by rare cancer linked to liver flukes](#)

You can help VFC by reading articles posted and commenting at the bottom and rate the articles. If you don't have an account, sign up today, it's FREE. Your comments and rankings tell us what type of information you want most.

Check us out today: www.veterans-for-change.org

Veterans Choice Program Update

The Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Choice Program (VCP) has helped increased veterans' access to health care since the program's inception in August 2014. To date, more than two million appointments with community care providers have been scheduled and completed for eligible veterans enrolled in VA health care programs. VCP was created by Congress as a temporary rapid-fire solution to alleviate long wait times at overburdened VA medical facilities. As the program draws closer to its 2017 sunset date, a recent panel on the current state of veterans health care was hosted by the Alliance for Health Reform and Ascension Health. A transcript, speaker presentations and a link to a video of the panel discussions are available on the [Alliance for Health Reform website](#).



Are you seeking employment? Been looking and not found the right job?

Well Veterans-For-Change is working hard to bring you more information on Job Fairs and Job postings available across the country.

<http://veterans-for-change.org/documents-library/category/167-job-fairs-job-postings>

If you're an employer and have a job to post, send an E-Mail to: Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org

Military-Veterans Advocacy Report From Capitol Hill November 2016

(Please "Like" our Facebook Page). I arrived in Washington DC on November 9 and the Congress returned on November 14. Immediately prior to the trip I was notified that the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) had indicated they would score House Concurrent Resolutions 161/Senate Concurrent Resolution 51. These resolutions are non-binding "sense of the Congress" regulations that should never be assigned a cost. In this particular case, the Resolutions would state that it was the sense of Congress that the exposure presumption provisions of the Agent Orange Act of 1991 included the bays, harbors and territorial seas of the Republic of Vietnam. This would clarify the intent of Congress and allow us to use this clarification in our pending court case seeking review of the VA policy denying sea service Vietnam veterans their Agent Orange benefits. I had briefed House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller last September and he promised me that he would take a position on the Resolution. As of Wednesday afternoon he had not responded.

We were preparing to "hotline" the resolutions, but a Senator asked the Committee to confirm from CBO that there would be no cost involved. We had previously been told informally by CBO that they would assign a zero cost. Once the Committee request was made, however, the CBO felt that they had to consult with the VA. The

VA argued that they “might” change their mind based on the Resolution so that it was appropriate to assign a score. In this case, the score would be \$1.1 billion. That would bring the Resolution under the provisions of the Pay As You Go Act that requires an offset. Although we are working on an offset, we have some opposition to our proposed offset from Senators in the minority.

In a previous visit, I had discussed these Resolutions with the staff of the members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. This week I concentrated on members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. This included personal meetings with Cong Tim Walz D-MN, Gus Bilarakis R-FL, Dan Benishek R-MI, Tim Huelskamp R-KS, Ann Kuster D-NH and Mike Bost R-IL. I also had the opportunity to chat informally with Cong Phil Roe R-TN and Ralph Abraham R-LA. There was general support and sympathy for the Resolution and for the plight of the Blue Water Navy veterans, but the CBO action seemed to be a game changer that allowed the VA to once again block benefits for the Blue Water Navy veterans.

On Wednesday afternoon, the picture began to change. I met in a consolidated meeting with staff members from Speaker Paul Ryan, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Majority Whip Steve Scalise. They were not only sympathetic to our mission but expressed strong concern at the CBO action. Since this Resolution is non-binding, it should not be scored. There was concern that this could set a precedent that affects future Resolutions as well as ours. I am hopeful that the House leadership will address this action, on our behalf, with CBO.

I was heartened by the leadership’s interest in this and other veterans issues. They informed me that veterans matters will be a priority of the new Administration and I was told that if the Resolution/Bill did not pass this Congress they wanted to see it again next year and they wanted to see it early.

In talking with the members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, all expressed an interest in working with Military-Veterans Advocacy next Congress. Although we do not know who will be the Chairman/Ranking Member, all of the contenders for those posts stated that they would look forward to hearing our proposals and views.

As well as the Blue Water Navy issue, I met with the Center for Prosecutorial Integrity to discuss our joint approach on military justice reform. I also met with people from the Veterans Pro Bono Consortium and the Federal Bar Association to discuss appellate reform that will enhance the right of veterans rather than strip away their due process rights. For part of the week, I was also accompanied by Vince Diem from “Operation Stand Together,” a Fort McClellan veteran who is trying to unite all toxic exposure issues into a single omnibus bill. Operation Stand Together will be holding a rally on the National Mall on May 20, 2017. Vince’s efforts are becoming more and more critical because it appears that the Toxic Exposure Research Act will not pass this year.

On a personal note, I was honored and touched by the grass-roots effort to promote me as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Over 600 veterans and their supporters have joined the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/JohnWellsSecVA/>. Irrespective of whether that is a success or not, Military-Veterans Advocacy will continue and I personally will continue to work hard to reform the VA and to fight for veterans.

John B. Wells
Commander USN (Retired)
Executive Director



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