



Veterans-For-Change Newsletter

A Voice of the Veterans

Week Ending Sunday, September 03, 2017

Volume 8, Issue 36



This-N-That

NOTE: *My apologies for the re-send, we had a huge technical problem and didn't know it till we received a copy from a reader.*

We all have our eyes on Texas due to hurricane Harvey, we send our many prayers to them, that all are rescued, provided the much needed shelter, food and clothing being sent from all around the country, and from all our friends in Israel!

And if you haven't noticed one special thing during this time or crisis. President Trump has been there boots on the ground while if you remember during Isaac, Obama was on the golf course. (My apology for the error in initial send)

And with Congress the legislation to expedite the claims/appeals process was passed, however, it was missing one critical piece. The Duty to Assist!

Personally and along with many others who tried to encourage all to call their Reps and Senators in DC to insist it be placed back in, it simply just didn't happen, and now will almost certainly make it all the more difficult for Veterans and further makes the VA that much more of an adversary than an ally.

For those Veterans who took the chance to call President Trump's White House Veteran Hotline and were able to receive help from them. We'd like to hear from you about your experience, and the results you received.

For those Veterans who have not called yet, I strongly encourage you to please call them, express your problems and needs.

I can't and wouldn't promise you anything, but it truly is worth a shot, and you just never know, that someone who answers the phone and talks to you just might give you a miracle!

Finally a Veteran took on the VA for lack of timely medical care, and WON!

The Department of Veterans Affairs is paying an Iowa Veteran \$550,000 to settle his allegation that he suffered life-shortening heart damage because of a three-year delay in treatment.

John Porter, 68, of Greenfield, initially sought \$5 million when he sued last year in federal court in Des Moines after he says VA staff overlooked a test result showing his heart was failing.

To me, this proves if you ride it out, push hard enough, you can win, and in my eyes this man is a double winner. Not only did he manage to force the VA to pay for his suffering, but he got the attention of media and made this a national alert not just to Veterans but civilians as well so they know that Veterans don't

always get TOP NOTCH CARE which they should be providing all across the country, not in just a few select locations!

Since President Trump took office, main stream media has gone black on Veterans issues, I can only assume as a retaliatory move against President Trump, but when We The People push, and push hard we can still garner their attention, and we need to be doing this a hell of a lot.

While there are some improvements happening within the VA, in my eyes most are trivial, baby steps, other than the new law regarding VA Employee's, that was one huge move for the better but there is just so much more that needs to be done.

We continue to receive more stories, but now they are coming in way slower, but we have been blast faxing to all members of Congress since sixteen weeks ago Sunday non-stop.

It's never 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. We need to keep this up for as long as we can, staying in their face every single day and thwart off all their lame excuses for not doing what is right, due and just!

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@Veterans-For-Change.org

VA staffing new White House VA Hotline Principally with Veterans

A few days ago the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that the two-month pilot phase of the new White House VA Hotline that began in June has demonstrated that Veterans calling the hotline respond best when their calls are answered by fellow Veterans and others with first-hand experience on their issues.

As a result, VA announced that it will target highly qualified Veterans to staff the hotline going forward, instead of contracting the service to a third-party vendor, and is hiring additional VA personnel to complete the planned move to a 24-hour operation.

"The message we've heard loud and clear is Veterans want to talk to other Veterans to help them solve problems and get VA services," said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. "We're taking steps to answer that call."

This decision will delay the full-time stand-up of the 24-hour service by two months, to no later than October 15, in order to ensure the hiring and training processes are complete.

Until that time, the hotline's current pilot program service is available to receive calls at **855-948-2311** from Veterans from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

Source: TREA

ACLU Sues Trump Over Transgender Military Ban

The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a lawsuit challenging President Donald Trump's ban on transgender individuals joining the military. The federal lawsuit, *Stone v. Trump*, was filed in Maryland on Monday by the ACLU of Maryland on behalf of Petty Officer First Class Brock Stone, an 11-year Navy veteran who served in Afghanistan, and several other transgender members of the Navy, Army, Air Force and Marines. For more details, see this [article](#).

Treat Anxiety with Grounding Skills

If you want to stop feeling “spacey,” or you feel yourself slipping into the spiral of anxiety, try some of these helpful [anxiety management techniques](#):

1. Bring up today's newspaper on the web, notice the date. Read something fun!
2. Breathe slowly and steadily from your core. Imagine letting fear and worry go, evaporating along with each breath.
3. Trace your hands against the physical outline of your body. Experience your own presence in the world.
4. Call a friend and have a chat.
5. If you are feeling ‘stuck’, change how you're positioned. Wiggle your fingers, tap your feet. Pay attention to the movement: You are in control of what your body is doing, right here and now.
6. Eat or drink something. Is it hot, or cold? Sweet, or sour?
7. Meditate, if that's OK for you. Otherwise use distractions like television or music to help settle down.
8. Use your voice. Say your name or pick up a book and read the first paragraph you find out loud.
9. Look at yourself in the mirror. Smile, even if that's the last thing

you feel like! How does that feel? What can you see? (If negative thoughts come to mind, write them down to look at later but let them go for now. You're anxious enough as it is.)

10. Write out what's going on. Keep writing until you start to notice it makes a difference, lets some of the things you're anxious about out.

11. Take a shower/bath. Notice the sensations of the water.

12. Write somebody you care about an email.

13. Imagine yourself in a familiar, comfortable place. Feel the safety. Know it.

14. Take a look outside. Count the number of trees and street signs.

15. Exercise. Jump up and down on the spot. Try some gentle yoga, or ride a bike.

16. Hold onto something comforting. Maybe a blanket or an old stuffed toy.

17. Laugh. Even if that's hard. Just the act of laughing about something, anything can break that spinning out of control feeling.

18. When you're not too stressed, make a list of the things that provoke your anxiety. Take it to your therapist and ask them to help you find ways to desensitize you to some of those things.

Then those triggers won't be quite so powerful, and your [anxiety coping skills](#) will work better.

19. If you get [PTSD flashbacks](#), when you're feeling OK, make a list of the furniture in your home and what room it's in. Give the list to a friend you can call to help you focus on what's now and safe.

20. List 5 really positive things in your life. Put the list where you'll see it and remember that there's more to the world than just panic and fear.

21. Think about the last week. Was there a day you didn't have so much anxiety? Remember how it felt to be less anxious than you are right now. What was different? What can change?

Once you've found which techniques help, make a list to put on your wall, or carry in your pocket.



Abilities Job Fair

For veterans and individuals with disabilities
Tuesday, September 12th 10AM - 1PM
War Memorial Building

Come in professional attire
and bring your resume!

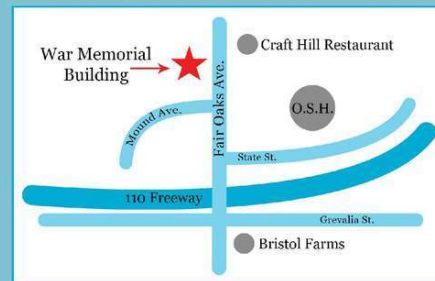
Accommodations for job seekers available - contact
Nita Davis at ndavis@almansor.org

Employers - contact Lupe Vasquez at
gvasquez@almansor.org or 626-755-4382

www.redesignlearning.org

435 Fair Oaks Avenue
South Pasadena, CA 91030

*Just north of the 110 freeway,
across from Craft Hill Restaurant.*



Sponsored By:





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!

Please, even if you have already sent this pre-written E-Mail, do it again, and forward the link to your friends, family, etc via an E-Mail and ask them too, to please sign and forward on to their address book.

We need to take care of our widows too! Current, past and future!

Harvey Help

"There are several paid positions to help with
[#HurricaneHarveyRecovery](#)

These positions will pay a base hourly rate of \$16.77 - \$39.96;
overtime rate of \$25.16 - \$41.97.

The U.S. Small Business Administration Dallas / Fort Worth,
Texas Office of Disaster Assistance, located in the CentrePort
Business Park near DFW Airport and DART / TRE Station, has an
ongoing need for multiple temporary full time professionals in
various occupations. Come take part in helping businesses and
individuals recover from disasters.

- Overtime will be paid for hours in excess of 40-hours per week.
Weekend work required for all positions and mandatory overtime
could be substantial.
- All Positions require competency with Microsoft Office.
- Must pass Credit & Background Check; Must also be a U S
Citizen.
- Bilingual language skills a plus. Position available!
- DOCUMENT PREPARATION / LEGAL REVIEW / LOAN
CLOSINGS
- CREDIT ANALYSIS / LOAN PROCESSING / MORTGAGE
UNDERWRITING
- COST & DAMAGE ESTIMATION / DAMAGE VERIFICATION /
FLOOD ZONE MAPPING
- LOAN PROCESSING ASSISTANCE / CLERICAL / DATA
ENTRY / DOCUMENT SCANNING

Email resumes to: PDCHR@sba.gov Mention Code "S-T Harvey"
in the subject line. Please do not submit multiple resumes.

EOE/Veterans must submit DD-214"



FREE RESUME REVIEWS For VETERANS

September 10, 2017 only by

Appelbaum's Resume Professionals, Inc.

At the War Memorial Center

Doris Appelbaum

Founder and President of Appelbaum's Resume Professionals,
Inc.

(414) 352-5994

<http://www.appelbaumresumes.com>.



Save on Out of Pocket Costs Not Covered by TRICARE

Stop paying out of pocket for co-pays and other medical related expenses not covered by TRICARE. Help minimize or even eliminate out-of-pocket expenses with the [TRICARE Insurance Supplement Plan](#).

VA Claims Backlog Update

Congress has sent the president a bill aimed at trimming a rapidly growing backlog of veterans' disability claims. The House approved the bill by voice vote 11 AUG during a brief session, sending the measure to President Donald Trump. It would overhaul the appeals process, allowing veterans to file "express" appeals if they waive their right to a hearing or the ability to submit new evidence. The VA could test the new program for up to 18 months until Shulkin could certify it was ready for a full rollout with enough money to manage appeals effectively. Lawmakers hope the legislation ultimately could reduce average wait times to less than a year. Currently, veterans could wait five years or more to resolve their appeals over disability claims.

"Veterans have been waiting far too long for an answer from the VA. This bill will speed up the outdated appeals process so veterans can receive the disability benefits that they have earned," said Sen. Tester (D-MT). Still, the legislation offers no immediate fix for the bulk of the 470,000 appeals claims in VA's backlog; the changes would apply almost entirely to newly filed appeals. Shulkin has said Trump's proposed VA budget for the next fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 doesn't account for \$800 million in "hiring surges" that would be needed if VA hoped to clear the current backlog within 10 years. The department provides \$63.7 billion in disability compensation payments each year to about 4.1 million veterans with disabling conditions incurred during their military service.

Source: Associated Press



U.S. Government Accountability
Office Reports

- 1) [Civil Penalties: Certain Federal Agencies Need to Improve Efforts to Comply with Inflation Adjustment Requirements](#)
- 2) [Foreign Trade Zones: CBP Should Strengthen Its Ability to Assess and Respond to Compliance Risks across the Program](#)
- 3) [Intelligence Community: Analysis of Alternatives Approach for a New Site Reflects Most Characteristics of a High-Quality Process](#)
- 4) [Vehicle Data Privacy: Industry and Federal Efforts Under Way but NHTSA Needs to Define Its Role](#)

**CONTACT YOUR
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS!**

To Call your Representative:

202-225-2305

To Call your Senators:

202-224-3841 or 202-224-3553

To call Different Members of Congress:

202-224-3121

TOLL FREE: 866-272-6622

PLEASE... STOP Making Excuses!

www.veterans-for-change.org

**Discover New Paths to a Successful Civilian
Career**

Our new tool integrates an innovative [Personality Assessment](#) with our [Military Skills Translator](#) to deliver a comprehensive job search experience. The tool not only displays jobs related to your MOS/military experience but also takes your workspace personality into consideration and matches you with career paths and jobs. This feature addresses a key need of veteran job seekers who are unsure of what career or education options to pursue upon transitioning out of the military.

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 average 2,200 hits per day, and downloads average 1,200 per day with a total **3,522,977** 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 **16,142** documents on-line
(Updated: 8/12/17)
- 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: **6,720**)
- Polls
- Web Links, more than **3,608**, Added 17 New Links (Updated: 08/12/17)

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

VA Offers TBI Clinic

The [Phoenix VA Health Care System](#) established its Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Alzheimer's Disease & Cognitive Disorders Clinic in 2014 in response to the growing need to treat Veterans' exhibiting TBI symptoms from their service in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. TBI Injuries often go unreported because brain injuries are difficult to diagnose if the military member does not lose consciousness and if there is no superficial evidence of a head wound. Also, doctors often tend to look for structural evidence of explicit brain injuries and fail to understand that TBI can have a chemical component as well. For more information, read the [VA Vantage Point Blog](#) and visit the [VA National Center for PTSD website](#).

VA to Pay Iowa Vet \$500,000 to Settle Suit Over Treatment

The Department of Veterans Affairs is paying an Iowa veteran \$550,000 to settle his allegation that he suffered life-shortening heart damage because of a three-year delay in treatment. John Porter, 68, of Greenfield, sued last year in federal court in Des Moines after he says VA staff overlooked a test result showing his heart was failing. Porter told the Des Moines Register on Friday he was glad he lived long enough to see the case settled. For more details, see this [article](#).



Possible Cause for Severe Eczema Found

Some patients living with severe eczema - a possible disqualifying factor for military service - have been found to have mutations on a gene called CARD11. Identified as a possible cause for the condition, the discovery can lead to exciting possibilities for advancements, according to the researchers.

For more than 17 million people in the United States living with severe eczema - a condition that results in dry, itchy rashes and disqualifies many from military service - the mystery behind its cause may be all too familiar. Thanks to researchers at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences and National

Institutes of Health, certain patients may understand more about their condition.

"Studying these ... disorders, especially when we can define the disease based on a single mutation, is incredibly informative because you can learn a lot," said Andrew Snow, assistant professor in the department of pharmacology and molecular therapeutics at USU, and senior co-author of a study recently published in the journal Nature Genetics.

Researchers at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences and National Institutes of Health identified mutations in a gene known as CARD11 as one underlying cause for severe eczema.

In this study, mutations in a gene known as CARD11 were identified as one underlying cause for severe eczema. The discovery led the researchers to ask whether excess glutamine can help correct some of the allergy-related defects in patients' immune cells. The testing was done with T cells, known as the conductors of the body's immune response against infections, from one patient in a lab, and the results were promising. Additional work with the NIH to study whether symptoms for patients with similar mutations improve with glutamine supplements - a readily available product in stores - is likely, said Snow.

Severe eczema can run in families, which suggests a genetic cause, said Snow. One by one, Snow and NIH allergist Dr. Joshua Milner received referrals for patients who had mutations in the same gene - totaling eight patients from four different families.

"However, such treatments are not a cure for the cause of the disease, particularly if it's a genetic cause," said Snow.

During the study, researchers discovered these CARD11 mutations can prevent T cells from being able to do their jobs normally. The mutations prevent the cells from taking in enough glutamine, which is needed for T cells to maintain their proper function. This may help explain why some patients with severe eczema have a history of pneumonia, warts, and other types of lung and skin infections, said Snow.

While a mutation in the CARD11 gene is only one possible cause for severe eczema, its discovery can influence new therapies. Current treatments, including over-the-counter and prescription pills or creams, focus on bringing down the inflammation and relieving the itching.

Jeffrey Stinson, a former USU graduate student in Snow's laboratory, who is currently at the National Institute of Standards and Technology and co-author on the study, said the possibility of having something so easily accessible as a targeted form of treatment would be an incredible achievement for those living with severe eczema and other allergic symptoms.

"This genetic condition is considered rare, but it's important to acknowledge the impact that findings from small, basic research studies like this can have in the medical field," said Stinson, stressing that the research would not be possible without the time and participation of the families who volunteer.

"Thanks to their dedication, we have new and exciting possibilities for advancement before us."

Source: TREA



Salute to Vietnam!

October 21, 2017

Cocktails start at 5:00 pm

Dinner and Silent Auction

Live Entertainment by Phoenix Patriot Band

Come Dress in your 1970's Attire

French Valley Airport, Hangar 31

33750 Sky Canyon Drive

Murrieta, CA 92563

Purchase tickets by phone (951) 696-3901

\$65/per person or \$100/per couple



**New to the VA World? Here's What You Need
to Know**

If you're transitioning out of the military, your family will likely soon embark on a new journey with a completely different government agency — the Department of Veterans Affairs. While there are some things on which the Defense Department and the VA work together, for the most part they are two totally separate systems. So what do you need to know about going through the VA process? [Here are some basics.](#)

TRICARE: State of Emergency in Texas, Louisiana

The governors of Louisiana and Texas have declared a State of Emergency due to severe weather. Emergency refill procedures are in place from August 23, 2017 through September 05, 2017. A list of the counties affected is available on the [TRICARE website](#). To get an emergency refill, take your prescription bottle to any TRICARE retail network pharmacy. To find a network pharmacy, call Express Scripts at **1-877-363-1303** or search the [network pharmacy locator](#). If possible, visit the pharmacy where the prescription was filled. If you use a retail chain, you can fill your prescription at another store in that chain. If your provider is available, he or she may call in a new prescription to any network pharmacy. If you are evacuated, you may not have to get a referral from your primary care manager to see a provider.



VA White House Hotline Update

On 11 AUG the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that the two-month pilot phase of the new White House VA Hotline that began in June has demonstrated that Veterans calling the hotline respond best when their calls are answered by fellow Veterans and others with first-hand experience on their issues.

As a result, VA announced that it will target highly qualified Veterans to staff the hotline going forward, instead of contracting the service to a third-party vendor, and is hiring additional VA personnel to complete the planned move to a 24-hour operation. "The message we've heard loud and clear is Veterans want to talk to other Veterans to help them solve problems and get VA services," said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. "We're taking steps to answer that call." This decision will delay the full-time stand-up of the 24-hour service by two months, to no later than 15 OCT, in order to ensure the hiring and training processes are complete. Until that time, the hotline's current pilot program service is available to receive calls from Veterans from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. The phone line at **855-948-2311** is designed to "collect, process and respond to the complaints of individual veterans in a responsive, timely and accountable manner," according to Department of Veterans Affairs officials.

Source: VA News

Compare Competitive VA Loan Rates

Home loan and mortgage offerings can vary dramatically based on variables such as institution, location, loan type and loan amount to name just a few. That's why it is best to shop multiple loan providers in order to get comfortable with the lingo, options and requirements. The rate table provides a number of providers that offer VA Loans and/or conventional mortgages and work with both active military and veterans. Click [here](#) for available rates.



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) More tech, less red tape help Veterans Affairs expand its reach
- 2) New Manchester VA Whistleblower Comes Forward, Claims Retaliation
- 3) Once homeless Veteran moves into unique new home
- 4) Proving Service Connection Without Service Treatment Records
- 5) Rating Knee Disabilities – Knee Replacements
- 6) Research Says VA Hospital Is Obstructing Research into Marijuana's Effects on PTSD
- 7) Sgt. Robert Bales and multiple tours of duty: How many is too many?
- 8) VA Secretary on Hurricane Harvey response
- 9) VA secretary, VSOs: Changing the VA culture together
- 10) VA to Increase Access to Safe and Effective Lung Screening Programs
- 11) VA to pay Iowa Veteran \$550,000 to settle suit over treatment
- 12) VA under 3 investigations over report of rushed, botched radiology scans
- 13) Veteran talks about suicide to help other Veterans
- 14) Veteran with stage 3 cancer dragged out of VA hospital room by police
- 15) Yardley: New position not best way to help 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

All of These Military ID Cards Expired September 3

September 3, 2013 was a big day for many military spouses. The policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" had been repealed, and thanks to a Supreme Court ruling, their marriages were now legally recognized. After months of waiting for the policy, the spouses who had been living in secret could finally be "real" in the eyes of the military benefits system. But that was four years ago. For more details, see this [Spousebuzz post](#).



Changes Coming to TRICARE

The Military Health System (MHS) is modernizing TRICARE to better serve you and respond to changes in law and policy. Most provisions will go into effect on January 1, 2018, with full implementation occurring on January 1, 2019. You will find changes that may affect you listed on the [TRICARE website](#). TRICARE is still finalizing some policies and will update the webpage when additional details become available. For more information, read the press release on the [TRICARE website](#).

DoD Clarifies Discharge Upgrade Policy

The Department of Defense (DoD) recently released guidance to clarify the liberal consideration given to veterans who request upgrades of their discharge saying they had mental health conditions or were victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment. The new guidance clarifies that the liberal consideration policy includes conditions resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, sexual assault or sexual harassment. The policy is meant to ease the burden on veterans and give them a reasonable opportunity to establish the extenuating circumstances of their discharge. The guidance is available on the DoD [website](#). For more information including points-of-contact, read the article on the DoD [website](#).



Free Mental Health Care For Veteran Students

Give an Hour (GAH) and University of Phoenix recently announced a new alliance that provides free, confidential mental health care and support to military-affiliated students, alumni and their loved ones. The services are provided by a nationwide network of more than 7,000 mental health professionals who volunteer their time to help address the psychological needs of U.S. troops and their dependents. For more details, see this [article](#).

Grunt Style Donating to Texas Relief Efforts

Responding to the disaster in Texas, the veteran-owned company Grunt Style has committed supplies and search and recon resources to aid with relief efforts in Houston and the surrounding communities. Grunt Style is donating 9,000 T-shirts and 9,000 hoodies to residents of Rockport, Texas, which was devastated by the hurricane. They are producing those shirts and hoodies this week and look to ship them down to Texas by Friday. In addition they've launched a "[Bigger Than The Storm](#)" T-shirt and hoodie on their website. They will be donating \$10 for each hoodie and T-shirt purchased.



New Legislation in Congress

Last week TREA's Washington Office endorsed the following legislation on behalf of TREA's members.

H.R.3492 -

To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand educational assistance to veterans who pursue certain apprenticeship program, to establish a pilot program for veterans to pursue certification programs in computer numerically controlled machining, and for other purposes.

Introduced by Rep. Dan Lipinski (D- Ill.)

S.1635 - Keeping Our Commitment to Overseas Veterans Act-

This bill extends authority through September 30, 2018, for operation of the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office in Manila, the Republic of the Philippines.

Introduced by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D- Hawaii)

HR 3370 - Fry Scholarship Enhancement Act-

This bill includes under the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program (public-private contributions for educational assistance in addition to post-9/11 educational assistance): (1) the child or spouse of an individual who, on or after September 11, 2001, dies in the line of duty while serving on active duty (Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry scholarship recipients); and (2) an individual who, on or after such date, serves at least 90 days but less than 6 months on active duty and who, after completion of such service, either continues on active duty for an aggregate of less than 6 months or is discharged or released before completion of such amount of active duty service.

Introduced by Rep.Hakeem Jeffries (D- N.Y.)

H.R. 3642 - Military SAVE Act-

Military Sexual Assault Victims Empowerment Act

This bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to improve the access to private health care for veterans who are survivors of military sexual trauma.

Introduced by Rep. Andy Barr (R-Ky.)

S.1619 -

A bill to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to extend the interest rate limitation on debt entered into during military service to debt incurred during military service to consolidate or refinance student loans incurred before military service.

This bill amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to extend the 6% interest rate limitation on debt entered into during a servicemember's military service to any debt entered into to consolidate or refinance one or more student loans incurred before such service.

Dick Durbin - D- II

Each of these bills, if passed, would improve things for veterans, members of the Guard and Reserve, and/or military families.

If you would like to see these passed into law it is important that you contact both of your Senators and your Representative and urge them to support the bills. Without strong support from military voters they will not make it through Congress.

Source: TREA



VA Presumptive AO Diseases Update

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin will decide “on or before” 1 NOV whether to add to the list of medical conditions the Department of Veteran Affairs presumes are associated to Agent Orange or other herbicides sprayed during the Vietnam War, a department spokesman said 1 AUG in response to a Tom Philpott enquiry. Any ailments Shulkin might add to VA’s current list of 14 “presumptive diseases” linked to herbicide exposure would make many more thousands of Vietnam War veterans eligible for VA disability compensation and health care.

Ailments under review as possible adds to the presumptive diseases list include bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms without diagnosis of that particular disease. But hypertension (high blood pressure) and stroke also might be embraced, or ignored, as part of the current review. The process was sparked by the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) 10th and final review of medical literature on health effects of herbicide exposure in Vietnam. The 1,100-page report concluded in March

2016 that recent scientific research strengthened the association between herbicide exposure and bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms. Specifically, the institute, or IOM, found “limited or suggestive” evidence of an association to herbicide versus its previous finding of “inadequate or insufficient” evidence of an association.

The IOM report also reaffirmed from earlier reviews “limited or suggestive evidence” of an association between herbicide sprayed in Vietnam and hypertension and also strokes. That same level of evidence was used in 2010 by then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to add ischemic heart disease and Parkinson’s disease to the Agent Orange presumptive list. Shinseki had stronger evidence, an IOM finding of “positive association” to herbicide for chronic lymphocytic leukemia, which he also added to the list that year. Shulkin, the current secretary, has authority to use IOM findings to add all five diseases to the presumptive list, or he can choose to look at other studies and scientific evidence to support adding fewer ailments or none at all.

The IOM, renamed the National Academy of Medicine last summer, delivered its Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014, to then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald 15 months ago. He immediately ordered a technical work group formed to review IOM findings and original studies it relied on, as well as any new science relevant to Agent Orange ailments. The workgroup’s findings then were reviewed by a smaller strategic workgroup, followed by an internal task force of senior VA leaders. “The entire VA response packet (with specific 17 FEB, a senior official said at the time. Shulkin that month was confirmed as VA secretary. The previous 18 months he was VA undersecretary for health and would have been familiar with the Agent Orange packet. So, what has happened since then?

VA officials are lean on those details. A spokesman said VA

continues to work “diligently to review the National Academy of Medicine report on potential new presumptions for Agent Orange and prepare the Secretary to make an informed decision. This includes everything from what the science is indicating, necessary regulations and a complete regulatory impact analysis. There is no delay in the decision process. Rather VA is taking appropriate time to ensure we are prepared to provide any benefits and services based on the Secretary’s decision.” Past VA secretaries had rigid timetables for accepting or rejecting IOM findings. They also had to adhere to certain standards and procedures in determining if more diseases should be presumed service connected, and to explain in writing if they declined to add IOM-identified conditions to the presumptive list.

But Congress allowed those provisions of the Agent Orange law to “sunset” Oct. 1, 2015, six months before IOM delivered its last report. Shulkin therefore is under no “statutory deadline nor required to do anything” with the IOM report, except whatever he promised veterans and Congress, said Bart Stichman, co-director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit that advocates for veterans and had lobbied to the Agent Orange provisions.

Many veterans know what’s at stake and have been pressing VA to add more diseases to the presumptive list. Also, thousands of sailors and Marines who served on ships in the territorial waters off Vietnam continue to press VA and the Congress to make Blue Water Navy veterans eligible for Agent Orange benefits. “I’ve been doing everything I can to bug the hell out of Secretary Shulkin” on the latest IOM study, said Rick Weidman, executive director for policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. Shulkin responds, Weidman said, that “he’s trying and it’s a process.” Weidman said he suspects one big hurdle is the White House’s Office of Management and Budget, which likely resists saddling VA with sharply higher disability pay obligations for high

blood pressure, bladder cancer or stroke contracted by any veteran who stepped foot in Vietnam during the war.

OMB tried to block Shinseki in 2010 from adding three ailments, including heart disease, to the presumptive list. Shinseki went around OMB and appealed directly to then-President Barack Obama, who sided with veterans, Weidman said. The Congressional Budget Office calculated that within three years of that decision, ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's and leukemia accounted for 280,000 additional compensation claims and \$4.5 billion in retroactive disability payments. Beside resistance from OMB, Weidman said Shulkin is counseled by senior staff who run post-deployment health services and study environmental hazards for VA and yet are skeptical of the science associating herbicide dioxins with higher incidence of various ailments. The Agent Orange "experts" they rely on, Weidman charged, haven't published "one scientific paper in a reputable peer review journal. The whole crew should be fired and I've told the Secretary that."

But is VA studying more than whether to add Agent Orange ailments? Anthony Principi, VA secretary in President George W. Bush's first term, argues for more sweeping changes. Like Weidman, Principi served in combat in Vietnam but believes the Agent Orange law went too far, forcing VA secretaries to build out lists of presumptive illnesses based only on suggestive links to their wartime service, and ignoring the impact of unhealthy lifestyles, heredity and aging. Interviewed 1 AUG, Principi said it doesn't seem fair that an elderly Vietnam veteran can begin receiving more disability compensation for heart disease at 75 or 80 than a young Marine receives who loses a leg fighting in Afghanistan.

Principi said he wants "common sense" changes to the Agent Orange law so that, for example, diseases on the presumptive list are deemed service connected only if diagnosed within 30 years

of a veteran exiting Vietnam. There's legal precedent if Shulkin were to propose such a rule, perhaps while adding hypertension to the presumptive list, said lawyer Stichman. In 1994, he recalled, Congress allowed such a "manifestation 1 rule" for Agent Orange-related respiratory cancers. By 2001, however, it rescinded it on complaints by veterans groups that there was no science to support limiting benefits in that way.

Source: Stars & Stripes



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Bells Across America

On Sept. 21, Navy installations will participate in the second annual Bells Across America for Fallen Servicemembers ceremony to honor those who died while on active duty. The bells rung will not signal anyone's presence; instead they will toll in their absence. Ceremonies are held in association with Gold Star Mother's and Family Day, which is celebrated the last Sunday in September. To learn more about Bells Across America for Fallen Servicemembers ceremonies nearest you, contact your Navy Gold Star Coordinator at 888-509-8759 or follow the Navy Gold Star Program on [Facebook](#), visit their [website](#), or watch the video on [YouTube](#).

VA Secretary Update

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin thinks the federal government should take cues from entrepreneurs and focus on

what veterans need. At the VA, he'd like to see the agency ensure it's "solving one of the problems that our veterans are experiencing or one of the problems the VA [is] experiencing," instead of providing services regardless of demand. On the NBC reality show "Shark Tank," business owners pitch products to a panel of celebrity judges and the ones whose products don't gain traction aren't solving relevant customers' problems, Shulkin explained.

That's why the department is focusing on issues such as expediting the disability claims process, staffing shortages, preventing veteran suicides, and cleaning up the VA's information technology problems, Shulkin said at an event Tuesday hosted by the VA Innovators Network, a set of laboratories dedicated to creatively solving internal problems at the department. The best way to address the VA's shortfalls is to be "open and honest with the problems we have," he said. Thinking of veterans as customers who have the option to go to elsewhere could provide an incentive for the VA to improve its services, he explained. "Make them consumers [for whom] we have to have a product that they want," he said. "We're going to have to open up our system to be more competitive with the private sector."

Other priorities include reducing the wait time for benefit claims to 30 days. The VA is working on technology that could eventually process veterans' disability claims instantly -- similar to what happens when they request a credit score, he said. Broadly, the VA should focus on the services it provides more effectively than the private sector does, such as treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, prosthetics and rehabilitation, Shulkin said.

President Donald Trump's newly established White House Office of American Innovation also counts improving VA technology among its initial projects. Earlier this summer Jared Kushner,

Trump's son-in-law and head of that office, said his team had advised the VA to use the same electronic health record system as the Pentagon already does. In June, VA announced its intent to sole-source the contract in three to six months. The Obama administration struggled to tackle that same problem, attempting to build a database that would let personnel view records in two separate systems used by the Pentagon and the VA.

Source: NextGov

Hurricane Harvey Help

If you live in Texas or surrounding areas, and have been directly affected by Hurricane Harvey, call 2-1-1 or visit 211.org for information on emergency shelters, food and water. Here are agencies to give to for Hurricane Harvey relief: (1) for the Red Cross, visit redcross.org or call 1-800-RED CROSS; (2) for the United Way, visit the [United Way website](#); (3) to support The Salvation Army's Hurricane Harvey relief efforts, call 1-800-SAL-ARMY, or visit the [Salvation Army website](#).

Legal Aid in California

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has announced that the state will provide legal services to deported military veterans from California, which is a huge victory for these often-overlooked veterans as they seek citizenship. California becomes the first to provide this legal help, which will be available to all deported veterans who formerly lived in California and were honorably discharged from the military. Many veterans mistakenly believed their military service automatically made them citizens. In other cases, the federal government failed to make sure these veterans followed the necessary procedures to become citizens. Read the original bill introduced by Assembly Member Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher on the [California Legislative website](#).

New Law to Streamline VA Claim Appeals Eases Some Protections

Every major veteran service organization except Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) supported legislation, signed into law last week, to reform a clogged process for deciding appeals of veterans' disability claims. Even VVA concedes the new "three-lane" option for appealing claims, when implemented via regulation a year or more from now, will produce speedier appeal decisions and begin to reverse what continues to be a steadily rising backlog of appeals, soon to surpass 500,000. For more details, see this [Military Advantage blog post](#).

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