



Veterans-For-Change Newsletter

A Voice of the Veterans

Week Ending Sunday, June 04, 2017

Volume 8, Issue 23

This-N-That

Last weekend we had to send out a special release due to the Appeals bill having already passed the House and had stripped out the "Duty to Assist" from the bill.

This would only be a huge set back and cause even more problems than ever, so we still need all of your help to call on your Senators in DC and ask they either vote no, or amend the bill to include the duty to assist at the appellate level.

Further down you will find a list of phone numbers you can use to call them. I would also strongly suggest that you go to their individual websites and send them a message there too!

Amending the bill to put the Duty to Assist back in is much preferred, but if they're not willing to go for that, then a NO vote would be the next best thing.

And should you feel an extra step is needed, then I'd call your Reps and let them know just how strongly disappointed you are that they would remove that from the legislation and be so comfortable with it to have passed it in the House!

If you're interested, you can go to this link to read more:

http://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/sites/default/files/written%20testimony.517.HVAC_

Secretary of the VA, Dr. David Shulkin announced "sweeping reforms" for VA programs and Operations. But he has already taken a couple of actions I am personally not pleased with, nor are thousands of Veterans who have commented on Social Media and/or also sent me

E-Mails expressing their disapproval.

While I had been trying to give Shulkin the benefit of the doubt already having been a VA Employee before being appointed as a candidate for Sec VA and eventually being approved and him taking the reigns, my personal hopes for him doing the right thing has diminished a bit.

I am thankful however, he's not doing the dog and pony show we saw so much of during McDonald's reign and he has met with many strong leaders and listened to them, people such as Commander John Wells.

And I hope he will continue to meet with various leaders and advocates for Veterans during his tenure and not just meet with but listen to what is being said, information and evidence that is being presented and will make much better choices and decisions based on those meeting and information.

And I still encourage all Veterans if you've not already called and voiced your concerns, expectations, needs and demands to the White House Veterans Complain line, to PLEASE do so. Again that number is 855-948-2311.

And remember the people manning the lines are all volunteers comprised of Veterans, Spouses and Widows. They all want to help in what ever way they can, so please keep that in mind and be kind to them. Who knows what they can or might be able to do for all Veterans.

Three weeks we put the call out to everyone for stories they would share with us to send to members of Congress.

We've received several hundred stories and have been blast faxing to all members of Congress since three weeks ago Sunday non-stop.

It's not too late, so if you'd like to share your story and help put faces on the problems that you face in your everyday life in dealing with the VA, please send them on to my e-mail address.

Only rules are no last names, no social security numbers, no phone numbers, only first name, city and state. All other information would be redacted and isn't needed so we can insure the protections of everyone.

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

Respectfully,
Jim Davis
Founder

Jim.Davis@VeteransForChange.org



Stop Tricare Fee Increase

The proposed budget would increase some health care fees. Last year, Congress passed substantial TRICARE Reform that merged TRICARE Standard/Extra into TRICARE Select. Among the changes, service members entering the military after January 1, 2018, would have to pay higher out-of-pocket costs for healthcare. But current service members and retirees were grandfathered into the new TRICARE program without any cost increase. These changes are supposed to go into effect on January 1, 2018. But the DoD request proposes new TRICARE changes that will lead to higher out-of-pocket costs, including:

- Elimination of the grandfathering provision, directly causing higher out-of-pocket costs for all working age retirees;
- premiums, co-pays, deductibles and catastrophic caps for beneficiaries under age 65 would dramatically increase annually based on the increases in health care costs as measured by the growth in National Health Expenditures (NHE);
- Increasing copays, deductibles, and the catastrophic cap for currently serving TRICARE Standard/Select families;
- Increasing pharmacy copays 300% over 10 years for retirees under age 65, including introducing a new copay for mail order generics that are currently available at no out-of-pocket cost; and
- Allowing larger annual increases to TRICARE out-of-pocket fees that would impact all working age retirees and currently serving TRICARE Standard/Select families. Their participation fees, deductibles, copays, and the catastrophic cap would have higher annual increases.

Use the [Action Center](#) to ask your legislators to oppose these TRICARE fee increases.

Commission Eyes Changing Military Pay System

System

By year's end the Department of Defense expects to launch its 13th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC), which will assess the pros and cons of converting service members from traditional [basic pay](#) and tax-free [allowances](#) to a single, civilian-like salary system. Read the full [article](#).



Support SBP/DIC Offset Repeal Legislation

Senator Nelson (FL) has introduced legislation (S. 339) and Congressman Joe Wilson (SC) has introduced identical legislation in the house (HR 846) that repeals the SBP/DIC offset for survivors, sometimes referred to as the "Military Widows Tax.". Please use this action center contact your legislators to ask them to support this important legislation.

[Take Action!](#)

Vets Groups Back Bill to Hasten VA Firings Despite Union Opposition

Major veterans service organizations have rallied behind proposed legislation to speed up the firing process at the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), but a government union charges it would be a gross violation of workers' rights. "Trampling on the rights of honest, hard-working public-sector employees is not the solution to holding bad employees accountable for their actions," American Federation of Government Employees National President J. David Cox said. He said the bill would set up different standards for VA employees and other federal workers. For more details, see this [article](#).

Ex-Spouses Have No Claim to VA Disability Comp

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that state courts cannot order military retirees to divide their disability pay with ex-spouses to compensate for a drop in shared retirement triggered by the [disability](#)

compensate for a drop in shared retirement triggered by the [creativity compensation](#) award. The landmark 8-0 decision May 15 in *Howell v Howell* could impact contested military divorce settlements nationwide, although lawyers caution that family courts generally are reluctant to reopen settled divorce agreements. [Learn more about this landmark decision.](#)



More Housing for Homeless Vets

The [VA Illiana Health Care System](#) has opened a 65-unit Veterans housing apartment building on its campus, which provides affordable and supportive housing for homeless, at-risk of being homeless, and disabled Veterans and their families as part of VA's [Enhanced-Use Lease](#) (EUL) program. The program provides veterans in need with access to safe, affordable housing and also includes wraparound

services to help them get back on their feet. For more information, visit the OAEM Program [webpage](#) and click on the EUL tab, watch the EUL Program video on [YouTube](#), and read the VA [VAntage Point Blog](#). Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless to call or visit their [local VA Medical Center](#), or ask them to call 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838).

U.S. Government Accountability Office Reports

- 1) [Coast Guard Recapitalization: Matching Needs and Resources Continue to Strain Acquisition Efforts.](#)
- 2) [Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Establish Performance Measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program.](#)
- 3) [Open Innovation: Executive Branch Developed Resources to Support Implementation, but Guidance Could Better Reflect Leading Practices.](#)

Army Gets First Islamic Division Chaplain

Lt. Col. Khallid Shabazz, the former I Corps deputy chaplain, became the Army's first Islamic chaplain at the division level. Shabazz was selected for the job in January by the Army chief of chaplains based on his leadership qualities. Shabazz, who holds a doctorate degree as well as four master's degrees, has dedicated his life to working with servicemembers of all religions. He grew up as a Lutheran in Louisiana and converted to Islam as an enlisted Soldier. Showing care and compassion while helping servicemembers succeed is Shabazz's specialty, according to Sgt. Maj. Elian Strachan, the chief chaplain assistant at I Corps.

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

Combat Vets More Prone to Headaches

According to research, veterans are more likely to develop migraine or other persistent headache disorders than their civilian counterparts. One study showed that 36 percent of Veterans who had completed a 12-month deployment to Iraq were either diagnosed with or exhibited symptoms of migraine. In comparison, it has been estimated that migraine affects approximately 12 percent of the general population. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is able to connect veterans to a large network of doctors, neurologists and medical facilities that can help them better diagnose and treat their condition. For more information, read the [VA Vantage Point Blog](#).

TRICARE News: Drug Takeback Program

Now is the perfect time to get rid of medicines that are expired or no longer needed. With the Military Health System Drug Take Back

longer needed. with the military Health System Drug Take Back program, you can safely and easily dispose of unwanted and expired medications at U.S. Military pharmacies. To dispose of prescription and over-the-counter drugs safely, (1) drop off old or expired drugs in secure collection boxes at military pharmacies, or (2) send them by mail in a special envelope available at the military pharmacy. To find out which Drug Tack Back option your pharmacy has, [contact your military hospital or clinic](#). For more information on how to safely dispose of drugs through the Drug Take Back program, visit the TRICARE [website](#).



Poll: Did Your Tricare Dentist Dump You?

After a recent Tricare dental contract change for active duty families and Guard and Reservists and their families, we want to know — did your Tricare dentist move out of network? [Take our poll](#).



Oppose Benefit Cuts to Retirement Age Disabled Veterans Don't Reduce Disabled Vets Benefits

The Trump Administration's FY 2018 budget request reduces some VA benefits.

The proposed budget eliminates the Individual Unemployability benefit payments to retirement-age disabled veterans. Under current policies, the Individual Unemployability program allows VA to award payments at

the individual Unemployability program allows VA to award payouts at the 100-percent disabled rate to veterans who cannot find work due to service-connected injuries, even if they are not deemed 100-percent disabled. The Administration has proposed stopping those payouts once veterans are eligible for Social Security retirement benefits. This cut would impact more than 225,000 veterans currently receiving this benefit.

Veterans receiving benefits checks from the VA would also have their annual cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) reduced or “round down” to the nearest dollar.

Use the [Action Center](#) to ask your legislators to oppose these benefit cuts.



WELL-INTENDED BILL MAKES THINGS WORSE FOR VETERANS, ADVOCATE SAYS

A bill recently passed by Congress that was intended to improve the delivery of care through the Department of Veterans Affairs has had the opposite effect, according to a column published yesterday in *The Hill* and written by Cdr. John Wells (USN, Ret.), head of Military-Veterans Advocacy.

The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017, which recently passed in the House of Representatives, was intended to streamline the delivery of care and reduce the backlog of cases. But a single provision of the bill eliminates the VA's duty to provide medical care during an appeals process, when a veteran has been denied but has sought further review.

Adding to this problem is that veterans are prohibited from hiring legal counsel until they reach an appeals process, and VA claims are not subject to legal discovery. Thus, appellants and their attorneys have to rely on Freedom of Information Act requests to acquire necessary documentation for appeals. The process can take years, while individual veterans are denied needed care, and veterans must absorb their own costs.

“The ‘duty to assist’ that this bill removes from current law and policy is a crucial element of veteran care,” Wells said. “This legislation might’ve been well-intentioned, but it will make a bad problem so much worse.”

To read Wells’ column in The Hill, click here:

<http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/healthcare/336367-va-appeals-reform-bill-strips-due-process-from-veterans>

Commander J. B. Wells U. S. Navy (Retired)
Attorney at Law
Executive Director
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc.

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

Links to Other Stories

- 1) [Do sleep apnea and PTSD have overlapping factors?](#)
- 2) [Face of Defense: Mother, Daughter Reflect on Air Guard Service](#)
- 3) [Friends recall only nurse killed by hostile fire in Vietnam](#)
- 4) [Historic military hangar recreated at National WASP World War II Museum](#)
- 5) [Jet Fuel Exposure causes Hearing Loss??](#)
- 6) [Proposed Medicaid cuts could impact veterans' health care](#)
- 7) [Rating Knee Disabilities – Flexion vs. Extension](#)
- 8) [Secretary Shulkin on the ‘State of VA’: Making VA into an organization Veterans deserve](#)
- 9) [Shulkin unveils sweeping reforms for VA programs, operations](#)
- 10) [VA appeals reform bill strips due process from Veterans](#)

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

Names Added to the Vietnam Memorial

A special unveiling of 140 names being added to the Vietnam Memorial Wall South was the highlight of the annual Memorial Day Observance Ceremony, May 28, 2017, at the Pensacola Fla. Veterans Memorial Park. Among the names being added were four members of 'The Lost Back End Crew,' which received this name after having to bail out over the South China Sea during an in-flight emergency while en route to a combat mission May 26, 1966. The men were never heard from again. The 140 names added to Wall South this year are in coordination with the names updated on the Washington memorial over the years. For more information, visit the Pensacola Veterans Memorial Park [website](#), the Wall South [webpage](#), The Sextant [website](#), the Northwest Navy Life [website](#), and the Lost Back End Crew [webpage](#).

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 1,000 per day

with a total 3,334,567 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 16,034 documents on-line (Updated: 5/19/17)
- FAQ's with more than 1,600 FAQ's and answers
- Multiple Forums
 - o Afghanistan Veterans
 - o FMP - Foreign Medial Program
 - o Gulf War & Desert Storm Veterans
 - o Iraq Veterans
 - o Korean Veterans
 - o Men Veterans Forum
 - o Mental Health for Veterans
 - o Political Issues
 - o Suggestion Box
 - o The Mess Hall
 - o VA Hospitals and Medical Centers
 - o Veteran Affairs
 - o Vietnam Veterans
 - o Welcome Mat
 - o Women Veterans Forum
 - o WW II Veterans
- Job Postings
- Memorial Pages (Updated: 10/10/16)
- News (Articles On-Line: 6,496)
- Polls
- Web Links, more than 3,587, Added 38 New Links (Updated: 05/26/17)

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



**Support our Services to Veterans
Caregivers Act**

Caregivers Act

Congressman Raul Ruiz introduced H.R. 1618, the Support Our Services (SOS) to Veterans' Caregivers Act. The bill would amend the law to allow VA to assist caregivers who are supporting the needs of veterans with serious illnesses related to military service. Such illnesses of veterans might include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease), cancer or other devastating illnesses that can leave veterans completely dependent upon others for help.

Caregiver assistance has been critical for supporting family members of post 9/11 veterans who have turned their lives upside down to address the often constant care demands of gravely injured veterans. Under the current program, caregivers are provided assistance with training and technical support to manage their loved ones' care needs. Even more importantly, VA is authorized to provide health care coverage and counseling for the caregiver, at least 30 days of respite care, and a small stipend for the caregiver so they are not impoverished by the commitment they have made to meet their loved ones' needs.

Ruiz views his legislation as a correction for an unintentional oversight that has left the needs of thousands of caregivers assisting veterans with serious illness, rather than injury, unaddressed. It would also require VA conduct an annual multidimensional assessment to measure the impact of caregiving on the overall health and wellness of caregivers.

DAV Resolution No. 131 supports comprehensive assistance for caregivers of veterans with wounds, injuries or illness from all eras of service.

Please write your Representative asking him or her to cosponsor and support the final passage of H.R. 1618. Thank you for your participation in the Commander's Action Network.

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

New Tricare Dental Provider Calls Complaints 'Typical'

A month into the changeover, [Tricare's](#) new dental insurer, United Concordia, says it's meeting contract requirements and that user complaints about lack of access and those from dentists' about low reimbursement rates are a "typical" part of any change. For more details, see this news [article](#).



<https://twitter.com/Veterans4Change>

Some Veterans Can Get Early Access to Online Exchange Shopping

An online verification system for veterans who want to shop the online Exchange system is live, and some users will get early shopping access before the official Veterans Day benefit launch. Learn more in this news [article](#).



8 More State Ids Will No Longer Be Accepted At Bases

Unless the Department of Homeland Security grants a series of extensions, IDs from eight additional states will no longer be accepted at base gates nationwide starting July 10. For more, see this news [article](#).

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Please pass on to all your Veteran Friends and Family!

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Google	28,819
Los Angeles	135,434
Microsoft	9,740

National Guard	4147
New York	153,001
Other Social Media	43,114
San Francisco	79,079
Twitter	41
US House of Reps & Staff	989
US Senators & Staff	109
University of So. California	5,275
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US Army	67,318
US Marines	28,692
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