



Veterans-For-Change Newsletter

A Voice of the Veterans

Week Ending Sunday, December 15, 2019

Volume 10, Issue 50



This-N-That

More on the good news front, the "Widow Tax" was unanimously passed in both the Senate and House Committees, and was put to the floor in the House and was passed! But to insure passage in the Senate I'm asking everyone who reads our newsletter to please, go get on your phones and call your Senator (numbers are listed further down in this newsletter in a box with a blue border) and ask your Senator to please vote YES and lets get this done and over with.

65,000 plus widows are counting on us, and we owe them just as much as we do our Veterans!

On the bad news side, the transition between contractors ended up causing many medical service providers to not be paid, and those who pay premiums for Tricare had their fees more than one hundred times their normal premium.

Humana is working with Tricare members to reverse the charges and will also cover bank fees for any over drafts!

Electronic Records system is moving forward, but most of us are anticipating huge problems as the transition into electronic records systems has been a nightmare since the beginning.

I recommend paying close attention to all news on the Electronic Records system, and be sure to always request copies of your medical records so you can be on top of what is in them and make sure at the same time there are no errors and if errors are found be sure to bring it to your doctors attention immediately, but keep the original copy with errors in your own file do not surrender it to

anyone. Make a photo copy and give whom ever the copy.

This way should any problems arise later on, you can prove beyond a doubt the error, date you notified them of the error, and be able to get it corrected.

Personally I have little faith in what it coming out. Main reason is no one has made any mention what so ever that any medical notes entered in could not be altered later on. To me, this is one of the most critical pieces of information no on involved in the processes and programming have made mention of, and as many know, their records had been tampered with and no ability to get them corrected.

Some of you have discovered a few hiccups in our website, and I sincerely thank you for bringing them to my attention, it does help us a great deal. Once we're notified of a hiccup we send it to our web master to make repairs or adjustments as needed.

Continue to let me know as we're finishing off with

the old web master before we bring in the new web master who has some pretty good ideas on updates, changes, etc. so I'm pretty excited at some of the potential new looks and feel.

As a reminder I was asked a few weeks ago to write a piece to be included in a publication, however due to personal health issues, changing hosting systems, etc. there simply wasn't enough time to manage that task. But I do want to move forward as there will be other publications in the future that I'd like for VFC to participate in which could help many.

The areas of interest are as follows:

- Military sexual trauma
- Anger, Social support in U.S. Veterans
- Suicide prevention in the military
- Psychometric evaluation of the Military Suicide Attitudes
- Impact of different types of trauma on suicidality in women veterans
- Suicide ideation to avoid action among psychiatrically hospitalized military personnel
- Depression and PTSD, trauma, overdose

- Prevention by Pastoral Counseling and mental health treatment.
- Confessions of a Soldier etc.

If you're interested in contributing, have a personal story to share I'd really like to hear from you, and should you decide to share please also let me know if you'd like to remain confidential so I can and will respect your wishes!

The more we can educate our civilian friends, the better our chances are at getting them to assist in getting various pieces of legislation passed to help all Veterans!

I'm looking to write a piece that will be approximately 20+ pages and will reach millions of people not on our newsletter databases.

Any and all assistance would be greatly appreciated.

As a reminder those who receive our newsletter via Yahoo Groups, since their making so many changes and restrictions, please click on the link toward the bottom of this newsletter and subscribe direct.

Effective January 1, 2020 we will close down those groups and be walking away from Yahoo.

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

Respectfully,

Jim Davis

Founder

Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org



VA extends benefits to offshore Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans January 1st

Law also affects survivors of Veterans, certain dependents and Veteran homebuyers

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) begins deciding Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 claims, Jan. 1, 2020, extending the presumption of herbicide exposure that include toxins such as Agent Orange, to Veterans who served in the offshore

waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Prior to the measure, only Vietnam War Veterans who served on the ground in Vietnam or within Vietnam's inland waterways were eligible to receive disability compensation and other benefits based on a presumption of herbicide exposure.

Signed into law June 25, the law specifically affects Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veterans who served as far as 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 6, 1962 and May 7, 1975, as well as Veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between Jan. 1, 1967 and Aug. 31, 1971. These Veterans can apply for disability compensation and other benefits if they have since developed one of [14 conditions](#) that are presumed to be related to exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange. Veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides. The specific conditions can be found by searching Agent Orange on www.va.gov.

“For six months VA worked diligently to gather

and digitize records from the Naval History and Heritage Command in order to support faster claims decisions,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These efforts will positively impact the claims process for Veterans filing for these benefits”

Qualifying recipients, in addition to affected Veterans still living, are certain survivors of deceased BWN and Korean DMZ Veterans.

Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the Veteran’s service if the Veteran died from at least one of the 114 presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange. The law also provides benefits for children born with [spina bifida](#) if their parent is or was a Veteran with certain verified service in Thailand during a specific period. The Blue Water Navy Act also includes provisions affecting the VA Home Loan Program. The law creates more access for Veterans to obtain no-down payment home loans, regardless of loan amount, and the home loan funding fee is reduced for eligible Reservists and National Guard borrowers who use their home loan benefits for the first time. Certain Purple Heart recipients do not pay a funding fee at

all. VA's website describes these and [other benefits](#).

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for an herbicide-related disability can use VA Form [21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits](#) or work with a VA-recognized Veterans Service [Organization](#) to assist with the application process. Veterans may also contact their [state Veterans Affairs Office](#).

BWN Veterans who previously filed a claim seeking service connection for one of the 14 presumptive conditions that was denied by VA may provide or identify any new and relevant information regarding their claim when reapplying. To re-apply, Veterans may use [VA Form 20-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim](#). As a result of the new law, VA will automatically review claims that are currently in the VA review process or under appeal.

For more information about the Blue Water Navy Act and the changes that will take effect visit [here](#).



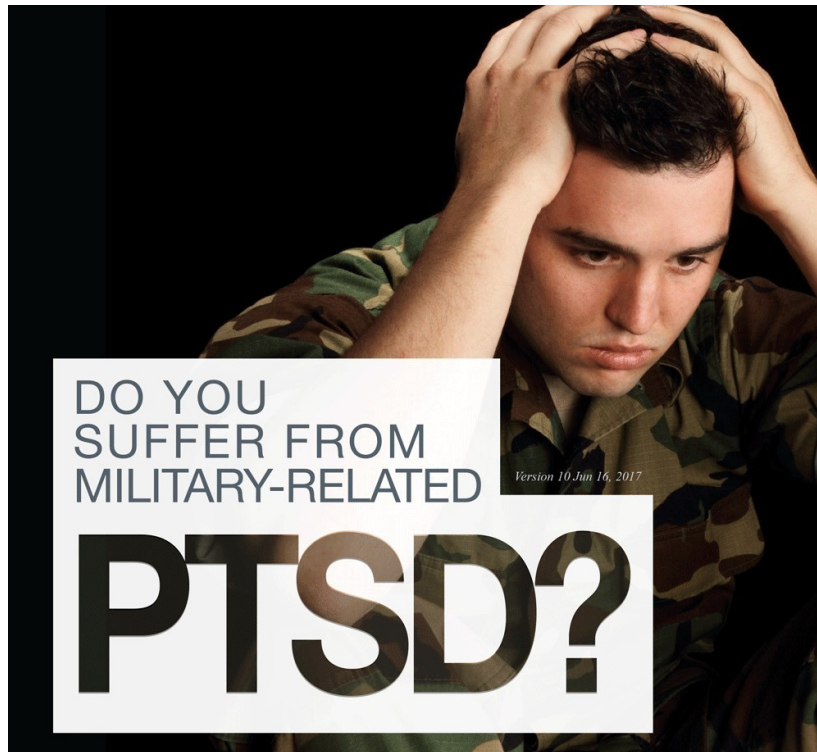
Senate Hearing on Military Housing Report

The Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing on a recently released Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that indicated the system that provides housing for families on military bases is plagued by systemic problems and sloppy record keeping. Elizabeth Field, GAO Director of Defense Capabilities, told committee members that housing problems include repeated sewage leaks, mold and rodent infestations. The GAO report is based on housing data collected from 10 different military installations and from 15 town hall meetings with residents. She testified that these are the same concerns revealed earlier

this year from military families living in off-base private housing. The secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force, along with senior members of each military service, testified and were called on to crack down on landlords who have failed to provide safe and clean living quarters for our military and their dependents.

The FRA is supporting provisions in the pending National Defense Authorization Act that provides for a tenant bill of rights for families in military housing. In April, the FRA National Board of Directors meet with senior Pentagon officials and expressed alarm about off-base private housing conditions. These conditions include faulty wiring, exposed plumbing, poor water quality, vermin infestations, mold and lead contamination, raw sewage, and other toxic exposures. These things all have made negative health impacts for all residents, many of whom are young children. Members can weigh in on this issue with their legislators by going to FRA Action campaign entitled [Oppose Skinny NDAA](#).





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



Veterans-For-Change Web Site

The Veterans-For-Change website has been around since 2009. 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 for Mental Health and are currently seeking a new Licensed Mental Health Worker, where you can seek help or just ask questions.

We average **3,238** hits per day, and downloads average **5,787** per day with a total **5,623,639** 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 **18,071** documents in 149+ Libraries, added **67** documents on-line (Updated: 12/08/19)
- FAQ's on-line with **1,790** FAQ's on 101 topics! (Updated 08/29/19 - 128 NEW)
- 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: 10/30/18) (37 Added)
 - News (Articles On-Line: **9,238**)
 - Polls
 - Web Links, more than **5,617**, Added **110** New Links (Updated: 11/21/19)

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



The FY2020 NDAA Contains SBP/DIC Offset to Be Phased Out in 3 Years

The House approved (377-48) the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA-S.1790), which includes a three-year phase out of the SBP/DIC offset for military widows/widowers. The FRA has long sought the elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset for widows and widowers of service members. This offset, also known as the Widow's Tax, and impacts approximately 65,000 widows and widowers of our

Armed Forces. The FRA has advocated that these widows and widowers should receive both SBP and DIC benefits without the current dollar-for-dollar offset. In addition, the 3,488-page bill includes:

- Delaying drastic cuts to the Defense Health Agency staff until a review ensures that reductions will not negatively impact military health care;
- No TRICARE fee or pharmacy co-pay increases in 2020. The previously approved (in 2017) TRICARE fee and pharmacy co-pay increases will take effect on Jan. 1, 2020;
- Authorizes Secretary of Defense to pay medical malpractice claims against military personnel for injury or death caused by a DoD health care provider. This provision does not repeal the Feres Doctrine, that was contained in the House-passed version;
- Doubling up to \$1,000, the reimbursement for professional relicensing costs of reassigned service members' spouses;
- Increasing active duty pay by 3.1 percent (largest increase in 10 years);
- Authorizing Reserve Component serving on

12304b orders (augmenting pre-planned combat operations) will now have this service applied toward their active duty time, which will lower the age that they can start to receive retirement pay;

- Requiring the service branches to establish a tenant Bill of Rights that creates minimum acceptable livability standards for privatized military housing, and bans the use of non-disclosure agreements in housing disputes; and
- Adding money to underfunded construction projects that include military housing and on-base childcare facilities.

The final bill (Conference Committee report) has passed the House and it is awaiting a Senate vote that will occur next week. President Trump has indicated he will sign it into law. When this occurs, it will be the 59th annual Defense Authorization bill to be enacted.





Below are links to all currently active pre-written E-Mails to many pieces of legislation. We ask that you go to each one, and send the pre-written E-Mails, and to also call your Reps or Senators and ask for their support on a weekly basis!

You don't need to be Active Duty or a Veteran, in fact we ask all Veteran friends to also help!

1. [Allow Active Duty to Sue Military for Medical Malpractice \(H.R. 2422\)](#)
2. [H.R. 1527, the Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act](#)
3. [Action Alert: Tell Congress to End the Widow's Tax Now!](#)
4. [H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act](#)
5. [H.R. 2359, the Whole Veteran Act](#)
6. [S. 514, the Deborah Sampson Act to Improve VA Services for Women Veterans](#)
7. [H.R. 445, Help Hire Our Heroes Act](#)

8. S. 2022, Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019
9. H.R. 96, to Provide Dental Care for All Veterans Enrolled in Veterans Health Care
10. S. 555 and H.R. 1377, Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act
11. H.R. 840, the Veterans' Access to Child Care Act
12. S. 179/H.R. 712, Legislation Calling for Clinical Trials to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Medical Cannabis for Chronic Pain and PTSD
13. S. 980, the Homeless Veterans Prevention Act of 2019
14. H.R. 2201, Include Military Installations in Thailand as exposed to Agent Orange
15. H.R. 444, Reduce Unemployment for Veterans of All Ages Act of 2019
16. S. 2216, Transparency and Effective Accountability Measures for Veteran Caregivers Act
17. H.R. 2200, the Keeping Our Promises Act
18. H.R. 553, Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act
19. Senate Bill Introduced to Protect Active Duty from Medical Malpractice
20. H.R. 1182, Veterans' Access to Acupuncture

Services

21. Support SBP/DIC Offset Repeal (S. 622/H.R. 553)!
22. S. 374/H.R. 1092, the Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2019
23. H.R. 2568, the Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act
24. Urge Congress to Pass the Retired Pay Restoration Act
25. Protect Bankrupt Disabled Veterans from Losing Benefits
26. S. 318, the VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act
27. S. 785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act
28. Blue Water Navy Veterans Need Your Help
29. H.R. 713, Provide Beneficiary Travel Funds to Veterans Seeking Specialized Treatment for Military Sexual Trauma
30. Urgent Action Needed to End "Widow's Tax"
31. S. 154, VA CLEAR Act of 2019
32. H.R. 663/S. 191, Burn Pits Accountability Act
33. S. 1392, the Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act
34. S. 1881 and H.R. 3356, Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act

35. H.R. 1963, Expanding Care for Veterans Act
36. NDAA and Spending Bills
37. H.R. 4137, Healthcare for Open Air Burn Pit Exposure Act
38. H.R. 2982, Women Veterans Health Care Accountability Act
39. H.R. 4451, Support Our Services (SOS) to Veterans Caregivers Act
40. H.R. 3036, Breaking Barriers for Women Veterans Act
41. S. 2950, the Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act of 2019
42. H.R. 2200, Keeping Our Promises Act



**Listen to New TRICARE Beneficiary
Bulletin Podcast #531**

Listen to this latest podcast to hear about:

- Open Season Ends Dec. 9
- Benefit Updates
- Tobacco Cessation Services

Visit the [Multimedia Center](#) for this podcast and previous podcasts.



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Follow us on MEWE! The support staff at MEWE is responsive, open to suggestions and works very hard to protect your personal information.

We hope you will join us on this new site.

VETERANS-FOR-CHANGE

**HOMELESS HEROES PROGRAM OF
VETERANS-FOR-CHANGE**

AMVETS GROUP

VETERANS SOCIAL GROUP

**{USAVET} SUPPORTING GOD & ALL WHO
SERVED OUR GREAT NATION**

AMERICANS FOR SOVEREIGNTY





Links to Other Stories

1. [Alabama's homeless Veterans: 'We're treated like a disease'](#)
2. [Editorial: Veterans are still homeless in Los Angeles. They shouldn't be](#)
3. [Vet Benefits Vary Widely from State to State, CNAS Study Says](#)
4. [GI Bill Housing Allowances May Change Soon](#)
5. [VA insists it's ready for initial EHR deployment at first go-live site in March](#)
6. [Vet's family fights for VA help, says illness linked to Agent Orange](#)

7. Caregivers for Veterans Can Get Phone Support from the VA
8. The list of military sites with suspected 'forever chemicals' contamination has grown
9. A veteran's widow got free medical care for 12 years. Then a Navy hospital demanded \$10,600
10. VA Benefits for Loss of Use of Feet
11. More GI Bill horror stories: Vets say government reneged on promise to pay for kids' college
12. Native American Veteran care at center of hearing
13. Veterans can learn about wealth building, investment fraud
14. Local Veteran hopes to open free art gallery
15. Veteran, 88, saves girl from 'vicious' pit bull by hitting it with Christmas decoration
16. Veterans need VHIC for in-person Commissary, Military Exchange, MWR access
17. Inspector general makes 17 recommendations to improve Manchester VA Medical Center
18. TRICARE computer glitch impeding online open season enrollments
19. Online Health Library Available for Veterans
20. Older Vets need more than just appreciation
21. This class-action lawsuit could help thousands

of Veterans diagnosed with PTSD

22. Loophole allows some colleges to take advantage of Veterans

23. Lieutenant General Loses Star for Mocking Female Airman's Weight, Creating Toxic Work Environment

24. From call centers to advanced prosthetics, R&D aids wounded warriors

25. Award-winning Navy team successfully improves care for women, infants

26. This 100-year-old World War II Veteran is meeting with governors from every state

27. Agent Orange: Our Second Vietnam Battle for Life

28. Veteran suicides are the 'epidemic of our time' former head of the army has warned

29. VA Offers Tips on Coping with PTSD During Holiday Season

30. New federal rules for emotional support animals on planes are coming. Here's why Veterans with service dogs support restrictions — and some disability advocates don't.

31. White House, CDC feuding over study of toxic chemicals in drinking water

32. Veteran, Vet Center outreach specialist gets new home

33. Feds Hire Vets
34. Veterans with Base Access Still Face Delays on New Commissary Benefit
35. Veterans to see virtual hearings at Board of Veterans Appeals in early 2020
36. Heart from dead donor revived, transplanted into Veteran in US first
37. Thousands of Tricare Beneficiaries Lost Coverage During Contractor Changes: GAO

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



Armed Services Committee Leaders Help Military Spouses Storm the Hill

Reps. Adam Smith (Wash.), Mac Thornberry (Texas), Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee respectively, together with Military Personnel Subcommittee Chair Rep. Jackie Speier (Calif.) and Subcommittee Ranking Member Trent Kelly (Miss.) hosted dozens of military spouses as they kick off their Storm the Hill with Kindness effort.

The effort is part of a worldwide Giving Tuesday Military mission to inspire one million acts of kindness. The event was led by 2019 Armed Forces Insurance Coast Guard Spouse of the Year Jessica Manfre, 2018 Armed Forces Insurance Navy Spouse of the Year Brian Alvarado and Gold Star Spouse and 2018 Armed Forces Insurance Army Spouse of the Year Krista Anderson. Military spouses in the National Capitol Region from all branches of service and from hometowns across the country converged on the Hill on this week. The spouses plan to visit legislators and staff in their offices. Armed Services Members hosted the spouses at an informal kickoff event before their office visits.





Widows Tax to be Repealed

FY20 NDAA Conference Report Eliminates Widows Tax

The House and Senate Armed Services Committees (HASC/SASC) released the conference report for the FY20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) late Monday night. In a joint statement announcing the completion of their conference, the committee chairs and ranking members said the report is “the product of months of hard-fought, but always civil and ultimately productive, negotiations.”

After trying to do it for several years, lawmakers have repealed the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

(DIC) offset, colloquially known as the “widows tax”. Under this offset, surviving spouses who qualify for both programs lose SBP payments equal to what they receive from DIC. The NDAA agreement eliminates the offset over three years. When passed into law starting January 1, 2021, the 65,000 families affected by the offset will receive a third of their full SBP payment. The number rises to two-thirds in 2022, and the offset is completely eliminated in 2023. In the final year, families will no longer be able to transfer their SBP benefits to children. That transfer is usually done for tax purposes, and the conference agreement does not address the high taxes that resulted from the 2017 tax reform legislation. This program is one of the ones that necessitated the additional mandatory spending included in the final conference agreement, rather than finding an offset in other discretionary spending.

The House is expected to vote on the conference agreement on Wednesday after which it will move to the Senate for a vote next week. VVA thanks the members of the House/Senate Armed Services Committee for their commitment to surviving spouses of our defenders of freedom.

Source:

<https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/CRPT-116hrpt333-summary.pdf>



DHA Monitoring Payment Processing Error in TRICARE East Region

The Defense Health Agency (DHA) and Humana Military are working closely together to quickly assist approximately 75,000 TRICARE beneficiaries who are affected by a payment processing error that occurred December 5. Health care coverage remains uninterrupted for those affected.

"While this is an unfortunate error, I am confident this will be resolved quickly," said Army Lt. Gen. Ron Place, director of the Defense Health Agency. "I am personally in touch with the president of Humana Military, and his team has taken immediate steps to correct this error."

Humana Military is the TRICARE regional contractor that supports the TRICARE East

Region. Under the new regional contracts, the East Region is a merger of the North and South Regions and includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa (Rock Island area), Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri (St. Louis area), New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (excluding El Paso area), Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. According to Humana Military, the processing error generated inaccurate charges that were as much as 100 times larger than the accurate bill. The cause of the processing error is still under investigation. Humana Military is working with banks to reverse these charges and will cover any overdraft or other related fees.

Beneficiaries with questions should contact Humana Military at 1-800-444-5445. Humana Military is extending their customer service hours throughout the weekend between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. ET to assist TRICARE beneficiaries who received erroneous charges.



**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



**S.1790 NDAA FY2020 budget passes
full House**

Eliminating Widows Tax closer to becoming law

By a vote of 377-48, the full House last night passed the bipartisan S.1790 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 authorizing budget, which included the provision to remove the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)/ Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset, also known as the 'widows tax'

The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration, where wide bipartisan approval is also likely. The president urged passage and said he'd sign the bill if it reaches his desk.



VA Offers Tips on Coping with PTSD During Holiday Season

The holidays are a time for coming together with family and friends, but they can also bring on added stress for veterans dealing with PTSD, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. There can often be that person at holiday gatherings who just has to ask awkward questions of the veteran with post-traumatic stress, the VA said in a list of tips on its Vantage Point blog. Read more [here](#).



Electronic Health Record Implementation Moves Forward

The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization held an oversight hearing on the progress the VA is making implementing Electronic Health Records (EHR).

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) is scheduled to "go-live" March 28, 2020 in Washington State. This will be the first phase of the 10-year HER implementation timeline. Subcommittee Chair Rep. Susie Lee (Nev.) expressed concern that the system is not fully tested and not enough staff training has been conducted. She asked the VA for an honest assessment. Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Jim Banks (Ind.) encouraged the VA to take a few more weeks if needed.

The Deputy Secretary of VA, James Byrne and his team testified that everything will be ready to go-live March 28th. Deputy Secretary Byrne mentioned five milestones that are vital to the success of the implementation of the EHR throughout the next 10 years.

1. Twenty Task Orders (TO) that allows the VA the flexibility to moderate work and modify implementation and deployment plans efficiently
2. Organizational structure and strategic alignment with DoD
3. Implementation planning and strategy
4. Change management and workflow councils -

the VA has established 18 EHR Councils to support the development of national standardized clinical and business workflows for the VA's new EHR solution.

5. Infrastructure in place for both structural facilities and electronic capabilities

Deputy Secretary Byrne is "very confident" that the VA is on schedule to have the implementation done on time. He has confidence in the team as well as having proper oversight and a matrix in place. If a later implementation date is requested, that decision will be made by VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and Deputy Secretary Byrne.



**Last Day to Make 2020 TRICARE,
FEDVIP Enrollment Choices**

Did you know today is the last day of open season? If you want to enroll in or change your TRICARE health plan or Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) plan for 2020 coverage, act now. Both TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season end at 11:59 p.m. ET Monday, Dec. 9. For any changes you make, your new coverage will start on Jan. 1, 2020.

Remember, if you want to stay in your current TRICARE health plan or FEDVIP dental or vision plan, you don't have to take any action. You'll remain in your current plan through 2020 or as long as you're eligible.

To learn more, [read the full article](#).



Thousands of Tricare Beneficiaries Lost Coverage During Contractor Changes: GAO

At least 15,000 Tricare beneficiaries lost their health care insurance after delays and fights over data caused problems for Tricare's incoming contractors last year, according to a recent Government Accountability Office report. In total, about 224,000 beneficiaries were put at risk of losing their insurance, the report said, because beneficiaries' credit cards or other payments could not be shared with the incoming contractors. Read more [here](#).



Senate Committee Reviews Veterans Scams

Assistant Director of Veteran Programs Brian Condon attended a hearing of the Senate Special Committee on Aging entitled Veteran Scams: Protecting Those Who Protected Us. Committee Chairw Sen. Susan Collins acknowledged that some veterans are too embarrassed to report that they fell for a scam, suggesting that the reported number of scams is deflated. She emphasized the need to protect veterans before they become victims.

U.S. Postal Inspection Service senior law enforcement official Carroll Harris said veterans are twice as likely to unknowingly participate in a scam as the general population. According to a 2017 American Association of Retired People (AARP) survey, 16 percent of veterans have lost money to fraudsters, while 78 percent have been targeted by scams specifically crafted to exploit their service history. Arizona Sen. Martha McSally (Ariz.) said, "As a veteran, I get one of these every week," as she waved a printout of a scam email. She added that "There is a special place in hell for these people." Indiana Senator Mike Braun said, "The federal government, banks and phone companies can do more to monitor these types of scams." Chair Collins agreed that focusing on preventing scams instead of providing remedies is a realistic option. Sen. Jacky Rosen (Nev.) encouraged veterans, who believe they have become the victim of a scam, to seek state resources.

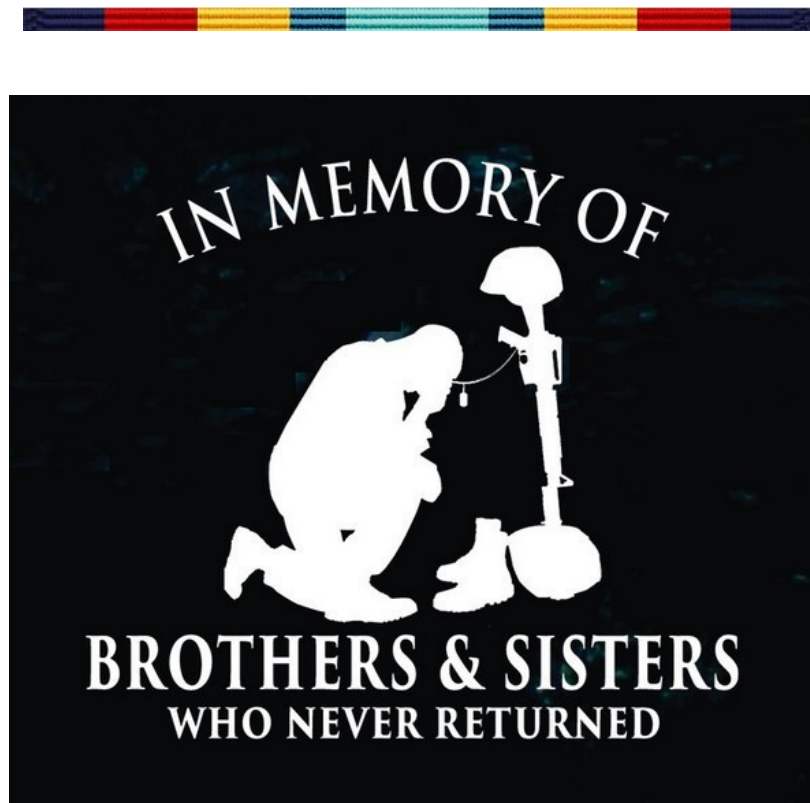
Air Force veteran Ben Wells suggested enhancing awareness and education. He testified that while he was volunteering with Vet2Vet, he identified and prevented an elderly veteran from becoming a

victim. Older veterans have a tendency to want to help and when they see a need they react instead of asking questions. The best way to avoid becoming a victim of a scam is to be mindful of unknown solicitors. Do not give out personal information over the phone and most importantly do your homework on the organization that is asking for money before you give.



Use These Military Travel Companies? You Could Be Getting a Cash Settlement

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) recently announced legal settlements with Easy Military Travel and USA Service Finance LLC, as well as their principal owner, Brandon Edmiston. These companies provided financing for airline tickets to military members and their families. The consent orders issued late last month against Easy Military Travel, USA Service Finance LLC and Edmiston require them to provide restitution to service members and their families who paid the hidden finance charges, and prohibits them from conducting some future military-targeted business. Read more [here](#).





DHA Wants Beneficiaries to Be Aware of Diabetes Symptoms

The Defense Health Agency (DHA) wants beneficiaries to learn how to reduce the risks of diabetes. Diabetes is a condition where your body does not properly process food for use as energy. Your body turns most of the food you eat into glucose, or sugar, to use for energy. The pancreas, an organ near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into our cells. When a person has diabetes, the body cannot make enough insulin, or does not effectively use the insulin it does make. This causes sugar to build up in your blood.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), diabetes can cause serious health complications including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and lower-extremity amputations. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. The CDC estimates that approximately 29 million people are living with diabetes in the United States. As a result of better treatments, people with diabetes

are now living longer and enjoying a better quality of life. Research studies have found that moderate weight loss and exercise can actually prevent or delay type 2 diabetes in adults who are considered to be at high-risk for developing diabetes. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimates that by 2040, more than 640 million people may be living with diabetes.

People who think they might have diabetes must visit a physician for diagnosis. Some common symptoms of diabetes include:

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst
- Unexplained weight loss
- Extreme hunger
- Sudden vision changes
- Tingling or numbness in hands or feet

Unfortunately, some people may have no symptoms at all. For a complete list of symptoms and information on the types of diabetes, visit the CDC's [Basics About Diabetes web page](#).

TRICARE covers diabetic supplies through the

pharmacy and medical benefits. Your doctor can do screenings, answer your questions, explain what a diagnosis means and provide details about the best treatment. Visit the [TRICARE website](#) to learn more about coverage.



Design Approved for Gulf War Memorial on National Mall

The effort to build a National Desert Storm Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., passed a significant milestone recently with formal approval of a design concept granted by the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts. Now, the plan is to have the memorial dedicated by Veterans Day 2021, which would mark the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Gulf War, said Scott Stump, CEO and president of the National Desert Storm War Memorial Association. The design was unveiled this month. Read more [here](#).





Can You Carry a Gun on a Military Base?

In the wake of mass shootings, including multiple active-shooter incidents on military installations, some might be wondering whether they can openly carry a gun or have a concealed weapon on base. The answer is probably not, according to typical military base rules. But that might not be true for all current and former troops, depending on the base. Read more [here](#).



'We Were All Sick:' Military Families Take Housing Horror Stories to Capitol Hill

Some brought their kids, who they said had been sickened by mold and pest infestations in their military housing -- something they say has been ignored or begrudgingly addressed with sloppy maintenance by indifferent property managers. Others brought nondisclosure agreements private housing companies wanted them to sign before they would listen to complaints. They came from Fort Benning, Georgia; Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma; the Army's Presidio of Monterey, California; Dover Air Force Base, Delaware; Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia; and other installations to a Senate hearing room last week on the off chance of telling their stories to top leadership. The occasion was a rare gathering of all the service chiefs and secretaries to testify at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the crisis in the construction and maintenance of privatized housing on military installations nationwide. Read more [here](#).





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Here's How to See the New WWI Epic '1917' for Free

The new movie "1917" recreates the experience of troops on the ground during World War I through the story of two young soldiers sent on a dangerous mission to the front lines. The movie won't get a nationwide release until Jan. 10, 2020, but Universal Pictures is inviting readers to free advance screenings at 15 military bases, as well as local theaters in more than 40 markets, before the official release. Read more [here](#).





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could save a life.

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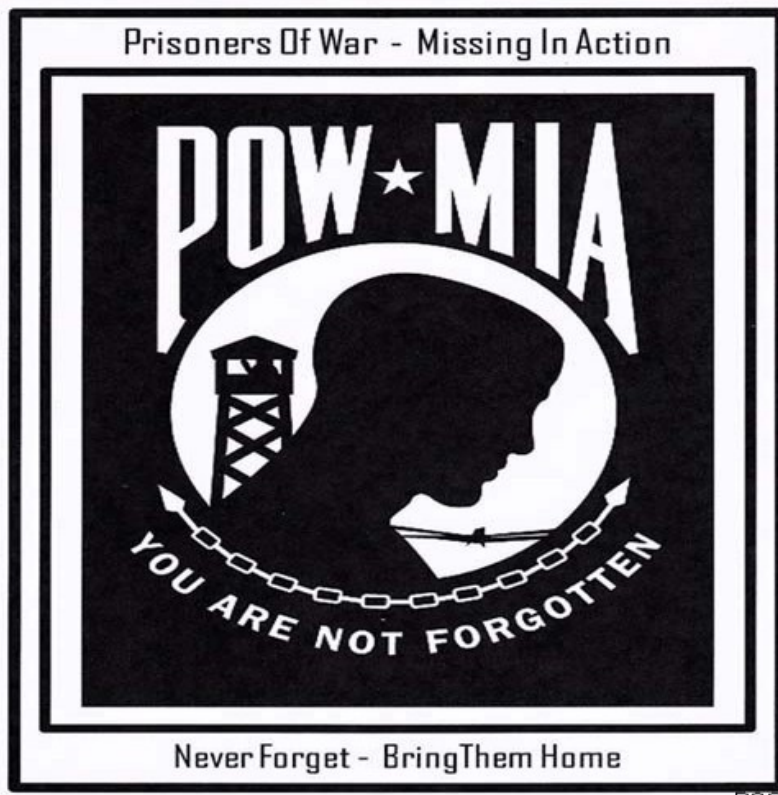
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Lawmakers expressed concern Dec. 5 after hearing how many military medical billets are slated for elimination next year as management of the services' hospitals and clinics transitions to the Defense Health Agency. Members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel received an update on the Military Health System transition in a lively hearing. The hearing focused mostly on access to mental health care for troops and their families. Surgeons general for each of the services told Congress that they are no longer filling vacant positions, pending a billet review by the DHA. They broke down how many billets their own reviews last year determined were "excess." That included about 4,000 for the Air Force; 6,935 for the Army; and 5,386 for the Navy. Read more [here](#).





Veterans with Base Access Still Face Delays on New Commissary Benefit

Having prior access to a base won't be enough to allow newly eligible veterans to shop at its commissary and exchange Jan. 1, Military.com has learned. Beginning Jan. 1, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and veterans with any service-connected disability will be eligible to shop at on-base facilities -- if they hold a Veterans Health Identification Card. But access will be delayed for those who do not have a VHIC as military officials negotiate access to secure military facilities for what may potentially be millions of new shoppers. Read more [here](#).



Office of Inspector General

1. [Defense Health Care: Opportunities to Improve Future TRICARE Managed Care Support Contract Transitions](#)
2. [Federal Research: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Public Access to Research Results](#)
3. [Generic Drug Development: Stakeholders' Views of Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies Differ](#)
4. [Medicaid Providers: CMS Oversight Should Ensure State Implementation of Screening and](#)

Enrollment Requirements

5. Medicare Hospice Care: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen CMS Oversight of Hospice Providers
6. Nursing Homes: Better Oversight Needed to Protect Residents from Abuse
7. Tobacco User Fees: Further Action Needed to Ensure Calculations Are Based on Complete and Accurate Data
8. Tribal Programs: Resource Constraints and Management Weaknesses Can Limit Federal Program Delivery to Tribes
9. Information Security: VA and Other Federal Agencies Need to Address Significant Challenges
10. Drug Safety: Preliminary Findings Indicate Persistent Challenges with FDA Foreign Inspections
11. VA Health Care: Opportunities Exist for VA to Better Identify and Address Racial and Ethnic Disparities



**Thousands of Tricare Patients Billed
100 Times More Than Premium in
Glitch**

A massive billing glitch Dec. 5 in Tricare's East region, managed by Humana, slammed about 25,000 beneficiaries with premium charges 100 times more than they owe monthly for their coverage. The problem impacts all users in the East region who automatically pay monthly enrollment fees by credit or debit card, including military retirees on Tricare Prime and those enrolled in Tricare Reserve Select, Tricare Retired Reserve and Tricare Young Adult. It does not impact retirees and others who pay premiums through paycheck allotment. Read more [here](#).



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TRICARE Expands Breast Cancer Screening Options to Include 3-D Mammography

TRICARE is committed to improving preventive health care services for women. On Jan. 1, 2020, TRICARE expands coverage for breast cancer screenings to include digital breast tomosynthesis, or 3-D mammography. TRICARE will cover 3-D mammography as a preventive health care service through the provisional coverage program.

Previously, TRICARE only covered 3-D mammograms for diagnostic purposes. This means a physician could order them for at-risk patients or for further diagnosis.

To learn more, [read the full article](#).



TRICARE Overseas Program Health Matters Newsletter Issue 4

Want to learn more about your overseas TRICARE benefit? Here's what you can look forward to in the latest issue of the TRICARE Overseas Program (TOP) Health Matters Newsletter:

- TRICARE Open Season Closes Dec. 9
- Federal Benefits Open Season Closes Dec. 9
- TOP Prime vs. TOP Select: What's the Difference?
- Getting TRICARE for Your Child Overseas
- Differences Between TRICARE Overseas and Stateside
- TRICARE Benefits Year in Review

Download the latest overseas newsletter [here](#).



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How to Make Enrollment Changes Outside of TRICARE Open Season

In case you missed it, the annual TRICARE Open Season and the Federal Benefits Open Season ended on Dec. 9. The next open season will take place in the fall of 2020. If you didn't enroll or make a change to your TRICARE health plan during open season, you must wait until the next open season unless you have a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event (QLE).

Outside of TRICARE Open Season, you can only enroll in or make changes to your TRICARE Prime (including US Family Health Plan) or TRICARE Select plan if you experience a TRICARE QLE.

To learn more, [read the full article](#).





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