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LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

Both the House and Senate returned to the Nation's Capital after the Memorial Day/district work period recess. Both chambers continued consideration of fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations measures. In addition, the House began debate on a plethora of amendment to **H.R. 4909**, the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Senate also commenced consideration of **S. 2943**, the upper chamber's version of the NDAA measure, which has over 300 amendments.

OTHER UPDATES

DOD Begins Training on Blended Retirement System

The new retirement system for the Department of Defense (DOD) will affect 2.2 million servicemembers currently serving in all components. DOD announced a four-phase training program for the Blended Retirement System, or BRS, to educate all affected servicemembers.

The BRS learning strategy includes four separate modules:

- Leader training, starting now;
- Training for installation and command financial counselors in the fall;
- Opt-in training for current servicemembers begins in January 2017; and
- Servicemembers who join after January 2018 will receive BRS training during their first months of service.

Everyone serving as of December 31, 2017 will be 'grandfathered' under the current retirement system. Servicemembers who have served fewer than 12 years on active duty or accrued fewer than 4,320 retirement points in the reserve components will have the option of remaining covered under their current retirement system or enrolling in BRS. Those with greater than 12 years on active duty or more than 4,320 retirement points in the

reserve components will stay under their current system. The decision on whether to opt in belongs to the individual.

Servicemembers who join on or after January 1, 2018, will automatically be enrolled in BRS. Servicemembers eligible to opt into BRS will have until December 31, 2018, to decide if they want to switch to the new plan.

The “blending” in BRS comes from the combination of the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and an annuity provision for those who retire after 20 or more years. BRS will use the annuity formula of the average of the servicemember’s highest 36 months of basic pay times 2.0 percent of his or her years of service.

TSP is currently offered to servicemembers without government contributions, but under BRS several changes take place. After their first 60 days in service, all members will be enrolled in TSP and receive an automatic government contribution of 1 percent of basic pay into their account each month. Additionally, the servicemember will be automatically enrolled with a 3 percent contribution from their own pay. After two years of service, the government will match the member’s contributions up to an additional 4 percent. BRS includes a mid-career continuation pay at about 12 years of service, as an incentive to continue serving toward the traditional 20 years to qualify for monthly military retired pay.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

On June 6, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Military Legislative Assistant for Rep. Ralph Abraham (LA). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that he join the bill as a co-

sponsor.

On June 6, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Chief of Staff for Rep. Will Hurd (TX). The Chief of Staff simply wanted to speak about how his office and The American Legion can work together moving forward.

On June 6, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Legislative Assistant for Rep. O'Rourke (TX). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that he join the bill as a co-sponsor.

On June 7, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Legislative Assistant for House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (CA). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that he join the bill as a co-sponsor.

On June 7, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Military Legislative Assistant for Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (AZ). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that she join the bill as a co-sponsor.

On June 7, Deputy Director Dean Stoline, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein and Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Legislative Director for Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA). The meeting focused on **H.R. 303**, and how The American Legion and her office can work together to pass this common sense legislation. Rep. McMorris Rodgers is the Chairwoman of the entire Republican Conference, and certainly has sway and influence over what the Republican led House does.

On June 8, Deputy Director Dean Stoline and Assistant Director Warren Goldstein conducted a meeting with Tyler

Brace, Legislative Assistant for Sen. Rob Portman (OH). The meeting served as a discussion to request the senator to co-sponsor **S. 271**, the *Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2015*.

On June 8, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman attended the Samsung/American Legion Breakfast.

On June 8, Deputy Director Dean Stoline and Assistant Director Warren Goldstein conducted a meeting with Sierra Forbes Robinson, Legislative Assistant for Sen. Mike Crapo (ID). The meeting served as a discussion to request the senator to co-sponsor **S. 271**, the *Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2015* as well as discussing other issues affecting our nation's veterans .

On June 8, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a coffee meeting with the Legislative Counsel for Sen. Rand Paul (KY). The meeting served as a Meet & Greet, which also led us to a meeting with the Veterans Affairs Staffer.

On June 8, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Military Legislative Assistant for Rep. Tim Walz (MN). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that he join the bill as a co-sponsor.

On June 9, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Military Legislative Assistant for Rep. Darrell Issa (CA). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that he join the bill as a co-sponsor.

On June 9, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman and Assistant Director Warren Goldstein conducted a meeting with the Legislative Assistant for Rep. Mark Walker (NC).

The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*, **H.R. 303**, and draft legislation they are proposing. We requested that he join the bills as a co-sponsor.

On June 9, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Senior Legislative Assistant for Rep. Mike Bost (IL). The meeting focused on **H.R. 5190**, the *SOLVE Act*. We requested that he join the bill as a co-sponsor.

Letters of Support

The American Legion on June 7 sent a letter of support to Sen. Richard Durbin (IL), giving our organization's support for an amendment to **S. 2943**, the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The amendment would allow continued and sustained funding of the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) studying Gulf War Illness. Since the initial deployment for the 1990-91 Gulf War, servicemembers and veterans have continued to suffer from a broad spectrum of persistent symptoms, including chronic headaches, cognitive difficulties, respiratory problems, gastrointestinal disorders, and other conditions. Research conducted through the CDMRP is critical to discovering the causes of these conditions and finding effective treatments.

Update on Flag Amendment Bill

On January 7, 2015, **House Joint Resolution (H.J. Res.) 9** was introduced by Rep. Steve Womack (AR). This legislation is a proposed constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration. Its text states simply: *"The Congress shall have power to*

prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.” In addition to Rep. Womack and the five original co-sponsors of the House joint resolution there are now a total of **40** cosponsors, with the addition of Rep. Daniel Webster (FL) on June 7.

On July 30, 2015, Sen. David Vitter (LA) introduced **Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res.) 21**. The Senate measure has **8** cosponsors.

Additional cosponsors continue to be sought for both measures. [A listing of all cosponsors for both flag amendment bills is attached to the end of this report.]

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For Week Ending 06-10-2016

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 9

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 21

Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR-3) [Sponsor] Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) [Sponsor]

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE-1) Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT)

Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-ND-At Large) Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH-6) Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL)

Rep. David Roe (R-TN-1) Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA)

Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN-7) Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)

Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC-3) Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV)

Rep. Steve Palazzo (R-MS-4) Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE)

Rep. Scot DesJarlais (R-TN-4) Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH-5)

Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT-1)

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL-1)

Rep. Michael Simpson (R-ID-2)

Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-OH-12)

Rep. Ralph Abraham (R-LA-5)
Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-KS-1)
Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ-2)
Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL-3)
Rep. Brad Ashford (D-NE-2)
Rep. Mark Amodei (R-NV-2)
Rep. John Kline (R-MN-2)
Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO-8)
Rep. David Young (R-IA-3)
Rep. Adrian Smith (R-NE-3)
Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC-2)
Rep. Steve King (R-IA-4)
Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA-3)
Rep. Brian Babin (R-TX-36)
Rep. Pete Olson (R-TX-22)
Rep. John Duncan (R-TN-2)
Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ-11)
Rep. John Fleming (R-LA-4)
Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC-7)
Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK-4)
Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO-4)
Rep. Bill Flores (R-TX-17)
Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR-2)
Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX-32)
Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA-4)
Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ-4)
Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL-10)

Most recent addition to list of cosponsors in the House.

Week Ending 6-10-2016
National Security

1. ISIS Suicide Car bombing Attack in Karbala, Iraq

Three different car bombings in Baghdad Wednesday killed at least 93 people and wounded upwards of 165 in one of the deadliest days in Iraq this year, according to media reports. One blast hit the northern area of Kadhimiya and the other went off in Jamia, in the west. The bombings came hours after at least 64 people were killed and dozens injured in the largest attack of the day — a car bombing in a market in a mainly Shiite neighborhood of Baghdad on Wednesday. In a propaganda statement, the so-called Islamic State said it had targeted members of the Popular Mobilisation Committees - mainly Shia militias fighting Isis alongside Iraqi government forces.

2. Two Palestinian Gunmen Kill Four and Wound Several in Israel

At least four people were killed and several seriously wounded in a mass shooting at a trendy Tel Aviv food market Wednesday night. The attacks occurred near Israel's version of the Pentagon. Police said two assailants were in custody. One of the gunmen was wounded. Israeli authorities described the shooting as a terror attack. The attackers' identities were not released. Police said the two gunmen were members of the same family from the Palestinian village of Yatta, near the city of Hebron in the West Bank.

As events were unfolding in Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu landed in Israel after a three-day trip to Russia. He immediately called a meeting of his emergency security cabinet in the Defense Ministry. Hamas, the Islamic militant group that rules the Gaza Strip, welcomed the attack but did not claim responsibility for it, the Associated Press reported. Hamas official Mushir al-Masri called the shootings a "heroic operation," and the group later issued an official statement promising the "Zionists" more "surprises" during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

3. Arizona Tenderfoot Fire: FEMA Relief Declared

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency authorized the use of federal funds to assist the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management combat the Tenderfoot Fire burning in Yavapai County.

On June 8, the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management submitted a request for a Fire Management Assistance Grant declaration for the Tenderfoot Fire, which started on the same date. At the time of the request, the fire was threatening 300 homes in and around the community of Yarnell, population 700. Mandatory evacuations were issued for approximately 150 people, with the potential for an additional 550 evacuations. The fire has burned in excess of 300 total acres of State and private land. The Arizona Department of Forestry's request was approved at 7:59 p.m. June 8. Fire Management Assistance Grant provides federal funding for up to 75 percent of eligible firefighting costs. Eligible costs can include expenses for field camps; equipment use, repair and replacement; tools; materials; supplies and mobilization; and demobilization activities.

4. Force of the Future Initiative

On Thursday, June 9, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced the latest two developments in the Force of the Future initiative. The first development is focused on making improvements to the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) system. The other initiative is focused on developing the 700,000 strong DoD civilian workforce in tandem, reflecting commitment to "one team-one fight."

Changes to the DOPMA include asking Congress for authority to enable experts in critical skills to join the military at a mid-career level, such as currently authorized for medical officers. Under Secretary Carter's proposal, officers would be able to voluntarily be excluded from promotion consideration, in order to undertake activities to deepen their expertise, without impact to career.

Secretary Carter is also asking Congress for authority to enable DoD to directly hire top qualified college students and recent graduates, establish a DoD and private sector employee exchange program, increase the cap on payments under the Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay (VSIP) program, and to provide six weeks of paid parental leave for DoD civilian employees in connection with the birth or adoption of a child.

Secretary Carter approved modernization of the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command (MEPCOM), expansion of Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) micro-targeting to create a recruiting database, and increasing the use of DoD's Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) Defense Scholarships to attract individuals to mission critical science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations. Secretary Carter also approved allowing DoD civilian employees to work part-time for the first year after the birth or adoption of a child, or subsequent to beginning service as a foster parent, "phasing in" the employees return to full time employment.

5. DPAA Conference

On Thursday, June 9, 2016, Larry Provost, Assistant Director for National Security, participated in a conference call with Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) Director Michael Linnington. The conference call discussed DoD's past conflict personnel accounting mission and the continued progress of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

6. NDAA-Changes To Military Commissaries

On Tuesday, June 7, 2016, Deputy Director for National Security Freddy Gessner participated in a conference call with a senior defense official to discuss proposed modifications to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) regarding changes to military commissaries. The proposal is in response against legislation that would begin privatization of five commissaries. The defense official emphasized that DoD is making every effort to find cost savings in the commissaries program without affecting savings to customers. There will be no changes to pricing based on rank or geographic location. Privatization is an option that DoD has previously reviewed and found would not be a suitable option to meet their mission of preventing cost increases to their customers. More discussions are planned with the next being this summer.

7. United States of Women Summit

On Tuesday, June 7, 2016, Director of National Security Rhonda Powell participated in a conversation, convened by the White House, focused on the upcoming United State of Women Summit to be held on June 14. Tina Tchen, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady, and Jordan Brooks, Deputy Executive Director of the Council on Women and Girls briefed participants on the United State of Women Summit. Public service announcements featuring First Lady Michelle Obama, Meryl Streep, Oprah Winfrey, Jessica Williams and several other incredible women have been launched to highlight the importance of this high profile summit

8. Army Reserve Lieutenant Wins Miss USA—Will Use Title As Platform for Vets

Deshauna Barber, a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve and native of the District of Columbia, was named Miss USA 2016 on June 5, 2016. Ms. Barber, is a full time IT analyst with the U.S. Department of Commerce in addition to her duties in the Army Reserve.

When asked by judge Joe Zee whether the Pentagon's decision to open up all combat roles to women had "put political correctness over our military's ability to perform," 1st Lt. Barber responded, "As a woman in the United States Army, I think it was an amazing job by our government to allow women to integrate into every branch of the military.

9. POW/MIA Update

Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Alfred F. Wells, 32, of Syracuse, New York, will be buried June 11 in his hometown. On Dec. 7, 1941, Wells was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in 429 casualties, including Wells. From December 1941 to June 1944, Navy personnel recovered the remains of the deceased crew, which were subsequently interred in the Halawa and Nu'uauu Cemeteries.

In September 1947, tasked with recovering and identifying fallen U.S. personnel in the Pacific Theater, members of the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) disinterred the remains of U.S. casualties from the two cemeteries and transferred them to the Central Identification Laboratory at Schofield Barracks. The laboratory staff was only able to confirm the identifications of 35 men from the USS Oklahoma at that time. The AGRS subsequently buried the unidentified remains in 46 plots at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP), known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu. In October 1949, a military board classified those who could not be identified as "non-recoverable," including Wells.

In April 2015, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a policy memorandum directing the disinterment of unknowns associated with the USS Oklahoma. On June 15, 2015, DPAA personnel began exhuming the remains from the NMCP for analysis.

To identify Wells' remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched a cousin; as well as circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons, which matched Wells' records.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died during the war.

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Health Policy Unit

Executive Gov: [GAO: VA Worked to Manage Coasts, Obligations to Prevent Funding Gaps.](#) The Government Accountability Office has said the Department of Veteran Affairs launched efforts to manage estimated costs and obligations to prevent future funding gaps following VA's projected \$2.75 billion budget shortfall in fiscal year 2015. GAO said Friday obligations for hepatitis C drugs and VA's care in the community programs accounted for \$408 million and \$2.34 billion of the funding gap, respectively.

The Wall Street Journal: [The Chance of Real Reform at the VA is Low, VA employment has grown from 235,000 to 363,000 with an increase in the Washington DC](#)

Headquarters of 32%. Regarding former Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi's "Money Can't Cure What Ails Veterans Affairs" (op-ed, May 27): Why is the guy who helped run the boat onto the rocks qualified to fix the problem? The biggest indicator of what is wrong is that VA employment has grown from 235,000 to 365,000, with an increase in the Washington, D.C., headquarters of 32%. Did it hire 130,000 doctors and nurses?

Government Executive: VA Is A Safety Net For Many Vets, Study Finds. Veterans are an older and more diverse group than they were 15 years ago, and they are also much more dependent on the health care and other benefits provided by the Veterans Affairs Department, according to a new study. The VA "continues to be a health care safety net for many veterans," concluded a study published in the June 2016 issue of Health Affairs Journal, based on two surveys of vets conducted in 2001 and in 2010.

Government Executive: Bill Would Turn Veterans Health Administration Into Nonprofit Corporation. The Caring for our Heroes in the 21st Century Act, introduced by Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., the chairwoman of the House Republican Conference, would create the Veterans Accountable Care Organization to manage the VA's brick and mortar health care facilities. It also would launch the Veterans Health Insurance Program to manage VHA's insurance programs, creating two separate entities to handle VA's payer and provider functions.

Stars and Stripes: House proposal would give VA hospitals to nonprofit corporation. The nation's veterans hospitals would be transferred from the Department of Veterans Affairs to a charitable nonprofit corporation under a plan floated Tuesday by a House lawmaker. The proposal unveiled by Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., who is the House GOP conference chairwoman, terminates the Veterans Health Administration's role in hospital care, medical services and other health care and creates a Washington, D.C.-based corporation and board of directors to take its place.

Military Times: [Commission to propose Tricare-like system for VA.](#) The goal, according to Commission on Care members, would be a more efficient version of the VA's current system, in which the department provides direct care to most veterans, and those who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility or who cannot get an appointment in a month offered private care. Under the draft of the commission's final report, all veterans enrolled in VA care would choose a primary care provider at the VA or from a civilian network.

NPR (Audio): [Doctors Must Overcome New Red Tape in Struggle To Treat Veterans.](#) The Veterans Choice program hasn't cut wait times for vets seeking medical care because the program has added one more layer of bureaucracy. That complicates life for doctors trying to provide care to vets and for vets looking to see a doctor. This story is part of a collaboration among NPR and member stations looking at Veterans Choice.

Cincinnati Enquirer: [House panel looks at VA-affiliate problems.](#) A House subcommittee heard testimony Tuesday about the complicated relationship of the VA nationwide and its affiliated medical schools and hospitals, when affiliates dictate contract terms to the VA, take possession of VA property and steer money away from VA research nonprofits. The testimony left subcommittee chairman Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., worried that despite insistence from Veterans Affairs officials that they are addressing problems...

The Detroit News: [Senate Oks removal of PTSD-related military discharges.](#) The Senate approved Tuesday an amendment to make it possible to remove certain "less than honorable" military discharges for behaviors that are now associated with mental problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder from the records of veterans of wars that have been fought after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists attacks.

Forbes: [New National Poll: Americans Say Yes To Veterans And Medical Marijuana.](#) American voters overwhelmingly believe veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder should be allowed to get a prescription for marijuana in pill form according to a new poll released by Quinquennial University

National on Monday. 87% of Americans say yes and in military households, where at least one person is either active duty or a veteran, 82 % said yes. There was over 80% support in every group that was asked the question.

Washington Examiner: [Poll: Vets with PTSD should be prescribed marijuana pills.](#) Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder should have access to prescribed marijuana pills, 87 percent of registered American voters responded in a poll released Monday. The Quinnipiac University National poll said that among every party, gender, age or racial group, at least 79 percent of voters expressed support for marijuana to treat PTSD.

LifeZette (PoliZette): [Out-Of-Control VA: Sex Changes Over Service Dogs, Embattled Obama VA wants to cover sex realignment but won't cover trained service dogs for PTSD.](#)

Transgender people cannot openly serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, but Department of Veterans Affairs has proposed paying for former military personnel to get sex-reassignment surgery. At the same time, the VA will not pay for specially trained service dogs to aid veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. “It underscores a confusion of priorities when we have 22 veterans per day committing suicide, and the number, tragically, is probably higher than that”...

Associated Press [Long Ordeal for Seattle Worker Who Exposed Veteran's Fraud.](#) A federal employee in Seattle helped expose a fraud in which an Army veteran lied his way to a Purple Heart and hundreds of thousands of dollars in government benefits. Her reward? The agency Cristina Jackson works for repeatedly tried to punish her for what it said were violations of the man's privacy, according to an AP review of hundreds of pages of personnel and investigative records.

Orlando Sentinel: [Orlando VA construction problems raise questions.](#) The Orlando VA Medical Center in Lake Nona is up and running, but the construction woes of its past still haunt the gleaming facility. In a letter dated June 1, U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller, a Florida Republican and chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, asked the VA whether it conducted an

investigation to find out who should be held accountable for the construction problems and delays at the facility.

WLSL (NBC-10): [VA teams up with Team Rubicon to educate Veterans in a new, tech savvy way.](#) The VA and Team Rubicon are hosting an online chat on Wednesday to educate participants about the educational options available to veterans and their family members. Representatives and others from the veteran community will be online to answer questions about the post 9/11 GI Bill and the Montgomery GI Bill. They will also cover available online resources, like the GI Bill comparison tool.

Stars and Stripes [Veterans provide flooding relief in the wake of Fort Hood deaths.](#) Barrett Frantzen stood on the bank of the Medina River and looked up at the gutted RV's axles pointing toward the sky. "This makes you appreciate what flood water can do," said the 34-year-old chainsaw-toting Army veteran working with Team Rubicon, a veterans disaster relief organization.

Marine Corps Times [Marine vet loses job after lowering American flag on Memorial Day.](#) [A Marine veteran's attempt to remember his fallen comrades has reportedly cost him his job.](#)

Task & Purpose: [Obama Warns Against Privatizing the VA.](#) During a visit to the Air Force Academy in Colorado, the president flatly stated he opposed privatizing the VA. As efforts to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs continue, there's an ongoing debate about the best way to fix a system mired in bureaucracy and haunted by past scandal. While some argue in favor of VA privatization, either in part or in full, others and most recently, the president, are in favor of continued VA reform.

NPR (Audio): [For Doctors and Patients, 'Veterans Choice' Often Means Long Waits.](#) When clinical psychiatrist Cher Morrow-Bradley and other health care providers call the Veterans Choice program, they are greeted with a recorded, 90-second "thank you" from Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald. It's not having the intended effect. "Why don't you make this easier? The process is so cumbersome, and I have to

listen to you thanking me for spending all this time...

USA Today: [VA nurses aren't equipped to act like doctors – Column, Veterans who understand the training gap would be appalled to be thrust into the sole care of a nurse.](#) Fueled by pressure to cut costs and improve veteran access to medical care, the Veterans Administration plans to allow certain types of registered nurses to practice medicine without physician oversight. This move implicitly assumes that doctors and nurses are interchangeable, that their medical training and ability are equivalent. But those assumptions are wrong. Simply empowering nurses to play the role of doctors effectively admits that second-class care is acceptable for our nation's veterans.

The Denver Post: [Poll reveals vast support for medical marijuana for Veterans, Prescriptions should be available to treat PTSD, poll indicates.](#) Veterans Health Administration doctors should be allowed to prescribe marijuana pills to veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, according to 87 percent of registered American voters who participated in a recent Quinnipiac University National poll. The poll, released Monday, asked 1,561 registered voters nationwide whether they support the use of marijuana for veterans, as well as broader questions...

POLITICO: [National poll: Majority supports legalizing marijuana.](#) A majority of American registered voters nationwide support the legalization of marijuana, according to the results of the latest Quinnipiac University poll out Monday. On the question of whether Veterans should be allowed to use medically prescribed marijuana, 87 percent — said Department of Veterans Affairs doctors should be able to prescribe medical marijuana in pill form in states where it is legal to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, while 9 percent said they should not be able to do so.

The Hill: [Poll: Majority of voters support marijuana legalization.](#) A majority of voters surveyed in a new national poll say marijuana should be legalized. Fifty-four percent of voters surveyed in the Quinnipiac University poll released Monday said marijuana should be made legal in the U.S., while

41 percent said it should not. Men largely support legalizing marijuana, 60 percent to 37 percent, while women are divided on the issue, 48 percent to 46 percent.

Task & Purpose [How PTSD Cost Many Vets Their Military Benefits.](#) In Episode 20, Task & Purpose Radio discusses less than honorable discharges that result from mental health issues.

WLFI (CBS-18, Video): [Female Veterans transition from military to home.](#) More women are going into combat than ever before, but resources available when they return home are slim. Local government is looking to add more resources to help ease the transition from military to home. News 18 met with one female veteran who said resources have evolved but are far from picture perfect. For Martina Sternberg, serving in the military was a family tradition.

WCYB (NBC-5): [Teen volunteers serve local Veterans.](#) The Mountain Home VA Medical Center in Johnson City is giving local kids a way to keep busy this summer while helping some American heroes. The youth volunteer program serves those who have served by doing simple tasks like taking them things they need while they're in the hospital, or answering phones to help family members find services and give directions.

Benefits Staff

For the week of June 6-10, Deputy Director Hearn is conducting a ROAR Inspection at the Portland Regional Office. Assistant Director Labozzetta and Administrative Specialist Kim Mitchell continued preparing for upcoming DSO School. The benefits staff provided claims assistance to a total of 41 veterans to include but not limited to; evidence submission, claims processing, and benefits advising.

TBI Claim Equitable Relief

The benefits staff is actively focusing on the VA's granting of equitable relief to veterans who had received initial C&P exams for TBI which the VA has now deemed to be inadequate. The VA has identified approximately 25,000 veterans affected by this regulation which has now designated 4 specific medical

specialists as the only ones qualified to perform TBI C&P exams. Therefore, equitable relief will afford the affected veterans a new TBI C&P exam by one of the newly designated specialists which may result in the awarding of an effective date as early as the date of the TBI claim. The benefits staff is collaborating with VBA to ensure affected veterans we represent are not denied their rights relating to this issue.

Veterans Benefits Administration Statistics

1. Completed **1.4M** claims in FY15 – nearly **67K** more than last year – highest ever in our history – sixth year in a row of more than **1M** claims; fourth year in a row we set new records again!
2. Reduced backlog **87%** from a peak of 611K in March 2013 to historic lows – currently **80,415**; reduced inventory **59%** from 884K peak in July 2012 to **364,493** – **30%** lower than FY14; claim quality at **90.3%**; issue quality at **96%** and above **98%** in 7 of 8 categories where we measure quality – several above **99%** – one at **97.4%**
3. Average days a Veteran is waiting for a claims decision (pending) is **95** days – a 187-day reduction from a peak of 282 days in March 2013; average days to complete is **124** days – a 57-day reduction from FY14
4. Increased claim productivity per FTE by **25%** since 2011 and issue productivity per FTE by **81%** since 2009 – helped mitigate effects of a **132%** increase in workload (2.7M medical issues in 2009, **6.35M** medical issues in 2015); added estimated **1.8M+** Veterans to compensation rolls since 2009 (**1.2M** net), and **28%** more Veterans and Survivors to compensation and pension caseload (from **3.9M** to **5M**)
5. Went from touching **5,000 tons of paper annually** to processing **99.8% of disability compensation claims electronically**, with **337K claims** in electronic inventory – only **27K** pension and DIC in paper, completed over **4.1M** rating decisions and over **2.35M** claims in VBMS

6. Enabling Veterans to file claims online through eBenefits – over **5.3M** registered users, **212M** contacts with Veterans in FY15 (**96%** online) – **211%** increase over FY14 – vs. **9M** contacts (majority by phone) in 2009
7. Expediting Veterans claims: **54%** of receipts in FY16 Q1 were Fully Developed, up from **3%** in 2012; received over **2.8M** completed exam templates from VHA in FY15
8. Dedicated non-rating workforce completed **3.1M non-rating end products** in FY15 – **15%** more than the 2.7M completed in FY14 – and **71%** more than FY11
9. More automation: **1 in 4** Veterans submit their dependency requests online – **more than 64 percent** of these receive payments in **under 1 day**; automatic burial allowance payments to surviving spouses within **6 days** (down from **190**)
10. Appeals actions increased **30%** from 135K in 2011 to **176K** in FY15; held appeal rates steady amidst increased production – nearly **1.4M** completed claims in FY15, **11-12%** (historical rate) appealed, **4-5%** reached Board of Veterans Appeals, **1.2%** decided in Veteran’s favor, often based on additional evidence
11. Reduced Veterans Pension backlog by **94%** from peak of **15.3K** to **985**; inventory by **54%** from peak of **36.4K** to **16.9K**; reduced Survivors’ Dependency and Indemnity Compensation backlog by **79%** from peak of **8.8K** to **1.8K**; inventory by **47%** from peak of **19.1K** to **10.2K**; improved DIC timeliness by **104 days** from peak of **182** to **78 days** while maintaining **99%** accuracy
12. Provided **\$59B** to send **1.5M** Veterans and dependents to school under the Post-9/11 GI Bill since 2009; now processing reenrollment claims in **average of 9.7 days** at **99.8% accuracy**
13. Over **2.4M** total loans on the books; guaranteed a record **631K** loans in FY15 (**44%** more than FY14) totaling **\$153B** and helped **90K** Veterans avoid foreclosure, while maintaining the lowest foreclosure rate (**1.39%**) in the

- industry for **25 of the last 30 consecutive quarters**
14. Paying insurance death claims in an average of **2.5 days** at **99% accuracy**
 15. Paid an estimated **\$1.2B** in VR&E benefits to nearly **100K** Veterans in FY15

Military Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board (MEB/PEB)

Gerardo Avila, Deputy Director, MEB/PEB & DoD participated in a discharge upgrade clinic on Monday June 6th in collaboration with the Washington DC Mayors office on Veteran Affairs. The goal of the clinic was to provide information on how the upgrade boards work and assist with filling out all necessary paperwork. Submitted one applications to the discharge upgrade board (DD Form 293) and one application to the correction board (DD Form 149). Mailed five packets to former service members who are in the process of applying for an upgrade, the packets contain all essential information on filing your application with the board. Conducted a briefing at Walter Reed Hospital on the IDES process, assisted 52 veterans and service members by providing information and answering their inquiries pertaining to VA benefits, the DoD correction boards, IDES, and records requests from the National Records Archives.

Board of Veterans Appeals Unit (BVA)

During the week ending June 3, 2016 the Board of Veterans' Appeals reached dispositions on **226** American Legion represented appeals. Of those dispositions **66.4%** of the denials were overturned with outcomes favorable to the veteran. In **57** cases, the Board granted benefits outright after considering The American Legion's arguments. In **93** cases, The American Legion was able to point out errors in the development of the veteran's claims which mandated corrective action under the law. Of the total number of dispositions, **69 (30.5%)** were outright denials.

Also during this period, the American Legion Appeals Unit

reviewed, prepared written Informal Hearing Presentations (IHP), and/or orally argued **218** veteran's appeals. These claims included originals, remands, as well as specialty cases (Advance on Docket, Independent Medical Opinions, Court Remands, etc.). The unit handled telephone inquiries and provided consultations with veterans, VSO's, and Congressional Offices. The administrative team fielded 172 phone inquiries during this period. The appeals representatives conducted two (2) Central Office Hearings during the week.

Insurance, Pension and Debt Management

The VA&R VA Insurance unit began review and processing of 80 applications for new insurance coverage in the Service-Disabled insurance program, along with 40 disability and settlement claims on veteran's VA policies. Further case development included 21 phone calls with veterans, family members and VSOs, 40 insurance inquiries / transactions, and 38 veteran insureds were contacted by mail on their policies, insurance options and action deadlines. There were 22 direct contacts with VA personnel in regards to policy information or having additional actions taken on veteran's accounts.

The Philadelphia VA&R Pension unit processed 12 new claims for Veterans or Death pensions, along with reviewing and preparing 302 case actions for support of on-going pension benefits. Casework included processing 147 additional transactions and case inquiries to VA, and 21 phone contacts with claimants and VSOs, along with 6 personal contacts, and 2 waiver cases.

The VA&R Pension offices in St. Paul and Milwaukee processed 128 new claims for Veteran's pensions and Death pensions, and presented supporting casework material on 95 claims already in progress, while also processing 173 inquiries and pension transactions, and 233 rating review audits. Contacts with claimants and VSOs amounted to 168 calls and e-mail contacts, and 2 Appeals handled for the week ending June 8, 2016.

Benefits Delivered at Discharge (BDD)

The Western BDD Office reviewed 18 claims with 178 issues. Each claim required reviewing the rating, C&P examination, and Service Treatment Records. Additional research was required on some cases. The BDD office also received 8 phone calls from Veterans and Department Service Officers throughout the country requesting the status of claims or had questions concerning a rating. The office provided an update to the status of the claim or provided options concerning the rating. One Veteran visited the office. The office received and reviewed 24 pieces of VA correspondence.

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Mortgage rate reversed course this week, falling for the first time in three weeks, according to the latest data released Thursday, June 9, by the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. Friday's feeble jobs report, which showed the labor market is far from robust, had most economists predicting that when the Federal Reserve meets next week, it will not raise interest rates. The Fed doesn't set mortgage rates, but its decisions influence them. Global economic concerns – chiefly the United Kingdom's referendum later this month on whether to remain part of the European Union, or Brexit, as it is commonly known – are also fueling investor worries. Those fears are driving down Treasury yields. After Wednesday's auction, the 10-year note dipped to its lowest level in two months.

Home-loan rates, which are closely linked to long-term bonds, retreated as well. The 30-year fixed-rate average dropped to 3.6 percent with an average of 0.5 point (points are fees paid to a lender equal to 1 percent of the loan amount). It was 3.66 percent a week ago and 4.04 percent a year ago. The 15-year fixed-rate average fell to 2.87 percent with an average 0.5 point. It was 2.92 percent a week ago and 3.25 percent a year ago. The five-year adjustable rate average sank to 2.82 percent with an average 0.5 point. It was 2.88 percent a week ago and 3.01 percent a year ago.

Growing optimism about the state of the economy was quickly erased with May's employment report. The disappointing release caused an immediate flight to quality resulting in the 10-year Treasury yield dropping 10 basis points on Friday. The 30-year fixed-rate mortgage responded by falling six basis points to 3.60 percent. This week marks the 10th consecutive week the 30-year rate has averaged under 3.7 percent, allowing an extended window for home buyers to take advantage of these historically low borrowing costs.

The drop in rates helped spur mortgage applications this week, according to the latest data from the Mortgage Bankers Association. The market composite index – a measure of total loan application volume – grew 9.3 percent from the previous week. The refinance index climbed 7 percent, while the purchase index jumped 12 percent. The refinance share of mortgage activity accounted for 53.8 percent of all applications.

HOUSEHOLD DATA

Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted

[Numbers in thousands]

Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total	Men	Women			
	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY	MAY

	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Gulf War-era II veterans						
Unemployed	160	125	132	105	28	20
Unemployment rate	5.4	4.0	5.3	4.0	6.3	4.0

National unemployment rate is 4.7 percent (May 2016). Gulf War II veterans unemployment rate is 4 percent. Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 4 percent (down from 5.1 percent in April).

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

On Wednesday, June 8, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with the DC Coalition for the Homeless to discuss the numbers/data/trends of the homeless individuals in the District of Columbia as well as the amount of transitional beds (and other related resources) that are open/available for veterans and their families.

On Wednesday, June 8, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the Small Business Administration's Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs. The Committee continued with presentations on independent research topics. The focus of this quarterly meeting was on veteran small businesses in the agriculture arena.

On Thursday, June 9, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the Small Business Administration's Interagency Taskforce meeting chaired by the Deputy Administrator Doug Kramer. The Taskforce is in the process of closing out or pivoting their recommendations for their new report due in October. These recommendations would bolster the veteran small business economy and will be the catalyst for new legislation and rules pertaining to veteran entrepreneurship.

TOPIC 3: SMALL BUSINESS

The Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship in the Florida State University College of Business will host its ninth annual Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) June 7-14 in Tallahassee. The EBV program gives U.S. military veterans with service-related disabilities the training they need to become successful entrepreneurs and small business owners. The 2016 FSU EBV class includes 21 veterans from 11 states including Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio and Virginia. Four veterans are from the Air Force, nine are from the Army, four are from the Marine Corps and four are from the Navy.

During the EBV program, which includes a yearlong mentoring component, veterans take a three-week online course, then travel to Tallahassee for on-site workshops with guest entrepreneurs on topics including business strategy, sales, marketing, leadership, operations and finance. The on-site training culminates with the participants preparing a venture pitch to promote their new business ideas to a group of panelists on their final day. The EBV program is an important part of the Jim Moran Institute's small business outreach activities. FSU is one of 10 sites participating in

the EBV program, which was launched by Syracuse University in 2007. All FSU EBV services are provided to the veterans at no cost through the program's generous donors. For more information about the FSU EBV program, visit jmi.fsu.edu/ebv.

TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

For veterans looking to transition into the tech sector, consider the following jobs that Information Week listed in their "[10 Best Tech Jobs for 2016](#)" article. Most of these jobs will require additional training and education, but are a logical career progression for those of you well-versed in computers, or simply working hard to achieve your aspirations. If you are still trying to figure out your career plan, consider this list while you take classes and pursue your education. If you are past that phase, get that resume ready and land yourself one of these top jobs.

1. **Data scientists** make a median base salary of \$116,840, and came in at No. 1 on Glassdoor's [25 Best Jobs in America](#) in 2016. With 1,736 job openings at the time of the article, the demand is fairly high. The article lists Andrew Chamberlain, Glassdoor's chief economist as saying, "Since all companies have an online presence these days, they need people who know how to manage and store data that helps them make better business decisions." Like many of the following jobs, veterans can learn this job but will likely require additional education.

2. **Solutions architects** make a median base salary of \$199,500, and are described as "a problem solver, and has a mix of both business and technical skills. Solutions architects often work closely with clients to hear feedback on their company's product, and then provide any solutions needed based on the feedback." Once again, you'll likely require more education before being eligible for the solutions architect title, but based on that description, many veterans would do well here.

3. **Mobile developers** make a median base salary of \$90,000 and are in high demand, since companies across all industries could benefit from mobile apps as part of their business plan. That said, there aren't likely many jobs in the military that directly translate into developing apps.

4. **Project managers** make a median base salary of \$106,680 and are probably the most natural transition point for most service members. The job can be quite different depending on the industry, but the foundational skills required are quite similar to what many of us learn in the military.

5. **Software engineers** make a median base salary of \$95,000, and with 49,270 job openings in 2015, are apparently in high demand. Companies are in need of software engineers to, in addition to other projects, build up their online presence. If you can apply for this job as a veteran with the required skills, you have an advantage.

6. **Analytics managers** make a median base salary of \$105,000 and are in charge of analyzing data and making conclusions about it. The job only had 982 openings in 2015, so you may have a harder time finding openings.

7. **Software development managers** make a median base salary of \$135,000, which is "one of the highest paying positions among the top 25 best jobs in America." As this is a managerial position, be sure to beef up your leadership skills on the resume when it becomes time to apply. This is also a job that requires higher education and technical skills, so it may be a job for further down the road.

8. **QA managers** make a median base salary of \$85,000. They may be in charge of monitoring software testing processes or testing new products, and may be a good starting point if you are able to meet the job description requirements.

9. **UX designers** make a median base salary of \$91,800, and will continue to be in high demand as companies build their online presence. This is certainly a job that requires additional education, but one that allows more creativity than the others.

10. **Software architects** make a median base salary of \$130,000, but there were less job openings last year than in some of these other jobs. This job is more senior and technical, so it might be one you list as further along in your career plan.

There are plenty of other career routes in the tech field, such as network administrators and information security, jobs which most tech veterans probably go for.

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

The rate of unsheltered veterans living in Santa Clara County is significantly higher than the national average, according to recent census data. Lockheed Martin is joining the All the Way Home campaign to help those men and women find a home. All the Way Home is co-led by San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo, Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors President Dave Cortese, and Destination: Home, with the goal of housing all veterans in Santa Clara County by Veterans Day 2018. With a long-standing commitment to veteran outreach, Lockheed Martin is the first Fortune 100 Company in Silicon Valley to sign on and support the effort through a three-year commitment.

“About one in four Lockheed Martin employees is a veteran, and we know first-hand the meaningful contributions and talents that veterans bring to our workplaces and our communities,” said Doug Graham, Lockheed Martin vice president and board officer of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, which is encouraging other local businesses to support the effort. “We have the highest respect for veterans and their families, and we're honored to join All the Way Home to support these men and women who selflessly served our country.” Today, there are more than 700 homeless veterans in Santa Clara County, with close to half of those individuals considered chronically homeless. To accomplish its mission, All the Way Home works with landlords and apartment owners to increase access to rental units for homeless veterans and their families.

“I'd like to thank Lockheed Martin for stepping up in a big way to help our homeless veterans,” said Mayor Sam Liccardo. “These men and women have served our country, and it's our moral obligation to see that they have a roof over their heads. We're proud Lockheed Martin has joined myriad businesses and churches who have worked tirelessly to ensure all veterans come all the way home.”

Lockheed Martin's commitment spans three years, in which the company will provide funding to support All the Way Home programming and volunteer efforts, including move-in-kits with the campaign's non-profit partner Destination: Home. The company's initial \$ 10,000 contribution will supply 70 kits that include basic move-in essentials like personal care items, clothing, cookware and linens, as well as an additional 10 kits that include furniture. "I hope that many businesses will follow Lockheed Martin's example and join our effort to house homeless veterans," said Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors President Dave Cortese. "I thank the company for leading the way. No one who served his or her country should be without a home. They fought for us and we need to stand up for them."

TOPIC 6: CAREER FAIR

This week, work continued on The American Legion's upcoming hiring events to be staged in Atlanta, Belle Chase (LA), Biloxi (MS), Detroit, El Paso, Fort Indiantown Gap (PA), Fort Jackson (SC), Huntsville (AL), Houston, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Latham (NY), Los Angeles, Memphis, Montgomery (AL), Omaha (NE), Pinellas Park (FL), Rochester (NY), Springfield (IL) and Washington, DC. The mission of The American Legion's National Employment & Education Commission is to take actions that affect the economic well-being of veterans, including issues relating to veterans' education, employment, home loans, vocational rehabilitation, homelessness and small business.

