



# **Veterans-For-Change Newsletter**

*A Voice of the Veterans*

Week Ending Sunday, August 05, 2018

Volume 9, Issue 31



## **This-N-That**

This week the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2018. Lawrence urged senators Wednesday to vote against legislation that would extend VA benefits to sailors who served off the coast during the Vietnam War and claim their illnesses were caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

I'm not surprised one bit, although it's extremely disappointing, when has the VA upper echelon ever not lied through their teeth when it comes to taking care of all those who have served?

We are asking that everyone, Active Duty, Veteran and Civilian to continue calling your Senators in DC and

requesting that they please pass HR 299. And you can call either 202-224-3121 or the toll free number 866-272-6622. We are asking that you please call every week and share this information with friends and family asking they too make the calls weekly.

You will need to make one call per Senator and ask for them by name. And although I have posted a special piece from Commander Wells just below this piece with talking points, you can also download and get a copy [here](#).

The Departments of Education and Veterans Affairs (VA) have teamed up to notify Veterans with severe disabilities that they may be eligible to have their federal student loans discharged tax-free.

If you have a permanent and total disability from the VA or the Defense Department, or are considered unemployable by the VA due to your service-connected disability, you may qualify for a total and permanent disability (TPD) discharge or waiver of your federal student loans or TEACH Grant service obligation.

You can learn more about this and apply for this relief by going down to other news articles and reading the article and click on the link(s) provided.

Veteran suicide is still among all the hot topics to be addressed by the VA, and since the first of July, 748 more Veterans have committed suicide!

A former Marine and Army National Guardsman killed himself after being denied admittance to a VA facility in Iowa City, despite telling doctors that he was having “serious mental

issues.”

Brandon Ketchum, 33, killed himself only a few hours after being turned down at the Iowa City VA Medical Center on July 7th. He made an emergency appointment with the facility and spoke to doctors about his struggle.

It wasn't but just a few weeks ago I posted how many medical professionals there are within the VA Healthcare System, and there are less than 1,200 mental health professionals there are and nationwide that comes to 24 per state, not anywhere near the amount needed, and the biggest struggle are the salaries they are paying, no where near meeting what those in civilian practice make.

So again when the budgets are passed, Veterans ALWAYS fall to the bottom of the list!

Over the past month, we've added a little more than 100 new documents to the library, you will be able to notice which ones are new as they have an orange box that says "NEW!"

We are hoping to have about 100 per month minimum added over the next few months. So do check the libraries often.

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](mailto:Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org)



## HR 299 Strategy

Mike K will put out weekly requests for folks to contact SVAC one day, their Senators the next day, Chairman ...Isakson another day and the other Senators on SVAC another day.

I will write letter to Secretary Wilkie discussing testimony and confirming that we need a meeting.

Please write a letter to the editor once per month

Call in to local talk radio shows.

As soon as we get the date for meeting we will want everyone to send emails (respectful) to Secretary Wilkie.

MVA will travel to Washington as soon as resources allow it to visit the rest of the GOP Senators. To help please go to [here](#).

**NOTE:** National media does not seem to be an option but I am working with military media. McClatchy is also working with us. But Fox, NBC, ABC CBS and CNN are not interested.

**FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS:** Contact our media consultant James Hartman at [james@jameshartman.net](mailto:james@jameshartman.net)

Talking Points for letters to editor, local talk shows and letters to Senators

- The VA position opposing the bill was a complete reversal from former Secretary Shulkin's testimony in support at the Oct 24, 2017 House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing.
- Dr. Erickson;s testimony that ships did not distill water within

12 nautical miles of land is untrue. The Institute of Medicine found that this was guidance that was routinely ignored. Actually water was routinely distilled for the boilers close to land and in harbors and there was no prohibition against that. Since the same distillation system was used for both boiler water and potable water the entire system would have been contaminated.

- Under Secretary Lawrence testified that the Navy ships were “miles offshore.” That is untrue. Some ships were anchored in harbors just a few feet from shore and often in the discharge path of the river discharge. Studies discovered that toxic level of dioxin remained in the harbor sediment 20 years after the war in Nha Trang Harbor. Another study showed that dioxin that was accidentally spilled into the Passaic River was found in seafood 150 nautical miles from shore.
- Dr. Erickson’s testimony that the Australian study was flawed as was the methodology used is untrue. The theory behind the enrichment of the dioxin during the distillation process is based on Henry’s Law of thermodynamics. Two separate committees of the Institute of Medicine reviewed and affirmed the methodology used and the enrichment effect of the dioxin process.
- Dr. Erickson testified that “The Australian format allowed them to draw water close to shore. You cannot go from that experiment and make a conclusion about U.S. naval personnel.” Dr. Erickson is wrong. Most Navy ships operated in the bays harbors and close shore waters to maximize their field of fire.
- Under Secretary Lawrence’s statement that the Institute of Medicine could not confirm the contamination of the bays harbors and estuarine waters is misleading. The Committee indicated that due to the passage of time they could not

confirm the presence of Agent Orange with certainty but that there was a plausible path for exposure. The Committee went on to note that there was no more or less evidence to support exposure among the blue water Navy veterans than there was among the ground force and brown water compatriots. Several IOM Committees since have indicated it is generally accepted that the dioxin entered the estuarine waters. One IOM committee specifically recommended that the Blue Water Navy personnel not be excluded from the presumption,

- Under Secretary Lawrence's statement that the Blue Water sailors can receive benefits on a case by case basis is patently false. Claims are routinely rejected based on a lack of "boots on the ground." The VA's own adjudication manual requires the rejection of claims if the veteran was not on land or served in the inland waters. While a ship moored to the pier may be covered if the veteran went ashore, ships anchored a few feet off the coast are not covered.

- The term inland waters has been defined by national and international treaties as inland waters, This includes the waters landward of the demarcation line marking the start of the territorial seas. All bays and harbors and most estuarine waters are covered in this definition of inland waters. The VA has repeatedly ignored the law on this subject in formulating their flawed policy. The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims rejected the VA definition and methodology in *Gray v. McDonald*, 27 Vet. App. 313 (2015).

- The dynamics here are fairly straight forward, The Agent Orange was mixed with petroleum. Petroleum floats. It flowed down the rivers and streams and washed off the land mass into the bays and harbors. Tidal action took it to the South China Sea. It was taken into the distillation plant suction. Some emulsified and fell to the sea bed where maritime traffic would stir it up causing it to float up to the distillation intake.

The distillation process enriched the dioxin. The same system used for potable water made water for the boilers

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



## Congress Says No to Retiree TRICARE Hikes

A House-Senate conference committee tasked with ironing out differences in separate versions of the defense authorization bill has rejected Senate-passed provisions that would have sharply increased **TRICARE** fees, deductibles and co-pays for a million retirees under age 65. Read this week's Update to learn more about the [final markup of the 2019 NDAA](#).



REMEMBER THOSE WHO SERVED



ALL GAVE SOME, SOME GAVE ALL



## **More Cuts to Veterans Benefits Coming**

TREA has been alarmed for a long time about the continuing reductions and cuts being made to promised and earned military benefits. These include retirement, health care, and the commissary.

While the ones mentioned apply mostly to military retirees, veterans are also experiencing threats. The latest is an announcement from DoD that they are reducing the Post-9/11 GI bill benefit.

The Pentagon has announced that effective July 12, 2019, servicemembers desiring to transfer their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit to a spouse or child(ren) will need to do so no later than their 16th year of service. Prior to this announcement, there were no restrictions on when servicemembers could transfer educational benefits to family members. The requirement for the servicemember to have at least six years of service to apply for transfer remains in effect.

The change will affect all currently serving servicemember



and their families.

When Congress passed the law back in 2008, the leaders of Congress believed the educational benefit transferability option in the new GI Bill was needed as an important retention tool so that the services could retain top talent - just like the retirement, health care and commissary benefits.

At the same time, however, Congress gave the Pentagon the authority to control changes in the transferability policy. As a result, DoD can make this change on its own without any Congressional action being necessary.

Unfortunately, the new DoD policy wasn't enough for the Navy. On July 16 the Navy announced that effective immediately, any sailors and naval officers who can't serve four additional years are ineligible to transfer the benefit. This affects Navy personnel ineligible due to their time in grade as well as those with an impending medical retirement. This new policy does not affect the Marine Corps and so far the Navy is the only service to institute even more restrictive policies regarding the GI Bill.

We believe this is another completely unnecessary attack on this critical benefit and together with cuts to other benefits now in place or coming soon will hurt our military recruitment and readiness.

TREA has already made our opposition known to Congress and the DoD and we will continue to do so.

Source: TREA



## 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 **2,500** hits per day, and downloads average **1,500** per day with a total **4,247,553** 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 **16,468** documents on-line (Updated: **07/30/18**)
- 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 (**Counselor Needed**)
  - 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: 01/11/18)
- News (Articles On-Line: **7,541**)
- Polls
- Web Links, more than **3,660**, Added 6 New Links (Updated: 07/14/18)

If you have a submission for the memorial pages, E-Mail:

[Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org](mailto:Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org)



## **North Korea Returns Presumed U.S. Remains**

“The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is incredibly encouraged by the news that North Korea has returned 55 boxes of remains believed to be U.S. service members who have been missing in action since the Korean War,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “This is a huge step in the right direction that we hope will finally bring peace to the peninsula and closure to American families who have been waiting more than six decades for their loved ones to return home from their war.” The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency lists 7,691 missing Americans from the Korean War, with some 5,300 believed to be in North Korea. DPAA also lists 111 Cold War losses in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula. The VFW sent a letter to President Trump in advance of the June 12 Singapore summit to urge him to include the return of American remains as a discussion point with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. “The return of our missing is a humanitarian mission that transcends politics,” Lawrence said.





## August's Featured Song

### Back to Blue Jeans Again

By

**LT Bobby Ross**

LT Bobby Ross - The Voice of America  
Previous Featured Songs

We are living in trying times. Our nation seems to be dividing more and more each day. American [hunters](#) and [fishermen](#) make up a large part of my 30 year old LRRP Network. It is my duty to make my [AFOA](#) a stunning example of how Veterans and autistic folks can work together to keep our American farms safe and secure, and support those who believe in our 2nd Amendment. For those of you interested, please feel free to contact me at this E-Mail Address:  
[ltbobbyr3@gmail.com](mailto:ltbobbyr3@gmail.com)



## 6 Things to Know About the New Retiree Dental Plan

**TRICARE's** retiree dental program will shutter Dec. 31; users be shifted into the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) marketplace. That means retirees will have more choice over what their plan covers and how much they pay — but it also means they'll need to navigate a new system and new set of rules. There are **6 things you need to know** about this benefits change. Click **HERE** to learn more.



**Commissary and Exchange May Open to Disabled Vets**

The final version of the 2019 Defense Authorization Act (2019 NDAA) would allow disabled veterans, **Purple Heart** recipients and caregivers of veterans severely injured in war to shop on military bases, paying slightly more at checkout than current patrons. They also will be able use base recreational facilities. Read this [article](#) to learn more about the 2019 NDAA.



## **S. 2821, the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act**

Senator Tina Smith (MN), introduced S. 2821, the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act. The bill is named after the late Hawaii Congressman Mark Takai, a veteran of the U.S. Army and Hawaii Army National Guard who passed away in 2016 and was the original sponsor of the bill in the House of Representatives.

From 1977 to 1980, the United States conducted nuclear testing on the Enewetak Atoll. More than 30 megatons of TNT nuclear testing took place and a concrete dome was built to deposit radioactive soil and debris. However, existing statutes only recognize those veterans who participated in nuclear testing on Enewetak Atoll from 1951 to 1959.



Current statutes regarding presumptive service connection for radiation exposure defines a radiation-exposed veteran as a veteran that, while on active duty, participated in a radiation risk activity. S. 2821 will expand recognized radiation risk activities to include the cleanup of Enewetak Atoll from January 1, 1977, to December 31, 1980. This bill will provide presumptive exposure to thousands of veterans who participated in the testing and clean-up and who were previously excluded as radiation exposed veterans.

DAV supports this legislation as it is in concert with DAV Resolution No. 043, to recognize veterans exposed to radiation while performing clean-up duties. Please use the prepared letter or draft your own to urge your Senators to support and cosponsor S. 2821.

Your commitment and advocacy helps make DAV a highly influential and effective organization in Washington. Thank you for all you do for America's veterans and their families.

### **Take Action**



**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](http://www.veterans-for-change.org)



**Senate Hearing on Blue Water Navy,  
Korean DMZ & Thailand Vets**

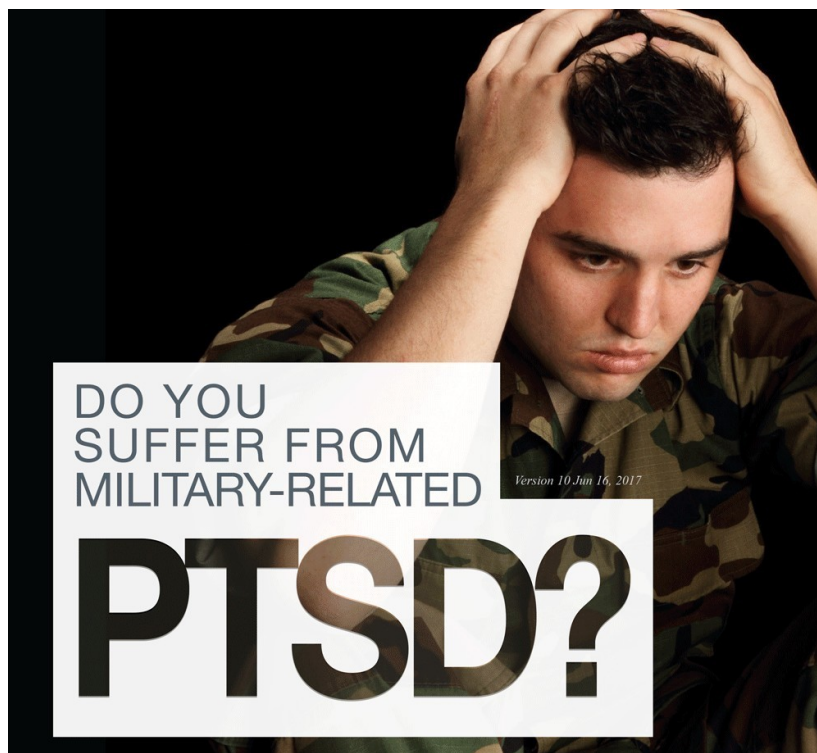
Retired VFW National Veterans Service Director Gerald Manar, a Blue Water Navy veteran, testified on behalf of the VFW in support of several important bills being considered at a Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing on Wednesday. The primary focus of the hearing was H.R. 299, which would expand Agent Orange-related benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans who served in the coastal waters of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The VFW-supported bill would also expand benefits to Korean DMZ veterans who were exposed to harmful toxins in 1967, and children born with spina bifida due to a parent's exposure during service in Thailand. While H.R. 299 faced strong opposition by VA, committee members expressed overwhelming support and urged the Senate to pass it soon. H.R. 299 has already cleared the House with a unanimous vote of 382-0. Manar also offered the VFW's support for legislation to expand VA dental care benefits, improve the Transition Assistance Program, increase burial plot allowances for veterans buried in private cemeteries, and a bill to require VA to manage and improve the Mare Island Naval Cemetery, which has fallen into disrepair since the Mare Island Naval Shipyard was closed. [Read the VFW's testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 17:30 mark.



**Protect Your Family from Lyme  
Disease this Summer**

For many, summer heat brings more outdoor play for the entire family. But being outside also increases your risk of getting a tick-borne disease. Should you or a family member get Lyme disease, your TRICARE benefit can help you get the care you need.

Read the full article [here](#).



**Veterans Crisis Line:  
1-800-273-8255 & Press 1  
Ntl Call Center for Homeless Vets  
1-877-424-3838**



# **A Warning About Picking Your New Dental Plan This Fall**

TREA has been alerting you for several weeks about the end of the current TRICARE Dental Plan and the need to enroll in the new FEDVIP dental and vision plan later this fall if you still want dental insurance as one of your military benefits.

Now comes word from Military.com that "Military retirees who are currently using orthodontic services through **Tricare's** dental plan or who may soon need major dental work should select a new plan this fall that does not have a waiting period, as the TRICARE retiree dental program comes to an end."

The article goes on to say "...retirees who are using the TRICARE retiree plan through Delta Dental to receive orthodontic services or who anticipate requiring major dental work soon have more to worry about than just selecting a plan that fits their general needs. They also must read the fine print about potential coverage delays.

"That's because many dental plans come with a long waiting period before a buyer can utilize the coverage for major dental work, such as crowns or orthodontia."

What this means is that if you will soon be needing major dental work, or even if you are now in the middle of major dental work, if you chose the wrong plan, in other words one that has a waiting period, you could end up paying for the work out of your own pocket.

Please keep this in mind when the enrollment period opens on November 12 and pick your plan carefully and wisely.

Source: TREA



## **CalVet Seeks Events for Our 2018 Veterans Day Online Calendar**

Sacramento – In our ongoing efforts to serve California’s Veterans and their families, the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) seeks 2018 Veterans Day events for our online calendar. Calendar listings are free and viewable by anyone who visits our CalVet website.

To submit your Veterans Day event, or any other veteran related event for consideration, please e-mail the following information to [PAO@calvet.ca.gov](mailto:PAO@calvet.ca.gov):

Event date

Event start and end times

Name of event (ceremony, parade, memorial, etc.)

Name of sponsoring organization

Venue name

Venue address

Provide parade route details as applicable

Contact person name, telephone number, and e-mail

Cost of admission, if any

If pre-registration is required, provide link and registration deadline

Provide a flyer or other image (pdf, jpg, png)

Request CalVet representative:

- Speaker (usually reading of Governor’s Veterans Day proclamation)

- Participant in parade or otherwise

Indicate Northern or Southern California

Follow CalVet on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).







**Our values  
match yours.**



[www.veterans-for-change.org](http://www.veterans-for-change.org)



## **Congress Might Pass the Defense Budget on Time**

Congress is in the position of doing something it hardly ever does — passing a defense budget bill on time. Read about how this could happen and what it will mean to you. Read the whole story [here](#).



## **Bug off, Mosquitoes!**

You may know that mosquitoes carry disease. But did you know that disease epidemics from mosquito-borne viruses are on the rise? Protect yourself against mosquitoes, and know how TRICARE covers you if you suffer more than the usual itchy bite this summer.

Read the full article [here](#).



## **7 Tips for Summer Travel on a Budget**

There are plenty of travel hacks out there, but here are a few finance-related tips to facilitate positive vacations. Read this [Paycheck Chronicles](#) post for seven tips, and for travel deals for military families and veterans, visit the [Discount Center](#).



## **Travel Checklist: Prepare for Bugs and More**

Regardless of where this summer takes you, be aware of the bugs and insects that you may encounter along your way. Many can carry harmful diseases. Whether you're traveling across the world or across the state, get familiar with common symptoms and learn how TRICARE covers you should you run into creepy-crawlers this summer. When preparing for a trip, follow this bug safety checklist.

Read the full article [here](#).



## **Vets Don't Need 20% Down with the VA Loan Benefit**

2018 is here and the VA loan limits have increased again, now worth up to \$453k financing. Now is the time to use this great benefit. Qualified borrowers can buy or refi with as little as \$0 down, and have no PMI payments with great rates and financing up to \$453k. Use your [VA loan benefit](#) today.



## **Petition the Whitehouse to pass Blue Water Navy bill**

We desperately need to make HR 299 move to the senate floor. Please share with all your friends , FB and those who care for vets.

By the way it passed the house 382-0. So close to getting it signed into law.

[\*\*CLICK HERE\*\*](#)

Source:

Susie Belanger

Board Member

Blue Water Navy Association

Deputy Chief of Staff

Military Veterans Advocacy, Inc.



**Never forget our fallen!**





## **Defense Authorization Bill Heads to President's Desk**

Yesterday, the Senate passed the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2019. The VFW thanks the conferees and the more than 7,000 veterans and supporters who responded to the VFW Action Alert opposing a provision that would have dramatically increased TRICARE fees for current retirees. The final bill does not include the misguided proposal, but does include several provisions to improve the financial viability of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, such as authorizing the home to accept financial gifts, and expanding eligibility to disabled veterans and spouses who are not currently eligible. The bill would postpone the fee increase that was scheduled to be implemented in October 2018, but applies only to those who were residents as of April 9, 2018, and authorizes gradual fee increases over the next three years. The bill would also authorize a 2.6 percent pay increase for America's service members; grant disabled veterans access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities; require DOD to design and produce a medal or award for veterans exposed to radiation (Atomic Veterans); improve reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases; expand eligibility for Military OneSource to one year after discharge; and require DOD to conduct an assessment on ways to enhance and reform Taiwan's military forces. This important legislation now heads to the president who is expected to sign it.



**S. 2884, the Veterans Fair Debt Notice  
Act of 2018**

Senator Deb Fischer (NE) introduced S. 2884, the Veterans Fair Debt Notice Act of 2018.

This bill would require the VA to create a debt notice letter, with the assistance of veterans service organizations, to be written in plain language, providing a clear explanation of why the debt was created and the options available to the veteran. The VA would further be required to develop a method that allows veterans to receive the debt notice via email as well as by standard mail.

Currently, VA debt letters are not written in easy to understand language and often lack an explanation of why the debt was created. Many veterans do not understand the reason for the debt, their options after notification, and in many instances, do not receive the notice in a timely manner. Enactment of S. 2884 would provide veterans with a better debt explanation and allow them to receive a more expedient notice via email.

DAV applauds the efforts to simplify the debt notice process and supports this legislation. S. 2884 is aligned with the intent of DAV Resolution No. 171, which calls for an improved debt notification process. Please use the prepared letter or draft your own to urge your Senators to support and cosponsor S. 2884.

Our successes depend on our unified voices and we thank you for adding your voice to stand up for veterans and their families.

**Take Action**



## **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**



## **Still No VA Bill in Congress**

When both houses of Congress passed their respective versions of the MilCon/VA bill, the legislation that funds and initiates programs for the Department of Veterans Affairs, many assumed the House and Senate would reach agreement on one final bill and move it fairly quickly to the President for his signature. However, that has not happened.

The cause for the delay is the debate about how to fund the VA MISSION Act that was passed earlier this summer - the bill that establishes the new VA CHOICE program.

The view among many Senators seems to be that it should be paid for by (basically) borrowing more money, while the view in the House is that it should be paid for by cutting other programs. In this case, they have their eye on the Department of Homeland Security.

The proposal from the House of Representatives is to cut



\$1.7 billion from the Department of Homeland Security, including \$1.1 billion from the Coast Guard. A proposal in the Senate, on the other hand, would be to cut Coast Guard spending "only" by about \$200 million and would include \$750 million for a heavy icebreaker.

At the same time, the House proposal would include \$5 billion for the border wall while the Senate bill would provide \$1.6 billion for the wall.

It seems ironic to us that since one of the Coast Guard's important jobs is to secure our borders they want to cut its budget while at the same time partially fund the border wall.

Because of the current debate and the looming August recess for the House of Representatives, Congress may not finish final work on the bill until early September.

Source: TREA



Links to Other Stories

1. 2 years after Trump promised a White House Veterans hotline, it's open – in West Virginia
2. All photos of Escambia County men killed in Vietnam War found for virtual wall
3. Disabled Vets May Be Eligible for Student Loan Write-Off
4. El Paso VA Health Care System shooter, victim dead; Hundreds of potential witnesses, officials say
5. FDA approves first treatment for rare adrenal tumors
6. GAO Report: VA Whistleblowers 10 Times More Likely To Be Punished
7. Soft Tissue Sarcoma due to Agent Orange Exposure
8. Tennessee Former VA Worker Convicted of Defrauding Veteran of \$680K
9. U.S. Military Is World's Biggest Polluter
10. VA Disability Benefits – Back to Basics
11. VA looking to fill about 80 jobs before Springfield clinic opens
12. Veteran commits suicide hours after being turned away at VA facility – Rest In Peace
13. Veterans exposed to battlefield burn pits press VA for care and compensation
14. Viagra and Skin Cancer
15. Wilkie Sworn In to Head a VA Suffering from Infighting and Low Morale

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](http://www.veterans-for-change.org)



## 6 Unbeatable Benefits of VA Loans

The VA home loan benefit has helped millions of veterans, service members and military families achieve the dream of homeownership. Today, in many ways, it's more important than ever. Here's a look at [six of the biggest benefits](#) of these long-cherished home loans.



## TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin #460

Listen to this week's podcast to hear about:

- TRICARE Overseas Providers
- TRICARE Young Adult
- Other TRICARE Resources

Visit the TRICARE Media Center for this and previous podcasts at [www.tricare.mil/podcasts](http://www.tricare.mil/podcasts).





*CLICK HERE TO JOIN US ON TWITTER*



## **Navy Exchange Text Coupons**

The Navy Exchange (NEX) is now able to deliver coupons right to its customers by sending text messages to their wireless device. NEX customers in the continental United States can now sign up to connect with the NEX through their mobile device which will give them access to special offers and coupons through SMS messages as well as special online offers. Customers can sign up for the mobile information by texting JOIN to 57662. Message and data rates may apply. Customers will receive one message each time JOIN is texted to 57662 and then monthly recurring messages after sign up is completed. Terms, conditions and privacy are available on the [NEX website](#). To sign up, customers must have a text messaging-enabled mobile device provided by a supported carrier.



## **VA Whole Health Approach**

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) [Whole Health](#) approach aims to let veterans take charge of their health based on their priorities with the support of [Whole Health peer facilitators](#) on their health team. For more information, read the VA Vantage Point Blog and listen to the video online. To learn more about Whole Health, visit the VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation [website](#).



## **Guam-based Vietnam Vets Seek Benefits**

An estimated 50,000 men and women who served on Guam during the Vietnam War are asking Washington lawmakers to support giving them benefits after mounting evidence suggests they were exposed to Agent Orange. Retired Navy Cmdr. John Wells, the executive director of Military Veterans Advocacy, is an attorney leading the fight for national legislation to provide a financial lifeline for vets who, he said, were never told of the potential side effects of Agent Orange. For more information, visit the Military Veterans Advocacy [website](#).



## **Update on New Dental and Vision Plans**

The TRICARE Retiree Dental Program ([TRDP](#)) ends on Dec. 31, 2018. Beginning in 2019, dental and vision plans will be available through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program ([FEDVIP](#)). Now is a good time to become familiar with FEDVIP options. FEDVIP 2019 plans and rates will be online in the fall. But you can look at 2018 plans and rates now. You can enroll in FEDVIP during the Federal Benefits Open Season. This year's open season runs from Nov. 12 through Dec. 10, 2018. Your coverage will begin on Jan. 1, 2019. For more information, visit the FEDVIP [website](#). You can see if you are eligible for [FEDVIP](#) in 2019.



1. Bureau Has Made Progress with Its Scheduling, but Further Improvement Will Help Inform Management Decisions
2. Critical Actions Needed to Address Shortcomings and Challenges in Implementing Responsibilities
3. DOD's Use of Commercial Satellites to Host Defense Payloads Would Benefit from Centralizing Data
4. Financial Oversight of the Use of Overhead Funds Needs Strengthening
5. Improved Information Sharing Could Help DOD Determine Whether Items Are Commercial and Reasonably Priced
6. Improvements Needed to Better Oversee Payment Risks
7. IRS Needs to Rectify Control Deficiencies That Limit Its Effectiveness in Protecting Sensitive Financial and Taxpayer Data
8. Management of Minor Construction and Non-Recurring Maintenance Programs Could Be Improved
9. Status of HHS's Implementation of Required Prior Authorization Medical Reviews and Provider Education for Chiropractic Services
10. Treasury and IRS Should Document the Roles and Responsibilities for Updating Annual Withholding Tables



**Happy Birthday, Coast Guard!**

August 4 marks the birthday of our nation's Coast Guard, which has been in service since 1790. For more features on Coast Guard history and a Coast Guard quiz, visit [Coast Guard birthday section](#). [Semper Paratus!](#)



## Remembering WWI Veterans

Genealogy expert Deborah Dudek recently spoke with host Theo Mayer about researching family members who served in WWI. Also, Theo Mayer explains how anyone can upload their ancestor's information to the WWI Centennial Commission's Stories of Service [page](#). Read a transcript of this interview [online](#).



**“We Proudly Support our  
Military Personnel & Families”**



## VA, IBM Watson Form AI Partnership



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and IBM Watson Health have announced the extension of a public-private partnership to apply artificial intelligence (AI) to help interpret cancer data in the treatment of veteran patients. First announced two years ago as part of the [National Cancer Moonshot Initiative](#), VA oncologists have now used IBM Watson for Genomics technology to support precision oncology care for more than 2,700 Veterans with cancer. Precision oncology is the practice of biologically directed cancer care. VA's precision oncology program primarily supports stage 4 cancer patients who have exhausted other treatment options. The partnership extension with IBM will enable VA oncologists to continue using Watson for Genomics through at least June 2019. For more information about the VA's precision oncology program, visit the VA Office of Research and Development [website](#).



## **VA Mental Health Benefits**

Veterans enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care have access to mental health services, including inpatient and outpatient care for PTSD, depression, readjustment, substance use disorders, military sexual trauma and more. Visit [Explore.VA.gov](#) to learn more about VA benefits and how to apply. If you or a veteran you know is in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1.

For more mental health and wellness resources, visit [Mental Health and Wellness section](#).



1. ADM Animal Nutrition Recalls Mintrate® 36-15 Breed Right Cattle Tub - A specific lot of product may contain elevated levels of non-protein nitrogen, could harm cattle
2. AuroMedics Pharma LLC Issues Voluntary Nationwide Recall of Piperacillin and Tazobactam for Injection 3.375 grams per vial, Due to Presence of Particulates Identified as Glass and Silicone Material
3. FDA updates on valsartan recalls
4. Lipari Foods Issues Voluntary Recall of Premo Brand & Fresh Grab Turkey & Swiss Submarine Sandwiches Due to Potential Contamination of Listeria Monocytogenes
5. Ranier's Rx Laboratory Issues Voluntary Recall of All Sterile Compounded Products Within Expiry Due to Lack of Sterility Concerns
6. Sweet Earth Foods Issues Allergy Alert for Undeclared Egg and Milk in Aloha BBQ Quesadillas Due to Mismatched Packaging
7. TeaSource Issues Allergy Alert on Undeclared Almonds in Product
8. Zithromax, Zmax (azithromycin): FDA Warning - Increased Risk of Cancer Relapse With Long-Term Use After Donor Stem Cell Transplant



## **Veterans' Expedited Recovery Commission**

President Donald J. Trump has selected former VA White House Senior Advisor Thomas 'Jake' Leinenkugel to lead a key commission focused on the department's mental health care programs. The Creating Options for Veterans' Expedited Recovery (COVER) commission will examine VA's evidence-based therapy model for treating mental health conditions, as well as the department's complementary and integrated mental health approaches. The COVER commission is scheduled to hold its first meeting July 24 and 25 in Washington, D.C. For more information about the COVER commission, email [COVERCommission@va.gov](mailto:COVERCommission@va.gov).





*CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION*

## **SURVIVAL IS FUN**



### **There is no VA bill yet... but there is a newly confirmed Secretary of the VA**

Last Monday, July 23th the Senate voted 86-9 to confirm Robert Wilkin as the new Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. While it is a healthy passage it is the first time that the Secretary of the VA has not been unanimously approved.

Voting against his confirmation were Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Ed Market (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Bernie Saunders (I-VT), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)

and Ron Wyden (D-OR). 5 other Senators were absent.

This result was somewhat surprising since Mr. Wilkie had a very smooth confirmation hearing. (The New York Times referred to Mr. Wilkie as a "career Washington insider."). Senate VA Committee's Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MT) said: "You've gotten pretty good at this. You ain't a rookie. You not only answer questions, but you anticipated questions as good as anyone I've ever seen in front of a Senate Committee. I would just say that I, as others, believe you're going to be confirmed. ... You will be held accountable."

Mr. Wilkie was DoD's Under Secretary for Defense for Personnel and readiness and Acting VA Secretary until nominated for the position of Secretary. He is from a military family and served in the Navy Reserves and presently an intelligence office in the Air Force Reserves. He was born in Frankfurt West Germany and grew up at Ft. Bragg and Fayetteville. His father was a highly decorated artillery officer who was severely injured in the Vietnam War. So, hopefully, he knows first hand the medical needs of veterans.

He will be taking over the second largest federal department with over 360,000 employees which you all know well has been in turmoil for the last several years. Unlike his predecessor he does not have any medical training or experience but he has a great deal of administrative and bureaucratic and Hill experience.

As well as overseeing TRICARE as Under Secretary of Personnel and Readiness, he was a top staffer for late Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), chief of Staff for former Representative Dave Funderburk (R-NC); counsel and international advisor to former Senate Majority Leader Trent

Lott (R-MS) and senior advisor to Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC). He also facilitated the confirmations of Defense Secretaries James Mattis, Robert Gates and Mike Millen. (Which is probably why he was comfortable with the process himself.

He said:" Every day on our way to and from high school, we would see a sign outside the veterans' hospital that says that 'the price of freedom is visible here.'" He has said that his priorities at the VA will be improving its culture and providing "top-notch customer service" in health care and benefit claims.

Source: TREA



## **WWI Truman Exhibit**

Harry S. Truman departed New York for the battlefields of France in the spring of 1918. Truman returned a hero, and his service helped set him on the path to the presidency. A new exhibit at the Truman Library Institute, 'Heroes or Corpses: Captain Truman in World War I,' tells the captivating story of Truman's service in the Great War through never-before-exhibited photographs, personal letters and more than 40 artifacts from Truman's personal World War I collection. The new exhibition runs until December 31, 2018 at the Truman Library Institute. Entry is included in museum admission. For more information, visit the WWI Centennial Commission [website](#) and the Truman Library Institute [website](#).



## MIA Update

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced five new identifications, and burial dates and locations for three previously identified servicemen. Returning home with full military honors are:

**Navy Fireman 1st Class Chester E. Seaton**, 20, of Omaha, Neb., accounted for last year, will be buried Aug. 8 in Tacoma, Wash. On Dec. 7, 1941, Seaton was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Seaton. [Read about Seaton.](#)

**Army Sgt. William A. Larkins**, 20, of Pittsburgh, accounted

for last year, will be buried Aug. 10 in nearby Bridgeville, Pa. In late November 1950, Larkins was a member of A Battery, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, fighting in the Ch'ongch'on River region of North Korea. On Dec. 1, his battalion began moving under continuous fire toward the town of Sunchon. Larkins was reported as missing in action. It would be later learned he had been captured and died at a POW camp in January 1951. [Read about Larkins.](#)

**Army Cpl. Terrell J. Fuller**, 20, accounted for this spring, will be buried Aug. 11 in his hometown of Toccoa, Ga. In February 1951, Fuller was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, fighting in an area known as the Central Corridor in South Korea. During a unit withdrawal to Wonju, Fuller was reported missing. [Read about Fuller.](#)

**Army Pfc. Leslie Shankles**, 34, of Vernon County, Mo., was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, when he was killed Oct. 14, 1944, by enemy fire in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. Shankles' name is recorded on the Tablets of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery, along with the others missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shankles.](#)

**Marine Corps Cpl. Claire E. Goldtrap**, 21, of Hobart, Okla., was assigned to Company A, 2nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Goldtrap died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. His name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing



at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, more commonly known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, along with others who are missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Goldtrap.](#)

**Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Robert L. Zehetner**, of Brooksville, Fla., was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Zehetner died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. His name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, along with others who are missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Zehetner.](#)

**Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Merton R. Riser**, of Sanborn, Iowa, was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Riser died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. His name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from World War II. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Riser.](#)

**Army Air Forces Capt. Lawrence E. Dickson**, 24, from Bronx, N.Y., was a P-51D Mustang pilot with the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, the famed Tuskegee Airmen. On Dec. 23, 1944, while on an aerial reconnaissance

mission, his aircraft suffered massive engine failure and was seen crashing near the mountainous border of Italy and Austria. His remains were unrecoverable at the time and he was subsequently declared missing in action. Dickson's name is recorded on the Tablets of the Missing at the Florence American Cemetery in Italy, along with other MIAs from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dickson.](#)



## **This Month Please Remember These Women Who Died During August While Serving Our Country In Or During War Times**

2 Aug 2008: USA PFC Jennifer L Cole, 34, IRAQ

3 Aug 2013: USA Lilli Anna (Moore) Panttila, 25, possible suicide, IL

4 Aug 1943: WASP Kathryn Barbara Lawrence, WW II

5 Aug 1984: USN Pamela Cahanes, 25, found murdered in Sanford, FL two days after graduating from Orlando Navy Training Center

7 Aug 1998: USAF SrMSGT Sherry Lynn Olds, 40, Military Assistance Office in US Embassy bombing in NAIROBI, KENYA, Africa

7 Aug 2007: USAF Airman Basic Paige R Villers, 19, boot camp flu, Lackland AFB

7 Aug 2010: USA SPC Faith R Hinkley, 23, RPG attack, IRAQ

8 Aug 2009: USA SSG Tara J Smith, 33, non-combat health, Bagram AFGHANISTAN

9 Aug 2007: USA SSG Alicia A (Finklea) Birchett, 29, non-combat vehicle accident, IRAQ

10 Aug 2006: PAARNG SPC Kirsten Fike, 36, died in AZ watching the Mexican border

13 Aug 2008: USAF SrAirman Sabrina Autrey, 23, unknown Bolling AFB

14 Aug 1944: WASP Mary E. Hartson, WW II

14 Aug 1968: USA ANC LTC Annie Ruth Graham, 52, VIETNAM

14 Aug 2005: USA SPC Toccara R. Green, 23, IRAQ

14 Aug 2008: USA PVT Janelle F King, 23, IRAQ

15 Aug 2006: USMC LCPL Amanda Carrithers, 19, murdered in NC

15 Aug 2007: USA SGT Princess C Samuels, 22, mortars, IRAQ

15 Aug 2007: USA SPC Zandra T (Worthy) Walker, 28, mortars, IRAQ

15 Aug 2017: USA 1LT Kathryn Bailey, 26, helicopter crash, Hawaii

15 Aug 2017: SSG Abigail Milam, 33, helicopter crash, Hawaii

16 Aug 2007: USA SPC Kamisha J Block, 20, non-combat murdered by US soldier, IRAQ

16 Aug 2008: USA SGT Kendale B Carney, died of natural causes while home on leave, Hamlet, NC

17 Aug 2006: USCG LT Jessica Hill, 31, drowned in training off Barrows, AK

18 Aug 2005: USA 1LT Laura M. Walker, 24, AFGHANISTAN

19 Aug 2006: USA SGT Wakkuna A Jackson, 21, AFGHANISTAN

21 Aug 2012: NYANG SGT Kristie A (Robrts) Proctor, 27, suicide, NY

23 Aug 1943: WASP Mabel Virginia Rawlinson, WW II

24 Aug 2012: USA PFC Patricia L Horne, 20, AFGHANISTAN

24 Aug 2015: USA PFC Karlyn S Ramirez, 24, shot in  
Severn, MD

25 Aug 1950: USN NNC LT Wilma Ledbetter, drowned when  
USS Benevolence sank after colliding with the SS Mary  
Luckenback near the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco,  
CA

25 Aug 2013: USA WO1 Anisha Phillips, 30, motorcycle  
accident, Florence, SC

25 Aug 2014: USA SFC Paula Walker, 33. suicide, Ft Lee, VA

26 Aug 1944: USA WAC PVT Allene M Baker, suicide, Camp  
Patrick Henry, VA

27 Aug 2012: MEARNG SSG Jessica M. Wing, 42, non-  
combat, KUWAIT

29 Aug 2008: USA Kanika T Powell, 28, murdered, Laural,  
MD

30 Aug 1943: WASP Margaret "Peggy" June Seip, WW II

30 Aug 1943: WASP Helen Jo Anderson Severson, WW II



## **TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin #461**

Listen to this week's podcast to hear about:

- Bug Week Travel Checklist
- Mosquitoes
- Lyme Disease

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1. Extension filers can avoid making these common filing errors
2. IRS offers guidance on recent 529 education savings plan changes
3. IRS reminds truckers: E-file highway use tax return by Aug. 31
4. Resources on IRS.gov help all taxpayers understand tax reform

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