

# RAO

# BULLETIN

# 1 June 2018

PDF Edition



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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title  
 2. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment – Vermont Vet State Benefits & Discounts May 2018
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 JUN
- Attachment - Russia's Japanese Islands Invasion



## DoD Recruitment Concerns Update 01 ► Loan Forgiveness Bill HR.4508

Veteran education advocates are continuing to fight a controversial bill that would sunset a student loan forgiveness benefit for public-sector employees, including service members, hoping their efforts — and the Pentagon’s opposition — can keep it from ever getting to a vote. “It’s a national security issue at this point, and that’s highly concerning to us,” said Tanya Ang, policy and outreach director for Veterans Education Success. The nonprofit is one of many veteran service organizations that have opposed the legislation since it was first introduced by Republican House lawmakers late last year. Among their chief concerns with the PROSPER Act (H.R.4508) is its proposal to eliminate the public service loan forgiveness program for nonprofit workers and employees of local, state and federal agencies, including the military.

Despite the opposition, the bill’s proponents see PROSPER as a way to curb rising college costs and enable students to pursue careers without demonstrable student loan debt. A spokesman for the House Committee on Education and the Workforce told Military Times, “We have heard from many groups on provisions within the PROSPER Act, and believe the bill will provide veterans and active duty military the best opportunity to achieve a postsecondary education that they rightly deserve.” A Defense Department document released earlier this year states the loan forgiveness program, available to eligible borrowers after 10 years of qualifying student loan payments, is an “important recruitment and retention tool for the military to compete with the civilian sector,” particularly in specialty fields. The Navy has also raised concerns for the Navy Judge Advocate General’s Corps, which leans on this program as an incentive for new recruits. The House committee spokesman did not comment directly on the Pentagon’s position.

Ang said, “When you’re dealing with issues as (loan forgiveness) and cutting a recruiting tool for our armed services when we’re in one of the longest wars we’ve ever been in, that to me is a national security issue.” A House committee spokesman told Military Times in March that borrowers currently using federal direct student loans would be grandfathered into the legislation and would not be affected if the program is cut. According to the DoD document, approximately 6,800 service members are anticipating having their student loan debt written off through the loan forgiveness program, created in 2007. Though there’s been no movement on the bill since February, the education committee spokesman said staff are working with House leadership to getting it to the floor. But the clock is ticking.

Sources with close knowledge of the legislative agenda tell Military Times PROSPER has a lot of must-pass legislation to compete with, and the partisan nature of the bill may make it a tough sell in an already-contentious election cycle. “There are a lot of concerns from both sides of the aisle on it,” said Lauren Augustine, policy director for Student Veterans of America. And with August recess just two and a half months away, “it’s less likely to have floor time as the floor time dwindles,” Augustine said, though she’s not ruling it out. She and Ang said it’s clear the bill’s Republican proponents, led by House Education and the Workforce Committee chairwoman Rep. Virginia Foxx, (R-NC) are committed to moving forward with the legislation as soon as possible. “My feeling is that if we can get through (July) then it will probably be OK,” Ang said.

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy’s office did not respond to requests for comment on how soon the bill may hit the House floor for a vote. But even if it does make it to the floor, PROSPER is unlikely to get a fast-track through Congress, as the Senate has made no moves to introduce companion legislation. A representative for Senate education committee chairman Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) told Military Times earlier this year that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions planned to unveil a bipartisan higher education bill by the spring, though it would not necessarily mirror the PROSPER Act. However, a committee spokeswoman said last week that timeline is now “probably not likely.” She said that while the committee is ready and willing to work on legislation, there’s a lot more that needs to be done before they’re ready to introduce a bill. “There are a lot of problems that we agree on and ... a lot of things where we differ, and we have to get in the room and figure out what works for a compromise,” she said.

Alexander has been critical of loan forgiveness programs in the past, but the committee’s ranking member, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) supports public service loan forgiveness. “I think the PROSPER Act is a partisan bill proposed by the Republicans in the House and was jammed through committee at the objection of the committee Democrats,” the committee spokeswoman said. “Sen. Murray and Sen. Alexander have a good reputation of working together on bipartisan (bills).” If PROSPER passes and the public service loan forgiveness program ends, the Defense Department has recommended increasing military funding to develop alternative recruitment and retention incentives to offset its loss. “I think there’s a little bit more pressure on us now to continue to voice our concerns,” Ang said. “We would love to see something that is ... going to work for students just across the board.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | May 12, 2018]

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## **China Territorial Claims Update 05 ► US Navy Conducts FONOPS Again**

Tensions between the U.S. and China flared again on 27 MAY as two U.S. Navy warships cruised near South China Sea islands claimed by Beijing. The guided-missile destroyer Higgins and the guided-missile cruiser Antietam sailed within 12 nautical miles of the disputed Paracel Islands during a scheduled freedom of navigation operation, Reuters reported. The move angered Chinese officials, who claim the island group as sovereign territory. China’s Defense Ministry said it sent ships and aircraft to warn the U.S. vessels to leave the area. The U.S. military did not directly comment on the incident, but maintained its right to conduct routine and regular Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) in the region.



**USS Antietam (CG-54)**



**USS Higgins (DDG-76)**

During a stop in Hawaii to mark a change in leadership at U.S. Pacific Command, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said 29 MAY that the U.S. will continue to confront China's militarization of manmade islands in the South China Sea. Mattis said Beijing hasn't abided by its promise not to put weapons on the Spratly Islands. He said American ships are maintaining a “steady drumbeat” of naval operations around disputed islands, and “only one country” seems to be bothered by the vessels’ activities. Mattis said the U.S will confront “what we believe is out of step with international law.”

China has controlled the Paracels entirely since violently seizing Vietnam's holdings in the area in 1974. Called "Xisha" in Chinese, the islands have been incorporated into the southern province of Hainan and are being developed for tourism, as well as being equipped with weapon systems meant to enforce China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea. The incident over the weekend comes at a time of mounting tensions between the two nations. The Pentagon officially uninvited China from this year’s Rim of the Pacific naval exercise last week, citing the country’s “continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea.” The Chinese air force announced two months ago that it had landed long-range H-6K bombers on islands in the South China Sea. That announcement came not long after China deployed advanced fighter jets to the contested region for the first time on public record. [Source: NavyTimes | Victoria Leoni | May 29, 2018 ++]

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## **NDAA 2019 Update 01 ► 2.6% Pay Raise**

Congress is ready to give troops their biggest pay raise in nine years next January, a move that will mean almost \$700 more annually for even the most junior service members. On 22 MAY, members of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s personnel panel advanced their section of the annual defense authorization bill, which includes a 2.6 percent pay raise and a host of other military specialty pay renewals for 2019. The move comes less than two weeks after House lawmakers approved the same pay raise in their draft of the massive budget policy measure. Although the final bill still faces months of negotiations between House and Senate leaders, the identical pay raises signal that troops’ paychecks won’t be a significant stumbling point in that work. It also matches the White House request for military pay, unveiled back in February. While appropriators still must allot the funding for troops’ salaries, the defense authorization bill represents Congress’ best opportunity to override the president’s pay raise target. In the last two years, lawmakers went beyond the president’s pay request to provide for a slightly bigger bump.

The proposed 2019 raise is the largest since 2010, and 0.3 percent above last year’s increase. For junior enlisted troops, it amounts to about \$670 more a year in pay. For senior enlisted and junior officers, the hike equals about \$1,300 more. For an O-4 with 12 years service, it’s more than \$2,300 extra next year. The 2.6 percent mark matches the federal formula for military pay, designed to keep troops’ wages on par with their civilian peers. However, Pentagon planners in recent years have advocated for trims in those raises to help pay for other recapitalization and modernization priorities. The full Senate Armed Services Committee is expected to finish debate on its draft of the authorization bill later this week, and the full Senate is expected to vote on the proposal later this summer. House lawmakers will vote on their draft later this week.

Lawmakers have managed to pass into law some version of the defense policy measure for the last 57 years, making it arguably the most successful and bipartisan annual legislative effort in Congress. Personnel subcommittee Chairman Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) declined to give details of much of the panel’s draft, but said the spending levels mirror the \$717 billion plan outlined by the White House. Panel ranking member Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) said the measure includes a provision to make domestic violence a crime under the uniform code of military justice — an idea also included in the House bill — and another allowing military courts to issue protective orders to ensure the safety of military members and their families. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **NDAA 2019 Update 02 ► White House Objects to 37 Provisions**

The White House has objected to 37 provisions in the House draft of the annual Pentagon policy bill, but it stopped short of threatening a presidential veto. The Office of Management and Budget on 22 MAY released a policy statement on the draft 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, which is being debated in the House this week. The statement said the president will support the bill’s passage, and detailed what the administration hopes legislators will massage as the bill churns through Congress. Following are six of their objections:

- The White House objected to the bill’s prohibition on the Air Force killing the JSTARS recap program and starting afresh with a family-of-systems approach called the Advanced Battle Management System. “The JSTARS recapitalization program will be unable to perform its mission in high-end contested environments, which is counter to the National Defense Strategy,” the statement reads. It called an investment in ABMS “prudent” and a better fit for future military fights.

- The bill’s elimination of the \$222 million for the Boeing C-135 Stratolifter is also premature, according to the memo. The C-135 is the replacement for aging reconnaissance aircraft that enforce the 1992 Open Skies Treaty.
- The administration objects to a proposed increase from 11 aircraft carriers to 12, “which may not be sustainable” under the Navy’s current budget. The White House also opposes a provision in the bill that prohibits the Navy from fully exercising five-year procurement authority for the Virginia-class submarine, or SSN, until it certifies it will procure two more SSNs than the budget contains.
- The White House would rather not shutter the Defense Information Systems Agency. It’s not on board with the bill’s transfer of all information technology contracting, acquisition, and senior leader communication services from DISA to other DoD elements. “This action would increase the cost of acquiring information technology, weaken the Department’s ability to secure its cyber networks, and inhibit DISA’s mission to provide seamless communication to warfighters and senior leaders,” the policy statement reads.
- The White House called “premature” the proposed bill’s improvements to acquisition system, personnel, and organization of space forces. The Pentagon has not yet finished a review of its space organizational and management structure as required by last year’s NDAA.
- The White House is sticking up for the Pentagon’s Strategic Capabilities Office, which the bill would nix. That’s objectionable because the SCO’s work is “critical to maintaining our advantage over our strategic competitors,” according to the statement, which also pointed to concern that its elimination and transfer of functions would place operating forces at risk.

[Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **NDAA 2019 Update 03 ► Progress | House Bill Passed**

This week, the House overwhelmingly passed its version of the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The bill would provide a 2.6 percent pay raise for service members and includes many VA priorities, such as:

- Requires DOD to report and conduct outreach on exposure to burn pits.
- Grants disabled veterans access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities.
- Authorizes DOD to issue the Vietnam Service Medal to veterans who participated in Operation End Sweep.
- Requires DOD to design and produce a service medal for veterans exposed to radiation (Atomic Veterans).
- Requires DOD to publish information regarding the housing market around military installations.
- Prevents new mothers who are on active duty from being deployed.
- Requires an independent review of prosecutions and punishments that target sexual assault survivors, and many more.

The Senate also began consideration of its version of the NDAA under closed hearings. The NDAA now awaits consideration by the full Senate. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## Munitions Availability ► Could Become A Problem

The Pentagon plans to invest more than \$20 billion in munitions in its next budget. But whether the industrial base will be there to support such massive buys in the future is up in the air — at a time when America is expending munitions at increasingly intense rates. The annual Industrial Capabilities report, put out by the Pentagon’s Office of Manufacturing and Industrial Base Policy, has concluded that the industrial base of the munitions sector is particularly strained, something the report blames on the start-and-stop nature of munitions procurement over the last 20 years, as well as the lack of new designs being internally developed. Some suppliers have dropped out entirely, leaving no option for replacing vital materials. Other key suppliers are foreign-owned, with no indigenous capability to produce vital parts and materials — setting up the risk that a conflict with China could rely on Chinese-made parts. And the military’s desire to tinker with existing designs rather than create band-new weapons has left the industrial base with a lack of design experience, which means “design skills for critical components within the missile sector industrial base are at risk,” the authors write.

All this is happening as the U.S. is expending munitions at a rapid rate. For instance, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction concluded that 1,186 munitions were dropped in that country during the first quarter of 2018 — the highest number recorded for the first three months of the year since tracking began in 2013; that number is also more than two and a half times the amount dropped in the first quarter of 2017. Mackenzie Eaglen, a defense expert with the American Enterprise Institute, said figures in the report line up with worries from senior military leaders over the last two years. “This report puts a bunch of solid facts and figures, and real companies and impact, behind the anecdotal concerns of leadership,” Eaglen said, who added that the overall facts show “munitions production is then at risk.”

An overall issue identified by the report is a lack of diversity in the industrial base, as well as a lack of knowledge on how to develop new systems. “The loss of this design and production capability could result in costly delays, unanticipated expense, and a significant impact to many current and future missile programs, damaging the readiness of the Department [of Defense] and negatively impacting a foundational national defense priority by placing the ballistic missile production capability at risk,” according to the report. While there are a pair of new projects underway — the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile and the Joint Air to Ground Missile — neither is truly a new design as much as it is modernization for existing capabilities. Neither program features “significant design work,” the authors note, adding that the DoD “remains concerned that the design engineering capabilities needed for tactical and strategic missile systems may not be readily available in the absence of a long-term demand signal.”

As to diversity in the industrial base, well — there isn’t any, with the authors concluding that Raytheon and Lockheed Martin account for about 97 percent of the DoD’s munitions and missile procurement funding. But while those two firms are doing well, there are concerns about sub-tier suppliers in the realm of “thermal batteries, SRMs [solid rocket motors], fuzes, jet engines, inertial measurement units (IMUs), GPS receivers, seekers, and warheads,” as well as how healthy that base will remain in the future. Four industrial areas stand out as “high risk” areas of concern:

- **Solid rocket motors.** A military-only technology, SRMs are basically split between Orbital ATK and AerojetRocketdyne. However, Orbital is set to take on a broader section of this production, essentially leaving the U.S. with only one producer of this vital equipment, which the authors warn “can lead to cost increases due to lack of competition, decreases in internal research and development efforts, and risk of security of supply if a catastrophic accident should occur.”
- **Thermal batteries.** Used in all DoD missiles and guided munitions, there is one (unnamed) manufacturer of these technologies who controls about 80 percent of the market. Should something happen to that company, the DoD’s munitions stock could be endangered. In addition, the near monopoly means there has been a lack of investment in improving the technology.

- **Fuzes.** Used on all munitions, there is actually an excess of fuze capacity in the industrial base, due in part to improvements in other areas making the fuze less important. “Excess capacity limits manufacturers from being cost competitive and limits investment in improvements to fuze technologies, including sustaining a viable design engineering cadre,” the authors write.
- **Small turbine engines.** There are currently two companies involved in this sector, but one — Teledyne Turbine Engines — has announced it will be leaving the business in 2018, leaving only Williams International to supply this capability.

Overall, the authors found that of the 121 second-tier suppliers for munition capabilities, 98 percent of them were single/sole source. And of the 73 third-tier suppliers, 98 percent were also single/sole source.

There are also concerns about materials used in the systems. For example, the department is facing rising costs for ammonium perchlorate, used in almost all DoD missile programs. The sole producer, American Pacific, is only operating at 10-15 percent of capacity due to limited demand; as a result, there have been large increases in cost per round of chemical compound, a trend likely to continue into the 2020s. Another example: Dechlorane Plus 25, a component in the insulation of weapons. “There is no domestic supplier for this material; the sole source is Occidental Chemical in Belgium,” the authors write. “Even more concerning is that the pre-cursor to make Dechlorane came from China. The Chinese source can no longer produce that pre-cursor and so there is now no source for Dechlorane in the world.” And the sole producer of dimeryl diisocyanate, a key propellant ingredient used in systems like the AIM-9X and AMRAAM missiles, has informed the Pentagon it will be leaving the business shortly, leaving the DoD with “no qualified source” of the material.

The Pentagon is left to scramble to find potential replacements for these materials, which the authors optimistically conclude could be “the beginning of what could serve as a model for mitigating material obsolescence in the future.” But Eaglen thinks the issue of foreign suppliers needs to be dealt with quickly, or risk getting out of hand. “It’s worrisome enough for a capability that is essential in hostilities that policymakers will likely want to start considering special protections and/or subsidies when needed,” she said. “I’m not sure the bell can be un-rung in the case of Chinese suppliers. “We may be too far down the path to resurrect an authentic munitions industrial base. So then the question becomes: Now what?” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Aaron Mehta | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **DoD Tuition Assistance Update 08 ► New Navy Tuition Assistance Rules**

For sailors wanting the Navy to pay for more college courses, your prayers have been answered. Navy officials are eliminating service specific credit caps, allowing sailors to take more college classes. Many in the service have pushed back in recent years against the Navy’s long-standing TA limits, along with tightening rules related to tuition assistance over the last decade-plus. It’s another sign that as the Navy prepares to grow by 20,000 by the end of fiscal year, 2023, Vice Adm. Robert P. Burke, chief of naval personnel, is pulling out all the stops to keep sailors in the ranks. In the past six months, Burke has expanded up or out tenure limits and increased re-up bonuses. And in the past month, through a series of messages, has put a full-court press on commands to concentrate more on retention on a daily basis by being more responsive to sailors’ needs at the deckplate level.

“Higher education opportunities lead to a more capable and engaged sailor who thinks in terms of the bigger Navy team,” Burke wrote in NavAdmin 127/18 released 21 MAY, announcing the changes. “Maximizing TA opportunity is an investment in our sailors, and is consistent with our message that learning and professional growth are not only available, they are expected of senior leaders.” Starting 1 JUN, the Navy’s 16 credit annual cap per fiscal year goes away. In its place, sailors can now use TA up to the Department of Defense fiscal year funding cap of \$4,500 that comes with no credit hour limits. Under the old rules, the Navy would only pay up to \$4,000 per fiscal year, which amounts to 16 credits at \$250 per credit hour. Burke says by eliminating credit limits and giving them \$500 more

each fiscal year to spend, he's giving sailors the flexibility to make more college decisions on their own. The Department of Defense rules established limits, currently set at \$250 per semester hour, \$166.67 per quarter hour, or \$16.67 per clock hour up to the yearly \$4,500 cap.

“Sailors with currently approved education plans at high cost schools may benefit from comparison shopping to get better value under this expanded authority, potentially save money, and preserve GI Bill benefits if they have been constrained by previous limits,” Burke said. Any costs above \$250 per credit or the \$4,500 spending cap, as well as fees, books, and instructional materials, will have to be paid for out of the pocket. For those who've already reached the old cap level this fiscal year, Burke said that they can be funded for more courses, but won't be reimbursed for anything they've already paid out of pocket. All the rest of the Navy's TA rules remain in place.

To even take courses, sailors must have their command's permission to take classes and need to have a degree plan on file with the Navy as to their education goals. Sailors must pass their courses with a C or better for undergraduate courses and a B or better for graduate courses. Any failing grade will require repayment of any TA money for that course to the Navy. And there's plenty of money left to spend, as well. According to defense officials, the Navy's budget for TA this fiscal year is \$85.2 million. As of 20 MAY, they've spent \$63.7 million, funding roughly 34,500 sailors for a total of 91,000 courses. Last year, the Navy spent a total of \$85.2 million and funded 42,000 sailors for 130,000 courses. More information can be found in NavAdmin 127/18. [Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Pentagon Cellphones ► Use Policy Clarified | Will Not be Banned**

After months of review, the Pentagon will allow cellphones to continue to be brought into the building, according to a memo obtained by the Associated Press. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis had considered a ban on cellphones, smartphones and other wearable technology, such as FitBits, after the GPS reporting company Strava published a global heat map based on user exercise routes. The map revealed sensitive base locations overseas based on the running routes of service members and contractors deployed there. “Today the Department of Defense announces a policy regarding the use of mobile devices within the Pentagon and supported buildings,” the Pentagon said in a statement. “The policy, which applies to DoD personnel, contractors, and Pentagon visitors, clarifies restrictions for mobile devices anywhere within the Pentagon designated or accredited for the processing, handling or discussion of classified information.”

According to the AP, most of the previous use of cellphones will be continued, but with stricter enforcement to ensure the devices are not brought into secure areas. More than 25,000 people work in the Pentagon, ranging from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to restaurant workers and cleaning crews, and many use their phones for family emergencies and other needs. Fitness trackers that don't have wireless or cellular technology or contain microphones are not covered by the memo, but will be addressed in a separate policy that is still being developed by defense officials. And medical devices with cellular technology must be approved on an individual basis. The memo covers “laptops, tablets, cellular phones, smartwatches, and other devices” that are portable, can wirelessly transmit information and have “a self-contained power source.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Army Re-up Bonuses ► Updated List**

The Army is shoring up its numbers of security force assistance brigade NCOs and junior enlisted infantry, artillery and motor transport soldiers — including privates — at Fort Bliss, according to the latest Selective Retention Bonus

update. A year and a half into its SFAB program, the Army is adding re-enlistment bonuses to the \$5,000 enlisted soldiers already get for joining an SFAB. It also is offering big bucks to infantrymen, cannon crewmembers and E-5 drivers who re-enlist and stay at Fort Bliss, Texas, as laid out in a May 16 MILPER message. “The Army has a cost savings for not having to move somebody if they re-enlist for stabilization,” Sgt. Maj. Mark Thompson, the Army’s senior career counselor, said in a May 15 news release. “So we’re passing on that cost savings to the bonus even if it’s not the same pot of money, but that’s the mentality behind it.”

Bonuses are handed out according to re-enlistment length. On top of that, for soldiers who are 10 to 15 months out from the end of their enlistment term, the Army is offering a \$3,000 kicker to sign up for another five years, or \$6,000 to sign on for six years or more. Bonuses are available for a handful of SFAB MOSs:

- 11B/C: From \$10,800 to \$36,800 for sergeants and staff sergeants.
- 12B: From \$3,700 to \$12,600 for sergeants and staff sergeants.
- 13F: From \$4,800 to \$14,600 for specialists.
- 25C: From \$9,800 to \$36,800.
- 25L/S: From \$12,300 to \$46,000 for specialists through staff sergeants.
- 25U: From \$9,800 to \$36,800 for specialists through staff sergeants.
- 35F/M: From \$12,300 to \$41,400 for specialists and sergeants, \$12,100 to \$36,800 for staff sergeants.
- 35N: From \$12,300 to \$46,000 for specialists through staff sergeants.
- 35P: From \$13,500 to \$57,600 for sergeants and staff sergeants.
- 68W: From \$4,800 to \$16,100 for specialists and sergeants.
- 91B: From 9,800 to \$32,800 for specialists and sergeants.
- 92Y: From \$12,300 to \$41,400 for specialists and sergeants, \$12,100 to \$36,800 for staff sergeants.

Meanwhile, the Army is addressing shortages of some military occupational specialties at Fort Bliss, home of the 1st Armored Division, by offering bonuses for soldiers who re-up to stay there.

- 11B: From \$2,100 to \$11,200 for privates first class and specialists.
- 13B: From \$4,400 to \$20,900 for privates first class and specialists.
- 88M: From \$3,700 to \$16,100 for sergeants.

[Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | May 21, 2018 ++]

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## **Camp Humphreys Base Relocation ► Civilians PCSing Face Bigger Tax Bills**

American civilians moving to Camp Humphreys this year as part of a long-delayed relocation of U.S. military forces south of Seoul are facing a bigger tax bill. A revision in the new tax-reform law that removed exemptions on moving expenses took effect on Jan. 1, just as the relocation is picking up speed. U.S. Forces Korea plans to dedicate its new headquarters building on Camp Humphreys in late June, and officials estimate that about 650 employees and their families are expected to move from Seoul this summer. “We’re calling it the move phase,” USFK assistant chief of staff Col. Christopher Harris said during a town hall meeting last week. The changes, which are part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, will impact benefits for civilians moving on military orders in what is known as a permanent change of station, or PCS, he said. Active-duty servicemembers are excluded. “Most reimbursements and expenditures for U.S. civilians during a civilian PCS are now taxable for the employee,” he said, adding that officials were awaiting guidance from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. “We don’t have all the answers yet. Consulting with a tax adviser on the impact of a PCS may be advisable in some circumstances,” he said.

DFAS referred questions to the General Services Administration. The GSA, in coordination with the IRS, said it sent guidance to federal agencies on May 15. The federal travel regulation bulletin confirmed that most moving expenses are taxable, including lodging expenses, mileage, transportation and the shipment of household goods. “It

also clarifies the requirements of changes to the federal tax code to reduce income tax withholdings from 25 to 22 percent,” according to a statement by Jessica Salmoiraghi, the associate administrator of the GSA’s office of government-wide policy. “This bulletin will serve as the policy document agencies should rely on for clear interpretation of the updated tax law until GSA issues an amendment to the Federal Travel Regulation,” she said. “GSA will continue to monitor and work with agencies as they adjust their procedures to incorporate the new tax law requirements.” Civilians moving to Humphreys are receiving full benefits, including the shipment of household goods, reimbursement for temporary housing and a living quarters allowance.

One U.S. official who moved to Humphreys earlier this year said the IRS was compounding the problem by taking so long to release new rules. “It’s terrible timing,” he said, adding that he believes the increased tax burden on federal employees was an unintended consequence. “It was designed for companies with lavish relocation packages,” he said. “We are a captive audience and we are being directed to move.” Harris said employees should be able to recoup much of the money through an income tax refund but the lack of withholding will likely mean they will owe more in the near term. “We’ll give the employees the opportunity to recapture some of these expenses,” Harris said. “But it would be prudent to be prepared for a larger tax bill at the end of the year if you’re PCSing during this time of transition.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Kim Gamel | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 49 ► Is It Now Becoming An Afterthought?**

For years, Veterans Affairs leaders and administration officials have promised they won’t let health issues surrounding burn pit exposure in Iraq and Afghanistan become another “Agent Orange” in the community. Now, advocates and a handful of lawmakers are worried it already has. “The level of awareness among members of Congress on the problems from burn pits is abysmally low,” said Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) and an Army National Guard soldier who served in Iraq in 2004-2005. “Too few understand the urgency of the issue.” Gabbard and Afghanistan war veteran Rep. Brian Mast (R-FL) recently introduced new legislation dubbed the Burn Pits Accountability Act to require more in-depth monitoring of servicemembers’ health for signs of illnesses. The legislation is also serving as a springboard for renewed discussion about the lingering problem of burn pits, used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan to dispose of a wide variety of waste and suspected in a wide array of unusual cancers, respiratory illnesses and other health complications from the post-9/11 generation of veterans.

On 17 MAY, numerous veterans advocates joined Mast and Gabbard at a Capitol Hill press conference to support their legislation but also to highlight the issue, fearing that the once talked-about topic is now becoming an afterthought. “We’ve had an overflow of veterans sharing their stories, especially in the last few months,” said Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “Our members feel like their bodies are under attack. And they’re calling for help.” More than 141,000 veterans and current service members have enrolled in VA’s Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, which allows individuals to document their experiences and illnesses with the department. But those entries are voluntary, and advocates believe the total number of troops impacted by the poisonous fumes from the pit is significantly higher, since nearly every individual who deployed in the recent wars had some exposure to the burn pits. “Even when someone in the military is aware that burn pits existed out there, that doesn’t mean they’re aware of who is affected,” Mast said. “They often ask if you were assigned to a job where you (worked with the pits). And if you weren’t, how could this possibly affect you? “They don’t understand that’s not how the military works.”

Both Gabbard and Mast said the military and VA can do more to be proactive with the problem of burn pit exposure, especially in light of the spotty record with Agent Orange exposure during Vietnam. Decades passed before many rare illnesses linked to the chemical defoliant were acknowledged by either department or authorized for health and disability benefits. Advocates said they fear bureaucratic indifference will mean years of suffering by the current generation of veterans before the proper medical and financial support is put in place. House Veterans’ Affairs

Committee members will hold a hearing on the issue next month. Meanwhile, IAVA and numerous other veterans groups have been meeting with lawmakers to find a path ahead, either on the Gabbard/Mast legislation or another plan. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Leo Shane III | May 18, 2018 ++]

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## **Commissary Employees Update 02 ► Granted Shopping Privileges**

Commissary employees will be allowed to shop in commissaries, probably by the end of June. “We certainly expect the employees to be pleased,” said Michael Dowling, deputy director and chief operating officer of the Defense Commissary Agency, at a meeting of the American Logistics Association here. He said Robert Bianchi, interim director of the agency, notified employees of the policy change 17 MAY via email. Dowling said one of the most common requests from commissary employees is that they be allowed shopping privileges. He said about 50 percent of the commissary agency’s employees will benefit. The other half of the approximately 14,000 employees already have shopping privileges as military spouses, retirees, or other military connections. The benefit has been provided primarily for the military community for more than 150 years. The benefit will be extended to employees only; family members will not be allowed to shop. Once the employee leaves or retires, the benefit ends, a source said. Employees will not be allowed to purchase tobacco or other controlled substances, Dowling said. A source said the change was approved by Robert Wilkie, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. The move may help retention of commissary employees, one source said. Among those who are currently authorized to shop in commissaries are active duty, Guard and reserve members; retirees; Medal of Honor recipients; 100 percent disabled veterans; and their family members. Baggers are not commissary employees. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 17, 2018 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2018**

**Norfolk, VA** - When federal investigators first started looking into Clayton Pressley III, they thought the Chesapeake sailor was only guilty of stealing the identities of his subordinates. But while that case worked its way through the courts in late 2016, they got a tip: The Bronze Star recipient was also ripping off the Navy through an elaborate procurement fraud scheme. Pressley was sentenced 15 MAY to two years in federal prison in connection with the \$2.3 million fraud. That is on top of four years and two months he received in the identity theft case, in which he fraudulently obtained \$24,000 in loans. The fraud charges stem from Pressley's efforts in 2014 to manipulate the Navy's procurement process for personal profit. According to court documents, Pressley, then a senior chief petty officer, and unnamed co-conspirators were selling Navy "inert training aids," or fake bombs, that were never shipped but marked as delivered.

According to court documents, an unnamed Navy officer who had purchasing authority ordered the aids from two vendors, identified as Firm D and Firm V. Friendly sales representatives those firms funneled orders to Firm G, a Tucson, Ariz.-based business that served as a front for Pressley, the mother of one of his children and other co-conspirators. No goods were ever delivered, documents said. It is unclear whether the sales representatives knew the scope of the fraud. Pressley, who used an alias to serve as Firm G's chief operating officer, netted more than \$644,000 from the conspiracy, court documents said. He used the money to buy airline tickets, home goods, hotel rooms and a car, among other things. "The steps taken by Mr. Pressley and others to perpetrate their scheme demonstrated remarkable cunning and deceitfulness," Special Assistant U.S. Attorney David Layne said in court documents, asking for a sentence of at least three years and 10 months.

Defense attorney Bruce Sams asked the court for a sentence of no more than two years, saying his client was struggling with unspecified mental health issues at the time of his crimes. He noted Pressley was forced to forfeit his military retirement benefits. Pressley was forced out of the Navy last year after almost 20 years. "Mr. Pressley does not really know what reasons led him to engage in his criminal conduct but has expressed his remorsefulness and repentance for having done so," Sams said in court documents. Pressley, who was ordered to pay full restitution, received his Bronze Star in January 2007. According to a copy of the citation, it was "for exceptionally meritorious service during Operation Iraqi Freedom." Court documents said he served as a command action casualty officer, meaning he contacted military members' families in the event of their deaths. [Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Scott Daugherty| 16 May 2018 ++]

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**Oklahoma City, OK** -- An active-duty sailor stationed in Oklahoma was arrested last week and is being accused of running a prostitution ring out of a massage parlor he owned along with his wife. Navy Counselor 1st Class Joseph Edward Fetterman, 34, was booked by the Oklahoma County Sheriff's Office following an eight-month investigation that involved the Oklahoma City Police, Del City Police, the Department of Homeland Security and NCIS, according to a Fox 25 News report. Authorities uncovered evidence that patrons were allegedly visiting the Bangkok Thai Massage & Spa for much more than just back pain. And the sailor's wife, Kanyarat Fetterman, was instrumental in providing the prostitutes, the report said. "She's from Thailand and she also brought in some Thai girls to come over and assist in the prostitution," Oklahoma City Police Capt. Bo Mathews told Fox 25 News. Just how many ladies of the night worked out of the establishment remains unclear, the report said. Fetterman and his wife were booked by the Oklahoma County Sheriff's Office on felony charges of maintaining a house of prostitution, unlawful financial transactions, conspiracy to commit a felony, unlawful use of a computer and pandering, the sheriff's office said. Fetterman enlisted in the Navy in 2001 and has been stationed at Tinker Air Force Base with Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Three since April 2014, Navy records show. [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | May 21, 2018 ++]



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**Inchcape Shipping Services Holdings** -- It might not be a career-ender for Navy officers like we've seen over the past several years in the ongoing Fat Leonard scandal, but the Justice Department has won a \$20 million settlement with a logistics company that overcharged the Navy for ship husbanding services in ports across Asia, Africa, Panama, North America, South America and Mexico. According to a 31 MAY DOJ release, Inchcape Shipping Services Holdings Limited overcharged the Navy for years, and was only brought to task when a trio of whistleblowers — all former Inchcape employees — went to the FBI.

The U.K.-based company, which operates in 70 countries across the globe and boasts about 3,500 employees, violated the False Claims Act by "knowingly overbilling the U.S. Navy under contracts for ship husbanding services," the DOJ said. The charges brought by the government in D.C. federal court alleged that between 2005 and 2014, the company and its subsidiaries purposefully overbilled the Navy by submitting invoices that "overstated the quantity of goods and services provided, billing at rates in excess of applicable contract rates, and double-billing for some goods and services."

Inchcape denied the charges, but agreed to the civil settlement Thursday. "This settlement demonstrates that the Department of the Navy will continue to hold contractors accountable for the agreements they make to supply our fleet," said Navy Secretary Richard Spencer. "The Department expects strict adherence to higher standards within

the Department and expects the same from its contractors.” But the Navy might never have found out it was being scammed without the help of several former employees of the company. Noah Rudolph, Andrea Ford and Lawrence Cosgriff used the whistleblower provisions of the False Claims Act to bring suit on behalf of the United States for false claims. The U.S. government joined in, and according to the provisions of the act, the do-gooders will receive approximately \$4.4 million in awards.

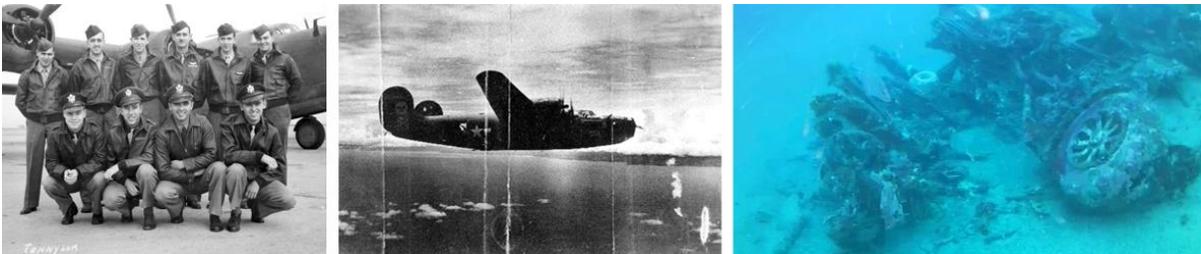
Janet Goldstein, a leading whistleblower lawyer, told me that her clients “spent over a year trying to convince Inchcape executives, including the CEO, to stop defrauding the Navy and come clean. They went to the FBI when it became apparent that nothing was going to change. Our clients are patriots who could not stay silent in the face of what they believed was a massive fraud.” The Navy had suspended Inchcape from contracting with the U.S. government in 2013, but the relationship restarted in 2014 under the terms of a deal to add additional controls.

The scandal comes as the sea service remains knee deep in another scandal over its dealings with Glenn Defense Marine Asia, run by Leonard Glenn Francis, a Malaysian businessman who pleaded guilty in 2015 to bribery and defrauding the Navy. As of the end of this month, over 30 civilians and Naval officers have been convicted or are facing charges in that case. So far, six admirals have been disciplined by the Navy. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | May 30, 2018 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 101 ► Tom Kelly’s WWII Plane Found**

Tom Kelly grew up on a Northern California farm and once thought of becoming a cowboy before World War II got in the way. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces instead, and on March 11, 1944, the 21-year-old 2nd lieutenant was aboard a B-24 bomber with 10 others when it was struck by Japanese anti-aircraft fire and plunged into the Pacific Ocean. When the plane Kelly and his fellow crew members called Heaven Can Wait was found at the bottom of a bay off the coast of Papua New Guinea, a wave of exhilaration — albeit one mixed with grief — washed over his family, including many members too young to have ever met him. “This discovery of where the wreck is, of seeing pictures and videos of the wreck on the floor of Hansa Bay. My goodness, it brings closure in a way we didn’t expect,” said Scott Althaus of Urbana, Illinois.



This circa 1943 U.S. Army Air Force photo (left) from the Kelly Family Research Project shows Lt. Tom Kelly, lower right, and other members of his crew of the B-24 bomber training in the U.S. during World War II. This circa 1943 U.S. Army Air Force photo (center) from the Kelly Family Research Project shows the "Heaven Can Wait" B-24 bomber, then location unknown, in which Lt. Thomas Kelly died when it was shot down in Hansa Bay. October 2017 photo (right) from a remote-controlled underwater camera shows the nose wheel of a B-24 bomber that crashed in Hansa Bay in what is now Papua New Guinea.

On Memorial Day 2013 Althaus launched what would quickly become a family-wide project to learn everything relatives could about the young man who grew up thinking he’d be a cowboy but then, inspired by his military service, decided he wanted to be a pilot instead. He was the bombardier on Heaven Can Wait. “He was a very gregarious man. He kept up correspondence with I think 38 different people stateside while he was overseas. He was just everybody’s friend, very well liked,” said Althaus, Kelly’s first cousin once removed. “It would have been something to see what he would have done after coming back from the war if that had been his outcome.” A year ago

Kelly's family turned over what they learned to Project Recover, a team of marine scientists, historians, archaeologists, divers and others who seek out military crash sites connected to cases involving those listed as Missing in Action. The organization announced the above find 21 MAY, and said its search was aided greatly by what the family provided, including eyewitness narratives, military reports, flight documents and even diary entries from crew members on planes flying in formation with Kelly's when it was hit.

This also marked the first time that an MIA family had provided his group such support, said Eric Terrill, Project Recover's co-founder and leader of the search. "The results from our efforts in Hansa Bay have stirred a mix of lasting emotions within our team and drives home the need to recognize the sacrifices that service members and their families make in protecting our freedoms," said Terrill, who works at San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography. The findings are being turned over to the Department of Defense's POW/MIA Accounting Agency, which seeks to recover remains of MIAs. Althaus said if his cousin's body is retrieved the family hopes he might someday be buried in his hometown of Livermore, California. For now, however, the family is simply rejoicing in having finally found him.

A professor of political science and communication at the University of Illinois, Althaus' area of expertise is political opinion and news coverage of war. It was his research into the subject that led him to try to learn the life story of the cousin he never met. Like many family members he was born after Kelly died. Others, including his mother, were small children when they last saw him. "One of the wonderful things that came out of this effort to just figure out what happened on March 11, 1944, was really bringing the family together across lines that we didn't communicate through very often," he said. "And to bring these stories to life." He's hoping that this Memorial Day other families might do the same. [Source: The Associated Press | John Rogers | May 24, 2018 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 102 ► Robert Anspach Will Forever Be 33**

Fifty-one years after he was killed in action on a reconnaissance mission near the height of the Vietnam War, Army Sgt. Robert Alen Anspach's status remains classified as killed in action and body not recovered. Attempts were made to recover his remains, but enemy presence at the site frustrated the attempt. Over the years since the death of Anspach the Vietnamese resolutely deny any knowledge of his fate. They also deny access to the area in which he is suspected to be buried. Essentially, he's missing in action. His body has never been repatriated. "They've never brought him home," said Cindy Anspach Baucom, his youngest daughter. "People say you need to let this go. We say, 'No,' there's no direction to push but to bring him home. "It was hard. Everybody else had a dad," she said. "It was very hard." Anspach, a drill sergeant who served with Fort Bragg's 4th Mobile Strike Force Command, 5th Special Forces Group, is honored on the Vietnam Memorial Wall. His name is etched into the polished black granite in Washington, D.C. But back home in Fayetteville, there is no gravesite for family members to visit. As she has in the past, Baucom said, she will probably put out flags from one side of her yard to the other in honor of her father on this Memorial Day. He will be in her thoughts.



Baucom was 8 years old when she last saw her father alive, while peering through a chain-link gate of the Fayetteville airport. Glenda Anspach, his wife, had just turned 30. Robert Allen Anspach had been home on reenlistment leave, and he was boarding a commercial flight for a return to Vietnam. As he was getting on, Glenda

Anspach said, Sgt. Barry Sadler of "The Ballad of the Green Berets" fame was disembarking. Robert Anspach's five family members -- Glenda and their young children, Greg, Sandy, Cindy and Michael -- waved goodbye. Mrs. Anspach later learned that her husband had told a friend that he felt if he went back to Vietnam again, he would never come back. His wife never remarried. She is now 81. "I probably think about him every day. Every other day," she said from Baucom's tri-level home off Village Drive. "It's never far from you."

Robert Anspach was among five service members given special honors on 19 MAY during the 11th annual Field of Honor ceremony at the downtown Airborne & Special Operations Museum. Six of his family members attended the ceremony, which was held inside the museum's auditorium because of the rain. While four U.S. flags were placed up front to represent four of those men during the presentation of honorees, a POW/MIA flag was selected to symbolize Anspach. "Because he hasn't come home," Baucom explained. "It's hard," she said. "The other day (at the ceremony) when I heard the bagpipes and saw the flags, my husband said to hold it together." Her mother, who tends to conceal her feelings, acknowledged that her emotions got the best of her toward the end of the flag presentation for her husband. Anspach is one of 1,598 Americans still missing and unaccounted for in Southeast Asia from the Vietnam War era, according to the National League of POW/MIA Families. [Source: The Fayetteville Observer | Michael Futch | May 2018 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2018 | Nineteen**

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II 73,025, Korean War 7730, Vietnam War 1604, Cold War (126), Iraq and other conflicts (5). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on 'Our Missing'. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2018> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2018. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs

== Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The names, photos, and details of the below listed

MIA/POW's which have been recovered, identified, and/or scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin are listed on the following sites:

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

## **LOOK FOR**

- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Clarence E. Allen**, 23, of Venice, Calif., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 23 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Allen was a member of the 395th Fighter Squadron, 368th Fighter Group, and was the pilot of a P-47 aircraft as the lead element in a dive-bombing mission near Aachen, Germany in mid-October 1944. The squadron engaged enemy aircraft in dogfights in the vicinity of Dusseldorf, but following the battle all aircraft except Allen's returned to the base. The squadron mission report indicated that a P-47 was seen crashing in the vicinity of the battle. [Read about Allen.](#)
- **Army Cpl. DeMaret M. Kirtley** was a member of Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Kirtley was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 6, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kirtley.](#)
- **Army Pfc. Willie E. Blue**, 19, of New Orleans, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 29 in Dallas. Blue was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In August 1950, his unit was defending the Naktong Bulge portion of the Pusan Perimeter. Blue was admitted to the 2nd Clearing Station, 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division in Yong-san, South Korea. After admission, Blue could not be accounted for. When no additional records could be found showing his disposition and the 8076th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital could not provide any information, the Department of the Army declared him deceased on March 3, 1954. [Read about Blue.](#)
- **Army Sgt. Eugene W. Yost** was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In September 1950, his unit participated in a defense of the Pusan Perimeter, a large defensive line west and north of Pusan, South Korea. Yost was reported to have been killed in action on Sept. 3, 1950, but his remains could not be located following the battle. Interment services are pending. [Read about Yost.](#)
- **Army Sgt. John W. Hall** a member of Headquarters Battery, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. In late November 1950, Hall's unit received orders to move from Kunu-ri to Suncheon, North Korea through an area known as "The Gauntlet." Hall was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, in the vicinity of Somindong, North Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hall.](#)
- **Army Sgt. Joseph Akers** was a member of Company C, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, participating in intense fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 25, 1944, his company was deployed as direct-fire support of American infantrymen attacking the town of Grosshau. The M10 tank destroyer Akers occupied was knocked out in the fighting. He was killed during the battle, though his status was initially listed as missing in action. On Dec. 21, 1944, his status was amended to killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Akers.](#)
- **Army Sgt. Melvin C. Anderson** was a member of Company C, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, participating in intense fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 25, 1944, his company was deployed as direct-fire support of American infantrymen attacking the town of Grosshau. The M10 tank destroyer

Anderson was commanding was knocked out in the fighting. He was killed during the battle, though his status was initially listed as missing in action. On Dec. 21, 1944, his status was amended to killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Anderson.](#)

- **Marine Corps 2nd Lt. Harvel L. Moore**, 25, of Chatham, La., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 26 in his hometown. Moore was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Moore's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Over several days of fighting, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed in the intense fighting. Moore was killed Nov. 22, 1943. [Read about Moore.](#)
- **Marine Corps Pfc. Francis E. Drake Jr.**, 20, of Framingham, Mass., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 25 in Springfield, Mass. Drake was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division. On Oct. 9, 1942, Drake's unit participated in the main offensive action in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Drake was killed during the two-month long battle and buried atop Hill 73 with two other Marines. [Read about Drake.](#)
- **Marine Corps Pfc. Jack H. Krieger**, 28, of Larned, Kan., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 28 in his hometown. Krieger was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 18th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Krieger's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Krieger died on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. [Read about Krieger.](#)
- **Marine Corps Sgt. Elden W. Grimm**, 26, of Menasha, Wis., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 26 in Neenah, Wis. Grimm was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 18th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Grimm's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Over several days of fighting, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed in the intense fighting. Grimm was killed on Nov. 25, 1943. [Read about Grimm.](#)
- **Navy Gunner's Mate 2nd Class William F. Hellstern**, 20, of Peoria, Ill., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 18 in Wheat Ridge, Colo. Hellstern was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Hellstern.](#)
- **Navy Radioman 2nd Class Walter H. Backman**, 22, of Wilton, N.D., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 28 in Batavia, Ill. Backman was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Backman.](#)
- **Navy Reserve Ensign Harold P. DeMoss** was a member of Fighting Squadron 100 (VF-100), piloting an F6F-3 Hellcat from Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii. On June 23, 1945, DeMoss was accompanied by two other squadron aircraft for a night division tactics training flight. Following the completion of their flight plan, the pilots circled the island. DeMoss climbed above the clouds and attempted to descend through them. His aircraft was not seen reemerging from the clouds and DeMoss was declared missing shortly thereafter. Interment services are pending. [Read about DeMoss.](#)
- **Navy Reserve Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class Thomas J. Murphy**, 22, of Greencastle, Ind., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 28 in Hamilton, Ohio. Murphy was assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Murphy's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Murphy was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. [Read about Murphy.](#)

- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Edward F. Slapikas**, 26, of Wanamie, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 2 in his hometown. Slapikas was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Slapikas.](#)
- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Willard H. Aldridge**, 20, of Sitka, Kan., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 26 in Ashland, Kan. Aldridge was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Aldridge.](#)
- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Carl Nichols** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Nichols.](#)
- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class William V. Campbell** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Campbell.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | May 31, 2018 ++]

\* VA \*



## **VA Disabled Vet IG Project ► \$12 Million ‘Colossal Mistake’ Enrages Lawmakers**

In 2015, the Veterans Affairs Department started tackling a project more than a decade overdue: bringing its rehabilitation program for disabled veterans into the 21st century by converting its paper-based case management system to a digital one. Three years and \$12 million later, there’s not much to show for it. VA officials didn’t realize until December 2017 that there was a major glitch with the new electronic management system for the department’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program. The project came to a halt in February after it failed to pass the necessary user tests, and officials are now considering the best way to move forward — including by pulling the plug entirely and starting over with a commercial product instead of continuing to build one in-house. In all, the VA paid about \$6.5 million to a contractor and spent another \$5.5 on staff time and other resources, according to statements made during the hearing. A VA spokesman later put the estimate at \$11.8 million and said the project was funded up to \$13 million.

Lawmakers from both parties were visibly frustrated, saying the project had “gone off the rails” and calling it a “failure” and “colossal mistake.” One questioned whether VA’s leaders really prioritize the program, which provided employment services to more than 132,000 veterans with service-connected disabilities last fiscal year. “You’re stuck in 1997 with a No. 2 pencil and a Big Chief tablet for your caseworkers,” said Rep. Jodey Arrington, R-Texas. Lloyd Thrower, deputy chief information officer and benefits account manager of the VA’s IT office, said the project

suffered from poor communication. Additionally, the IT office has had a lot of turnover in the last few years, and all of the project's senior leaders at the time of its inception have either left the VA or changed positions, he said. "I have been looking really hard at this because this bothers the heck out of me, too," said Thrower, who has been in his role for about six months. He told representatives he does not know when the project will be complete or what the final cost will be.

"We will know costs when we've completed that assessment," a VA spokesman told Military Times. "Given our objective of delivering the best possible solution to serve our veterans, we are assessing options based on a combination of cost, quality and time-to-market." He said the conversion of inactive case files to digital records is nearly complete; however, active case files remain in paper format. When asked if the project was, indeed, a waste, as members of Congress claim, the spokesman said many features of the case management are complete and have received favorable feedback. "If we choose to complete the current effort, the incomplete case management system would have to be finished and integrated into existing systems," he said. "Given that this effort has taken too long and more work remains, the Department feels it reasonable to look at other options." The number of veterans participating in Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment services grew 17 percent between fiscal 2013 and 2017 and is projected to grow another 12 percent over the next year, according to information provided to Congress. "I don't know how many counselors \$12 million would add to the roster, but I'm certain it would be significant," Arrington said.

The Disabled American Veterans organization echoed the congressman's sentiments. DAV, Paralyzed Veterans of America and other advocacy groups have previously pushed for more counselors. "The \$12 million that was apparently wasted in a failed attempt to create an electronic case management system could have funded two-thirds the number of new (vocational rehabilitation counselors) we recommended," Joy Ilem, DAV's national legislative director, said in an email. Currently, the veteran-to-counselor ratio is at a rolling average of 133 to one, down from 140 at the end of fiscal 2016, according to the VA. But some areas are seeing ratios as high as 225 veterans to one counselor. "VA must ensure accountability throughout the agency at every level, and specifically for this failed project that cost \$12 million and has apparently produced no usable end product," said Ilem, who is herself a veteran with a service-connected disability. "Resources are a valuable commodity within VA and to potentially waste \$12 million that could have been directed to assist veterans in other ways is troubling."

Heather Ansley, acting associate executive director of government relations for the 18,000-member Paralyzed Veterans of America, told Military Times, "The need for a paperless system is real." And whether it was an employee or a process that failed, "It's important for VA to figure out what happened and to make sure that it doesn't happen again." Despite lawmakers' push for repercussions, it's unclear who will be held accountable for the technical blunder — if anyone. As of 23 MAY, the VA had "no accountability actions to announce," but the spokesman said the agency is continuing to look into where things went wrong. "I don't know any place in the world, any market, any sector of the economy, any industry — private or public enterprise — where \$12 million is wasted, somebody's job wasn't on the line," Arrington said. "I don't imagine anybody is going to get fired and that frustrates the dog out of me." Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-TX) said this situation does not inspire confidence in the VA. "I think as we try to foster a culture of accountability and excellence for the delivery of care and earned benefits to veterans, to see this kind of money wasted, this lack of performance, it just undermines veterans' and their families' faith in the VA," he said. House lawmakers tasked the VA with providing an updated budget and completion date for the project. Thrower said officials should have more information in June. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 79 ► Trump Appoints Peter O'Rourke on A Temporary Basis**

President Trump on 29 SEP tapped the Veterans Affairs Department's chief of staff to lead VA on a temporary basis, as the previous acting secretary awaits confirmation to serve as permanent secretary. Peter O'Rourke has now been

twice elevated at VA since he first joined the Trump administration to serve as the first ever executive director of VA's Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. Trump first created that office as part of his effort to ease the process of removing poorly performing and misbehaving VA employees. It was later codified in law under a measure Trump signed in June 2017.

O'Rourke, a veteran of both the Air Force and Navy, received some criticism for the implementation of that law, with Democratic lawmakers alleging VA had overstepped congressional intent. VA has faced backlash for using its new authorities to disproportionately fire lower-level employees. Republicans have also raised some concerns about the enforcement of the law's provisions, though VA has denied any wrongdoing.

O'Rourke was promoted to chief of staff following an inspector general report that found former VA Secretary David Shulkin's chief of staff had doctored an email from an ethics official to justify Shulkin bringing his wife on official travel. O'Rourke continued in the chief of staff position after Shulkin's ouster and Robert Wilkie taking over as acting VA secretary. VA stated that O'Rourke would ensure "that the department works closely with the White House going forward." He continued to serve as executive director of the accountability office.

Trump announced earlier this month he was tapping Wilkie to serve as VA's permanent secretary. Under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, Robert Wilkie was required to step down from his acting role while he awaits confirmation. He is now back in his position at the Defense Department, serving as undersecretary for personnel and readiness. Jacquelyn Hayes-Byrd, who was O'Rourke's deputy, is now serving as acting VA chief of staff. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | May 30, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Medical Foster Home Update 02 ► Another Choice for Older Disabled Vets**

Ralph Stepney's current home on a quiet street in north Baltimore has a welcoming front porch and large rooms, with plenty of space for his comfortable recliner and vast collection of action movies. The house is owned by Joann West, a licensed caregiver who shares it with Stepney and his fellow Vietnam War veteran Frank Hundt. "There is no place that I'd rather be. ... I love the quiet of living here, the help we get. I thank the Lord every year that I am here," Stepney, 73, said.



**Joann West calls taking care of Vietnam War veterans Ralph Stepney, left, and Frank Hundt at her home in Baltimore a "joy."**

It's a far cry from a decade ago, when Stepney was homeless and "didn't care about anything." His diabetes went unchecked and he had suffered a stroke — a medical event that landed him at the Baltimore Veterans Affairs Medical Center. After having part of his foot amputated, Stepney moved into long-term nursing home care at a Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility, where he thought he'd remain — until he became a candidate for a small VA effort that puts aging veterans in private homes: the Medical Foster Home program.

The \$20.7 million-per-year program provides housing and care for more than 1,000 veterans in 42 states and Puerto Rico, serving as an alternative to nursing home care for those who cannot live safely on their own. Veterans

pay their caregivers \$1,500 to \$3,000 a month, depending on location, saving the government about \$10,000 a month in nursing home care. It has been difficult to scale up, though, because VA accepts only foster homes that meet strict qualifications. For the veterans, it's a chance to live in a home setting with caregivers who treat them like family. For VA, the program provides an option for meeting its legal obligation to care for ailing, aging patients at significantly reduced costs, because the veterans pay room and board directly to their caregivers.

Cost-effectiveness is but one of the program's benefits. Stepney and Hundt, 67, are in good hands with West, who previously ran a home health-care services company. And they're in good company, watching television together in the main living room, going twice a week to a center that offers daytime care and sitting on West's porch chatting with neighbors. West, who considers caring for older adults "her calling," also savors the companionship and finds satisfaction in giving back to those who spent their young lives in military service to the United States. "I took care of my mother when she got cancer and I found that I really had a passion for it. I took classes and ran an in-home nursing care business for years. But my dream was always to get my own place and do what I am doing now," West said. "God worked it out."

The Medical Foster Home program has slightly more than 700 licensed caregivers who live full time with no more than three veterans and provide round-the-clock supervision and care, according to VA. Akin to a community residential care facility, each foster home must be state-licensed as an assisted-living facility and submit to frequent inspections by VA as well as state inspectors, nutritionists, pharmacists and nurses. Unlike typical community care facilities, foster home caregivers are required to live on-site and tend to the needs of their patients themselves 24/7 — or supply relief staff. "It's a lot of work, but I have support," West said. "I try to make all my personal appointments on days when Mr. Ralph and Mr. Frank are out, but if I can't, someone comes in to be here when I'm gone."

VA medical foster home providers also must pass a federal background check, complete 80 hours of training before they can accept patients, plus 20 hours of additional training each year, and allow VA to make announced and unannounced home visits. They cannot work outside the home and must maintain certification in first aid, CPR and medicine administration. But one prerequisite cannot be taught — the ability to make a veteran feel at home. West has grown children serving in the military and takes pride in contributing to the well-being of veterans. "It's a lot of joy taking care of them," she said of Stepney and Hundt. "They deserve it."

To be considered for the program, veterans must be enrolled in VA health care; have a serious, chronic disabling medical condition that requires a nursing home level of care; and need care coordination and access to VA services. It can take up to a month to place a veteran in a home once they are found eligible, according to VA. The veterans also must be able to cover their costs. Because medical foster homes are not considered institutional care, VA is not allowed to pay for it directly. The average monthly fee, according to VA, is \$2,300, which most veterans cover with their VA compensation, Social Security and savings, said Nicole Trimble, Medical Foster Home coordinator at the Perry Point VA Medical Center in Maryland.

Since 1999, the Department of Veterans Affairs has been required to provide nursing home services to veterans who qualify for VA health care and have a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher, or are considered unemployable and have a disability rating of 60 percent or higher. VA provides this care through short- or long-term nursing home facilities, respite care, community living centers on VA hospital grounds, private assisted living facilities and state veterans homes. Shortly after, the Little Rock VAMC launched an alternative — a pilot program that placed veterans in individual homes, at an average cost to VA of about \$60 a day, including administration and health-care expenses, compared with upward of \$500 a day for nursing home care. And because veterans who are enrolled in the Medical Foster Care program must use VA's Home Based Primary Care program, which provides an interdisciplinary team of health professionals for in-home medical treatment, the program saves VA even more. One study showed that the home-based care has yielded a 59 percent drop in VA hospital inpatient days and a 31 percent reduction in admissions among those who participate.

More than 120 VA medical centers now oversee a Medical Foster Home program in their regions, and VA has actively promoted the program within its health system. It also has attracted bipartisan congressional support. In

2013, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced a bill to allow VA to pay for medical foster homes directly. In 2015, former House Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) introduced similar legislation that would have allowed VA to pay for up to 900 veterans under the program. And this month, Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA) raised the issue again, sponsoring a bill similar to Miller's. "Allowing veterans to exercise greater flexibility over their benefits ensures that their individual needs are best met," Higgins said in support of the program.

Foster care has been a blessing for the family of Hundt, who suffered a stroke shortly after his wife died and was unable to care for himself. Hundt's daughter, Kimberly Malczewski, lives nearby and often stops in to visit her dad, sometimes with her 2-year-old son. "I'm not sure where my father would be if he didn't have this," she said. "With my life situation — my husband and I both work full time, we have no extra room in our house, and we have a small child — I can't take care of him the way Miss Joann does." Medical Foster Home coordinator Trimble, whose program started in 2012 and has five homes, said she hopes to expand by two to three homes a year. VA will remain meticulous about selecting homes. "There is a strict inspection and vetting process to be a medical foster home," Trimble said. "We only will accept the best." It also takes a special person to be an "angel," as the caregivers are referred to in the program's motto, "Where Heroes Meet Angels."

Stepney and Hundt agree West has earned her wings. On a recent cruise to Bermuda, she brought Stepney and Hundt along. For Hundt, it was the first time he'd been on a boat. And Stepney said it was nothing like the transport ships he and his fellow troops used in the late 1960s: "Well, I've gotten to travel, but it was mainly two years in Vietnam, and there weren't any women around." When asked why she brought the pair along, West said caregiving is "a ministry, something you really have to like to do." "And you know how the saying goes," she said. "When you like what you do, you never work a day in your life." [Source: Kaiser Health News | Patricia Kime | May 27, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Toxin Claims ► Children & Grandchildren | Thousands Missing**

The lack of accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs seems to be reaching a level of absurdity. Thousands of claims filed on behalf of the children and grandchildren of veterans who were exposed to toxins are unaccounted for. The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) says the VA can't and won't say what happened to the claims. Whether it's from depleted uranium ammunition used in Iraq or a toxic herbicide called Agent Orange that was sprayed in Vietnam during war, members of America's military are learning they not only put their lives on the line, but possibly the lives of their children and grandchildren. "If you're going to send them there, make sure you take care of them when they come home. That means take care of them and their offspring," said Marc McCabe, Vietnam Veterans of America Bureau Chief.

McCabe is a battle-hardened Marine who fought in Vietnam. Now in his position as Vietnam Veterans of America Bureau Chief in Florida, he fights with the VA. The military exposed veterans like Lonnie Kilpatrick and Leroy Foster to Agent Orange. The weed killer wrecked Kilpatrick's heart. Foster suffers from terminal cancer. Kilpatrick's children and grandchildren were born with multiple health problems. Foster's granddaughter was born with 24 fingers and toes. McCabe filed hundreds of claims with the VA on behalf of children and grandchildren of veterans exposed to toxins. "And they got lost. The VA cannot account for them. They can't tell us where they collected it, where they stored it, what they did with it," explained McCabe. In fact, according to a letter the VVA received, the VA refuses to disclose information about how it keeps track of such claims.

Rick Weidman, Executive Director for Policy for Vietnam Veterans of America, compared the VA's refusal to disclose how it handled the claims to a line from the comedy "Animal House." "This is the most ridiculous damned thing we've heard from the VA since Dean Wormer's double secret probation," said Weidman. "If you file a claim and the VA rejects it, they still have to preserve it electronically." Weidman believes that until February of this year, the VA rejected the claims and threw them out. "Once again, the VA is doing everything it can to not do the research,

which will show one way or the other if children and grandchildren are affected," added Weidman. "Their overall strategy is delay, deny, until they all die." McCabe points out that the VVA will assist veterans along with their children and grandchildren through the maze of the VA's claims filing process. "Collect all your medical records on your children and your grandchildren," said McCabe. "But most importantly, we tell them, 'get your military records. Give them to your children. Put them in a safe place because you'll need that to produce evidence that your dad was in the service.'" If you need assistance filing a claim for yourself, your child or grandchild, contact Vietnam Veterans of America at 301-585-4000. [Source: WFLA Channel 8 News | Steve Andrews | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **VA TeleStroke Program ► What It Can Do for You**

Last winter Dr. Gilbert Teague began working with his VA facility's team to implement the VA National TeleStroke Program. An army Veteran, Teague is chief of primary and specialty medicine at VA Black Hills Health Care System in Fort Meade, South Dakota. Teague knew this innovation would improve care to many Veterans, especially in rural areas like the Black Hills, but he did not expect it to save his own life two months later. Teague suffered a stroke on 24 JAN. He lost motor and language function the moment his stroke began, falling motionless to the floor of his home. Teague's wife called the ambulance, which transported him to the Fort Meade VA Medical Center where he works. Upon his arrival at the facility, Dr. Peter Hasby, chief of staff, immediately recognized Teague's symptoms as a stroke and called VA TeleStroke. The VA TeleStroke physician on duty, based in New Haven, Connecticut, connected to Teague and his onsite care team within minutes to examine him, review his medical history and brain imaging, and ultimately direct timely administration of the "clot-busting" medication alteplase.



**Dr. Gilbert Teague**

"Studies show that people suffering a stroke may benefit from alteplase for up to four and a half hours following stroke onset. However, 'time is brain' and patients treated as soon as possible have the best chances for good recovery," said Dr. Glenn Graham, VA deputy national director of neurology. "This places a burden on medical centers that lack the local expertise to make rapid decisions for acute stroke patients. TeleStroke enables subspecialists at large tertiary VA medical centers to provide care to Veterans at smaller VA facilities in a timely manner." VHA's Office of Connected Care supplies the mobile tablets to VA facilities throughout the country that make remote tele-care possible. Connected Care partners with VHA's Office of Rural Health on the VA National TeleStroke Program.

Teague noted there are two types of strokes, and both destroy brain tissue as time passes. Ischemic strokes are caused by blood clots, while hemorrhagic strokes are caused by bleeding into the brain. The first line of treatment against an ischemic stroke, alteplase, exacerbates hemorrhagic stroke bleeding, and cannot be administered until a hemorrhagic stroke is ruled out by brain imaging. Dr. Pooia Fattahi, a remote stroke specialist, diagnosed Teague with an ischemic stroke and recommended alteplase to break up his blood clot. Fattahi's decision to administer alteplase bought Teague time to be flown to the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System for additional treatment, without significant damage to brain tissue. Dr. Sharyl Martini, medical director of the VA National TeleStroke Program, said if the Fort Meade facility did not have access to remote stroke specialists via Telehealth technology, the alteplase

injection would have been delayed. Because each minute of delay results in death of an additional 1.9 million brain cells, that delay might have cost Teague his opportunity to recover fully and enjoy a high quality of life.

“TeleStroke leads the neurology community in emergency stroke treatments,” said Katherine Murphy, program manager in VA Specialty Care Services. “Through direct employment with the VA or through affiliation, specialists seek to work with innovative technology, and the chance to provide optimal care to our nation’s Veterans.” By the time Teague arrived in Sioux Falls, his blood clot had dissolved significantly, and a much smaller section of his brain was affected. “Even though I hope no one is ever in need of TeleStroke services again, I will always be glad we implemented TeleStroke in VA Black Hills,” said Teague, who has fully recovered from his stroke and has returned to work at Fort Meade VAMC to provide care to Veterans. For more information on VA Telehealth Services go to <https://www.telehealth.va.gov>. [Source: Vantage Point | Alan Greilsamer | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Mesothelioma Claims ► Asbestos Related Illness Coverage for Vets & Survivors**

Every year in the United States, approximately 2,000 to 3,000 people are diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma. Unfortunately, this cancer disproportionately affects the men and women that have served our country. Some reports indicate that about one third of mesothelioma patients are Veterans. Many Veterans have misconceptions about the VA and benefits eligibility. If you are a Veteran and you’ve been diagnosed with mesothelioma – free help is available. Retired Naval officer, Lt. Cmdr. Carl Jewett, a VA-accredited claims agent, helps Veterans and their loved ones receive compensation from VA as a result of asbestos illnesses like mesothelioma. He provides free assistance in filing for VA benefits. “Most Veterans diagnosed with mesothelioma are entitled to disability compensation or pension benefits. Surviving spouses and dependents may also qualify for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) or survivor pension from VA,” said Jewett. “Veterans make up the largest group of people diagnosed with mesothelioma because asbestos was so widely used in the military. As a Vet who served your country, you are entitled to these benefits. They are your right. These financial benefits are how we, as a nation, take care of the men and women who helped to preserve the freedoms that we all enjoy in this country, especially those who are disabled as a result of their military service.”

Jewett is a retired Navy submariner who served in the military for just under 24 years, both enlisted and as an officer. Jewett understands that sometimes obstacles and concerns may keep a Veteran from filing a claim. Sometimes the greatest obstacles are misconceptions that many Veterans have about their eligibility for VA benefits. “I’ve worked with hundreds of Veterans who were floored to hear that they were eligible for disability for their asbestos illness, even if it has been decades since they were in the military. Too often they assume – despite asbestos diseases taking 15 to 45-plus years to manifest after exposure to asbestos – that they can’t apply for a service connected disability decades after serving. But, the reality is that there is no amount of time that can pass that would make a Veteran ineligible,” Jewett explained. “With the right help, it’s much easier to qualify and receive benefits than you realize,” he acknowledged, “over the past decade, I’ve had the honor of helping over 1,200 Veterans file, and get approved for asbestos-related illnesses.”

Many Veterans believe that they’re not entitled to compensation unless the military was the sole source of asbestos exposure. This is a myth. In truth, the VA only requires that your illness is “at least as likely as not” to have been caused by the military. This basically boils down to whether your military exposure to asbestos was at least a 50 percent contributing factor in your developing an asbestos illness. To accomplish this, Jewett assists Veterans in detailing their exposures to asbestos and their entire work history in a statement in support of the Veteran’s claim. “The VA acknowledges that asbestos is the only known cause of malignant pleural and peritoneal mesothelioma. However, they require a detailed asbestos exposure statement with each claim. I have helped thousands of Veterans convince the VA that their military exposure is at least as likely as not to have caused their asbestos disease. I streamline the claims process, assisting Vets in filling out the forms, writing their exposure statement, and gathering

all the other supporting documentation for their claim. I do everything I can to make it easy for Veterans to file,” said Jewett.

One of the benefits of this compensation is that it’s tax-free. Furthermore, Veterans with these asbestos illnesses are eligible even if they are already retired and no longer working. Employment status and age do not affect eligibility. Neither does the Veteran’s income. “I have talked to many vets who tell me that they aren’t eligible for VA benefits because they applied once in the past, and were denied because they made too much money. But this is only because they applied for non-service connected VA Pension, which is a means tested benefit, therefore your income does play a role. VA disability compensation is not means tested so their income is not a factor,” Jewett explained.

A large number of Veterans aren’t even aware that they have two of the nation’s best mesothelioma specialists available to them. Both Dr. Abraham Lebenthal and Dr. Robert Cameron offer mesothelioma treatment through their respective VA hospitals. Lebenthal is a mesothelioma specialist at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. He is known for treating many Veterans through the West Roxbury VA Hospital in Boston. Cameron is the innovator behind the lung-saving procedure known as pleurectomy with decortication (P/D). He is a specialist at the University of California Los Angeles Medical Center also treats Veterans with mesothelioma at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center. “Finding a mesothelioma specialist for your diagnosis is the best way to extend your survival time. All too often, patients are misinformed of their treatment options by doctors who aren’t specialists. I am telling Veterans with mesothelioma all the time that they should take anything that a non-mesothelioma specialist says about their treatment options or prognosis, with a grain of salt. You have a rare disease, you need a specialist.” stated Jewett.

Veterans with private health insurance should see one of the handful of mesothelioma specialists around the country, including Lebenthal or Cameron. Veterans who only have VA Health Care can either get their VA doctor to refer them to a civilian doctor outside the VA system, or simply get a referral to Lebenthal or Cameron, and be treated for free in Boston or Los Angeles. Many Veterans left the military and worked in civilian jobs that exposed them to more asbestos than they had in the military. If you are a Veteran with mesothelioma that isn’t service-related, you may still receive compensation in the form of a non-service connected VA pension. Pension requires that the Veteran served for at least 90 days, one of which was during a period of war, and their income must be below the amount prescribed by law. Pension can help both Veterans and their families by providing a tax-free monthly income to help with financial burdens. Both Veterans and their surviving family members can apply for the VA’s pension program. In circumstances where an individual is housebound or requires care from another person, they may receive additional compensation. [Source: Vantage Point | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Pain Management Update 10 ► Alternative Forms of Therapy Available**



**Veterans find relief through Tai Chi**

In an effort to decrease drug dependency, VA is actively exploring alternative forms of therapy to help Veterans ease pain and trauma. Most VA hospitals today offer some form of alternative treatment, such as yoga, mindfulness and art therapy. Recently, VA awarded a grant to a medical anthropologist at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, to expand his Tai Chi therapy program designed for patients in wheelchairs. The program focuses on breathing and

mindfulness techniques paired with light physical motions. Guo teaches classes in Chattanooga and Murfreesboro, TN, and is training VA instructors in Florida, Texas, Utah and Arizona. In addition to improved physical health, Guo believes Tai Chi may prove beneficial for reducing the symptoms of mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). “When you have a good amount of body harmony, people tend to engage in proactive life, so that helps with all kinds of symptoms” he says. Want to help Veterans reduce their prescription use and find relief through alternative therapies? Consider a career in recreational therapy with VA. As part of our team, you’ll receive expert training, career growth opportunities and [generous benefits](#) that support a healthy work/life balance. Plus, you’ll experience the joy of helping Veterans lead better lives. To get started, explore VA’s open positions and apply at <https://www.vacareers.va.gov>. [Source: Vantage Point | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Emergency Medical Bill Claims Update 03 ► Regulations Revised**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has, through a Federal Register notice, revised its regulations concerning payment or reimbursement for emergency treatment for non-service connected conditions at non-VA facilities. VA will begin processing claims for reimbursement of reasonable costs that were only partially paid by the veteran's other health insurance (OHI). Those costs may include hospital charges, professional fees and emergency transportation, such as ambulances. This change comes on the heels of an earlier announcement that VA was taking immediate action to address delayed payments to community providers. Effective 9 JAN, VA updated a portion of its regulations in response to an April 2016 U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims decision that stated VA could no longer deny reimbursement when OHI pays a portion of the treatment expenses. VA will apply the updated regulations to claims pending with VA on or after April 8, 2016, and to new claims. By law, VA still may not reimburse Veterans for the costs of copayments, cost shares and deductibles required by their OHI. VA will work directly with community providers to get additional information needed to review and process these claims. Previous claims do not have to be resubmitted unless requested by VA. As always please see your local County Veterans Service Officer if you have any questions. If in doubt as to who to contact refer to <https://nvf.org/veteran-service-officers>. [Source VA press release | January 10, 2018]

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## **Emergency Medical Bill Claims Update 04 ► Actions to Take After Receiving Care**

Once a Veteran’s immediate emergency medical care needs have been addressed, the Veteran, a family member, friend, or hospital staff member should contact the nearest VA medical facility within 72-hours. Once notified, VA staff will assist the Veteran and/or his/her representatives in understanding eligibility and how eligibility relates to services rendered in the community. VA staff will also ensure that, if desired, the Veteran is transferred to a VA medical center upon stabilization and that the Veteran is set up to receive additional care, post discharge, without interruption. Important: When a Veteran receives emergency medical care, notifying VA as quickly as possible is always best. It ensures maximum VA coverage and assists VA in providing the Veteran the care they need.

### **Filing a Claim**

Claims for emergency medical care should be submitted to VA as soon as possible after care has been provided. The deadline for filing a claim depends on whether care was provided for a service-connected condition or a nonservice-connected condition. Following describes the requirements, how to file a claim, and payment rates:

- *Service-Connected Condition* -- Claim must be submitted to VA within two (2) years of the date emergency medical care was received. However, filing the claim as soon as possible after care has been provided is

highly recommended because it helps make sure that all required documentation is readily available and that providers receive their payment in a timely manner.

- *Nonservice-Connected Condition* -- Claim must be submitted to VA within 90 days of the date of discharge, or 90 days from the date that all attempts to receive required payments from a liable third party are completed and not successful in eliminating the Veteran's personal liability to the provider. A liable third party includes an other health insurer, worker's compensation, civil litigation, etc.
- Veterans or their personal representatives may file a claim for reimbursement of emergency treatment costs that they have incurred and paid to the provider. In this situation, Veterans should obtain and submit all related treatment and billing records to the closest VA medical facility. In most cases, providers will submit a claim directly to VA, and the Veteran will not have to take further action. Submit claims for services not pre-authorized by VA to the VA medical facility closest to where the emergent treatment was provided.
- Submission must include a standard billing form (such as a CMS 1450 or CMS 1500), containing false claims notice. Submit claims via Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) transaction (such as an 837I or 837P). Documentation related to the medical care may be required prior to claim processing.
- Generally, 100% Medicare rates for service-connected conditions are paid. Generally, for nonservice-connected conditions, 70% of Medicare payments rates will be paid.

### **Receiving Payment from VA**

Once a claim for emergency treatment is received by VA, the claim will be administratively reviewed to determine Veteran eligibility. If the Veteran meets the administrative eligibility criteria to receive emergency care in the community, the treatment documentation will then be reviewed by VA clinical staff to determine if the treatment received meets the clinical criteria necessary for VA to pay for the care. VA makes every effort to adjudicate claims for emergency treatment quickly and accurately. When further information or clarification is needed by VA, claims processing may be delayed. If a Veteran is charged for emergency care received in the community and believes the charges should be covered by VA, they should contact the nearest VA medical facility as soon as possible. VA staff will assist the Veteran in understanding eligibility and in determining whether the bill received is appropriate. VA will assist the Veteran and work to resolve any billing issues with the community provider. For additional information, please reach out to the nearest VA medical center responsible for processing the claims.

[Source: IB-10-1119—COMMUNITY CARE | April 17, 2018 ++]

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## **VA R&D Program ► Congress Told DARPA-Like Program Needed**

The Veterans Affairs Department's research and development operations need a substantial reboot to provide vets with emerging technologies that could improve their lives when they return home, experts told Congress. Devoting more agency funds to R&D would not only help put more products on the market in less time but improving care today would drive down medical costs in the long run, veteran-focused technologists and entrepreneurs told a House panel on 22 MAY. And officials should specifically designate funds for the issues they want to impact, they said. Witnesses encouraged lawmakers to pursue legislation that lowers costs and increases vets' access to health care tech, and also explored the possibility of creating a moonshot research office at VA modeled after the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. Today, VA officials prioritize individual topics for more research, like suicide prevention or advanced prosthetics, but those efforts often get glommed onto existing efforts and may not get the extra resources they need. Witnesses said a structure that sets aside funds for researchers to target specific priority areas—the way DARPA does—could help get those projects over the finish line.

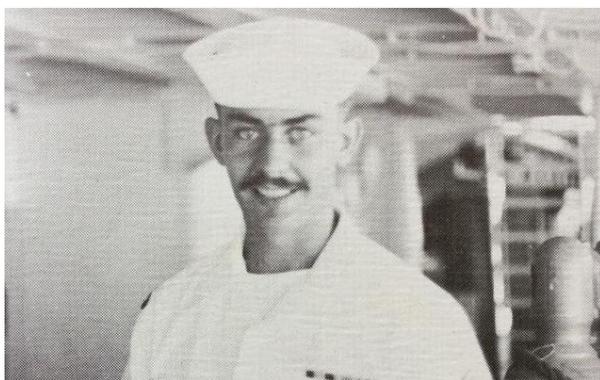
For instance, the Trump administration and former VA Secretary David Shulkin both singled out suicide prevention as a top priority for researchers, yet there's no funding for technology that specifically addresses that issue, said John Wordin, president and founder of Project Hero, which develops software to track PTSD symptoms in vets. "We're all fighting for the same private-sector, private-donor dollar," said Christopher Meek, founder and

chairman of SoldierStrong, which develops bionic prosthetics for disabled veterans. If Congress doesn't pour more money into long-term research, he said, the projects that could make the biggest impact on veterans' quality of life may never come to fruition. "This funding has to be found somewhere," he said. "In time, it will not only reduce the costs of those devices, it's going to reduce the cost of medical and VA care for those patients." The VA received a 6.1 percent increase in R&D funding under the 2018 appropriations bill, but "there's no question we need to reallocate resources and get new resources" for the agency, said Rep. Barbara Comstock (R-VA), who chairs the House Science Subcommittee on Research and Technology. [Source: Nextgov | Jack Corrigan | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Claims Backlog Update 158 ► Barry Mensch | One of 471,000 Appeals**

Barry Mensch is a statistic. He's one of nearly half a million veterans whose appeals for disability benefits are pending in the government system. He's waited nearly three years for a decision and wondered if he'd been forgotten. "I waited 45 years after I left Vietnam to file this claim and they're giving me the runaround like I don't even exist," said Mensch, 70, of Whitehall Township. He served on a Naval hospital ship in Vietnam for about 11 months in 1968. In 2008, he had surgery for cancer. He said 22 lymph nodes were removed from his neck, along with a muscle that supports his right shoulder. His right arm now droops. He can't use it to reach the top shelf of his kitchen cabinets and gave up bowling, which wasn't easy for someone who's rolled several perfect games.



"It took away some of the motion," Mensch told Morning Call's reporter Paul Muschick. In 2013, he applied for veterans' benefits for the cancer, loss of motion and other conditions. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs told him he didn't qualify. He appealed and in September 2015, had a video hearing with a judge from the Board of Veterans Appeals. He said he was told to submit additional evidence and did. He hasn't heard anything since, though the end finally may be in sight.

Sadly, other veterans have met their end before their cases were decided. Muschick wrote in a March column about 1,100 veterans who died after waiting more than a year for the VA to rule on their appeals, according to the agency's inspector general. Veterans died while waiting for slow-moving VA benefits appeals Mensch saw that column and contacted Muschick to share his story.

As we prepare to celebrate Memorial Day and honor veterans who died fighting for our country, let's keep people like Mensch in mind, too. In denying Mensch's benefits in 2014, the VA told him his service medical records showed no complaints about cancer symptoms and no link was found between the cancer and his service. The agency presumes certain illnesses, including some cancers, in Vietnam veterans stem from exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange. If veterans can document they have one of those illnesses, and document they served in areas in

Vietnam where herbicides were present, they qualify for benefits without having to prove the exposure caused their illness.

Mensch served offshore on the USS Sanctuary. Unlike ground troops, not all sailors are presumed to have been exposed. They must prove they came in contact with herbicides. Mensch can prove that. The Sanctuary is on a VA registry of watercraft determined to have been exposed by docking, sailing on inland waterways or operating close to shore with evidence that crew members went ashore. Mensch told me he went ashore to Da Nang at least twice. He suspects he also came in contact with Agent Orange through helicopters that brought wounded soldiers to the hospital ship from the battlefields. His primary job was managing supplies, but he said he occasionally carried stretchers from those helicopters.

What he's not proven to the VA, and hopes the information in his appeal will change, is that his cancer was related to his military service. Mensch had squamous cell carcinoma, which is not on the list of presumptive illnesses associated with herbicides, according to the VA. So he must prove a connection to his time in Vietnam. Mensch said the judge told him during his video hearing to submit a letter from a physician saying it was "at least as likely as not" that his cancer was related to Agent Orange. He said he sent three letters and has been waiting for a ruling ever since. "Sending these three letters was the last thing I had any control over," he said

As the delay dragged on, Mensch sought help from then-U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent and from the Lehigh County Veterans Affairs Office. All they could tell him to do was wait, explaining that appeals take time. They can take a long time. Veterans waited an average of three years for resolution of their appeals in fiscal year 2017, according to the VA. There were more than 471,000 appeals pending at the end of last fiscal year, some at the Board of Appeals where Mensch's case is and some at lower levels, according to the board's most recent annual report. The backlog grew as the VA focused on handling initial benefits claims and assigned appeals staff to that task. The March inspector general's report found that appeals often languished for hundreds of days with no activity.

Late last year, VA launched a new program designed to shorten appeal times. **It is available to some veterans now and will be implemented for all appeals next year.** It allows claims that aren't being submitted with additional information to go directly to a higher-level reviewer, with the goal of completing a review within 125 days. The previous process, which had multiple steps, was "too inefficient," the VA told Muschick. It split jurisdiction for processing appeals and was "open record," meaning new evidence could be submitted at any point. Mensch may not have to wait much longer. When VA was asked the VA about the case they said the veterans law judge requested another medical opinion on 9 APR. The opinion is expected to be provided by about 9 JUN. Then the judge will rule. If Mensch had been told about that, maybe he wouldn't have been so frustrated. Now he at least knows he wasn't forgotten. [Source: The Morning Call | Paul Muschick | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Leadership Update 01 ► 50 Days Without A Secretary | Long Term direction Unknown**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has now been without a secretary for 50 days, leaving the organization in a state of limbo. The absence of permanent senior leadership in the wake of former Secretary Shulkin's firing on 28 MAR and a high job vacancy rate across the enterprise has left many veterans uncertain about the future strategic direction of the VA. Despite the glaring deficiencies in both leadership and personnel, VA spokesman Curt Cashour said, "Under President Trump, VA has had its most productive year in decades — we have made groundbreaking progress, particularly in the areas of accountability, transparency and efficiency across the department." The American Legion counts 17 major issues that remain unaddressed in the absence of permanent Senate-confirmed leadership at the head of the VA.

The most glaring problem is the high vacancy rate at the VA. As of March 8, the vacancy rate is nearly 9 percent, amounting to more than 33,600 personnel. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the hardest hit by the

vacancies, is short more than 30,000 health-care providers and administrative personnel. Strangely, not all of the job vacancies are listed on USA JOBS. “I can’t identify any large corporation or hospital that has a nearly 9 percent vacancy rate and still attests to operating efficiently,” said Louis Celli, American Legion National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division Director. These vacancies are creating capacity shortages at the VA and pushing more veterans out of the system to seek more expensive community care. Although there hasn't been a presidential-appointed VA Secretary, acting Secretary of the VA Robert Wilkie has been serving in the capacity as Secretary since March 28, but the page listing his public travel hasn't been updated in months, marking another black hole in the “groundbreaking progress” the VA has made in transparency and accountability under the Trump Administration, according to Celli. The other significant issues needing the attention of top leadership include:

- Completion of the \$16 billion Cerner electronic health record contract;
- Filling the vacancies with qualified talent — many of the departed personnel held a doctorate;
- Full implementation of the Telehealth program;
- Improvement of the White House VA hotline — many veterans say they never hear back following initial calls;
- Expansion of mental health services for veterans not otherwise qualified for VA benefits due to conditions such as an other than honorable discharge;
- Implementation of the VA’s suicide prevention plan currently at the White House; and
- Completion of the MyVA website.

In the absence of a confirmed secretary, there is concern that the organization will not continue to progress on these issues. And with no name being touted for serious consideration to become the organization’s head, there’s no telling how the VA will continue to devolve over the coming months. Lambasting the state of the VA is easy. What’s not as simple is finding solutions to the problems plaguing the organization in the absence of qualified leadership. However, some of the issues at hand could be addressed without the nomination of a qualified and vetted individual. [Source: American Legion | Mackenzie Wolf | May 17, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 78 ► Trump Nominating Robert Wilkie to Lead VA**

President Donald Trump announced 19 MAY that he is nominating Robert Wilkie to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, three weeks after his previous nominee withdrew from the confirmation process amid controversy. Wilkie is currently the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness but has been serving as the VA's acting secretary since the President fired VA Secretary David Shulkin in late March. But Trump said the announcement came as a surprise even to Wilkie. "Acting Secretary Wilkie -- who, by the way, has done an incredible job at the VA, and I'll be informing him in a little while, he doesn't know this yet -- that we're going to be putting his name up for nomination to be secretary of the Veterans Administration," Trump said, before shaking Wilkie's hand. "I'm sorry that I ruined the surprise. I'll see you anyway." Wilkie's nomination capped a tumultuous seven weeks since the President fired VA Secretary David Shulkin and nominated White House physician Ronny Jackson to replace him, only to watch Jackson's nomination flame out amid allegations of improper behavior during his time at the helm of the White House medical unit.

Trump made the announcement during an unrelated White House event on prison reform and as news coverage of the latest mass shooting in America blanketed the airwaves. He delivered the VA news moments after expressing his "sadness and heartbreak" over the Santa Fe, Texas, school shooting. With Wilkie's nomination, the President will look to move past the failed nomination of Jackson, who was first viewed as unqualified to lead the federal government's second-largest department, but whose nomination was ultimately stymied by a series of allegations leveled by nearly two dozen of his current and former colleagues. Jackson denied the allegations of abusive behavior,

drinking on the job and loosely prescribing medication, but withdrew from consideration because he said the allegations had "become a distraction" to Trump's agenda.

Since being named to lead VA in an acting capacity, Wilkie has been working to steady the agency, meeting with employees to discuss their jobs, according to an agency source. But his views on how fully to shift care for veterans into the private sector and other high-profile issues facing the agency remain unclear. In an introductory three-minute video message to VA staff soon after taking the job, Wilkie stressed his background as the son of an Army artillery commander and service as a Navy intelligence officer. He was a senior Pentagon staffer under Defense Secretaries Robert Gates and Donald Rumsfeld. While serving in the VA's top job in an acting capacity, Wilkie had received praise from White House insiders and veterans' groups for the job he had done. But some veterans' groups chafed at his appointment, calling on Trump to remove Wilkie after he was nominated, and instead give the job to Thomas Bowman, the VA's deputy secretary, whom the White House passed over for the job of acting secretary.

In Wilkie's acting capacity, he oversaw the approval of a critical contract, the \$10 billion deal with Cerner Corporation to overhaul the health records of millions of veterans. Wilkie appeared at the White House press briefing 16 MAY, and praised the passage of House legislation that, if it becomes law, would give veterans more freedom to see doctors outside the VA's health care system. The bill passed the House in a bipartisan fashion, despite concerns from some Democrats who viewed it as a step toward dismantling the VA health care system. However, the move fulfilled a campaign pledge of Trump to expand private care for veterans who are dissatisfied with the healthcare they receive in VA's system. [Source: CNN | Jeremy Diamond, Juana Summers & Allie Malloy | May 18, 2018 ++]

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### **VA Heart Care Update 03 ► Cardiovascular Disease Death Rates**

Death rates for veterans with heart disease and chronic heart failure varied widely in the Veterans Affairs healthcare system in an analysis of medical records. Led by Peter W. Groeneveld, a researcher at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Philadelphia, researchers analyzed mortality rates for ischemic heart disease and chronic heart failure across the 138 VA medical centers in the United States. Their findings were published 16 MAY in the Journal of American Medicine Cardiology. The Department of Veterans Affairs provides healthcare to more than 2 million veterans with cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease includes ischemic heart failure, which is a restriction in blood supply to tissues, and chronic heart disease, which is when the heart fails to pump sufficient blood through the body, including during a heart attack. "Differences in mortality rates among VA chronic cardiovascular disease populations may reflect differences across medical centers in the quality of care," the researchers wrote.

The researchers said the differences could be in treatment and screening guidelines, access for urgent medical conditions, post-hospitalization care protocols, chronic disease management programs, and specialty care, social work services and behavioral healthcare. Studied were 930,079 veterans with ischemic heart disease (IHD) and 348,015 with Conic Heart Failure (CHF) that received inpatient or outpatient care between 2010 and 2014. The average age patients was 77, and 89 percent of IHD patients and 83 percent of CHF were white. Death rates varied across the VA medical centers from 5.5 percent to 9.4 percent for IHD and from 11.1 percent to 18.9 percent for CHF. The number of cases at each medical center also varied widely -- from 1,060 to 19,955 with IHD and for CHF it ranged from 335 to 7,917. "For more than 20 years, the VA has attempted to measure and improve healthcare quality for veterans with these conditions, yet most of these efforts have focused on either process measures of quality -- such as beta blockers for heart failure -- or surrogate clinical outcomes -- such as hypertension treatment targets," the author wrote. But the researchers noted that while data permitting hospital comparisons of the outcomes of acute cardiovascular care are publicly available, "little is known about variation" across the VA medical centers in outcomes for chronic, high-risk cardiovascular conditions. [Source: UPI | Allen Cone | May 16, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Caregiver Support ► CaringBridge Partnership & Caregiver Support Line**

The Caregiver Support Program would like to introduce a new partnership with CaringBridge. It is a non-profit that allows people going through a health journey to create a free, secure and private website to keep family and friends updated on their health, treatment and recovery. CaringBridge has created a customized and dedicated landing page for Veterans, Service Members, and their Caregivers to connect with family and friends. The Caregiver Support Program and CaringBridge welcome those in need to create a website and experience the support of their loved ones. Creating a website is easy. You can personalize it by giving it a name, adding photos, and creating a section that identifies ways your family and friends can support you through your journey. You have the ability to post quick updates and/or longer journal entries. Your personalized CaringBridge website can be linked to personal fundraiser sites and other helpful tools. To get started today visit [www.caringbridge.org/military-service](http://www.caringbridge.org/military-service). CaringBridge has been in existence for 21 years and today is the largest nonprofit social network dedicated to health with a global footprint:

- More than 2.1 billion visits to CaringBridge since 1997
- 90% of CaringBridge funding comes from those who use CaringBridge
- Every 8 minutes a CaringBridge website is created
- 1 in 12 people in the U.S. turn to CaringBridge either as a patient or as a family or friend supporting a loved one
- Over 60% of the websites started on CaringBridge are by Caregivers

VA's Caregiver Support Line assistance is just a quick phone call away. Whether you're in need of immediate assistance or have questions about what services you may be eligible for, the caring licensed social workers who answer the support line can:

- Provide you with information about assistance available from VA.
- Help you access services.
- Connect you with the Caregiver Support Coordinator at a VA Medical Center near you.
- Just listen, if that's what you need right now.

If you're just getting started with VA, calling the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274 is a great first step to learn more about the support that is available to you. [Source: Veterans Health | May 24, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Prostate Cancer Program Update 14 ► Non-Aggressive Cancer Treatment Progress**

The Veterans Affairs health system has made tremendous progress over the past decade in convincing patients to postpone surgery or radiation for non-aggressive prostate cancer, new research shows. Instead, strong majorities of VA patients are opting for active surveillance of the slow-growing cancer, which relies on regular check-ups, blood tests, and occasional needle samplings of prostate tissue to check for any signs of a tumor getting worse. The researchers used data from the VA's Central Data Warehouse, in one of the largest studies of its kind, involving a review of the medical records of 125,083 former servicemen, mostly over the age of 55, who were newly diagnosed with low-risk prostate cancer between 2005 and 2015. Researchers found that:

- In 2005, 27% of men under age 65 passed on immediate therapy, and 4% chose active surveillance.
- In 2015, 72% passed on immediate therapy, and 39% choosing active surveillance.

"Our study shows that the Veterans Affairs health care system has done a good job over the last decade in adopting 'conservative management' of men diagnosed with early-stage disease, with many men choosing active surveillance as an alternative to immediate therapy," says study senior investigator Stacy Loeb, MD, a urologist. "This marks a historic reversal, at least at the VA, in the decades-long overtreatment of men with prostate cancers least likely to

cause harm, and brings their care more in line with the latest best practice guidelines," Loeb says in comments accompanying the study. Loeb credits the VA's success to several factors, and noted that it is part of a national network of publicly funded hospitals, where many physicians are salaried, so there is little financial incentive to over treat. "The main conclusion to be drawn from the data is that if so many veterans can quickly adopt this less-risky disease-management strategy, then so too might other American men if they understood the potential benefits of this option," she says. [Source: Health Leaders Media | John Commins | May 16, 2018 ++]

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## **VA RAMP Update 02 ► Program Opt In Vice Invitation Only Now Allowed**

In November 2017, VA launched Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) with the goal of providing eligible Veterans with the earliest possible resolution of their disability compensation claim. Initially started as an invitation only program, on April 2, 2018, the Department of Veterans Affairs expanded RAMP, by removing the requirement that Veterans first receive an invitation from VA in order to elect participation in the program. You can access the [Opt-in Form](#) on the Appeals Modernization webpage.

RAMP is voluntary and will provide eligible Veterans the opportunity to enter the new, more efficient review process outlined in the historic Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (Appeals Modernization Act), before the law becomes effective in February 2019. Under RAMP, Veterans can expect to receive a review of the decision on their claim much faster than if they remain in the legacy appeals process. The program will allow participants the option to have their decisions reviewed in the Higher-Level Review or Supplemental Claim Lane outlined in the Appeals Modernization Act. RAMP will only run until the February 2019 implementation period for the Appeals Modernization Act. However, VA will continue to process any RAMP elections received after February 2019.

The legacy appeal process, which was set in law, split jurisdiction over appeals in compensation claims between Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board), adding more complexity to the appeal process. The Appeals Modernization Act establishes a new review process for VA claims that is timely, transparent, and fair, and thus allows us to improve the delivery of benefits and services to you and your family. RAMP gives you the opportunity for early participation in the new Supplemental Claim and Higher-Level Review lanes. To determine which route is the best for you to take consider the following:

- **Supplemental Claim Lane** - Select this option if you have additional evidence that is new and relevant to support granting your benefit claim. VA will assist you in gathering new and relevant evidence to support your claim. VA will also review any new and relevant evidence submitted since they last decided your claim. If desired, you can continue to submit supplemental claims with new and relevant evidence or use the Higher-Level Review Lane after you receive a decision in the Supplemental Claim Lane by making an election for further review within one year of the date on your decision notice. VA's goal is to complete these supplemental claims in an average of 125 days.

- **Higher-Level Review Lane** - Select this option if you have no additional evidence to submit in support of your claim but you believe that there was an error in the initial decision. VA’s goal is to complete these higher-level reviews in an average of 125 days. A higher-level review consists of an entirely new review of your claim by a senior claims adjudicator. Note that the Higher-Level Reviewer will only consider evidence that was in VA’s possession at the time you opt-in. You and/or your representative will NOT be able to add new evidence during this process. VA cannot assist you in developing additional evidence. However, if the Higher-Level Reviewer discovers an error in their duty to assist in the prior decision, your claim will return to initial decision makers for additional processing to correct the error. You or your representative can request an optional one time telephonic informal conference with the Higher-Level Reviewer to identify specific errors in the case. Requesting an informal conference may cause some delay in the processing of your higher-level review. If necessary, you can use the Supplemental Claim Lane after you receive a decision in the Higher-Level Review Lane, by making an election for further review within one year of the date on your decision notice. However, you will not have immediate access to the Higher-Level Review after receiving a decision in the Higher-Level Review Lane.

Veterans may check the status and stage of their appeal to determine if it meets the RAMP eligibility criteria listed above by visiting VA’s vets.gov website at: <https://www.vets.gov>. You are eligible for RAMP if you have a disability compensation appeal pending in one of the following legacy appeal stages:

- Notice of Disagreement (NOD)
- Form 9, Appeal to Board of Veterans’ Appeals (Board)
- Certified to the Board but not yet activated for a Board decision.
- Remand from the Board to VBA.

[Source: VA Benefits Bulletin | May 2018 ++]

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## **VA EHR Update 13 ► Records Remain Overhaul In Jeopardy After Department Shakeup**

Congressional Democrats are demanding Veterans Affairs leaders fire the department’s acting chief information officer, saying his past involvement with questionable data collection during the 2016 presidential campaign raises concerns about his access to veterans’ personal information. In a letter to VA Deputy Secretary Thomas Bowman sent 15 May 15, 11 House and Senate Democrats also decried the “malign neglect” of the department’s electronic health record modernization efforts since VA Secretary David Shulkin was fired in March. “This is evident through the failure to obtain qualified leadership for the Office of Information Technology, reports of political interference hindering EHR implementation, as well as the rampant vacancies for positions that ensure proper oversight of a new EHR system,” the letter stated. “We ask that you act to swiftly resolve our concerns and ensure an interoperable VA EHR system with the Department of Defense expeditiously comes to fruition.”

In a statement 16 MAY, acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie pushed back on the lawmakers’ request, calling Camilo Sandoval, the acting VA chief information officer, “an important member” of the VA leadership team. “(He) has extensive experience in financial technology and digital mobile payments,” Wilkie said. “Along with his close working relationship with the White House, this makes him well suited to oversee VA’s IT infrastructure while the White House vets a permanent candidate for the position.” Wilkie also said finalizing a decision on electronic health record modernization remains a top priority for department leaders. A plan to overhaul Veterans Affairs records was one of President Donald Trump’s most touted achievements last year, but the work has been stalled for weeks since Shulkin’s dismissal. Multiple sources close to work on the issue say White House officials are wavering on whether

to move ahead on contract plans with the Missouri-based Cerner Corp. to bring VA's electronic medical records systems in line with the Defense Department.

The plan was designed to provide seamless lifelong medical files for service members, and was touted by Shulkin as potentially revolutionary to American medicine because of the interoperability between the massive Defense Department and VA health systems. But concerns over Cerner's work with military health officials in recent weeks have led to a halt in negotiations with the VA contract. The official mostly closely associated with that work — Scott Blackburn, VA's acting executive for the Office of Information and Technology — left his post last month. He was replaced by Sandoval, the former data operations director for Trump's presidential campaign. Democrats in their letter Tuesday called his appointment unacceptable. "This appointment raises serious data security concerns stemming from Mr. Sandoval's previous position as the director of data operations in 2016 while the Trump campaign was contracting with Cambridge Analytica," the letter stated. "Cambridge Analytica's misuse of personal information from tens of millions of Americans, including veterans, was an incredible breach of trust. As such, Mr. Sandoval's role in these activities must be thoroughly examined and he should be put nowhere near veterans' health and benefits data."

The letter also references a Politico report that Sandoval is the subject of a \$25 million lawsuit for harassment and discrimination against other campaign staffers. The letter signers asked for "a first-class leader who is capable of implementing the VA's EHR modernization and fulfilling the VA's obligation to our nation's heroes" instead of Sandoval. The letter notes that in the last four months, nearly 40 senior staffers have resigned from the department, "effectively stalling operations in essential areas such as information technology." Both Democrats and Republicans in Congress have voiced concerns about extensive vacancies at the bureaucracy. "In order to provide world-class service to our veterans, the VA must be fully staffed with driven, capable leaders," the letter stated. "Current VA employees, who are dedicated to serving and honoring our veterans, are forced to shoulder the work of former-colleagues, contributing the low morale among the VA workforce."

Signers of the letter included Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) and ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee; Mark Takano (D-CA) and the second-ranking Democrat on that panel; and Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), the second-ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 16, 2018 ++]

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## **VA EHR Update 14 ► 10-Year, \$10 Billion Signed With Cerner Corp.**

The Veterans Affairs Department inked a 10-year, \$10 billion contract 17 MAY with Cerner Corp. to adopt the same commercial electronic health records system as the Pentagon. Veterans Affairs Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie in a statement said VA's future health records system will seamlessly communicate and exchange records with the Pentagon's, resolving an issue that cost the agencies billions in recent years. "President Trump has made very clear to me that he wants this contract to do right by both Veterans and taxpayers, and I can say now without a doubt that it does," Wilkie said. "Signing this contract today is an enormous win for our nation's veterans. It puts in place a modern IT system that will support the best possible health care for decades to come. That's exactly what our nation's heroes deserve."

The contract with Cerner was announced last year by then-Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, but several issues, including congressional funding and Shulkin's eventual firing, slowed the contract's final signing. According to Wilkie, the Cerner contract will allow the agencies to share patient data among Veterans Affairs, the Defense Department and community providers "through a secure system." Combined, the two agencies have more than 20 million beneficiaries, including soldiers and veterans. "Health information will be much easier to share, and health care will be much easier to coordinate and deliver, as well as faster and safer," Wilkie said. The department received

nearly \$800 million in funding from Congress for fiscal 2018 to begin the contract. "We're honored to have the opportunity to improve the health care experience for our nation's veterans. The VA has a long history of pioneering health care technology innovation, and we look forward to helping deliver high-quality outcomes across the continuum of care," said Cerner President Zane Burke, in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department is rolling out MHS Genesis, also developed by Cerner Corp., at four locations, but the pilot keeps hitting problems. That contract is worth up to \$9 billion. Work temporarily stopped in February to address more than 14,000 help-desk tickets, many of which involved workflow changes. Pentagon testing and evaluation officials last week declared the system "neither operationally effective nor operationally suitable" after testing three of the four facilities. Testing officials determined users could only use about half the 197 tasks used as performance measures, and experienced latency issues and outages as more logged on. They concluded the end-to-end system couldn't support the capacity of the four test sites even though the department expects to support 9.6 million beneficiaries from hundreds of facilities. Defense officials said they will learn from the platform's initial failures, and they'll be working hand in hand with Veterans Affairs officials as the agency works to implement the same health records platform. "VA and DoD are collaborating closely to ensure lessons learned at DoD sites will be implemented in future deployments at DoD as well as VA. We appreciate the DoD's willingness to share its experiences implementing its electronic health record," Wilkie said. [Source: Nextgov.com | Frank Konkel & Heather Kuldell | May 17, 2018 ++]

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## **VA ID Card Update 17 ► New Cards Paid for With Home Depot Logo**

Thousands of veterans received their free veterans ID cards this week featuring their names, their branch of service and a bright red advertisement on the back. The cards, approved by Congress almost three years ago, are available at no charge to veterans with good conduct discharges. But to pay for printing and delivery, the Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with Office Depot, whose logo is displayed on the back of each card. The arrangement was first reported by Military.com earlier this week. VA officials dismissed concerns about the unusual decision to display a corporate logo on a federal ID, noting that Congress approved no funding for the program when it passed the requirement in summer 2015. "As such, VA approached Office Depot regarding a partnership to print and mail ID cards to veterans after applications are reviewed and approved by VA staff," said VA spokesman Curt Cashour. "Under the arrangement, Veterans are not required to pay a fee for the card.

"This is precisely the type of outside-the-box thinking that has been missing from the federal government for far too long and that we are bringing to the table under the leadership of President (Donald) Trump." Neither VA nor Office Depot officials would release the cost of the partnership to the office supply firm. In a statement, Office Depot Vice President for Print Services Andrew Tomlin said the company will supply veterans with ID cards at no cost through the end of 2020 because "Office Depot recognizes the sacrifices that veterans have made and this partnership is one small way that we can give back and thank them for their service." The backs of the cards also feature contact information for the Veterans Crisis Line and a line specifying that the corporate logo "does not represent an endorsement of Office Depot's general policies, activities, products or services" by the VA. As of 15 MAY, 10,735 veterans had received the ID cards, about one-tenth of the applications received through the VA website.

Administration officials touted the new card process in November, as part of their extended Veterans Day celebration. But shortly after the department began accepting online applications, the system was overwhelmed and taken offline. Cashour said officials are confident those technical issues have now been resolved. Nearly 16,000 more veterans have been approved for the cards and are expected to receive them in the mail in coming weeks. The new cards do not replace VA medical cards or official defense retiree cards, and will not carry any force of law behind them. They are designed to be an easy way for veterans to prove their military service for private sector recognition or discounts, replacing the need for individuals to carry around copies of their discharge paperwork. Numerous states

have adopted procedures to display veteran status on driver's licenses to work around that problem. Under rules developed by VA, individuals who served in the armed forces, including the reserve components, and have a character of discharge of honorable or general under honorable conditions are eligible for the new IDs. Veterans with other than honorable status are not eligible, a move that has upset some outside advocates. Veterans can apply for the cards through the VA web site <https://www.vets.gov/?next=%2Fveteran-id-card%2F>. Applicants must register through the site to begin the application process. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 16. 2018 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2018**

**Los Angeles, CA ---** A man who operated parking lots at Los Angeles Veterans Affairs hospitals has agreed to plead guilty to defrauding the VA out of nearly \$14 million. Authorities say David Scott agreed 14 MAY to plead guilty to conspiracy and wire fraud. He's facing 70 months in federal prison. Prosecutors say Scott operated parking lots at VA medical campuses, including a hospital in West Los Angeles. Scott was supposed to pay the VA 60 percent of revenue from the lots, which also were used during UCLA baseball games, nearby theater events and a PGA golf tournament. But authorities say for 15 years, Scott short-changed the system by millions and used the money to finance a lavish lifestyle. Scott also allegedly bribed a VA contracting officer about \$300,000. That man awaits sentencing. [Source: The Associated Press | May 14, 2018 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## **Folds of Honor Scholarships Update 01 ► Free College for Some Vet Families**

A university in Tennessee says it intends to offer a free college education to the children and spouses of military personnel killed or seriously wounded in action, according to media outlets in Memphis. Starting this fall, the University of Memphis will admit such students at no charge, with the help of scholarship dollars, reported TV station WMC. The financial aid is coming through an expansion of the decade-old Folds of Honor program, a nonprofit that offers \$5,000 scholarships to dependents and spouses of the military. Folds of Honor officials told the Commercial Appeal that they have been seeking colleges to accept its \$5,000 scholarships as "payment-in-full" and the University of Memphis was the first to agree.

The scholarship is available to dependents of service personnel under the age of 24, and military spouses of any age, as long as they haven't remarried, says the Folds of Honor website. University officials told WHBQ that they will make up the \$10,000 difference in costs per student through other scholarships. The idea of the scholarship was presented in March to the university's board and received "resounding approval," with details to be worked out later, reported the Commercial Appeal. "This sacrifice is remarkable and we need to recognize that," University of Memphis President David Rudd told the newspaper. A university spokesperson told FOX13 that there may be a cap

on how many scholarship recipients will be admitted, and only Tennessee residents can qualify. [Source: The Charlotte Observer | Mark Price | May 29, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Public Leadership** ► **New Political Office MA Degree Program**

Officials from the Veterans Campaign and University of San Francisco are teaming up to offer a new veterans-focused degree program in public leadership designed to prepare former military members for a life in political office. The new two-year Master’s degree curriculum, which begins this fall, will build off existing seminars and workshops by both institutions geared toward helping would-be candidates for public office build their campaign organization skills. Alumni of those programs include former Navy SEAL Rep. Scott Taylor (R-VA) and Democratic California State Senator Josh Newman.

The degree program will be open to both veterans and non-veterans, but will include a host of military-themed aspects including guest speakers with military backgrounds, networking with veterans in the public policy field, and instructors with knowledge of specific challenges and advantages veterans face when running for office. “Veterans learn what it takes to be a leader in the military, and they often enter civilian life with a drive to continue leading others,” said Seth Lynn, administrative director of the new curriculum program and founder of Veterans Campaign. “Going from being a leader at home or overseas to being a public leader takes a new kind of training. (This program) gives veterans, service members and others who want to keep serving the tools and skills needed to take the next steps.”

The move comes at a time of increasing concern about the lack of veteran voices in national elected office. In the 1970s, more than 75 percent of congressional lawmakers has military experience. Today, less than 20 percent of the elected members in Congress are veterans. Organizers hope the non-partisan program will help ease entry into the public policy field for that group. Officials called military members “a valuable, yet largely untapped, source of civic and political leaders.” Courses will focus on the election process, community organizing and civic management roles, as well as “a variety of professional settings outside politics” for public service. Among the faculty for the program will be Patrick Murphy, former acting secretary of the Army and the first Iraq War veteran elected to Congress, in 2006. Courses will be offered online, with periodic in-person seminars on the East and West Coasts. More information on the program is available at the Veterans Campaign website <http://www.veteranscampaign.org/masters>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 14, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Fraud Attempts Update 01** ► **Anchorage AK | Christopher James DeMure**

A 40-year-old Army officer assigned to Alaska has been charged with making false insurance claims and pocketing nearly \$400,000. Lt. Col. Christopher James DeMure is charged with mail fraud, wire fraud and money laundering. He was arrested Thursday and held at the Anchorage jail. Online court documents do not list his attorney. Prosecutors say DeMure starting in September 2014 filed fraudulent claims for insurance payments from USAA Federal Savings Bank and American Express. Prosecutors say he bought jewelry, performance bicycles, clothing, and electronics, returned them for a refund and later claimed they were lost or stolen. In one claim, Demure during a move from Fort

Benning, Georgia, to Alaska's Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, said his rented trailer was burglarized in Kentucky. He claimed a loss of more than \$215,000. [Source: The Associated Press | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Jobs Update 232** ► **Employer Discrimination Warning | Less-Than-Honorable Discharge**

Military veterans who were discharged for relatively minor offenses say they often can't get jobs, and they hope a recent warning to employers by the state of Connecticut will change that. The state's human rights commission told employers last month they could be breaking the law if they discriminate against veterans with some types of less-than-honorable discharges. Blanket policies against hiring such veterans could be discriminatory, the commission said, because the military has issued them disproportionately to black, Latino, gay and disabled veterans. At least one other state, [Illinois](#), already prohibits hiring discrimination based on a veteran's discharge status, advocates say, but Connecticut appears to be the first to base its decision on what it deems discrimination by the military. Regardless of the state's reasons, veterans say, the attention there could at least educate employers. "You may as well be a felon when you're looking for a job," said Iraq War veteran Kristofer Goldsmith, who said the Army gave him a general discharge in 2007 because he attempted suicide.

An honorable discharge is the only type that entails full benefits. A dishonorable discharge is given after a court-martial for serious offenses, which can include felonies. Other types of discharges in between – known by veterans as "bad paper" – are issued administratively, with no court case, and can stem from behavior including talking back, tardiness, drug use or fighting. The commission says its guidance focused on that middle class of discharges. Sometimes such discharges are given to veterans whose violations stemmed from post-traumatic stress disorder, like Goldsmith's, or brain injuries. Many private employers may not be aware of those extenuating circumstances or understand the differences between discharges, critics say. And they either won't hire bad-paper veterans or won't give them preferences an honorably discharged veteran would get, the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School told the Connecticut commission.

The clinic, acting on behalf of the Connecticut chapter of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, showed the commission job postings that require applicants who have served in the military to have been honorably discharged. It also cited a 2017 report by the advocacy organization Protect Our Defenders that found black service members were more likely to be disciplined than white members. And the commission's guidance to employers notes thousands of service members have been discharged for their sexual orientation. Employers might require an honorable discharge as an easy way to narrow the pool and get strong applicants, said Amanda Ljubicic, vice president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut. "At face value it seems like a simple, logical cutoff to make as an employer," she said. "Certainly this new policy forces employers to think about it differently and to think about the complexities." The Vietnam Veterans of America asked for a presidential pardon for bad-paper veterans. President Barack Obama didn't respond as he was leaving office, nor did President Donald Trump as he was entering, said John Rowan, the organization's president. He was unsure whether activists would ask Trump again.

More than 13,000 service members received a type of discharge for misconduct, known as other than honorable, between 2011 and 2015, despite being diagnosed with PTSD, a traumatic brain injury or another condition associated with misconduct, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found. The Department of Veterans Affairs, under an order from Congress, expanded emergency mental health coverage to those veterans for the first time last year. Passing new laws to address the effects of bad paper is probably not the best solution, said U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who pushed for the changes; rather, he said, the military should stop issuing bad-paper discharges to injured veterans. Goldsmith, 32, said he developed PTSD after his first deployment to Iraq. He was set to leave the military and go to college when the Army extended his active-duty service and ordered him back in 2007.

Goldsmith said he attempted suicide shortly before he was due to deploy. Because of his general discharge, Goldsmith lost his GI Bill benefits. He didn't know how he'd find a job. If he didn't mention his military service, he

would have a four-year gap on his resume. But if he did, he would have to disclose medical information to explain why he left. A friend eventually hired him to work at a photo-booth company, and Goldsmith began contacting members of Congress to press for health care for veterans with bad paper. "Things like addressing employment discrimination on the national level are so far from possible," he said, "I don't think any of us in the advocacy community has put enough pressure on Congress to handle it." [Source: Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Jobs Update 233 ► Truck Driver | Downside**

America has a massive shortage of truck drivers. Joyce Brenny, head of Brenny Transportation in Minnesota, increased driver pay 15 percent this year to try to attract more drivers. Many of her drivers now earn \$80,000, she says, yet she still can't find enough people for the job. About 51,000 more drivers are needed to meet the demand from companies such as Amazon and Walmart that are shipping more goods across the country, according to the American Trucking Associations. The driver shortage is already leading to delayed deliveries and higher prices for goods that Americans buy. The ATA predicts that it's likely to get worse in the coming years.

Many trucking companies are so desperate for drivers that they are offering signing bonuses and pay raises. So why don't more Americans want this job? The Washington Post asked truck drivers who have been doing the job anywhere from four months to 40 years for their views.

- Most said the answer is simple: The lifestyle is rough. You barely see your family, you rarely shower, and you get little respect from car drivers, police or major retailers. Michael Dow said he has been divorced twice because of trucking. Donna Penland said she gained 60 pounds her first year from sitting all day and a lack of healthful food on the road.
- A few drivers told The Washington Post that they earn \$100,000, but many said their annual pay is less than \$50,000 (government statistics say median pay for the industry is \$42,000). As for the bonuses, driver Daniel Gollnick said they are a "complete joke" because of all the strings attached.
- Despite the hardships, half said they would recommend the job to friends and family, chiefly because, as Gollnick said, "it's the easiest money you can get without a college degree."
- Michael Dow of Dallas has been a truck driver for more than two decades. He and his brother started a company, Dow Brothers Transportation, this year. They hope it will more than double their pay from prior years.

[Source: Washington Post | May 29, 2018 ++]

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## **Six Flags ► Handicap Policy Impacts Some Vet Access**

A wounded veteran was dismayed to be turned away from a Six Flags Over Georgia ride the other day, but the park cites safety precautions. "We apologize to Mr. Jones for any inconvenience; however, to ensure safety, guests with certain disabilities are restricted from riding certain rides and attractions," a statement from Six Flags said. "Our accessibility policy includes ride safety guidelines and the requirements of the federal American Disabilities Act." USMC Staff Sgt. (Ret.) Johnny "Joey" Jones is a Dalton native who enlisted after high school and worked as a bomb

technician while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2010, he stepped on an improvised explosive device and lost both of his legs. Today, he uses prosthetic limbs.



A lifelong fan of amusement parks, he says he’s been able to enjoy attractions at Disneyland, Universal Studios Hollywood and Sea World even after his injury. “I do not try to ride a ride where your legs dangle,” he said. “I’ve only gone on rides where I knew the safety equipment could function. If there is a safe way to ride it, I’m on it.” He and his son had boarded the Mindbender roller coaster at Six Flags when an attendant said he had to exit the ride. “I got in, the lap thing came down. I was fixed in. Once they saw my legs they asked me to get off,” Jones said. “(The attendant) said, ‘you’ve got to have two real legs to ride.’” That is, in fact, exactly what Six Flags’ safety policy states.

*“Each rider must maintain an upright seated position with their head against the headrest and back against the seat back during the duration of the ride and their arms, hands, legs, and feet inside the ride vehicle at all times. Guests must possess at least one (1) fully functioning arm and two (2) fully functional legs,” the policy posted on the Six Flags site reads. It goes on to say that riders “must have upper body control, a strong grasp, and must be restrained by a lap bar and notes that “exceptionally large or tall people may not be able to ride.”*

The Mindbender is a fast-moving attraction where the riders go upside down at times, the park’s description says. “Guests should be prepared to brace for strong front-to-back, top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top forces as well as mild side-to-side forces,” the safety guidelines say. “The Mindbender is very difficult to evacuate due to the high, steep, narrow catwalks.” In July 2011, a U.S. Army veteran who’d lost his legs while deployed in Iraq was killed after he was thrown from a roller coaster in upstate New York. The family of Sgt. James Hackemer settled for “a seven-figure amount,” investigators having determined that “park workers didn’t follow rules posted at the ride’s entrance, which require that riders have both legs,” The Associated Press reported. Jones said he had not heard directly from Six Flags since posting messages about his experience on social media. The host of an inspirational podcast, “Blown Away with JJJ,” he has served as a military analyst for Fox News and made numerous other media appearances. He’s also appeared in some big-screen roles including a turn as a wounded soldier in “Lincoln,” starring Daniel Day-Lewis. [Source: Atlanta Tribune News Service | Jennifer Brett | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Cemetery Colorado Update 06 ► Pikes Peak National Cemetery**

VA’s National Cemetery Administration continued a proud legacy as they dedicated [Pikes Peak National Cemetery](#) on 25 MAY. Cemetery director Paul LaGrange said the dedication signified our nation’s on-going commitment to care, in perpetuity, for the men and women who served with distinction in the U.S. armed forces. In President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, he said, “From these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.” During the ceremony, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Randy Reeves will renew President Lincoln’s pledge to honor the unbroken line of American citizens who

served and sacrificed in defense of our nation. It is a pledge current and future team members of Pikes Peak National Cemetery will commit to daily as they provide each Veteran’s final benefit with full dignity: we will forever commemorate the service and stories of our Veterans and their contributions to protecting and building our country.



The new 374-acre national cemetery will serve the burial needs of the 95,000 Veterans in the area for the next 100 years. VA is expected to complete as early as October 2018 an early turnover portion of the property along Drennan Road which will accommodate the casketed and cremated remains of Veterans, their spouses and eligible dependents. When complete, Pikes Peak National Cemetery will be VA’s 136th national shrine and serve as a centerpiece for Veterans in the greater Southern Colorado area. It will serve as a gathering place on special occasions, especially Memorial Day, to pay tribute to the brave men and women who served our country during times of war and peace. The cemetery will also be a focal point for greater volunteerism in the community. Veterans and non-Veterans, civic groups and youth organizations will contribute toward fulfilling our nation’s final promise to maintain this cemetery as a national shrine. The opportunity to honor the service of Veterans is a sacred trust – a part of VA’s historic mission, found in the words of President Lincoln, “to care for him who shall have borne the battle.” LaGrange said he was indebted to the Veterans and civic groups that have been a vital part in VA’s efforts to establish this national cemetery. With strong partnerships forged in the community, he was honored to host this dedication ceremony. [Source: Vantage Point | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Student Loans Update 03 ► How Veterans Get Loans Without Knowing It**

Jonathan Ngowaki was halfway through getting his undergraduate degree at DeVry University when he got a letter saying he was \$15,000 in debt. The letter confused him not only because he’d told the school he didn’t want any loans, but also because his post-9/11 veteran status meant his education should have been fully paid for by federal grants. “I was like, ‘Wait a minute, I never signed any loans,’” said Ngowaki, who finished his degree and now works as an engineer with a medical systems company. He went to the financial aid office—the same office that assured him his college expenses were all paid up even as \$5,000 checks began arriving in the mail. Ngowaki said he was told the school had made the loans, something he inadvertently authorized by signing a master promissory note when he first enrolled at DeVry.

For many of the nearly 43 million borrowers with federal loans, signing a promissory note is a noncontroversial part of the college enrollment process in which they promise to repay their loans. Students also check a box when filling out their student aid form indicating whether they want federal loans. The school then certifies the student is eligible and requests a loan from the Education Department, which sends the loan to the school. The college puts it toward the student’s tuition or refunds it to the student for education-related expenses. But the note’s complexity, paired with the ease of signing it and poor practices at some schools, has resulted in dozens — if not hundreds — of students like Ngowaki being shocked to discover they had inadvertently taken on debt. While hard numbers are

difficult to find, groups advocating for student veterans say the problem is one of the most common ones they see. “I didn’t even know what that was,” Ngowaki said of the master promissory note.

Bloomberg Government viewed a copy of his note, which had been digitally signed by him in 2010 prior to enrolling. Ngowaki recalled needing references for part of his student financial aid forms, but wasn’t aware what they were for. DeVry, through a spokeswoman, said Ngowaki received the required disclosure steps regarding his loans. Complaints from student veterans collected by Veterans Education Success and analyzed by Yale Law School found financial issues and student loans were the top problems for veterans at several major for-profit schools. That included numerous complaints from students who were told their education would be fully covered through grants, only to discover the school had taken out loans in their name. The problem isn’t limited to for-profit schools. A 2014 Brookings Institution survey of freshman students at four-year public, private and for-profit schools found that of those with federal loans, 28 percent didn’t even know they had federal debt and 14 percent thought they had no loans at all.

The issue has attracted the attention of lawmakers who want to help students know what they are signing up for when it comes to loans and the subsequent debt. Several proposals, including one in the House Republicans’ bill (H.R. 4508) to update the Higher Education Act, would focus on making the master promissory note, and related documents, more transparent. “There’s a lot of talk about reducing student loan debt,” said Ashlynn Haycock, deputy director of policy and legislation with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. “A large part of that could be resolved by reducing people taking out unnecessary loans.”

Initially, students had to sign a promissory note each time a loan was disbursed. Master promissory notes, which are valid for up to 10 years, were introduced in 1999 to cut down on paperwork for students. “They were trying to make the financial process easier,” said Betsy Mayotte, president and founder of the Institute of Student Loan Advisors, a nonprofit offering students advice on their loans. “Now we have a situation where borrowers have no idea how much they took out in loans because they don’t pay as much attention to it.” There are safeguards in place to ensure students understand their loans, but their effectiveness has been questioned by advocates and lawmakers.

The master promissory note is a 16-page legal document filled with legal and financial terms that are likely beyond the understanding of most recent high school graduates. It is also accompanied by a six-page, plain-language document spelling out what is in the note. But lawmakers have questioned whether that second document is read and understood by students. Rep. Luke Messer (R-Ind.) sponsored an amendment to the House higher education reauthorization bill to create a new plain language form using consumer testing and input from borrowers. It would also include more information for each student on the cost of the loan. Messer initially introduced the measure as a bipartisan bill (H.R. 4119) with Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) before adding it to the larger higher education bill in committee. The bill would also ensure that students would have to give their permission each time a loan is taken out in their name. Colleges and universities are currently required to notify students each time a loan is being taken out. However, students don’t necessarily need to approve the loan after receiving the notification. Instead, colleges can use an opt-out process where students only take action if they want to stop the loan.

Ngowaki said he never heard from DeVry University about the three loans taken out in his name. He only knew of their existence when he was contacted by the servicer of the loans. DeVry has a process in place to provide students information, loan counseling and the rights to opt out of loans, all steps Ngowaki was told of, said Donna Shaults, a spokeswoman for the school. While student advocates accuse some schools of never sending notifications, even schools that do can have things fall through the cracks, said Jill Desjean, a policy analyst with the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. “Students kind of notoriously don’t open their email, or maybe if they’re getting a lot from the institution they might just kind of skim or delete things,” she told Bloomberg Government. “I can see where a student might legitimately say at the end of their time, ‘I didn’t know I was borrowing a loan,’ but I wouldn’t say it was from a lack of trying to tell them they borrowed a loan.”

Students tend to get a lot of email from their schools, making it difficult to determine what they need to open and respond to, said Walter Ochinko, research director with the nonprofit Veterans Education Success. “I’m sure they

send these notices,” he said. “But what I’ve always heard from students is, ‘Do you know how many emails I get from the school?’ ” To combat overwhelmed inboxes, the House higher education bill would require students to sign a promissory note before each loan is taken out. While the measure could help more students be aware of their loans, it could also prevent students from paying their tuition on time, said Mayotte. And eliminating paperwork barriers was the point of the 10-year master promissory note in the first place. “This falls very neatly under the expression the road to Hell is paved with good intentions,” Mayotte said.

It is unclear whether the House will vote on its higher education bill this year. Even if it does, it is increasingly unlikely that the Senate will act on it or produce its own. Yet student veterans groups are continuing to push lawmakers for more clarity in the promissory notes, such as adding the word “loan” to the title of the master promissory note and allowing veterans covered by the GI Bill to sign up for federal grants without also signing up for loans. Veterans groups have taken a particular interest in demystifying the master promissory notes. Most veterans have their tuition covered by federal grants, yet schools will take out loans in the veteran’s name to cover tuition costs while waiting for the Veteran Affairs Department to process payments for the students, Ochinko said. He estimated that getting a student loan can take two to three days, while getting a payment from the Veterans Affairs Department can take several weeks. Haycock said she understands that the higher education law is unlikely to be updated this year. But she’s hoping changes to the master promissory note might be able to move as a standalone bill. “The cost is minimal,” she said. “And the impact is huge.” [Source: Bloomberg Government | Emily Wilkins | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Predatory Colleges ► Freed to Fleece Vet Students**

Try as they might, the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress cannot disguise that they continue to do the bidding of the for-profit college industry, which has saddled working-class students — including veterans — with crushing debt while providing useless degrees, or no degrees at all. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos claimed ignorance during a congressional hearing on 22 MAY when she was asked how many of the college students who told her department that they had been ripped off were complaining about for-profit schools. The widely publicized answer is more than 98 percent. For-profit college fraud dates back to the inception of the G.I. Bill during World War II. A congressional investigation during the 1950s found that schools had cropped up to fleece veterans, siphoning hundreds of millions of dollars while providing worthless training. Since then, Congress has intermittently tightened regulations, only to loosen them under industry pressure, leading to a cycle of exploitation.

The problem became so pervasive that 37 state attorneys general joined forces to combat it. Attorneys general are not only suing abusive for-profit schools, they are suing the federal government, resisting efforts to weaken or ignore regulations that protect students from predatory institutions. The federal government was late to this effort but finally found its footing after the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau opened its doors in 2011. In 2014, the bureau sued Corinthian Colleges, which soon collapsed amid charges that it had lured poor and working-class students by lying to them about job-placement rates — then saddled them with predatory loans. Congress was forced to confront the problem last year when it passed the Forever G.I. Bill, which restored veterans benefits to thousands of men and women who had found themselves shut out of school when for-profit programs charged with fraud closed their doors. Indeed, as The Times reported last week, the Education Department has undermined investigations of the industry by marginalizing or reassigning lawyers and investigators who had been assigned to this matter during the Obama years. Major investigations had been abandoned, including those of the DeVry Education Group (now known as Adtalem Global Education), Bridgepoint Education and Career Education Corporation.

The House would further weaken fraud protection in a bill to overhaul the Higher Education Act. That effort would do away with rules that deny federal aid to career education programs that have historically burdened students with loans far beyond their capacity to pay. It would make short-term or untested programs eligible for federal aid

for which they do not now qualify. The bill would also blur the distinction between for-profit and other colleges, allowing for-profit career training programs to escape regulatory scrutiny that is now required under federal statute and regulation. This bill, in other words, is a love letter to the for-profit industry the likes of which the country has never seen. With the midterm elections fast approaching, Ms. DeVos's enabling of for-profit colleges is putting even some Republicans on edge. This romance with financial predators will be hard to defend for Republicans facing re-election. It should be. [Source: The New York Times | Editorial Board (Opinion) | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **U.S. Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims ► Overview**

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims was established by Article I of the Constitution to review decisions of the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA), which is part of the VA. This court has exclusive jurisdiction over these types of cases. The court reviews decisions appealed by claimants who believe the board erred in its decision. The court's review is based on the record before the agency and arguments of the parties, which are typically presented in a written brief, with oral argument generally held only in cases presenting new legal issues. Among the types cases heard by the court are:

- Survivor benefits cases relate to decisions on whether survivors of Veterans killed in the line of duty will be granted VA benefits. This can include education payments, medical coverage and even lost wages.
- Service-connected disability claims relate to any case searching for disability benefits for a Veteran who was injured while serving his/her country. This type of case will typically seek disability payments, medical coverage and payments, and education payments.
- Cases that involve dispute over education payments – either the amount or frequency.
- Cases that involve claims of benefits such as medical coverage and payments, and may be seeking coverage for specific ailments, surgeries, medicines or other therapies.
- Waivers of indebtedness cases involve requests for the VA to waive, or cease collection on, a debt that is owed for education, disability benefits or medical costs.
- VA home loan eligibility involving the Board of Veterans' Affairs decision in matters of eligibility of a home loan.

The court mainly reviews the board's decision or just as the Veterans law judge reviewed it at the BVA. However, BVA will consider new evidence once the file has been returned to them. The court's decisions primarily are based on whether a legal error was made when BVA denied the claim. The court operates on strict timelines for paperwork and filing, and these are outlined on the court's website as well as the process. Either the appellant (claimant) or the appellee (court attorney) may request extensions for filing necessary documents. Court documents and responses are filed electronically. Sometimes a record may be sent to the representative of the Veteran for review via mail. The court has two clerks who handle all paperwork and filings. The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims can issue the following decisions:

- Remand – The court issues this type of decision most often, and this means the BVA's decision has been overturned and the BVA is required to make a new decision after finishing actions outlined by the court.
- Grant – The court rarely grants the claim and automatically gives the Veteran everything he/she is asking for.
- Deny – The court can also outright deny the claim. If this happens, the Veteran still has the option to appeal to the Federal Circuit, but only in cases where actual VA law is in question. If the case doesn't involve actual question of the VA laws, the Veteran may start over with a new claim to VA.

The court may issue decisions within a few months or may take more than a year. There is no set amount of time for the court to issue a decision. Many times, this period depends upon the type of appeal and the defending attorney

for the Secretary. In 2014, the court’s annual report stated that the average time between filing an appeal and the court issuing a decision as a whole was 286 days. In cases where a single judge’s decision was rendered, the time frame was only 69 days. When an appeal is filed, it is assigned to a judge. It can be reviewed by only one judge, a panel of three judges and although rare it may be heard “en banc” by all nine judges. Most decisions are issued by a single judge. Veterans should remember that the caseload for these judges is quite substantial – nearly 175 per judge were assigned in 2014. Congress enacted the Equal Access to Justice Act in 1980, which states VA will pay attorneys’ fees for representation in the Court if the Veteran’s case prevails. For additional information from these government agencies, the following websites may be useful:

- The Court’s main website can be found at: <https://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/index.php>
- Court forms can be found at: <https://www.courtrecords.org/tools/courtforms>
- The VA Benefit homepage can be found at: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>
- VA’s main website is located at: <https://www.va.gov/>

[Source: Vantage Point | Emily Andrews | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Fraud & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2017**

**Cedar Rapids, IA** -- A woman was convicted 18 MAY for stealing nearly \$200,000 from her deceased boyfriend and his mother for about three years. **Robin Ann Bertelli**, 60, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to one count of bank fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. The plea agreement shows Bertelli admitted that she began a romantic relationship with a former Navy SEAL, identified in court documents as “K.M.,” in 2013, who lived with his elderly widowed mother in rural Central City. Bertelli then moved in with the son and mother and started stealing mail from the widow, including items sent to her from Collins Community Credit Union, because the mother was unable to walk to her mailbox to check her mail. In December 2015, K.M. received an inheritance of about \$18,000 from a relative and deposited it into his checking account. In February 2016, Bertelli and K.M. traveled to Puerto Rico for a vacation, but during the trip, K.M. unexpectedly died in Puerto Rico. Bertelli reported to others that K.M. went swimming, hit his head on a rock, and accidentally drowned, according to court documents.

His family members ultimately discovered that Bertelli had stolen blank checks from him and his mother, according to court documents. From July 2013 through September 2016, Bertelli fraudulently wrote 63 checks to herself and forged their signatures. She then deposited them into her own account at another bank, fraudulently causing transfers of funds from the credit union, which belonged to K.M. and his mother, the plea shows. Three of the transfers occurred after the death of K.M., Bertelli stole a total of \$191,500. Bertelli used the funds for her own purposes, including a purchase of a BMW, according to court documents. Bertelli faces a mandatory minimum of two years and up to 32 years in federal prison and up to over \$1 million fine. This prosecution is part of the Department of Justice’s Elder Abuse Initiative. In March 2016, the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Iowa was selected as one of ten districts nationwide to launch regional Elder Justice Task Forces, which is committed to protecting seniors. [Source: The Gazette | Trish Mehaffey | May 18, 2018 ++]

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## **National Economy Vet Impact ► Current Uptick Not Good for All**

The overall uptick in the national economy may be good news for most veterans, but some states are bucking that trend, according to a new report from researchers at Purdue University. Ten states — California, Washington, Texas, Kansas, North Carolina, Montana, New Mexico, New Jersey, Arkansas and South Dakota — are seeing increases in homeless veterans, according to 2017 statistics cited in the report. And while unemployment among veterans has

dropped, there are regions where veteran unemployment is still higher than that of civilians of similar age, including six western states, five northeastern states and three southeastern states.

The report, “Measuring Our Communities: The State of Military and Veteran Families in the United States,” pulls together military-specific data from more than 30 nationally representative sources, including government sources such as the Census Bureau, the Veterans Affairs department, and others. It uses the “Measuring Communities” online tool (<http://measuringcommunities.org/pages/home/1>), which launched two years ago to facilitate access to data for government, nonprofit and other organizations that want to provide services to veterans and military families in their communities. The tool helps provide insights about all geographic regions of the U.S., often down to the county level. This report uses a snapshot of data from previous years, but the data that is part of the tool itself updates each time the sources provide new figures.

The finding that some states are bucking the national trend, with more unemployment or homelessness among veterans, “made me want to ask more questions,” said Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, director of Purdue’s Military Family Research Institute and co-author of the report along with Purdue’s Kathy Broniarczyk, who is MFRI’s senior director for outreach and operations. One recommendation by the authors was to pay attention to areas where the number of homeless veterans is increasing and find ways to reverse the trend. It’s important to look at the data over time, Wadsworth said. “Wars have long tails,” she said, noting that the needs of Vietnam veterans have not yet peaked. “These veterans will be with us for the rest of their lives. It’s important to know how they’re doing, and how things are changing.”

More than 60 different organizations throughout the country are using the “Measuring Communities” online tool. Now, individuals have access to the tool as well as organizations. Individuals and families might use the tool, for example, to look at aspects of communities where they will move, and perhaps use it in making choices about where they will live, especially when leaving the military. The tool already has helped local nonprofits better focus their limited resources. One group, Wadsworth said, called the institute about providing employment help for younger veterans, not knowing that in their county, unemployment was much higher among older veterans. “They were about to spend a lot of energy ... focusing their efforts on the wrong kind of employment problems,” she said, speaking during a panel discussion Monday about the findings of the report and the uses of the data.

The executive director of a northern Virginia nonprofit used the tool to show a disproportionate amount of aging veterans in her area weren’t getting the services they needed, said Chris Ford, CEO of the National Association of Veteran-Serving Organizations. This data helped her apply for, and receive, a \$68,000 grant — worth nearly seven times the nonprofit’s revenue the previous year. Among other findings:

- Military-connected individuals live in all but three of the 3,142 counties in the U.S.
- More than half of U.S. counties are designated as a “Health Professional Shortage Area” by the Department of Health and Human Services, indicating shortages in at least one type of primary care, dental care or mental health providers. This puts civilians and military families at risk for limited access to health care.
- Nearly 1,000 counties have a shortage of at least one type of mental health care professional.
- Texas and California have the largest numbers of veterans with disabilities, but there are 100 counties where more than 40 percent of the veteran population has disabilities.
- The three states with the highest percentage of 100 percent disabled veterans are Connecticut (4.6 percent); Pennsylvania (3.9 percent) and Illinois (3.7 percent).

Terri Tanielian, senior behavioral scientist for Rand Corp., cautioned that those using data should become “a bit of a skeptic” and should ask whether the information is “enough for me to understand what’s happening in Community X?” “I’m a huge proponent of data-driven decision making,” Tanielian said, noting that the tool helps make data “digestible and usable.” But she said, “I’m also very cautious and concerned that sometimes when there’s a really cool infographic, we just believe it to be true.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 15, 2018 ++]

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## Pin Ups For Vets ► USS Midway Photo Shoot for 2019 Calendar

Female veterans trade in their camouflage and military boots to dress up in 1940s style glam - for a good cause. The models are all part of a World War II style pinup photo shoot aboard the historic Queen Mary in Long Beach. The idea is the brainchild of Gina Elise, who started "Pin Ups For Vets," a nonprofit organization that supports the troops and veterans by producing pinup calendars. Money raised goes to support their initiatives. "We do everything from donating rehab equipment to VA hospitals nationwide, to a 50-state hospital tour where we visit veterans dressed up as World War II pinups and we deliver our calendars as gifts of appreciation to them," Elise explained.

Most of the models are veterans themselves. Tracy "Birdie" Gibbons says there's a lot to learn by serving. "Being in the military shows you how to enter new environments and adapt to new cultures and you meet some awesome people," Gibbons said. Supporting others, being inclusive, and giving back seem to be the running theme - which Birdie Gibbons learned in the Coast Guard and as the daughter of a Navy veteran. "Being a navy kid helped us to learn how to be a new kid at school and realize that everybody has been the new kid," Gibbons said. "So there were no bullies. He wanted everyone to feel included and to know that they weren't alone."



Patti Gomez-Michalkow is excited to be part of any effort that recognizes and supports veterans. "As Mrs. New York, I'll be competing for Mrs. America in August, and I'm already involved with Homes for our Troops, which is an organization that builds homes for our most injured post-9/11 veterans. So being a part of another veteran organization that does so much for our vets, well, I couldn't pass up the opportunity," Gomez-Michalkow said.

The majestic setting for the photo shoot made everyone feel a little bit more connected to the project. In fact, the Queen Mary has an important history with the military, and happens to be one of the largest and oldest surviving veterans of World War II. The Queen Mary's very own Commodore Everette Hoard was on hand during the photo shoot. "The Queen Mary is a veteran herself shouldering some 810,000 military personnel over the course of the second world war. It was key in the buildup for the invasion of Normandy," Hoard explained. The 2019 calendar will be ready by July and can be purchased from the Pin Ups for Vets website <https://www.pinupsforvets.com>. Gibbons sums it up well. "This is an amazing opportunity to show people that the military sticks with you and you can keep giving and keep feeling the love and the support." [Source: KABC-7 | Kimi Evans | May 14, 2018 ++]

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## Vietnam Vets [29] ► Jim Pawlukiewicz | Denied Citizenship for 50 Years

The first time Jim Pawlukiewicz applied to become a U.S. citizen, he was building quonset huts and pulling guard duty in Bien Hoa, Vietnam. It was July 1967. Pawlukiewicz was a 21-year-old U.S. Army specialist with B Company, 34th Engineering Battalion. He'd been drafted in 1966. Once he got to Vietnam, he learned there was a naturalization office in Guam. So he mailed in a request to U.S. immigration offices: could he take leave to become a citizen? The letter back was his first no. "Sorry, but you have to have six months residency in Guam before you can apply," the government responded. That was almost 51 years ago. His latest rejection came last year, when the Chicago immigration office denied his paperwork because he'd entered dates in the European, not American, format. His

sister Georgia Ackerman helped him with that most recent request. After it, too, was rejected, she wrote to Military Times, enraged. “I just want to ensure that someone receives his application and reviews it according to the laws of the United States,” Ackerman said. “The man is 71 years old and has had strokes, heart attacks and his bones are falling apart. I just want to see him have a country, this country, before he dies.”



Pawlukiewicz is a man without a country. He was born in July 1946, in a liberated Nazi work camp in Germany. But Germany would not grant him citizenship because his parents were Polish, and Poland would not grant him citizenship because he was born in Germany. The family was welcomed into the United States under a post-war displaced persons program; they arrived by the U.S. Army transport ship Gen. R. L. Howze in 1950. His parents chose Michigan because an uncle lived there. But they never became naturalized citizens, which meant Pawlukiewicz grew up like a typical American kid, except that he carried a green card as a permanent resident. He graduated from St. Hedwig High School in Detroit in 1965 and was working the assembly line at Ford Motor Co. when his draft number was called. After he got home from Vietnam, he tried twice again to become a citizen, but was unsuccessful.

Over the years he’s been told he provided the wrong form, or that he was missing paperwork, or he hadn’t submitted the proper payment to have his fingerprints taken — even though as an honorably discharged veteran he’s not required to pay. After the first few rejections, he stopped trying for many years. “Initially, he was kind of ticked off, after being in Vietnam and sending paperwork in and getting rejected,” said his wife, Donna. “He’s given up a number of times.” “I was pushed around so many times I figured I didn’t need the hassle,” Pawlukiewicz said. Instead, he and Donna had kids. After Ford Motor Co., he built hot-rod engine parts for Mallory Electric, then went to work for Wilson Dairy. “When that closed, somewhere in the ‘80s, I went to work for different trucking outfits.” He ultimately retired from a quintessential American heartland life, except the whole time, Pawlukiewicz wasn’t an American.

That difference in status has cost him. One of his best friends was a member of American Legion Post 232 in Dearborn, Michigan, and Pawlukiewicz wanted to belong. “I went there and tried to join, and they refused me, because I’m not a citizen,” he said. Then he tried the VFW. “They had the same thing, ‘Sorry, you’re not a U.S. citizen.’ ” Five years ago he tried again with a full application packet detailing his life: his marriage license, his permanent resident card and his military service record. In that application, he laid out his case. “I have lived in this country basically my whole life. ... I served my country honorably and am proud to have done so,” he wrote. “After all my unsuccessful attempts to obtain U.S. citizenship, it is time I should be recognized as such.” That’s when he was told he got rejected — incorrectly — because he hadn’t submitted payment for fingerprinting. When his sister reached out to Military Times, it was a last-ditch effort.

Pawlukiewicz was exposed to Agent Orange and the VA has rated him 100 percent disabled. He’s had a heart attack and a stroke, to the extent that he struggles with memory and likely would not be able to get through a naturalization exam. What she wants for her brother is recognition — but also a U.S. passport, so he and Donna can finally take an overseas trip together, something they’ve never been able to do. Before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, they could visit Canada and Mexico, but the only overseas country Pawlukiewicz has ever visited is Vietnam. Reached for comment Tuesday, a staffer for Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI), whose district includes Pawlukiewicz, said they are now looking into his case. “We’re going to do everything we can to help,” the staffer said. In the last few weeks, her brother’s health has deteriorated, Ackerman said. Pawlukiewicz is in the hospital. Ackerman said when

he got the news that his request for citizenship would be looked at, he cried. “He has never had a country he could call his own legally,” Ackerman said. “Even though the U.S. is the only country he has ever known.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Tara Copp | May 15, 2018 ++]

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## **Vietnam Vets [30] ► Joe Rosa | Drafted At 17**

The year was 1970 and 17-year-old Jose “Joe” Rosa watched as plastic balls were poured into a container. It was a recurring event that, according to Rosa, had people glued to the TV. A ball containing the number 274 was picked. Rosa had been drafted for the Vietnam War. What followed was a letter from the Department of Defense notifying the teenager that he had been drafted. Rosa had been preparing for this moment and had already been in discussion with an Air Force recruiter who he then contacted after receiving the letter. Rosa told the recruiter he would join the Air Force as long as he wasn’t going to be sent to Vietnam. He was assured that he would not be sent to Vietnam and Rosa was soon sent off to Texas where he would learn how to be an aircraft mechanic.

However, Vietnam would soon become a reality. Not long after Rosa turned 18, he was lined up with other men drafted into the military waiting to be told where they would be sent. When the man reading off the list got to Rosa two words stood out: Southeast Asia. Rosa was going to Vietnam. “I had just hit 18, I knew nothing about life,” Rosa said. But Rosa’s introduction to being in the war was brief. After a quick stop in Taiwan, Rosa was in Vietnam where he became a crew chief on the C-130 aircraft, which transported troops and delivered equipment. One time, Rosa remembers landing at a base in Saigon and seeing hundreds of body bags laid out across the tarmac. “You see this on TV but imagine what that does to you [in-person],” Rosa said. Because the plane was so frequently shot at, Rosa would put his helmet and bulletproof vest under him for protection. One night, the crew counted 38 bullet holes in the plane. In spite of what Rosa experienced while in Vietnam, returning home in 1972 was what not what he had expected. “They said, you can’t wear your uniforms when you come back because the Americans are as hostile as the Vietnamese,” Rosa said. “How hurt are you that you went off to serve your country and they don’t want you back. That was a very bad feeling to have as happy as you are to be back.” Years later, friends told Rosa that even they had treated him differently and hadn’t trusted him when he returned.



There was one positive moment that Rosa does remember. About 20 years after the war, Rosa heard about a Vietnam veterans parade being held in New York. Rosa decided to take the day off, put on his uniform and march with other veterans. “Finally, I could say, I’m a Vietnam vet, I did serve,” Rosa said. Now, Rosa is the commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3282 and has a goal to help other veterans in any way he can “When these military folks come back they need help and they don’t know where to get it,” Rosa said. “We’re still fighting to do everything we can to make life normal for them again.” when they get back. [Source: The Patriot Reader | Michael Rothfeld | May 2018 ++]

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## **Vietnam Vets [31] ► Raymond Kelley | Awarded Silver Star**



Lance Cpl. Raymond Kelley received the Silver Star more than half a century after his heroic deeds at a ceremony hosted by the National Museum of the Marine Corps on 18 MAY — exactly 51 years after the fateful incident that earned him the nation’s third highest award for combat bravery. Kelley was a machine gun team leader serving with Company D, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, on May 18, 1967, when his outfit was tasked to provide relief to a pinned down unit. Kelley maneuvered his team to provide suppressive fire on the enemy position, but enemy fire intensified on Kelley’s unit and the team took multiple casualties. “Disregarding his own safety, Lance Corporal Kelley repeatedly placed himself in the open in order to assist the wounded Marines to the platoon command post where they could receive medical attention,” the award citation reads. Kelley refused to allow his position to be captured by the enemy, “and ignoring his own wounds, murderously engaged the enemy until they broke contact,” the citation states.

The Silver Star award was approved in August 2017, but Kelley and fellow Marines waited until the anniversary of the firefight, museum officials told Marine Corps Times. Kelley’s Silver Star is the second this year to be awarded to a Marine who fought in the Vietnam War. First Lt. Philip H. Sauer was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for holding off an enemy attack with his .45-caliber pistol while on a recon patrol of Hill 861 in Vietnam. Sauer and his five-man patrol came under a sudden attack on April 24, 1967, which immediately killed the point man. Sauer ordered his men to withdraw and held the position with his pistol. He sacrificed his life that day so that some of his men could live to fight another day. His surviving siblings accepted the award at a ceremony held aboard Camp Pendleton, California, on April 24, exactly 51 years after the storied battle. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 31 MAY 2018**

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree\veternans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- HTML: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.html](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html).
- PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf).
- Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc).

Please note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event

sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.

Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com)

[Source: Retiree\veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | 31 May 2018]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs** ► **Scheduled As of 31 MAY 2018**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. refer to the Hiring Our Heroes website <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>. Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | May 31, 2018 ++]

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## **State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts** ► **Vermont 2018**

The state of Vermont provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – VT**" for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below refer to <http://veterans.vermont.gov> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/vermont.html>

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Recreational Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/vermont-state-veterans-benefits.html> | May 2018 ++]

**\* Vet Legislation \***



**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole.

## Vet Legislative Wins 2018 ► 17 Bills Passed Before Memorial Day

On 23 MAY Rep. Phil Roe, M.D. (R-TN), chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, released the following statement after the House passed 14 veterans bills: "In the week leading up to one of the most solemn days of remembrance for our nation, it is fitting we take steps to honor the men and women who have served this country by passing legislation to improve the lives of veterans. These measures will provide a cost-of-living-adjustment for disabled veterans; bring increased accountability to the Department of Veterans Affairs; and ensure veterans have access to the care and resources they have earned - to name a few of the provisions included in these important bills. As we honor the memory of the heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation, I am proud the House is coming together once again to move bipartisan legislation to keep our promises to the men and women who have served." The House passed the following bills:

- **H.R. 1972**, VA Billing Accountability Act, as amended: H.R. 1972 authorizes VA to waive copayment requirements when the veteran is not billed in a timely manner.
- **H.R. 3642**, Military SAVE Act, as amended: H.R. 3642 would require VA to carry out a pilot program to furnish community care to veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma.
- **H.R. 3663**, To designate the medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Huntington, West Virginia, as the Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center
- **H.R. 3832**, Veterans Opioid Abuse Prevention Act, as amended: H.R. 3832 would allow for the greater sharing of information between VA and State-based prescription drug monitoring programs.
- **H.R. 3946**, To name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Statesboro, Georgia, the "Ray Hendrix Veterans Clinic"
- **H.R. 4245**, Veterans' Electronic Health Record Modernization Oversight Act of 2017: H.R. 4245 would strengthen Congressional oversight of VA's electronic health record modernization program.
- **H.R. 4334**, Improving Oversight of Women Veterans' Care Act of 2017: H.R. 4334 would require VA to submit reports on access to gender-specific care in the community and environment of care standards for women veterans.
- **H.R. 4334**, Improving Oversight of Women Veterans' Care Act of 2017, which would require VA to submit reports on access to gender-specific care in the community and environment of care standards for women veterans.
- **H.R. 4451**, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2018, as amended: H.R. 4451 would reauthorize the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) as well as the Homeless Women Veterans and Homeless Veterans with Children Reintegration Grant Program (HVRP-W) for five years. The bill would also clarify eligibility for both programs to include incarcerated veterans and veterans using a HUD-VASH voucher.
- **H.R. 4830**, SIT-REP Act, as amended: H.R. 4830 would require that in order for a school or training program to be approved for GI Bill benefits they must adopt a policy that disallows the school or training

program from imposing a late fee, denial of access to facilities or other penalty against the veteran or eligible dependent due to a late payment from VA. This would only apply if the payments have not been received within 90 days of the beginning of the term and the Secretary would have the authority to waive this requirement.

- **H.R. 4958**, Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2018: H.R. 4958 would provide a cost-of-living adjustment for veterans disability, additional compensation for dependents, dependency and indemnity, and clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans.
- **H.R. 5044**, Service-Disabled Veterans Small Business Continuation Act: H.R. 5044 would address a technical issue that has arisen from legislation that was passed last Congress related to rules for surviving spouses' ability to claim service disabled veteran owned small business (SDVOSB) status for the Vets First contracting program.
- **H.R. 5215**, Veterans Affairs Purchase Card Misuse Mitigation Act: H.R. 5215 would strengthen controls over government purchase card misuse.
- **H.R. 5418**, Veterans Affairs Medical-Surgical Purchasing Stabilization Act, as amended: H.R. 5418 would reform the VA Medical Surgical Prime Vendor (MSPV) purchase program.
- **S. 1282**, To redesignate certain clinics of the Department of Veterans Affairs located in Montana

The Senate passed the following bills:

- **H.R. 4910**, Veterans Cemetery Benefit Correction Act, which would require the Department of the Interior to provide grave liners for veterans buried in National Park Service cemeteries. H.R. 4910 heads to the president's desk.
- **S. 1333**, Tribal HUD-VASH Act which would ensure Native American veterans are able to access federal rental and housing assistance for homeless and at-risk veterans. The Senate also passed
- **S. 2372**, VA MISSION Act which would permanently create a new Veteran Community Care Program to streamline the delivery of free market health care to veterans.

[Source: NCOAdvocate & VFW Action corps Weekly | May 23 & 25, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Mission Act Update 01 ► H.R.5674 Passes House & Senate**

The House of Representatives and the Senate on 16 & 23 MAY passed, by a vote of 372-70 and 92-5 the VA MISSION Act (H.R. 5674) to extend and reform the Veterans Choice Program to allow more private care options. Funding for the Choice Act was scheduled to expire at the end of the month. The legislation, which TREA: The Enlisted Association supported in a letter sent to the House Veterans Affairs Committee, would also lift the restrictions on family caregiver benefits, which are now limited to post-9/11 veterans, and extend them to the caregivers of veterans of all eras. President Donald Trump has said he will sign the bill quickly when it reaches his desk. In a statement last week, the White House said the bill would "transform the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a modern, high-performing, and integrated healthcare system that will ensure our veterans receive the best healthcare possible from the VA, whether delivered in the VA's own facilities or in the community."

Just two Democrats on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) voted against the consolidation of the VA's community care programs into one, one of which was HVAC Ranking Member Tim Walz (D-MN), who is a Life Member of TREA: The Enlisted Association. This is clearly bipartisan (or, more importantly, non-partisan) legislation. The only opposition to it is based on policy, not political, differences. Ranking Member Walz said "he supported 95 percent of the measure, but had concerns about how its provisions would unfold in future years." The VA MISSION Act, for example, would fund the new private sector health care program through the regular discretionary budgeting process. While Walz supported that funding stream, he issued an amendment to shield it

from potential cuts when budget caps are reinstated. All three Walz amendments were voted down by the full committee. The funding issue is a real one - Congress, especially this one, has shown little to zero patience when costs go up. As we all know, healthcare costs continue to rise in the private sector. What happens in the coming years when the cost of veterans getting care in the community rise? Will Congress finally 'bite the bullet' and increase spending? Or will they pull back on private healthcare for veterans while simultaneously having failed to properly invest in brick and mortar VA healthcare facilities? We shall see.

The VA MISSION Act would provide veterans access to private sector care when the services they are seeking are not offered at VA, there is no full-service medical facility in their state, they previously were eligible for outside care under the Veterans Choice Program or VA cannot meet its own standards of care in providing care to an individual veteran. It would also allow a veteran and doctor to mutually agree that private care was in the patient's "best medical interest." The VA provider would have to first assess the distance the veteran must go to receive care from the department's network of more than 1,200 medical facilities, the nature of the services required, the frequency of treatment, the timeliness of available appointments and other "excessive burdens to care." The measure includes another controversial provision to put VA through a process similar to the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Working out the eligibility standards for who can receive outside care and how those decisions will be made is expected to take about a year. That means most veterans won't see any change in how their medical appointment requests are handled until at least spring 2019. In the meantime, the bill includes \$5.2 billion in bridge funding for the existing VA Choice program, to ensure that current private-sector medical appointments for veterans aren't interrupted. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated the caregivers stipend expansion could affect more than 41,000 veteran families in coming years, but similarly won't be implemented immediately. Under current law, only caregivers of veterans from the post-9/11 era are eligible for monthly stipends through the department. The new proposal would expand that to veterans of all eras, first starting with pre-1975 veterans and later phasing in the remaining group. That will take place two years after the next VA secretary certifies to Congress that its information technology systems are ready to handle the new workload, after concerns over the past year that current VA stipends for caregivers are handled inconsistently. VA officials have not said how long that work may take. Critics of the measure have said they worry the volume of new applicants could overwhelm the existing system, hurting benefits delivery to existing participants. House and Senate lawmakers have vowed close oversight on the issue in months to come.

A review of VA facilities — similar to the military's base closing commissions, although supporters bristle at the comparison — is the third major initiative in the VA Mission Act but won't have any real impact for another four years. That's because under the measure, the first report to Congress on possible VA facility closings or expansions won't come until sometime in 2022, after years of study and deliberation. The legislation calls for the president to establish a nine-member Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission, with representatives from veterans service organizations, the health care industry and federal facility management. The panel would meet in coming years to set parameters for their work, with an eye towards "the modernization or realignment of Veterans Health Administration facilities." That could include closing, reducing or expanding a host of VA health facilities across the country. But VA officials have repeatedly warned that their current footprint includes hundreds of outdated or obsolete facilities, and department administrators have severe restrictions on managing those locations.

Despite those long-term impacts, numerous lawmakers and advocates characterized the legislation passage as an immediate win for veterans. In the lead-up to the vote, more than 40 different veterans organizations offered support for the massive policy bill. "This piece of legislation has been years in the making," said Louis Celli, executive director of the American Legion. "All of the different components that went into this are things our groups collectively have worked on for a great number of years. So this is a great accomplishment, and we're proud of it." White House officials have not said when the president is expected to sign the measure. VA officials have warned

that the legislation needs to be enacted before the end of the month to prevent funding disruptions with the current VA choice program. [Source: TREA & MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 16 & 23, 2018 ++]

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## CA VET Legislation [10] ► AB 1275 Tax Bill Dies in Committee

On 25 MAY the Assembly Committee on Appropriations held AB 2394-Brough under submission. AB 2394 sought to exempt uniformed service retirement pay from gross income for purposes of the state income tax. This legislation is effectively dead. The Appropriations Committee cited an annual General Fund revenue loss of \$130 million in 2018-19, \$80 million in 2019-20, and \$85 million in 2020-21. The bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Bill Brough, issued the following statement regarding his bill:

*May 25 at 11:41am ·*

*California claims to be a leader in the nation, yet providing assistance to veterans who have served our country for 20 years or more is not one of them. Today, Assembly Democrats held my bill in the Appropriations committee to exempt military retirement from state income tax. California falls behind 41 other states whose policies help retain their veteran population. We are losing veterans at an alarming rate because the cost of living in California is too high and our neighboring states provide better incentives. While the Democrat majority did not stand up for our veterans, I will continue to champion this issue.*

*Based on a study by the San Diego Military Advisory Council, my bill would have created 12,600 more jobs, \$56 million in net state and local tax revenue, \$1.27 billion in gross state product, and \$2 billion added to total business sales. California is only 1 of 9 states that fully taxes military retirement pay. By staying in the minority to the rest of the country, California will continue to lose out on skilled veterans who could make a positive impact to our economy and our communities.*

[Source: NGAC | Reeb Government Relations | May 29, 2018 ++]

**\* Military \***



## Army Handgun Update 03 ► Surplus M1911 .45 Caliber Pistols Availability

If you've been waiting to grab one of the Army's surplus M1911 .45 caliber pistols that officials announced last year would be sold to the public, the wait is nearly over. The Civilian Marksmanship Program last year announced it would sell 10,000 of the legendary pistols that have been in Army stocks for decades to collectors. But that number has dropped to 8,000 for this year as of a recent posting by CMP. Thing is, not all of the 8,000 to be made available will be up for purchase by those select few who're given the go ahead. Instead, some have been deemed "unusual and worthy of being auctioned," according to the CMP website. We cannot emphasize enough that details really matter here, gun fans.



To get one of these pieces of U.S. military history, you'll have to fill out the order documents posted on 4 JUN on the CMP website [http://thecmp.org/cmp\\_sales/1911-information](http://thecmp.org/cmp_sales/1911-information). The website also provides additional requirements buyers must comply with. If you have questions, on that date — and only beginning on that date — you can call: 256-835-8455, ext. 461, or email [cmp1911@thecmp.org](mailto:cmp1911@thecmp.org). The forms must be postmarked between 4 SEP and 4 OCT. Only one form per person is allowed. You must be a U.S. citizen, a member of a CMP affiliated club and provide proof of participation in a marksmanship activity. The CMP 1911s must be transferred through a Federal Firearms Licensed dealer with a completed purchaser background check. The CMP will randomly pick “winners” for the surplus 1911s on 5 OCT, where customers will be contacted and be allowed to select the grade of pistol they wish to purchase. The pricing is as follows and includes shipping:

- Service Grade \$1,050: Pistol may exhibit minor pitting and wear on exterior surfaces and friction surfaces. Grips are complete with no cracks. Pistol is in issuable condition.
- Field Grade \$950: Pistol may exhibit minor rust, pitting, and wear on exterior surfaces and friction surfaces. Grips are complete with no cracks. Pistol is in issuable condition.
- Rack Grade \$850: Pistol will exhibit rust, pitting, and wear on exterior surfaces and friction surfaces. Grips may be incomplete and exhibit cracks. Pistol requires minor work to return to issuable condition.
- Auction Grade: The condition of the auction pistol will be described when posted for auction. Note: If you have already purchased a 1911 from CMP you will not be allowed to purchase an auction 1911. If you purchase an auction 1911, your name will be pulled from the sequenced list. No repeat purchasers are allowed until all orders received have been filled.

[Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | May 14, 2018 ++]

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## **USAF Pilot Shortage Update 03 ► Up To 1000 Retirees Could Be Recalled**

Good news for U.S. Air Force retirees: The service has expanded plans to not only welcome back retired pilots into active-duty staff positions, but also combat system officers and air battle managers. To help alleviate its manning shortage, the service is encouraging retirees from the 11X, 12X and 13B Air Force Specialty Codes to apply for the Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty Program (VRRAD), it announced 23 MAY. It could take in as many as 1,000 former airmen. "Officers who return to active duty under VRRAD will fill rated staff and active flying staff, test, training and operational positions where rated officer expertise is required," said VRRAD Rated Liaison Maj. Elizabeth Jarding of the Air Force's Personnel Center. "We can match VRRAD participants to stateside or overseas requirements where they'll fill critical billets that would otherwise remain vacant due to the shortage of rated officers," Jarding said in a service release. Airmen who are currently in rated positions in those specialties but have already put in their retirement orders will also be welcome to extend their service in the VRRAD program, the release said.

The program expansion comes as the Air Force faces a growing deficit of 2,000 pilots, or roughly 10 percent of the total pilot force. Previously, the VRRAD program -- one of many efforts the service is making to ease the shortage -- accepted only the 11X career field and remained limited in scope, said Air Force Personnel Center spokesman Mike Dickerson. "The program was limited by law to a maximum of 25 participants and for a maximum 12-month tour, which limited officers to serving in non-flying staff positions," Dickerson told Military.com on 23 MAY.

Active-duty tour lengths have now increased to a minimum of 24 months and a maximum of 48 months, he said. VRRAD participants will deploy only if they volunteer, unless they are assigned to a combat-coded unit, the release said. "Many who inquired expressed interest in the stability afforded by a longer tour. In addition, longer tours also afforded the potential to utilize these officers in flying as well as non-flying positions, providing more time to requalify and be effectively utilized in various airframes," Dickerson said in an email. To date, the 2017 VRRAD program has approved 10 officers, and five have returned to active duty, he said. "We anticipate that will continue with the expanded authorities," Dickerson said, adding the officers currently in the program could expand their tour lengths.

Some of the criteria for the expanded VRRAD program have changed: Eligibility applies to rated officers who received an active-duty retirement within the last five years or those in the window to retire within 12 months of their VRRAD date of application, the personnel center said. Airmen must have previously served in the ranks of captain, major or lieutenant colonel, and must be under age 50. Those who are 50 and older may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Previously, the criteria applied to those age 60 and younger in those ranks. "Applicants must be medically qualified for active duty and have served in a rated staff position within 15 years or been qualified in an Air Force aircraft within 10 years of application for flying positions," the release said. Officers who retired for physical disability reasons are not eligible to apply.

The personnel center will accept applications for VRRAD until Dec. 31, 2018, or until all openings are filled, the release said. Those who return to active duty will not be eligible for the service's aviation bonus nor promotion consideration. The Air Force last year asked for expanded authorities for its retention shortfalls. As a result, in October, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13223, which allowed the service to recall up to 1,000 former pilots. The Air Force has said it does not plan to force anyone back on active duty involuntarily in any capacity. Officials said at the time they would work through how they could best use the executive order to voluntarily recall pilots. Officials said additional VRRAD application procedures and eligibility requirements can be found on the VRRAD page of the AFPC public [website](#).

The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps have all experienced pilot shortages in recent years, with fighter pilots a particular need, according to a Government Accountability Office study released earlier this month. Fighter pilots who spoke with the GAO "consistently stated that the typical workload has significantly increased in recent years due to, among other things, changes in fighter aircraft tactics and technology and reductions to administrative support in squadrons." Meanwhile, commercial airlines offering greater living stability have recruited to replace their own cadre of retiring pilots. That has placed further stress on those who stay in uniform. "We're burning out our people because we're too small for what the nation is asking," Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson told reporters in November after saying she had spoken with a pilot back from his 17th deployment. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | 24 May 2018 ++]

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## **USS Manchester (LCS-14) ► Commissioned 26 MAY**

USS Manchester (LCS-14), the latest Independence-class littoral combat ship, was commissioned in Portsmouth, N.H. on 26 MAY. To view the commissioning ceremony refer to <https://youtu.be/upEfjhLkr4c>. With the commissioning of Manchester complete, the Navy now has a dozen littoral combat ships in the fleet. Manchester is the seventh littoral combat ship built by Austal USA to enter the fleet. On May 5, Manchester set sail from Austal's Mobile, Ala., shipyard for the commissioning ceremony in New Hampshire, according to a Navy statement. "USS Manchester is a modern marvel and an example of the increased capability that comes from a true partnership with the American industry," Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer said in a statement released before the commissioning. "The ship honors the city of Manchester and the patriotic citizens of New Hampshire for their support to our military, and I cannot wait to see the amazing things the crew will accomplish."



USS Manchester (LCS-14)

The ceremony's principal speaker was Adm. Bill Moran, Vice Chief of Naval Operations. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), the senior U.S. Senator from New Hampshire, is the ship's sponsor, and gave the order to, "man our ship and bring her to life!" The Independence-class is one of two littoral combat ship variants. The Independence-class variant, signified with even-numbered hulls, are noted for their aluminum-hull trimaran design. General Dynamics Bath Iron Works originally developed the design but after the first two Independence-class ships were built, construction was taken over by Austal at its Mobile shipyard. The Freedom-class littoral combat ship variants have odd hull numbers and are built by a team led by Lockheed Martin. These ships are constructed by Lockheed Martin at Fincantieri Marinette Marine shipyard in Wisconsin.

Now when Manchester leaves New Hampshire, the ship will voyage to its new homeport, San Diego, Calif. As part of the ship's sail, Manchester is expected to conduct the training, equipment and systems checks standard for new ships. She is also expected to visit several ports and transit the Panama Canal on its way to San Diego. Much of the crew is San Diego-based but has been in Mobile since August as the ship was completing construction. "We are proud to take full ownership of our new ship, but we also thoroughly enjoyed our time here in Mobile, Alabama and were welcomed with open arms by the local community," Cmdr. Emily Bassett, Manchester's commanding officer, said in the release. [Source: USNI News | Ben Werner | May 28, 2018 ++]

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## **Afghanistan Failures Update 01 ► Trump Revamped Strategy Has Made Little Progress**

The Trump administration's revamped Afghanistan strategy has made little progress against the Taliban insurgency, leaving the country a "dangerous and volatile" place nearly 17 years after the U.S. invaded, a government watchdog report said 21 MAY. The conclusion contrasts with assertions last fall by the American military that the Afghans, with U.S. support, had "turned the corner" and captured momentum against the Taliban, which it called fractured and desperate. The report to Congress by inspectors general of the Pentagon, the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development also cast doubt on the administration's decision to send a new set of military advisers this year to work with Afghan forces closer to the front lines. It said this, combined with stepped-up Afghan offensives, "further raises the risk of civilian casualties, insider attacks, U.S. casualties, and other conflict-related violence." The U.S. has about 15,000 support troops in Afghanistan providing military assistance but not in direct combat roles.

Citing a series of deadly Taliban attacks, including last week in the western province of Farah, bordering Iran, the inspector general report released by the Pentagon said there are few signs of significant progress by Afghan forces.

"The Taliban continued to hold territory and launched devastating terrorist attacks in Kabul and across the country," said Glenn Fine, the deputy Pentagon inspector general wrote in an introductory note to the report, which covered the three months ended 31 MAR. Asked about the report's grim assessment, a Pentagon spokesman, Army Col. Rob Manning, said officials believe "chaos and progress can coexist" in Afghanistan. "That's exactly what we feel is happening in Afghanistan," he said. Manning said the Afghan armed forces are making important strides. He cited as an example the support that the Afghan air force provided in an offensive undertaken in Farah province in recent days to defeat Taliban forces that had attacked the provincial capital and overrun several security checkpoints. Manning also said additional U.S. military advisory units had arrived in Farah to advise Afghan forces. He said the Afghan government is now in full control of Farah.

The inspector generals' report agreed that Afghan security forces are improving but found they have made minimal progress toward securing the population. It also said the number of Afghan fighting forces has continued to decline, raising concerns about their effectiveness. The number of active-duty Afghan troops stood at 313,728 at the end of January, it said, down from 331,708 a year earlier. The estimated actual number of troops is 11 percent below the target level of 352,000, a gap that reflects difficulties in keeping Afghan soldiers in uniform. The report said it also may reflect high Afghan casualty rates. The Trump administration, in launching a new war strategy last August, said it was taking a regional approach to include Pakistan and making a bigger push to compel the Taliban to join peace talks. But Monday's report said there was little publicly available evidence that the actions to increase pressure on the Taliban were having a significant impact. "Militarily, the (Afghan security forces) and U.S. forces continued air strikes and ground operations, but did not gain a significant amount of territory," the report said. "On the diplomatic front, despite suspending between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion in planned security aid to Pakistan, that country did not take any significant action to eliminate terrorist safe havens."

Further complicating the outlook, the U.S. has accused Iran and Russia of interfering in Afghanistan. As further evidence of the volatile situation, the report noted that parliamentary elections scheduled for July have been postponed until October. It said this could make it difficult to hold the presidential election planned for 2019, and it questioned the extent to which balloting amid Taliban resistance will promote peace. "Given that the Taliban views the Afghan government as a U.S. puppet, it is unclear how U.S.-supported elections would increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government in the eyes of the Taliban and would pressure the militants to reconcile," the report said. [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **BAH Update 04 ► With Dependents Rate DA form 5960 Due NLT 5 JUN**

About 4,200 soldiers have until June 5 to update paperwork regarding their dependents, or their housing allowance at the "with-dependents" rate will end, officials said. For five years, the Army has required supporting documentation for the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) at the "with-dependents" rate. The documents must be filed in the Army's personnel records management system, iPERMS. Officials at Human Resources Command and Defense Finance and Accounting Service have been working with units to make sure soldiers update their records. The Army has been warning soldiers about the requirement for months. In September 2016, out of 315,000 soldiers drawing BAH at the "with-dependents" rate, about 140,000, or 45 percent, were missing documents in their files. As of 21 MAY, all but about 4,200 soldiers had updated their records. Officials sent out a message in January that soldiers had until 1 MAR to submit the documents, but they've extended the deadline to 5 JUN, officials announced 21 MAY.

Deployed soldiers will receive an exception to the policy: They must submit the documentation within 60 days after any post-deployment leave, or risk having their allowance reduced, officials noted. Every year, soldiers are required to submit a new DA form 5960 to their S1 or human resources professional, to be scanned into iPERMS. If a soldier's BAH is reduced, the "with-dependents" rate will be restored once the soldier's documents are loaded into the system. They'll also receive any back pay they lost, officials stated. "The Army must prove that every soldier is

entitled to all the payments they receive,” said Mike Mensch, policy proponent for HRC’s Army Soldier Records Branch, in a statement about the extended deadline. “These reviews are needed to confirm current pay entitlements and help ensure Soldiers’ personnel records are complete,” Mensch said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Gerald A. Ford Update 10 ► Forced Back Into Port for Adjustments**

Yet another propulsion train problem has forced the Navy’s newest aircraft carrier, the Gerald R. Ford, back into port for “adjustments” before it can get back underway to complete what had been expected to be a long testing period. “The ship experienced a propulsion system issue associated with a recent design change, requiring a return to homeport for adjustments before resuming at sea testing,” said Colleen O’Rourke, spokeswoman for Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington. The ship left Norfolk early 19 MAY for what sources tell Navy Times was to be an extended period underway, slated to be the ship’s last sea time before entering its scheduled post-shakedown availability maintenance period at Huntington Ingalls Newport News shipyard this summer. That yard period, known as a PSA, is expected to fix a laundry list of issues that have popped up in the past year onboard the first new carrier design the U.S. has fielded in 40 years.

Navy officials don’t know how long the current needed adjustments will take that caused the ship to abort its underway period. For security reasons, the Navy doesn’t normally discuss ship’s schedules, but the anticipation is that the ship will return to sea soon to resume testing. “Ford has been tasked with conducting critical test and evaluation operations that identify construction and design issues,” O’Rourke said “As a continuation of that testing and evaluation process, Ford got underway to conduct an independent steaming event that would allow the ship and its crew to continue testing its systems and procedures.” Navy officials say the issue isn’t with either of the ship’s two reactors. vRather, the issues reside in the mechanical components associated in turning steam created by the nuclear plant into spinning screws that power the ship through the water. These include steam turbines, reduction gear, shafts and screws. Details on exactly what in that drivetrain was redesigned and needs adjustment has not been released, though officials did say that this latest issue is unrelated to another propulsion-related issue that popped up earlier this year.

“During at-sea testing in January, the crew identified one component in the propulsion train was operating outside of design specifications and took action to place the propulsion train in a safe condition,” Bill Couch spokesman for Naval Sea System told Navy Times. “This was the second issue identified in the propulsion train in the last year.” A detailed inspection found that component, which some reports have described as a flawed bearing, was not built to design specifications. “The Navy and Newport News Shipbuilding have determined the required steps to correct the manufacturing defect,” Couch said. “The defects will be fully corrected during PSA.” The Navy and Newport News Shipbuilding, he said, are evaluating the case for a possible claim against the manufacturer. “As a first-in-class ship, this is not unexpected,” O’Rourke said. “Some of the ship’s components are most effectively tested while the ship is underway during typical steaming conditions. Events like this prove that the testing and evaluation process works. Corrections will be made to USS Gerald R. Ford, and integrated into the next ships in the Ford carrier class.” However, recent government reports question the long-term reliability of the new electromagnetic catapults and advanced arresting gear, as well as the ship’s weapons elevators, again called into question as to whether all the new technology is ready for prime time — or at least a wartime deployment.

This latest knock on the Ford came in a January 2018 report from the Department of Defense’s director of operational test and evaluation, which also called into question the long-term reliability of a number of other key systems onboard the Ford. A senior Navy official familiar with the Ford’s design and growing pains acknowledged that the difficulties are real, but that the Navy had similar issues with new technologies on other first-in-class vessels, such as the guided-missile destroyer Arleigh Burke, and the amphibious transport dock San Antonio. The official,

who has worked on the Ford's development, requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak officially on these topics. Both the Burke class and the San Antonio class ships, he said, brought new designs and technology, much of which took time to work out once the ships started to operate at sea. "The record shows that the Burke and the San Antonio had similar issues and got less than passing grades from DTO&E and other inspections at the time," the source said. "But somehow the issues have all been worked out over time and these ships and their classes have proven their reliability over time. The feeling in the Navy is that the Ford class will follow a similar path." Long-term effectiveness of the Burke class hasn't been questioned in years, the Navy official said, and the San Antonio class — after a lot of post-delivery issues — had developed into a darling of the Marine Corps. And Congress may now fund the building of yet another.

"Ford has proven out a lot of new systems and has the lowest number of deficiencies compared to the most recent new aircraft carrier," O'Rourke said. That most recent new carrier is the George H.W. Bush. Since being commissioned in July, NAVSEA's Couch outlined some of Ford's successes after spending "nearly 70 days at sea through six independent steaming events. To date, he said, the ship has completed 747 shipboard aircraft launches and recoveries and has successfully completed fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter integration and compatibility testing. Already certified are the air traffic control center and JP-5 fuel system. Other systems have completed initial demonstrations without major issues such as daytime underway replenishment capability and ship's defensive systems. Also, software fixes are slated to fix issues with the electromagnetic aircraft launch system already in the works to significantly reduce excessive stress put on airframes in the original EMAL's operating software that will be fixed in a 2019 upgrade. "Events like this prove that the testing and evaluation process works," O'Rourke said. "Corrections will be made to USS Gerald R. Ford, and integrated into the next ships in the Ford carrier class." [Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 13 ► Preliminary Hearing Revelations**

The sailors who were manning the combat nerve center of USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) did not know they were on a collision course with a ship almost three times their size until about one minute before impact, according to new information revealed in the preliminary hearing for two junior officers accused of negligent homicide for their role in the collision that resulted in the death of seven sailors.

Lt. Natalie Combs, the tactical action officer, and Lt. Irian Woodley, the surface warfare coordinator, were both on duty in the windowless combat information in the belly of the guided-missile destroyer on early on the morning of June 17 as the ship moved southwest from the coast of Japan less than a day out of port. "[Based on the interviews] the general consensus was it was a quiet night in CIC with four to five tracks and nothing within 10,000 yards," said Rear Adm. Brian Fort, the lead investigator into the admiralty investigation following the collision, said at Woodley and Combs Article 32 hearing on 9 MAY.

Then, shortly after crossing into a busy shipping channel, the merchant ship ACX Crystal popped up on the CIC's commercial ship automatic identification system dangerously close to Fitzgerald. The container ship was bearing down on the warship, bow pointed toward the middle of the warship. Woodley ordered the camera used to spot targets for the ship's 5-inch gun toward the bearing of Crystal. Fire Controlman Second Class Ashton Cato, who manned the camera, saw the flared bow of the ship fill up his monitor just seconds before the fatal crash. Prosecutors argued during the hearing that the fact that Woodley and Combs did not know the ship was at risk from Crystal, did not see other nearby contacts and were not in contact with the bridge crew was evidence of criminal negligence and hazarding the ship.

During the course of the hearing, prosecutors called witnesses to outline that the role of sailors in the CIC was to assist the bridge watch in understanding the surface picture around the ship, to make the point that Woodley and Combs failed to live up to that standard. In combat, the TAO fights the ship, coordinating attacks on air, subsurface

and surface threats. But the role is different during a peaceful transit. “The TAO has other areas of focus, but if they aren’t worried about the [air] or subsurface threat, they can truly focus on the surface picture,” retired Capt. Bud Weeks, an instructor at the service’s Surface Warfare Officer School, testified on Wednesday. He said CIC and the team on the bridge needed to be in constant communication to develop a good understanding of what’s happening around the ship.

However, that communication was non-existent during the late night watch, Fitzgerald officer of the deck Lt. j.g. Sarah B. Coppock admitted on 8 MAY when she pleaded guilty to a single count of dereliction of duty as part of a plea deal in a special court-martial. While Coppock admitted she should have talked with CIC during the watch, she “had low confidence in certain [CIC] watch standers.” “Coppock did comment that she had received poor information from [Woodley] before,” Fort said in testimony. However, the ship’s executive officer, Cmdr. Sean Babbitt, admitted to the Coast Guard during its safety investigation that he didn’t completely trust Coppock and that the inclusion of Woodley in the CIC was to provide backup for a bridge watch team he said wasn’t the strongest.

Woodley and Coppock had very different pictures of what was happening around the ship, and it would have taken communication to reconcile the differences. While the bridge had almost 200 contacts on its SPS-73 radar, the CIC’s SPS-67 radar had an only a handful due to an overall “poor radar picture,” Operations Specialist Second Class Matthew H. Stawecki said at the hearing. “There was a lot of clutter,” he said. Part of the reason the picture was muddy was the radar had been set to a long-range so-called “long pulse” mode that made contacts close to the ship difficult to see. The setting couldn’t be directly adjusted from CIC, and Fort’s investigation found there was no effort to contact the ship’s electronics technicians to adjust the radar picture. “They accepted the fact they had clutter, and they didn’t do anything about it,” Fort said. “It was the world in which they were living in, and it was the world that was accepted.”

But according to Fitzgerald’s former combat system officer, the circumstances of broken equipment and lapses in crew training were commonplace for a warship that was part of Forward Deployed Naval Force in Japan. Lt. Cmdr. Ritarsha Furqan, who reported to Fitzgerald in 2014 and left the ship a few months before the collision, said deploying with missing crew, insufficient spares or systems that didn’t work, under the direction of U.S. Pacific Command or Pacific Fleet was the norm — even if what was broken or who was missing violated a deployment redline, she said. “[Redline issues] were a much bigger deal with U.S.-based ships. They weren’t showstoppers in 7th Fleet,” she said. “We would find the body, find the part or just make do. ... Sometimes I thought it was unsafe.”

The pressure to deploy at a moment’s notice made it difficult for the crew to be proficient in all the tasks they needed to accomplish, and training time was cancelled with no notice for operational tasking, she testified. For example, following a longer-than-anticipated repair period, the ship had planned for two weeks of independent steaming to get the crew used to being back at sea. Instead, they were ordered to participate in an exercise and spent four months underway, moving from task to task at the expense of training time. Along the way, the ship suffered casualties they couldn’t fix, including the loss of both their unclassified and classified NIPR and SIPR networks. “I know I’ve stood in my boss’s office and told [previous Fitzgerald commander] Cmdr. Shu, ‘we’re not ready to execute.’ I was told ‘they know,’” Furqan said “We were told to go. We had to go.”

During the hearing, the defense and prosecutors largely agreed on the facts of the collision but were split on where to place the blame. Prosecutors said Combs and Woodley shared the blame with executive officer Babbitt and then-ship’s commander Cmdr. Bryce Benson – who faces his own Article 32 hearing on similar charges later this month. Defense attorneys said to look higher. “The Fitz was a wreck. A wreck of a ship,” Combs’ defense attorney, David P. Sheldon, said during his closing arguments of the hearing. “The blame? It lies with the Navy for putting its head in the sand, with putting a ship to sea that wasn’t ready. But the Navy wants only to hold these officers accountable.”

The hearing official will now craft a recommendation on how to proceed and provide it to Adm. James Caldwell, director of Naval Reactors. Caldwell is the Consolidated Disposition Authority who was appointed to oversee accountability actions related to the Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) collisions. Caldwell, who was

not present for the hearings this week, will decide how to proceed with the case later this summer based on the recommendation. [Source: USNI News | Sam LaGrone | May 10, 2018 ++]

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## USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 14 ► CO's Attorneys Torch Navy Brass

Attorneys for the former head of the warship Fitzgerald facing homicide charges for his role in the collision that killed seven sailors took a shot across the bow of Navy brass last week, alleging that public remarks made about the former skipper imperil his prospects for a fair trial. The statement by two Navy attorneys accuse leadership of repeatedly using “public forums to assign guilt, foreclose legitimate defenses, and cast unwarranted aspersions” against Cmdr. Bryce Benson. It also slams “the Navy’s method of litigating this case through the media and other out-of-court opinions and declarations from senior Navy leaders.” The statement points to a Navy press release last week regarding Lt. j.g. Sarah Coppock’s guilty plea on a dereliction of duty charge for her role in the Fitz collision. “By pleading guilty today, Lt. j.g. Coppock has accepted responsibility for the role she played in the USS Fitzgerald collision,” the press release states.



**Cmdr. Bryce Benson was in charge of the Fitzgerald when it collided with a merchant vessel last June, killing seven sailors.**

Benson’s attorneys, Cmdr. Ben Robertson and Lt. Cmdr. Justin Henderson, allege that language amounts to a “callous implication” that Benson has refused to accept responsibility by not pleading guilty. Henderson said in an email that the “implication was obvious to any senior Navy leader.” When asked for further examples of comments they viewed as improper, Henderson pointed to a November press conference where Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said the Navy had found negligence among the commanding officers of the Fitz and John S. McCain, which suffered its own collision in August, killing 10 more sailors. “With respect to the proximate cause of the collisions, there was nothing outside the commanding officer and the crews’ span of control,” Richardson told reporters in January after a House committee hearing, another example cited by Henderson. He also referred to comments made by Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Bill Moran when announcing non-judicial punishment actions against the Fitz’s command triad in August, a few days before the McCain collision. “Look at what happened here,” he was quoted as saying when asked about the triad’s future career. “It’s going to be pretty hard to recover from this.” Henderson said these are just a few of many such comments.

Navy officials pushed back on the accusations, saying any earlier administrative actions “are separate and distinct from the ongoing criminal proceedings.” “The Navy’s public discussion of earlier administrative actions does not imply guilt of (Uniform Code of Military Justice) charges,” Navy spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Daniel Day said in an email. “Those accused are always presumed innocent unless proven guilty, and our communication of the status of criminal proceedings have been fact-based and in accordance with service regulations.” Benson waived his right to an Article 32 hearing this month, which would have reviewed the Navy’s case against Benson and decided whether sufficient evidence existed to court-martial him on negligent homicide and other charges. Benson chose to skip the hearing to spare surviving families another recital of the grim details of the June 17 collision off the coast of Japan, according

to his attorneys' statement. "Rather than achieving accountability, the Navy's strategy harms the very system of justice that is designed to protect Sailors," the attorneys said in the statement.

Benson was asleep in his quarters when the larger ACX Crystal plowed into the Fitz's starboard. Crew had to pry open his door and were greeted by the night sky and Benson clinging to the side of the ship. He suffered "debilitating injuries" in the event, according to his attorneys. "A fair court-martial will expose the facts of the collision's causes and Cmdr. Benson's actions," the attorneys said in the statement. "Despite the Navy's prejudicial public affairs approach, Cmdr. Benson awaits the outcome of his law-bound, fact-finding tribunal, and hopes for a swift and just conclusion to these proceedings." No date has been announced for Benson's court-martial. Coppock received a punitive letter and pay forfeiture in her sentencing. As part of a plea deal, she agreed to waive her right to a board that would decide whether she should be separated from the Navy, according to officials. A joint Article 32 hearing was held for Lt. Natalie Combs and Lt. Irian Woodley to assess whether they will be court-martialed on dereliction of duty and hazarding a vessel charges. The hearing officer will make a decision in the near future, according to officials. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) Update 06 ► Travel Pay Denied for Fallen Sailors' Families**

In the depths of grief after the death of her son aboard the destroyer John S. McCain last August, Theresa Palmer received word that her boy's remains would return to the United States via Dover Air Force Base. Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Logan Palmer died with nine of his shipmates on 21 AUG, after the warship collided with a tanker near Singapore. For the Illinois mom, there was no question: She was going to Dover to meet her son. Then the Pentagon's bureaucracy kicked in. Palmer said the family's casualty assistance officer told them the military wouldn't pay for them to fly to Dover, because their 23-year-old son's death was not combat-related. "I feel like, we're all caught off guard, we're all numb, and we're all trying to figure this out, then you add the pressure of having to figure out how to get there," she said. Palmer said this week that other families told her of similar issues.

An amendment to the Fiscal 2019 defense bill aims to change that Pentagon policy. After hearing from the Palmers regarding the issue, Congressman Rodney Davis moved to insert the amendment so that the military pays for families of fallen service members to fly to places like Dover for their loved ones' return, regardless of how they died. "I was a little frustrated," the Illinois Republican said. "I went to the military and asked them why is it that families have to pay their own way?" Palmer praised the casualty assistance officers who worked with her and arranged for Fisher House to pay the Palmers' way to their son's homecoming at the Delaware base, known as a "dignified transfer." "We were shocked that that was not going to be covered," she said. "You wonder how many people don't go to the dignified transfer just because they can't afford the transportation."

Davis credited Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Robert Wilkie, currently also serving as acting Veterans Affairs Department secretary, with spearheading an effort within the Pentagon to change the policy. While Davis said he was told the Pentagon has changed this policy internally, he also wanted it codified in the defense bill. Pentagon officials confirmed 23 MAY that the policy is being changed. Families like the Palmers can ask the Pentagon for a waiver, Davis said, "but it wasn't guaranteed that waiver would go through." "They shouldn't leave any family behind when they're going through the sacrifices that so many of us have never faced, of losing a child," Davis said. "The military needs to be reminded on occasion that they need to put a face and put a stamp on doing what's best for the families." Davis said he hadn't spoken with any other affected families, but was troubled by the Palmers' experience. "The point I made to the military brass on day one is that if you can't do it right for the families of those who have sacrificed so much, how can I expect you to do it right every day, for those serving in that

situation?” Davis said. The House’s version of the Fiscal 2019 defense bill is expected to be voted on this week. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) Update 07 ► CO’s Negligent Homicide Charges Dropped**

The Navy has quietly dropped its pursuit of negligent homicide charges against the former commanding officer of a warship that collided with a tanker near Singapore last summer, killing 10 sailors. Earlier this year, the service announced it would seek negligent homicide charges against Cmdr. Alfredo Sanchez, who commanded the destroyer John S. McCain on 21 AUG when it collided with a larger vessel in busy West Pacific waters, crushing or drowning 10 shipmates. The January announcement stated Sanchez would face negligent homicide, hazarding a vessel and dereliction of duty charges. But in an official update last week, the service said Sanchez would now face only dereliction charges at a special court-martial set to begin 25 MAY. That development was tacked on to a statement initially focused on the former skipper of the warship Fitzgerald, Cmdr. Bryce Benson. The Navy officer who Navy officials said is Sanchez’s attorney did not respond to requests for comment this week.

Trying Sanchez in a special court-martial instead of general court-martial suggests the Navy “was not intent on obtaining serious punishment if the CO was convicted,” according to Lawrence Brennan, a retired Navy captain, military attorney and professor at the Fordham University School of Law in New York. Special courts-martial, which feature a judge and no jury, have limited punishment power, he said. “Essentially it is a misdemeanor court and cannot award confinement or dismissal of a naval officer,” Brennan said in an email. “The punishment will be limited to financial sanctions and lesser punishments.” Naval officers have traditionally only been tried via general courts-martial, even if there was a deal for sentencing limits that would align with the less-severe special court-martial, he said. “The decision to try most of the cases in both collisions at Special Courts suggests a message that may be interpreted as the deaths of 17 sailors and half a billion dollars worth of damage only warrants a misdemeanor,” said Brennan. “The timing of this trial at the start of Memorial Day weekend is questionable.”

Navy spokesman Cmdr. William Speaks declined to comment 23 MAY on what had changed in Sanchez’s case. Speaks referred to a Judge Advocate General regulation that prohibits public release of information regarding “the possibility of a plea of guilty to any offense charged or to a lesser offense or any negotiation or any offer to negotiate respecting a plea of guilty.” The McCain’s former second-in-command, Cmdr. Jessie Sanchez, was administratively disciplined for his role in the collision and charged with dereliction in February. Sanchez, who is no relation to Alfredo Sanchez, received a punitive letter of reprimand. The Navy has refused to release the full investigations into the Fitz and McCain. But information released stated that Sanchez was on the bridge when his ship collided with the tanker.

Sanchez’s dereliction of duty charge sheet accuses the officer of failing to ensure the McCain’s safe navigation as it was his duty to ensure “a proper watch was set for transiting a high-density contact environment.” The McCain was entering the Straits of Malacca that morning, one of the world’s busiest waterways, when confusion erupted over a perceived steering failure. The charge sheet also alleges that Sanchez failed to follow standing orders regarding responses to a ship system failure, all of which contributed to the deaths of Chief Electronics Technician Nathan Findley, Chief Interior Communications Electrician Abraham Lopez, Electronics Technician 1st Class Kevin Bushell, Information Systems 1st Class Corey Ingram, Electronics Technician 2nd Class Jacob Drake, Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Timothy Eckels, Electronics Technician 2nd Class Dustin Doyon, Electronics

Technician 2nd Class John Hoagland, Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Logan Palmer and Electronics Technician 2nd Class Kenneth Smith.



**Cmdr. Alfredo Sanchez**



**Cmdr. Jessee Sanchez**



**Chief Boatswain's Mate Jeffery D. Butler**

The Navy may have walked back Sanchez's negligent homicide charge because they felt they couldn't make that case, according to Eugene R. Fidell, a civilian attorney specializing in military law. Opting for a less-severe special court-martial could mean the authorities "sort of caught their breath in the cold light of day and thought it'd be overreaching, or they couldn't prove it," Fidell said. "That's a very good reason not to pursue a general court-martial, if you don't think you can prove the higher charges," he said. "I have to assume that, at least to some extent, people who are defending the CO proved to be persuasive." On 25 MAY Sanchez was sentenced by Navy judge advocate Capt. Charles Purnell to a letter of reprimand and a forfeiture of \$2,000 per month for three months. He currently has a base pay of \$9,009 per month. Part of the plea deal also stipulated that Sanchez will submit a retirement request. As the judge readied to announce the terms, Sanchez's defense asked that he be given a just sentence, "one that reflects the small slice of responsibility he has" in the collision. Much discussion has occurred on what went wrong the morning of 21 AUG, the defense said, but not enough has been said about the ship-saving efforts of Sanchez and his crew in the moments immediately following the collision. "We are here with 10 lost souls," said Sanchez's defense attorney, Cmdr. Stuart Kirkby. "This could easily have been 100 lost souls. This could have easily been a capsized ship."

Chief Boatswain's Mate Jeffery D. Butler pleaded guilty 24 OCT to a charge of dereliction of duty before a summary court-martial for his role in training and qualifying sailors who demonstrated that they were unable to perform basic ship-steering operations. Butler, who reached his 20-year mark last November, was sentenced by Navy judge advocate Cmdr. William Weiland to a reduction in paygrade to E-6. The maximum sentence possible was a reduction in paygrade, 60 days restriction and a forfeiture of two-thirds of one month's pay. Just before sentencing, Butler stood to address the families of the fallen who were in attendance. "I want to give my condolences and ask for your forgiveness," he said, fighting back tears. "They were more than just my shipmates – they were family members." The plea came as part of a pretrial agreement, which also indicated that Butler is expected to transfer to Navy Fleet Reserve to finish out his career. An announcement on his exact fate will come soon, his attorneys said. "Chief Boatswain's Mate Jeffery D. Butler did what every Navy Chief Petty Officer does every day across the Fleet – he took responsibility," Lt. Cmdr. Megan Jackler, Butler's defense attorney, wrote in a press release. "He hopes that the families of his fellow Sailors that were lost in the collision may find some solace in his desire to take responsibility at court-martial today."

Butler, the only chief boatswain's mate onboard the McCain at the time of the collision, was tasked with certifying sailors on the new, all-digital Integrated Bridge Navigation System, or IBNS, which had been installed on the destroyer four months before his August 2016 arrival to the McCain, the first destroyer he ever served on. Butler told the judge Thursday that he never took a single course on the new navigation system, and was given just 30 minutes

of training on the new tech from a master helmsman before being thrust into using it. And despite his requests for additional tech support and instruction, help never arrived. Butler, however, felt his past experience, coupled with the brief run-through, was enough to be proficient in certifying junior sailors. “As a chief, I thought I understood the system well enough to train my sailors,” he told the judge. Three of those sailors under his charge were boatswain’s mates 3rd class sailors who came to McCain from the cruiser Antietam. Butler mistakenly assumed they were already certified on the IBNS from their time on their previous ship. But it wasn’t until after the destroyer collided with the tanker that Butler discovered the McCain was the only ship in all of 7th Fleet outfitted with the new IBNS technology.

As a repentant Butler sat alone at his courtroom desk, he went over all the things he should have done differently. He should have persisted in pushing for more tech support. He should have performed more steering-loss drills for his junior sailors than the two he ran in the course of a year. He should have tested his sailors on the IBNS. “If you didn’t know how to run the system, how did you know the answers they were giving you were correct?” the judge asked. Looking back, Butler told the judge, “I should have gotten knee deep in that tech manual...dissect it page by page.” After his guilty plea, Butler called on his former executive officer and eventual commanding officer of the dock landing ship Germantown, Cmdr. Gary Harrington, to provide a character testimony on his behalf. Harrington told the judge that during Butler’s three years on Germantown, he exemplified a well-trained sailor, and put that training to practice under duress when the ship lost steering during an underway replenishment and began drifting toward the refueling ship. Butler was instrumental in correcting course and avoiding collision, Harrington said, and went on to win the 2014 Sailor of the Year award onboard Germantown. “I can’t speak to the training on” the McCain, said Harrington, “but it was immaculate on Germantown.” [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz & J.D. Simkins | May 23, 24 & 25, 2018 ++]

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## **USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) Update 08 ► Statements of Families of the Deceased**

The impassioned words of Thomas Bushell cut through the hushed Washington Navy Yard courtroom during the 25 MAY special court-martial as the grieving father fought back tears to pay tribute to his son, Electronics Technician 1st Class Kevin S. Bushell, one of 10 sailors killed when the destroyer John S. McCain collided with a 600-foot-long oil tanker on 21 AUG. “Arrogance killed my son. The arrogance of one man killed 10 sailors.” The father was one of a handful of Kevin Bushell’s relatives who made statements about his son. He was joined by family members of other sailors who also died on the ship, including Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Timothy Thomas Eckels Jr., Electronics Technician 2nd Class Dustin Doyon, Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Logan S. Palmer, Chief Interior Communications Electrician Abraham Lopez, and Chief Electronics Technician Charles N. Findley.

One-by-one, 15 gut-wrenching statements were read while the destroyer’s crestfallen former commanding officer, Cmdr. Alfredo J. Sanchez, sat only feet away, listening intently. The statements came during the sentencing phase of the court-martial following Sanchez’s guilty plea for dereliction of duty. “It takes three minutes to die from drowning,” Bushell continued. “And it was three minutes of the most agonizing pain...burning his mouth, lungs, esophagus, stomach. I’ve seen the autopsy photos and they’re not pretty. Bones of Kevin’s arm are visible, as his skin peeled away from chemicals and sea water.”

Thomas Bushell said his weight dropped from 220 pounds to under 175 in the months following his son’s death; he no longer has a desire to keep the business he wanted to pass on to his son and he said he has difficulty finding purpose each day, a sentiment echoed by other family members. “I feel like a shell of my former self,” Kevin Bushell’s mother, Karen, wrote in a statement read to the court. “I have very little desire to live. I’ve had nightmares about his body floating out at sea. Sometimes he was floating peacefully. Sometimes he was ripped apart.” “Making it through a full day and acting like everything is OK is exhausting,” said Bushell’s step-sister, Stephanie. Krystal Bushell, Kevin’s sister-in-law, told the court she has “spent many sleepless nights wrapping my arms around [her husband] while he cries for his brother. “I have seen the light inside him dim.”

The destroyer John S. McCain collided with the oil tanker Alnic MC a little after 5 a.m. on 21 AUG, puncturing a 28-foot hole in the warship and sending hundreds of bewildered sailors into a frenzy of survival and rescue. Sea water and oil rushed into the newly-created cavity on the port side of the ship that had once seemed impenetrable to those serving onboard. Berthing 5, a 15-foot area that was crushed into a space of only five feet, flooded almost instantly. Twelve sailors from the berthing were resting when the collision rocked the ship — 10 were soon reported missing.



Back in the U.S., families of the missing sailors flew from all over the country to join together in solidarity and prayer, clinging to hope that their loved one would defy the odds and emerge unscathed. “[We] waited for our fears to be dismissed, because denial told us Kevin would be coming home again,” said Bushell’s step-sister, Stephanie, who said she collapsed when she received the phone call confirming Kevin was dead. “I went to bed that night knowing he was alive,” Karen Bushell wrote. “I woke up the next morning to a knock at the door. All my hope deflated.”

Winters was celebrating her birthday when she learned of her brother’s death. Nothing has been the same since, she said. “[It’s been] a living hell,” said Winters. “I’ve ignored my needs, my kids, my husband. While I cherish...memories, I also curse them, because they don’t give me a moment of silence. It’s been a long year and I’m tired. I’m tired of being angry.”

On the stand, the brother of another sailor, Abraham Lopez, read a statement from the sailor’s wife, who had the colossal charge of comforting the couple’s daughter during the turmoil. “Don’t worry, he’s safe,” the brother, Richard Lopez, read. “Daddy is a strong man.” Lopez, 39, needed just over three more months of Navy service to reach his 20-year mark and retire, his brother told the court. But because he died only months before his December 2017 end-of-service date, his family will receive none of the benefits afforded to a retired sailor.

Thousands of miles away from the other families that August morning, a newlywed scrambled to keep abreast of the McCain’s search-and-rescue efforts. Riho Findley met her husband, Charles, while he was stationed in Japan. Fighting back an onslaught of emotion in the Washington Navy Yard courtroom, she told Sanchez that discovering her husband was among the dead was her “worst nightmare” and “the worst day I have ever had.” Riho’s first visit to the United States and first introduction to Charles’ family was for his funeral.

One after another, each statement yielded nightmarish details of the minutes and hours before and after receiving the inconceivable news. “That day will be scorched in my mind,” said Rachel Eckels, mother of Timothy Thomas Eckels Jr., 23. “I would have never thought I would have given the Navy a strong, determined young man, and in return I would receive a folded up flag.”

Assigning blame has proven difficult in the collisions of both the destroyer Fitzgerald and the McCain. It took extensive reviews by the Navy to determine that the sea service, not the other vessels, were at fault in both catastrophes. Deciphering which sailors were most culpable in each wreck has added yet another layer of complexity in the subsequent proceedings. Many family members of the McCain sailors, however, implied that blame doesn’t need to be equally divided. The commanding officer has total responsibility, Thomas Bushell said, “no matter if he’s on the bridge, in the head or sleeping.”

When it came time to read her statement, Karen Doyon, the mother of Electronics Technician 2nd Class Dustin Doyon, 26, took the podium wearing her son’s dog tags. “My son was my friend, my happiness, my encouragement,” she said. “I know

what a mother feels to have her heart pierced. The thought of his lungs filling with diesel fuel and sea water...I am haunted by it every day.” It only takes about 60 seconds to rouse sailors when an alarm is sounded, Doyon continued, but there was no alarm. Five short blasts were never sounded. The “CO had over 120 seconds to do something. What the hell was he thinking?”

Without an alarm or warning, Logan Palmer, 23, became trapped in Berthing 5. Palmer had only been on the ship for a few months and enlisted in the Navy just over a year before the collision. “For 23 years we raised him, kept him alive,” the sailor’s mother, Theresa Palmer, said through tears as she looked at Sanchez. “We handed him off to you for three months” and he was killed.

After the final family member in attendance was seated, Cmdr. Sanchez was offered the opportunity to issue a statement of his own. “They were under my charge and I failed,” he said to the families. “I willingly accept accountability and responsibility. Nothing in Navy training can prepare you for the deaths of your sailors.” The former commanding officer then asked the families to find some solace in the notion that their loved ones “were with family” when they died.

As part of a pretrial agreement, Sanchez pleaded guilty to dereliction of duty for his role in the collision. He was sentenced by Navy judge advocate Capt. Charles Purnell to a letter of reprimand and a forfeiture of \$2,000 per month for three months. He currently has a base pay of \$9,009 per month. Also as part of the plea deal, Sanchez will submit a retirement request. “Don’t be the eleventh casualty of McCain,” the judge told Sanchez. “You still have a lot to contribute.”

Toward the end of the court-martial, Sanchez’s wife of 16 years, Maria Zapata Yordan, took the stand, tearfully describing the effect of 10 lives weighing on her husband. “He would say he’s fine,” she said, “but during the night in his sleep he would start screaming.” “Part of this process is about closure,” Sanchez’s defense attorney, Cmdr. Stuart Kirkby, told the court. Turning toward Yordan, Kirkby asked whether the court-martial would bring Sanchez any such closure. “No,” she answered, wiping away tears. “It’s never going to end.” [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | May 29, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Daniel Inouye (DDG-118) Update 01 ► One Year Behind Schedule**

The Navy on May14 marked the ceremonial keel laying of the future destroyer Daniel K. Inouye at Bath Iron Works (BIW), Maine, a destroyer that is already more than a year behind schedule. Inouye, named for the Medal of Honor recipient and long-time Democratic senator from Hawaii, was originally slated to deliver in October of this year, according to 2015 Navy budget documents. But since then the schedule has slipped 18 months, putting Bath well behind its competitor Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The Navy awarded two ships in June 2013 as part of the DDG restart first kicked off in 2011 with DDG-113, the John Finn. The contracts gave DDG-117, the future Paul Ignatius, to Ingalls and DDG-118, the Inouye, to BIW. Ingalls is currently slated to deliver Ignatius in October, about nine months later than originally projected in the Navy’s 2015 budget documents, according to the Navy’s 2019 budget submission. But Inouye isn’t slated to be delivered until April 2020, according to an April report in the Honolulu Star Advertiser, a full 18 months later than its original planned delivery from the 2015 budget submission.

A January briefing on the DDG program delivered at Surface Navy Association put Paul Ignatius at 85 percent complete to Inouye’s 42 percent. The delays highlight the lingering struggles at BIW to adjust to a major realignment at the shipyard after the Navy truncated the Zumwalt class to just three ships, down from an originally planned 32, as well as restarting the DDG program there after being dormant for nearly a decade. For its part, General Dynamics says the delays have stabilized and the shipyard is in a better place moving forward. The Navy says the lengthy delay in Inouye’s construction was mutually agreed upon between General Dynamics, Bath’s parent company, and the program office as Bath devoted resources to finishing the DDG-1000 ships, the Honolulu Star Advertiser reported in April. The Navy and BIW in late 2016 mutually agreed on ship schedule adjustments to better sequence the Zumwalt

class and accommodate the DDG restart ships, the Advertiser reported, attributing the inputs to DDG 51 program manager Capt. Casey Moton.

The long delay in delivering Inouye highlights the difficulty inherent in resurrecting a dormant program, said Bryan Clark, a retired submarine officer and analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. “It gives you a sense of how difficult it is to restart a program after being shut down for a long time,” Clark said. “Now, seven years on might be a little extreme, and maybe you could infer some management issues from that as compared with Huntington Ingalls. But it also highlights a lack of surge volume at Bath in their workforce and in the shipyard itself.” Bath made alterations to its shipyard to build the now greatly diminished Zumwalt class and had to make personnel decisions geared toward a ship that is very different from the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, Clark said. Getting the yard realigned and rehiring workers to build Burkes was a big muscle movement that contributed to construction delays, Clark said. Bath also has fewer workers than Ingalls (Roughly 5,500 in Bath to Ingalls’ 11,500) which means they likely have more flexibility to move workers around, Clark said. In an April earnings call, General Dynamics top executive Phebe Novakovic told analysts that Bath is “working down its learning curve on the restart DDG-51s.”

“Our learning on the hull continues nicely apace,” Novakovic said. “So that shipyard has had some issues, which we’ve talked about in the past. But we are comfortable that is largely behind us, and we’re going to continue to do well as we go forward on what are really legacy platforms for us after we got that line restarted from a dead stop.” The yard is continuing to improve on its performance on the DDG restart, said Bath Iron Works spokesman David Hench in a statement. “BIW is committed to continuous improvement,” Hench wrote. “We are streamlining our processes, investing in our facilities and implementing new training programs for our workforce. This focus enables us to maintain our emphasis on superior quality, improve schedule and accelerate ship over ship learning.” Hench also pointed to the recent successful acceptance trials for the future Thomas Hudner as evidence that Bath is producing a quality product. Hudner returned from trials May 4, according to a Navy announcement. “We completed our second DDG 51 restart ship, DDG 116, with higher acceptance trials scores for contractor-responsible items, fewer trial cards and a greater level of ship completion at the time of the acceptance trials than our first re-start ship,” Hench said. [Source: Defense News | David B. Larter | May 16, 2018 ++]

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## **Military Domestic Violence ► UCMJ Inclusion Added to 2019 NDAA**

House lawmakers want domestic violence to be a crime under military law, calling its omission from the Uniform Code of Military Justice a dangerous oversight for both victims and the public. Members of the House Armed Services Committee included the provision in their mark-up of the annual defense authorization bill last week. The proposal, authored by Nevada Democratic Rep. Jacky Rosen, was adopted unanimously by the committee and is expected to remain in the legislation as it works through both the full House and Senate. In a statement, Rosen called the idea a “commonsense measure” that will help close “this dangerous loophole in the UCMJ that allows dangerous individuals convicted of domestic abuse to buy firearms.”

At issue is how military officials currently classify and report domestic violence crimes. Under the military code, such attacks are currently prosecuted as assaults, which carry with them severe penalties including jail time. But domestic violence convictions in the civilian world also trigger restrictions on future firearms purchases. Military officials are required to report such crimes to civilian authorities to ensure those restrictions are enforced. But because military officials only list them as assaults, that work is inconsistent and incomplete. The issue drew national attention when former airman Devin Kelley gunned down 26 people at a Texas church last November. Kelly was kicked out of the military after being convicted of assaulting his wife and child, but civilian authorities were not properly notified of the crimes that would have disqualified him from buying firearms.

In the months that followed, military officials added more than 4,000 former servicemembers to the list of individuals ineligible for gun purchases because of crimes while serving. Rosen — who introduced stand-alone legislation on the issue last fall with Republican Kansas Rep. Lynn Jenkins — said fixing the crime classifications in the UCMJ will simplify the notification process, and hopefully save lives. The full House is expected to vote on the authorization bill later this month. The Senate Armed Services Committee will take up debate on its draft next week. Both versions must be reconciled before the measure can be sent to the president to be signed into law. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane III | May 15, 2018 ++]

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## **Army Reservists BAH Lawsuit ► Wrongly Denied BAH Payments**

Army reservists deployed to Europe were wrongly denied housing allowance payments, subjected to humiliating criminal investigations and forced into debt by the service after the Army “willfully disregarded” its own policies to refuse benefits owed, according to a federal court complaint. The complaint, filed last month in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, accuses the Army of “gross negligence,” saying it caused financial and professional damage by intentionally denying benefits it should have paid. The lawsuit also says the soldiers faced threats that “jeopardized their careers and security clearances by flagging them as subjects to fraud or larceny investigations.”

The dispute began in 2016 after reservist soldiers deployed to Europe and received benefits authorized by the Army, which included basic housing allowance, or BAH, for their stateside homes. Full-time servicemembers normally receive either BAH or overseas housing allowance; however, when reservists mobilize overseas, they receive BAH because they cannot work the civilian jobs that pay their mortgages and rent. They also receive OHA when ordered by the Army to live off post, as the plaintiffs were in Germany because of a lack of available housing. The benefit is spelled out in the Joint Federal Travel Regulations, which govern how allowances are paid: “A Service member called/ordered to active duty in support of a contingency operation is authorized primary residence-based BAH/OHA beginning on the first active duty day . . . This rate continues for the duration of the tour.” Army regulations reiterate the policy.

Months into their respective deployments, the finance office at U.S. Army Europe decided the benefits should no longer be paid, said Patrick Hughes, the Washington attorney representing the seven soldiers who filed the lawsuit. Army spokeswoman Lt. Col. Nina Hill declined to comment on the case, citing “ongoing litigation.” The Army Reserve and National Guard officers, who were dispatched to Europe for contingency operations, are seeking to restore their benefits and abolish Army-imposed debts that have been levied. Over the past two years, Hughes said, soldiers have seen entire paychecks wiped out through wage garnishments as the Army seeks to collect on debts that range from \$13,000 to \$94,000.

Hundreds of reservists could have been affected by the Army’s actions, Hughes said. The court is expected to respond to the complaint within 30 days. If it’s accepted as the proper venue, the soldiers will move to certify the case as a class-action lawsuit that other reservists could join. “You do need power in numbers to get action to be taken in these situations. We are trying to address it at a massive scale,” Hughes said. “This an effort to resolve the issue in its entirety for everyone.” In some cases, soldiers were issued general officer reprimands, which are often considered career-killers.

Col. Bradley Wolfing, one of the plaintiffs in the case, successfully appealed his reprimand, which was the result of being “erroneously placed under investigation by the Army’s CID, and ultimately punished for BAH fraud on or about March 24, 2017,” the complaint says. A grade determination review board determined Wolfing satisfactorily served as a colonel and was allowed to retire as such, the complaint states. In conjunction with that ruling, Defense Financing and Accounting Services reviewed the case and “concluded that the Army’s decision to ignore (the Joint Federal Travel Regulation) and deny COL Wolfing his primary residence location BAH entitlement was erroneous.”

That conclusion will likely factor into any future litigation. “This DFAS opinion is of great significance, because its analysis is applicable to virtually all of those affected by the Army’s primary residence location BAH entitlement denial,” the complaint says. Still, the Army continues to garnish soldiers’ wages, a move the complaint says “amounts to gross negligence.” The Army indebted Wolfing for \$94,000.

In 2016, the Army launched criminal investigations into the reservists who received the benefits that the Army itself had authorized when the reservists were mobilized. “Basically, I was criminally processed, all because they are saying I shouldn’t (have been) collecting BAH for my Connecticut residence. I was stunned,” said Capt. Tim Kibodeaux, an intelligence officer with 27 years in the National Guard. Criminal Investigation Command agents fingerprinted him and took his mug shot for their records during the investigation. The Army levied a \$50,000 debt on Kibodeaux for BAH payments it says he wasn’t entitled to and has repeatedly garnished his wages, the soldiers’ complaint says. Meanwhile, he hasn’t received about \$16,000 in owed benefits. The six other servicemembers in the complaint are in similar situations.

“My credit has been completely ruined,” Kibodeaux said. “I am disgusted at this point. We think about 340 people were affected by this.” At least 140 soldiers were snared in the BAH investigation in Europe, according to the complaint, which cites information relayed by the Criminal Investigation Command. Given the high numbers of reservists who have been rotating through Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve — the campaign to deter Russian aggression in the region — the lawsuit says that the numbers are likely much higher. If the complaint grows, millions of dollars could be at stake in future litigation. One concern now, Kibodeaux said, is that lower-ranking reservists could have been intimidated into silence and may be unaware that their rights to certain benefits have been violated. “Several Plaintiffs were informed through their chain-of-command that any future inquiries into this issue would be met with negative consequences, and that the denial of the housing entitlement was a final decision,” the complaint says.

Kibodeaux said he and his colleagues never received a clear explanation from the Army why benefits were taken away or why they were subjected to criminal investigations. During the probe, Kibodeaux said, he told Army finance officials about the regulation that allowed for the allowance. He said the Army investigators told him they didn’t recognize the policy, which for decades has allowed reservists on deployment overseas to receive BAH for their home of record. “They said, ‘We don’t go by that. We go by the active duty one,’” Kibodeaux said. When Kibodeaux pointed out the military’s regulations governing allowances for reservists to a criminal investigator, the agent’s response was, “We just do what finance tells us to do,” Kibodeaux said.

In recent years, the military has struggled to interpret federal regulations dealing with living allowances. In 2013, a reinterpretation of overarching State Department regulations by the Defense Department put nearly 700 civilians in debt by cutting off their housing allowances. Special waivers were required to eliminate debts that in some cases reached six figures. Europe-based reservists have also been affected by new interpretations of long-standing regulations. In 2013, the Army decided to stop paying BAH to reservists who lived in Germany and deployed on Army missions in other parts of Germany that were hours away from their home.

The Army, which imposed debts on about 10 soldiers at the time, never fully explained its legal rationale for changing the rules. Servicemembers and civilians who have gotten caught up in benefits disputes have complained that there is little internal recourse in a one-on-one fight with the military bureaucracy over benefits. And the idea of taking on the federal government in a lengthy court fight also is daunting and costly. [Source: Stars & Stripes | John VanDiver | May 14, 2018 ++]

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**Warships That Will Change The Future ► FS Forbin (D620)**



The Forbin, commissioned in December 2008, is a large anti-air frigate of the Horizon class. At 501 foot length, 66 foot beam, and 7,050 ton displacement it has a radar signature which makes it appear so small that it shows up as a small fishing vessel on enemy radars. In accordance with other modern "stealth" initiatives regarding naval craft, the Forbin makes little use of hand rails and crevices so common to shipbuilding in decades past. Instead, many faceted surfaces are instituted to provide a smaller radar signature. Additionally, all vertical structures are enclosed and the smoke funnels are compact. The only noticeable railing is at the helo deck at the stern. All exhaust ports are also grated with special covers. This ship was specifically designed to be able to protect the French Charles De Gaulle aircraft carrier, and has been outfitted with anti-torpedo weapons as well as surface to air missiles. The frigate was most recently providing support for the Charles De Gaulle off the coast of Syria. Forbin is the sixth vessel of the French Navy named after the 17th century admiral Claude Forbin-Gardanne. [Source: <http://www.kiwireport.com/amazing-29-warships-will-totally-change-future> | May 2018 ++]

\* **Military History** \*



## **National WWII Museum Update 02 ► Bob Hope Exhibit Opened 25 MAY**

The National World War II Museum is about to open a new exhibit about comedian Bob Hope and his performances for American troops serving around the world. The exhibit includes wartime correspondence between Hope and service members, and World War II-era relics engraved to Hope. It also includes never-published or displayed photos taken by a military photographer, wartime films from his travels, Hollywood Victory Caravan photos and scrapbooks, an interactive display and an original 10-minute documentary. The museum also is hosting free showings of classic movies Bob Hope made from 1939 to 1955. All but two of Hope's radio shows during World War II were aired from military bases and camps, throughout the United States and in both the European and South Pacific theaters of war,

according to the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation's website <http://bobhope.org/the-foundation/our-mission>.  
<https://www.facebook.com/bobhopefoundation>



**Bob Hope shakes hands with American servicemen after entertaining them on Christmas Eve in 1964 at Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon.**

Hope's daughter, Linda Hope, was scheduled to speak at a 24 MAY evening kickoff reception for the exhibit, which runs from Friday through Feb. 10, 2019. She's chair/CEO of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation, which gave the museum \$3 million in 2016 to integrate Hope's story throughout its campus. "I am so pleased that the public is getting a chance to understand the role my dad played in keeping up morale both overseas and here at home during those difficult times," she said in the museum's news release Tuesday. The World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum is lending some of the items, the museum said. The exhibit is titled "**So Ready for Laughter: The Legacy of Bob Hope.**" The title is taken from Hope's 1990 memoir, "Don't Shoot, It's Only Me." Describing his first military performance, at March Field, California, in May 1941, he wrote, "We had no idea we were going to discover an audience so ready for laughter, it would make what we did for a living seem like stealing money." [Source: The Associated Press | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Arizona Memorial Update 09 ► Closed Indefinitely**



Damage to the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu was worse than expected and it will remain closed indefinitely, officials said. Boat transportation to the attraction was suspended 6 MAY after one of the vessel operators noticed a crack on the outside of the memorial, Hawaii News Now reported. Tourists were allowed to disembark at the memorial after crews completed interim repairs. But the cracks reappeared hours later, indicating a more serious issue. "There is a brow or an edge where the visitor ramp meets the memorial, and at that point, there's been some fissures located on the exterior," said Jay Blount, a spokesman for the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument. "After further investigation on the interior, it was determined that the structure is not supporting the loading ramp the way that we need." Engineers are working to figure out possible long-term solutions. "The amount of time needed to implement the repairs is unknown, but the (National Park Service) will continue to provide information to the public as our team of specialists works together to restore access as soon as possible," memorial staff said 25 MAY in a news release. Other areas of the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center remain open. [Source: The Associated Press | May 28, 2018 ++]

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## Russia's Japanese Islands Invasion ► The Ongoing Dispute After 70 Years

Seventy years after World War II ended, Japan and Russia are *still* trying to sign a peace treaty. The persistent bone of contention? The Kuril Islands, seized by Soviet troops in a bloody amphibious landing *after* Japan announced it was ready to surrender. But how and why did the Soviets seize the Kurils in the first place? That question is answered in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Russia's Japanese Islands Invasion**". [Source: The National Interest | Sebastien Roblin | December 23, 2017 ++]

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## Le Paradis Massacre ► WWII Machine-Gunning of 97 British Troops

The massacre of over 90 British troops at Le Paradis has, quite rightly, gone down in history as a major war crime. The machine-gunning of 97 soldiers, who had surrendered to the German forces, was exactly what it became known as - a massacre and mass murder in cold blood. Investigations into the event were delayed until 1944 due to the fact that nobody believed the two survivors - Privates William "Bill" O'Callaghan and Albert "Bert" Pooley. At the end of the war, however, even Germans were asking questions about what had gone on in the small village of Le Paradis on 27th May, 1940. Much valuable information was acquired by the Americans and forwarded to the London interrogation center known as The Cage.

On 24th May, 1940, British and Allied Forces were retreating from the German push forward and trying desperately to reach Dunkirk for evacuation back to the United Kingdom. They were followed by the Germans, who, suddenly, confused everyone by halting their progress which gave additional time for the evacuation. As a result over 338,000 troops made it back to Britain. Not all the troops could evacuate. Some had to stay and fight. The 3rd Company SS Division Totenkopf consisted of fanatical Nazis, prepared to fight aggressively for the Fatherland. On 24 MAY, the Totenkopf had been pushing towards the town of Bethune when they came under fire from British troops. Much to their surprise, the German troops were ordered to retreat before pushing forward yet again. The Second Battalion of the Royal Norfolk Regiment and the Eighth Lancashire Fusiliers were ordered to hold the line at the French villages of Riez du Vinage, Le Cornet Malo and Le Paradis.

On 27 MAY, the Totenkopf attacked the British at Le Cornet Malo with the death of 150 men from both sides. Meanwhile the Norfolks had set-up their headquarters at Le Paradis at a farmhouse known as Duriez Farm. Their orders were confusing but they did their best under the circumstances that prevailed at the time. Eventually the Norfolks, which also included the First Royal Scots, were forced out of the ruined farmhouse and took shelter in a nearby cowshed. The Norfolks ran out of ammunition late afternoon. There were only 99 men left under the command of Major Lisle Ryder. Ryder ordered his men to surrender after consulting them. They stepped out of the shed with a white flag. German SS Officer Fritz Knoechlein ordered the prisoners to be stripped of their weapons and marched them towards another barn. Lining the 99 British troops against the wall he then ordered two machine gunners to open fire followed by the bayoneting of any survivors. Pistols were also used to finish off any soldiers still alive. An account by Private Albert Pooley, one of only two survivors:

*... we turned off the dusty French road, through a gateway and into a meadow beside the buildings of a farm. I saw, with one of the nastiest feelings I have ever had in my life, two heavy machine guns inside the meadow ... pointing at the head of our column. The guns began to spit fire ... for a few seconds the cries and shrieks of our stricken men drowned the crackling of the guns. Men fell like grass before a scythe ... I felt a searing pain and pitched forward ... my scream of pain mingled with the cries of my mates, but even before I fell into the heap of dying men, the thought stabbed my brain 'If I ever get out of here, the swine that did this will pay for it...*

The Germans failed to kill two members of the Norfolks. Bill O'Callaghan was hit in the arm and knocked to the ground. Another body fell on him and Bill decided to play dead. He was aware of the Germans going along the line of dead soldiers and thrusting bayonets into them. They did this to the man who fell on him. Fate then took a hand as a whistle was blown to conclude the matter and the Germans left. Shortly afterwards, Bill was shaken awake, having fallen asleep, by the other survivor, Bert Pooley, who had a shattered leg. Bill managed to carry and shelter Bert by a woodpile before finding a pig sty to give them more shelter. That was some achievement bearing in mind the injuries to both men and the fact that Bert was well over 6ft tall whilst Bill stood at little more than 5ft 6in.

Bill and Bert survived for three days on raw potatoes and muddy water which they drank from puddles and which made them ill. They were found by Madame Duquenne-Creton and her son Victor who owned the farm and, ignoring the danger to themselves, sheltered the men. The German Wehrmacht 251 Infantry Division came along and took the men as prisoners of war. No action was taken against the Duquenne-Cretons. Bert was eventually repatriated to England on the grounds that he was no longer a threat to the Germans. Bill O'Callaghan spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner in a number of different camps and was also involved in the infamous 1,000 mile march in 1945. On the day after the massacre, 28 May, Gunter d'Alquen, a journalist in the Waffen-SS, arrived at the scene with Thum, the SS-Totenkopf deputy legal advisor. d'Alquen made a report of what he saw:

*It was possible to look into the back yard from the road...the corpses in British uniform were lying in the yard near the buildings. They were lying in such a position that one can assume they were killed by machine-gun bursts. It struck me at once that the dead soldiers were not wearing helmets, nor did they have any equipment on them...I took pictures of the dead bodies, and the whole farm. At Thum's request these were to be placed at the disposal of the division...I believe I was already sitting there in the vehicle when Thum told me...the shot British soldiers were lying in a heap, from which he had come to the conclusion that a summary trial had taken place.*

Major Friedkerr von Riedner, who was also at the scene of the massacre on that day, reported that "These people had almost all suffered head wounds from shots that must have been fired at close range. Some had their whole skull smashed in, an injury that can almost only be caused by a blow from a gun butt or similar means." News of the massacre spread to neighboring German divisions, eventually reaching General Erich Hoepner, commander of the German forces in France. He disliked the SS, especially, its commander [Theodor Eicke](#), and was determined to have him dismissed if charges of mistreatment or murdering of prisoners could be brought. However, none of these investigations were ever successful. Regardless, many SS officers were appalled by the massacre; some reportedly challenged Knöchlein to a duel, although none was ever fought.

The Allies received no information about the massacre until the summer of 1943, when Pooley, who had spent the last three years in a German hospital due to the injuries he had suffered in the massacre, was declared medically unfit and repatriated. British authorities did not believe Pooley's story on his arrival; it was not thought that the German army were capable of such atrocities against British troops. Private O'Callaghan did not return to the United Kingdom until 1945 after the liberation of his prisoner-of-war camp. His confirmation of Pooley's story prompted an official investigation. The bodies of those killed in the massacre were exhumed in 1942 by the French, but only about 50 of the 97 were successfully identified. The bodies were then reburied in Le Paradis churchyard, which now forms part of the Le Paradis War Cemetery administered by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. In 1970, a memorial plaque was placed on the barn wall where the massacre took place and a large memorial was subsequently erected beside the church.



Picture of the mass grave at Creton Farm shortly after the massacre. Note the helmets with what appears to be a bullet hole in the top. This could possibly tie in with what was said of the SS shooting any survivors after the massacre.

The massacre was investigated by the War Crimes Investigation Unit and after Knöchlein's company was identified as the perpetrators in 1947, he was traced and arrested in Germany. Knöchlein was arraigned on charges of war crimes in August 1948, to which he pleaded not guilty. He was tried before Curiohaus war crimes court in Rotherbaum, in Court Number 5 on 11 October 1948. Knöchlein's defense hinged on the claim that he was not present at the massacre, although his lawyers did not deny that the event took place. They also claimed that the British had used dum dum bullets during the battle and misused a flag of truce; all of which were vigorously denied by the prosecution. Evidence was given by Pooley, O'Callaghan, Madame Duquenne-Creton, and a French civilian who testified to recognizing Knöchlein. On the twelfth day of the trial, during his summation, the Judge-Advocate said that whether the British had used illegal ammunition or abused a flag of truce was irrelevant; the German troops still had absolutely no right to execute prisoners of war without a fair and proper trial. On 25 October at 11:30, the President of the court pronounced the verdict that the defendant, Fritz Knöchlein, had been found guilty of war crimes. His lawyer, Dr Uhde, made the following plea to the court for clemency on account of Knöchlein's wife and family, who had attended every day of the trial:

*"All that is left for me to say is that some little doubt may have remained in the minds of the Court which will enable the members not to award the extreme penalty. Spare the life of the accused. He has a wife and four children who are dependent upon him for support. Consider also the fact that he is a soldier, and the Court is composed of members of the British Army. I believe I am entitled to appeal to the Court to pronounce a sentence which will enable my client to come out of prison at an early date."*

Despite this plea, at 15:00 he was sentenced to death by hanging, which was carried out on 28 January 1949 in Hamelin. No other German soldiers or officers were prosecuted for their roles in the massacre. [Source: [www.leparadismassacre.com/massacre-overview.html](http://www.leparadismassacre.com/massacre-overview.html) & [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_Paradis\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Paradis_massacre) May 2018 ++]

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## **Hello Girls ► Telephone Operators In France During WWI**

They were known as the "Hello Girls" — American women fluent in French and English who answered the urgent call for telephone operators needed in France during World War I. They took oaths to join the U.S. Army Signal Corps, underwent training by AT&T before boarding ships to Europe, heading to war before most of the American doughboys arrived in France, connected 26 million calls and ultimately proved to be a significant factor in winning the war. And then they were forgotten.

A documentary filmmaker from Wisconsin has created a one-hour film about the American phone operators who served in the Army Signal Corps during World War I to shine a spotlight on a group of brave, selfless women who were not officially recognized for their work until it was too late for most of them. The film will be shown at the

Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia on 1 MAR, almost 100 years to the day the first ship carrying women phone operators left the U.S. "Telephone technology was really what America brought to the war," said Jim Theres, a Racine native who hopes to bring the film to Wisconsin this year. "Women by World War I had dominated the field as telephone operators. Gen. John Pershing (commander of the American Expeditionary Forces) said we have women who do this in America and I need them over here."

The Army's initial request for 100 volunteers was greeted with 7,600 applications. A total of 223 women — including two with Wisconsin connections — eventually traveled to France. This was two years before women in America were allowed to vote. "Every command to advance or retreat or hold fire was delivered by telephone and it took an operator to connect that call," said Elizabeth Cobbs, [author of "The Hello Girls: America's First Women Soldiers,"](#) published last year. French officers frequently needed to communicate with American officers and it was the American female phone operators who put those calls through and stayed on the line to act as simultaneous translators. That meant the women handled national security secrets, frequently served near the front lines and came under bombardment, and quickly, efficiently and calmly handled numerous calls. Male telephone operators, many of whom were disdainful of the job they considered women's work, took as long as 60 seconds to connect a call; when the women arrived, the timing was cut to 10 seconds. "As one woman wrote — their hands flitted like hummingbirds over the wires," said Cobbs.



**Gen. John J. Pershing inspects female operators serving in Europe during World War I.**

The two women with ties to Wisconsin were Martina Heynen of Green Bay and Hildegard Van Brunt, a California native who settled in Milwaukee in the mid-1920s. Both sailed to France in the second group of phone operators in April 1918. Van Brunt's mother was born in Paris and taught her daughter to speak French. Van Brunt was 19 when she headed to France and met William Abbott, an American soldier she married after the war. They moved to Milwaukee to run his family's furniture store, said Van Brunt's granddaughter, Elizabeth Goessling. Goessling has fond memories of her grandmother and knew she served in France during World War I but thought Van Brunt was with the Red Cross. During a recent interview, Goessling learned her grandmother was, in fact, a phone operator. "I thought she was really cool. She was my favorite. (Her World War I service) was just another cool thing she did," said Goessling, who lives in Madison. Van Brunt's mother also served in France during the war; Goessling thinks she was a Red Cross volunteer.

Two female operators died in France in the Spanish Flu epidemic, including one woman who died Nov. 11, 1918, the day the war ended. Grace Banker was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, one of only 18 of the 16,000 Army Signal Corps officers to receive the medal one step higher than the Silver Star. "I think Pershing and the generals recognized the role the women played in helping win the war. They gave one of the 223 women one of the highest awards you could get in World War I," said Cobbs. In his documentary, Theres interviewed Cobbs, families of several telephone operators, and the current national American Legion commander, Denise Rohan, who is from Wisconsin. Rohan is attending the March 1 premiere of the documentary.

When the war ended, many remained in France or were sent to Germany to continue working phone switchboards through the Treaty of Versailles. The last women returned home in 1920. Many tried to join veterans groups,

including the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. When they were asked for their Army discharge papers, they contacted the military for the standard forms. That's when they were told they were not veterans. It all came down to one word. While Navy and Marines regulations said any person could join the units, the Army was open only to men. While thousands of women served in the Navy and Marines during World War I, none were sent overseas, instead serving honorably in the United States.

But the 223 women who volunteered for the U.S. Army Signal Corps and were sent into harm's way were all told they were actually well-paid civilian contractors, said Theres, a Gulf War veteran who earned degrees at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and Cardinal Stritch University and now lives in Washington, D.C. "They were basically told, you didn't serve," said Cobbs. "They didn't get bonuses that every member of the armed forces at home or abroad received. It was the amount of money equivalent to buying a car. The sad thing is some experienced disability from their service, including tuberculosis, and were not allowed to get veterans benefits." Which was heartbreaking for many of the women.

Most got married and started families after they returned home and figured they would never get recognition. Van Brunt's husband died during gall bladder surgery — his business failed during the Great Depression — leaving her a widow at age 39. "When I think of what my grandmother went through during the Depression when she lost her husband and had two kids, what good that would have helped her being a veteran," said Goessling. A few of the phone operators petitioned Congress and the military for decades, repeatedly getting rebuffed until the 1970s. When President Jimmy Carter finally signed legislation in 1977 recognizing what should have been done six decades earlier — that the women were indeed veterans — there were only a few dozen Hello Girls still alive. Among them was Van Brunt, who died in 1985 in Milwaukee. One woman told her family upon hearing the news that the World War I victory medal was nice but that there was only one thing she wanted: an American flag on her coffin when she died. The remaining Hello Girls were given military burials. [Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | Meg Jones | February 12, 2018 ++]

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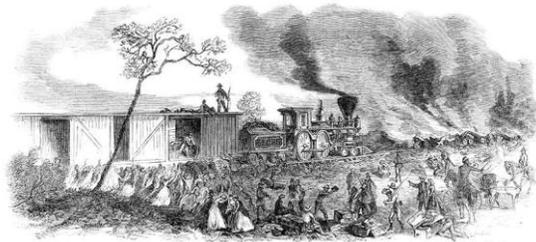
## **Franklin's Great Escape ► Union Major General Outwits Confederate Captors**

Major General William B. Franklin was a Union corps commander in various theaters during the war, but battlefield success typically eluded him. Moreover, though an ally and favorite of the Army of the Potomac's Commander Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan early in the war, Franklin heatedly clashed with each of McClellan's successors, earning him a reputation as a difficult subordinate who produced only mediocre results. The Battle of Fredericksburg catastrophe in 1862 and his part in Nathaniel P. Banks' Red River debacle in 1864 were perfect examples. Yet after being unceremoniously captured in July 1864, not even in the midst of battle, Franklin was determined not to end the war in a Confederate prison camp. Displaying uncustomary bold and swift thinking, he pulled off a gutsy escape from his captors.



**William Franklin**

The Red River Campaign was the final blotch on Franklin's Civil War resume. Besides the humiliation, all the 41-year-old commander could show for the campaign was a crippled left leg, injured at the Battle of Mansfield on 8 APR. A bullet had smashed into his leg, but failed to penetrate the flesh, leaving it severely bruised below the knee and nearly immobile. Returning north on leave after the campaign, Franklin spent some time with his wife in Portland, Maine, and then traveled to City Point, Va., in early July to visit his old West Point classmate, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. On 10 JUL, he was on his way back north, perhaps unaware that he was heading into danger.



A spirited fight had taken place at Monacacy, Md., the day before, with Lt. Gen. Jubal Early's Confederates defeating a Federal force under Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace. Gen. Early then moved on Washington, D.C., reaching the outskirts of the capital on 11 JUL. Meanwhile, Rebel Major Harry Gilmor, a native of the region, led a 130-trooper detachment of the 1st and 2nd Maryland Cavalry in a raid to destroy Union infrastructure between Washington and Baltimore, burning bridges, tearing up railroad track, and cutting telegraph lines. Franklin arrived in Baltimore amid the turmoil on 11 JUL. Aware that Early's gray legions were around, and eager to get back to Portland as quickly as possible, he boarded an 8:30 a.m. train on the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, hoping travel by rail, rather than road, would help him bypass any Confederate threats. It wasn't until about 20 miles out of Baltimore that Franklin's anxiety subsided. That reprieve turned to alarm, however, when the train unexpectedly jerked to a standstill about a mile after crossing the Gunpowder River Bridge, not far from Magnolia Station. The 26-year-old Gilmor had spotted the passenger train modestly chugging away in the vicinity of his detachment and ordered a captain and 20 of his cavalymen to stop it. Gilmor's cavalymen boarded each of the cars, their boots clunking as they paced down the aisles. Frightened passengers kept their heads down, eyes locked to the ground—at least the Union sympathizers.

The troopers seemed mostly interested in nabbing prisoners, and they had been tipped off that Franklin happened to be aboard. Dressed in civilian attire and squeezed in the seat next to another Union officer, Franklin sat motionless for a half-hour trying to blend in, hoping he wouldn't be spotted. Gilmor soon boarded the car rumored to be transporting the general. He demanded that the passengers point out Franklin, but received no response. Gilmor made his way down the car row by row, probing one man at a time and demanding, "Are you Major General Franklin?" and requiring each person to provide papers or some form of credentials. Through the process of elimination, he came upon the cornered general, who spoke up and bluntly addressed the Confederate major, "I am the person you are

looking for.” Franklin explained to Gilmor that his leg was disabled from his Mansfield wound, and that he could barely walk or ride a horse (likely hoping this would dissuade Gilmor from taking him captive). Gilmor informed him he was now his prisoner and that he would walk, and Franklin was pulled off the train without incident. The major admired Franklin’s tactful conduct, praising his “polite and gentlemanly bearing.”

Franklin and several other Union officers were detained under guard in a telegraph office, the civilian passengers removed, and the train put to the torch. Gilmor paroled most of the prisoners, not having enough horses to transport them back to Early’s army (most were invalids anyway). Five of the most desirable, including Franklin, were crammed into a commandeered carriage or wagon and placed under the custody of Captain Nicholas Owen. Owen’s party continued on until about midnight, encamping on Oliver’s Farm somewhere between Randallstown and Reisterstown, to rest and feed their horses. While the Union prisoners resigned themselves they’d probably spend the rest of the war rotting away in a prisoner camp, Franklin plotted his escape. Feigning illness, he quietly laid down on some straw and pretended to fall sleep. He hoped the Confederate guards would relax their watch, sensing he posed no threat of flight. Captain Owen and each of the guards, one by one, followed Franklin’s example and fell asleep, exhausted from their continuous hours in the saddle. Franklin, eyes closed but wide awake, sat motionless as each man tucked up against the butt of his rifle and fell into a deep slumber.

Eventually Franklin lifted his large frame off the ground with some difficulty and stood. Fearing the guards would gladly shoot him if he was discovered, he crept as best he could to a nearby fence next to a clump of trees. Testing to see if they were “playing possum” as he had done, Franklin purposely coughed loudly, and made some racket, peering back as he did for signs of movement. Getting no response from his Confederate guards, Franklin went for it. He scrambled over the wooden fence into the farmer’s field, glancing back one more time, and “ran” for his life. He hobbled along, slowed by his lame leg, across several fields and scaled several more fences. This continued for about 45 minutes. Not used to this kind of physical exertion, and with his leg starting to stiffen, Franklin concealed himself in some tall weeds and blackberry bushes near a tree line as daylight approached.

Major Gilmor arrived back at Owen’s camp early that morning to check on the Union general. “As if a broadside had been opened upon them,” the guards woke to their wrathful commander cursing them when he realized Franklin had vanished. Twenty men were dispatched to hunt down the Union general. Hoping to restore Gilmor’s confidence in them, they knocked on doors and questioned the local farmers, searched empty barns, and scoured every field and bush in the area. Franklin remained in that spot the following day. He intermittently peered through an opening in the brush, occasionally spotting Gilmor’s searching cavalymen not far from his location. The July sun beat down on his face and mosquitoes tore at his skin, making these agonizing hours seem like an eternity. Astoundingly, he remained undetected.

That night, Franklin finally felt it was safe to move on. Hungry and fatigued, having sustained himself on only a handful of blackberries, he stumbled into a local farmer’s cabbage field, ripping a head from the dirt and eating roots and all. A newspaper later recorded that he became “completely bewildered” as his “over-wrought imagination made him fancy all sorts of queer things.” He started to hallucinate from a combination of fatigue, dehydration, and hunger, at one point seeing a crowd of medieval knights with lances and shields lining up to face him in battle—actually, it was just a field of corn. In a drunken-like stupor he stumbled onto a road, hoping it would lead to his salvation. He suddenly came upon two men carrying bundles of hay. Knowing he wouldn’t be able to flee without alerting them—and unsure if this might be yet another hallucination—he casually strolled forward and bluntly asked what they were doing headed into the woods with that much hay. It was for their horses, concealed from prying Rebel cavalymen, one of the men admitted. Their apparent pro-Union sentiments were enough for Franklin to reveal his identity, and soon the general was accompanying one of the men down a secluded trail to his farm.

The farmer’s family received Franklin “kindly and hospitably” and gave him his first meal in more than 24 hours and let him spend the night indoors. Franklin, however, spent the next day in the woods, hidden away in case Confederate troopers came knocking. Franklin wrote a note reporting that he was alive and needed a rescue party, and arranged to have it sent to the commanding officer in Baltimore. A carriage and a Union cavalry escort arrived

at the farm shortly to transport Franklin to safety. The ragged and scruffy-looking general arrived in Baltimore at 4:30 a.m. 14 JUL. A few hours later, he was bound on a train for Philadelphia—a trip this time free of Rebel raiders. Nevertheless, though Franklin had been determined not to spend the rest of the war in a Confederate prison camp, he would find himself chained to a desk in an administrative role those final nine months—far away from the fighting. [Source: America's Civil War Magazine | Frank Jastrzembski | January 2018 ++]

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## **Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 June**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 JUN. [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | May 2018 ++]

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## **WWII Bomber Nose Art [07] ► Shady Lady**



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## **Medal of Honor Citations ► Donald J. Gott | WWII**



*The President of the United States in the name of The Congress  
takes pleasure in presenting the  
Medal of Honor posthumously  
to*

**DONALD J. GOTT**

**Rank and organization:** First Lieutenant, U.S. Army Air Corps, 729th Bomber Sqd, 452d Bombardment Group

**Place and date:** Saarbrucken, Germany, 9 November 1944. (Air Mission)

**Entered service:** 1943 at Arnett, Okla.

**Born:** June 3, 1923 in Arnett, Okla.

### Citation

On a bombing run upon the marshaling yards at Saarbrucken a B-17 aircraft piloted by 1st. Lt. Gott was seriously damaged by anti-aircraft fire. Three of the aircraft's engines were damaged beyond control and on fire; dangerous flames from the No. 4 engine were leaping back as far as the tail assembly. Flares in the cockpit were ignited and a fire raged therein, which was further increased by free-flowing fluid from damaged hydraulic lines. The interphone system was rendered useless. In addition to these serious mechanical difficulties the engineer was wounded in the leg and the radio operator's arm was severed below the elbow. Suffering from intense pain, despite the application of a tourniquet, the radio operator fell unconscious. Faced with the imminent explosion of his aircraft, and death to his entire crew, mere seconds before bombs away on the target, 1st. Lt. Gott and his copilot conferred. Something had to be done immediately to save the life of the wounded radio operator. The lack of a static line and the thought that his unconscious body striking the ground in unknown territory would not bring immediate medical attention forced a quick decision. 1st. Lt. Gott and his copilot decided to fly the flaming aircraft to friendly territory and then attempt to crash land. Bombs were released on the target and the crippled aircraft proceeded alone to Allied-controlled territory. When that had been reached, 1st. Lt. Gott had the copilot personally inform all crewmembers to bail out. The copilot chose to remain with 1st. Lt. Gott in order to assist in landing the bomber. With only one normally functioning engine, and with the danger of explosion much greater, the aircraft banked into an open field, and when it was at an altitude of 100 feet it exploded, crashed, exploded again and then disintegrated. All 3 crewmembers were instantly killed. 1st. Lt. Gott's loyalty to his crew, his determination to accomplish the task set forth to him, and his deed of knowingly performing what may have been his last service to his country was an example of valor at its highest.



Co-pilot 2nd Lt. William Metzger also stayed with the aircraft and was awarded the MOH concurrently six months later, on May 16, 1945. Aircraft was destroyed in the crash and all three aboard died. The tail gunner, S/Sgt. Herman B Krimminger was hanging under the tail, as he had opened his parachute early, his parachute pulled him out of the B-17G. His parachute went over the tail plane and he fell under the tail to be trapped by the parachute shroud lines. He was torn apart as the bomber lowered into the Boise de Hattonville and left a debris trail 600 feet long. It did not dive, explode and then explode again as stated in MOH Citations. The wounded crewman was T/Sgt. Robert A. Dunlap, radio operator. Gott, aged 21 at his death, was buried in Harmon Cemetery, Harmon, Oklahoma.

[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | May 2018 ++]

\* Health Care \*



## Collagen Crosslinking ► Keratoconus & Corneal Ectasia Corrective Eye Surgery

Every year, Air Force Academy Cadets and Airmen are found to have eyesight conditions that can disqualify them from flight status, according to Academy ophthalmologists. For patients with progressive keratoconus and corneal ectasia, the odds of their careers ending prematurely changed dramatically 3 MAY, when innovative laser surgery, called Collagen Crosslinking, was performed here. Air Force Maj. Marc Neuffer, chief of cornea and refractive surgery at the 10th Medical Group, corrected satellite engineer Air Force Capt. Brent Danner’s degenerative eye condition. “This groundbreaking capability to correct the condition allows us to treat cadets and active duty members here and from surrounding areas,” Neuffer said. “They keep their vision and stay eligible for deployment.” Cadets diagnosed with the condition are not commissioned unless they receive a waiver, and pilots with the condition are restricted from flying.

“Keratoconus is most commonly found in individuals between 20 and 30 years of age,” Neuffer said. “It eventually leads to loss of sight requiring corneal transplantation.” Neuffer said the condition typically isn’t diagnosed until after an individual has joined the military and is well into their career. Once discovered, it becomes a duty-limiting condition that can result in medical discharge from active duty service. Collagen Crosslinking was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2016 as a means to treat progressive keratoconus. The surgery stiffens and stabilizes the cornea which stops the degenerative process. Patients typically keep their vision and don’t require corneal transplants. The Academy is the third Air Force location to offer the procedure. Currently, there are 15 base patients awaiting the procedure. This does not include patients from Peterson and Schriever Air Force bases, or Fort Carson, installations that refer their keratoconus patients to the Academy for the surgery. The Academy is also the referral center for 10 additional Air Force bases in the surrounding states. “This procedure is a game changer for Airmen who would otherwise have their careers sidelined permanently,” Neuffer said. [Source: Health.mil | Laurie Wilson | May 14, 2018 ++]

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## TMOP Update 25 ► Ordering & Refilling Prescriptions | FAQ

### 1. How do I submit my new prescription?

- Order by Mail: Send your order form and the written prescription provided by your doctor to: Express Scripts, Inc., PO Box 52150, Phoenix, AZ 85072
- Order by Phone: Have your doctor call Express Scripts toll-free 877.283.3858.
- Order by Fax: Have your doctor fax your order form and your written prescription to Express Scripts using the following information:
  - Within the United States: Toll-Free, 877.895.1900
  - Outside the United States (*U.S. licensed prescribers only*): 602.586.3911

### 2. Where can I get a prescription order form? You can get an order form using any of the following options:

- Print the [Mail Order Registration Form](#) (PDF file).
- Login and print a form from the Print Forms page under Benefits section at [Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE](https://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE).
- Pick up an order form at any Military Treatment Facility.
- Call Express Scripts toll-free at 877.363.1303. Select the option to leave your name and address, and we'll mail an order form to you.

3. **Does my doctor need to write my prescription a certain way?** Have your doctor write your prescription to allow for up to a 90-day supply of medication (or the maximum days' supply allowed by your benefit) with each order. Your doctor should also allow for refills for up to one year, if appropriate. For example, if you take two pills per day, the prescription should be written to allow 180 pills with each order, indicating the prescription can be refilled three more times (for a total of one year's medication). This way, you won't have to obtain a new prescription every three months.

4. **What information needs to be on my written prescription?** The front of the prescription should include the patient's name and the other standard information provided by the doctor. You should also provide the following information on the back of your prescription. This helps Express Scripts fill your prescription safely and without delay.

- Patient's full name, including Sr. or Jr. if applicable
- Patient's address
- Patient's date of birth
- Patient's member ID number

5. **Can I submit prescriptions written by any doctor?** By law, only prescriptions written by prescribers licensed in the United States, District of Columbia or a U.S. territory are considered valid. For controlled substances, the prescriber must provide his or her individual DEA number. Prescribers can't write prescriptions for family members.

6. **If my doctor faxes in a new prescription, do I still have to fax/mail in the prescription order form?** No. If you wish to submit your prescription by fax, your doctor should fill out the entire order form, including your name, address and prescription information, then fax it to the Express Scripts Pharmacy. They can only receive faxed prescriptions sent directly from the doctor's office.

7. **Can I fax in my own prescription to Express Scripts?** No. Express Scripts cannot accept prescriptions faxed directly from patients. Faxes must be sent from a doctor's office and must include all of the necessary information, including the patient's first and last name, date of birth, address and member ID number. Login and print a fax form from the Print Forms page under Benefits at [Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE](http://Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE) so that your doctor can fill in and fax to us with the prescription.

8. **How do I move my current prescription to a different local pharmacy?** It's easy to transfer your prescriptions to another pharmacy. Simply take your current prescription bottle to your new pharmacy and ask the pharmacist to manage the transfer from your previous pharmacy. You can also call the new pharmacy and ask the pharmacist to contact your current pharmacy and transfer your prescription. Or ask your doctor to call your new pharmacy with your prescription information.

9. **When can I refill my Home Delivery prescription?**

- *Online Refills:* To order a refill, login to [Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE](http://Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE). Your prescriptions eligible for refill (or renewal) will be automatically displayed on the home page under the "Prescriptions you can order today" section. Simply click the "add to cart" button and complete the transaction.
- *Refills by Mail:* If you submit an order less than 90 days before the next refill date allowed by your plan, we will hold the prescription and mail you a letter informing you when we are allowed to process the refill. If you submit an order more than 90 days before the prescription renewal date, we will return the unfilled prescription with a letter informing you when it can be resubmitted, according to your plan.

10. **What if I am told it's too early to fill my prescription?** You may refill your prescription after you have used about 66% of your medication. If you send in your refill before the allowable refill date, Express Scripts will either:

- Hold the prescription for up to 90 days and fill it on the allowable refill date, or
- Return the prescription to you if it cannot be filled within 90 days of the allowable refill date.

To avoid delays in processing, we encourage you wait to order your next refill until you have about a three-week supply left of medication left. Check your prescription bottle for your next available refill date.

11. **When does my prescription expire?** Most prescriptions expire one year from the date they are written. The prescription cannot be filled after the expiration date, even if there are unused refills remaining.

12. **If my prescription is NOT a compound or controlled medication, do I have to speak with a patient care advocate to order a refill?** No. While you can always order refills from a patient care advocate, you can also order refills through [your online account](#) or through Express Scripts' Integrated Voice Response system (IVR) at 877.363.1303.

13. **My family member/caregiver handles my medications; can he/she contact Express Scripts for me and order my medication?** Yes. To protect your privacy, the person calling on your behalf must provide the sponsor's ID number, your name, date of birth, address, and telephone number. He or she should also have all of your medication bottles available to discuss your specific medications with customer service. Express Scripts will only be able to talk to your family member/caregiver about medications that you ask about by name, unless you establish power of attorney or designate them as a caregiver online via your Express Scripts Portal. Instructions to designate a caregiver online are listed below:

14. **How do I designate a caregiver online?** Follow these **beneficiary** instructions:

If the beneficiary wants to...	Then the beneficiary should...
Designate a Caregiver online (Designated Caregivers can access Protected Health Information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign into your account</li> <li>• Select "Account"</li> <li>• Select "Add a Caregiver"</li> <li>• Add Caregiver information</li> <li>• Check Electronic Signature box</li> <li>• Click Continue, then confirm</li> </ul>

[Source: <https://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/faq/qanda.shtml> | April 2018 ++]

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## Hand Dryers ► The Hidden Dangers of Using Hot-Air Dryers

Hot-air hand dryers may be spewing other folks' bacteria onto your freshly washed hands. A study published online in the journal Applied and Environmental Microbiology found that air blowing from hot-air hand dryers is germ-ridden. Researchers used petri dishes to test for bacteria in the restrooms of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. They found that an average of one bacteria colony or less grew on each petri dish that was exposed to bathroom air for two minutes. Yet an average of 18 to 60 colonies grew on each dish that was exposed to air from hand dryers for 30 seconds. They also found that adding high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to hand dryers reduced the amount of bacteria they blew onto petri dishes by about four-fold — or about 75 percent. Further, when researchers swabbed the inner surfaces of hand dryer nozzles, they found relatively few bacteria colonies — about four per bathroom, on average. These findings suggest that most if not all of the bacteria spewed by hot-air hand

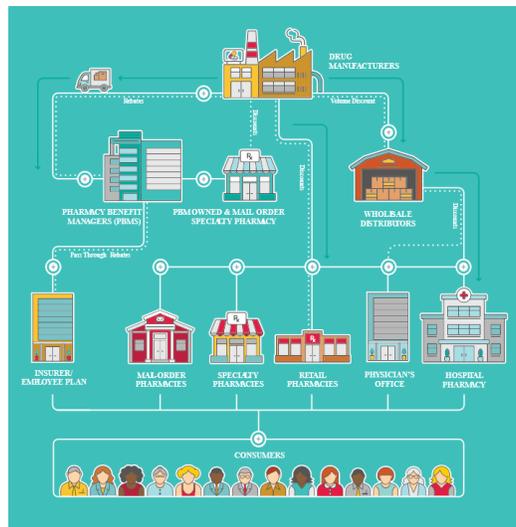
dryers comes from bathroom air, according to the study. In other words, bacteria are being sucked into dryers from the air, not multiplying within dryers.

Researchers suspect the bacteria are “either passing through hand dryers without HEPA filters, or pulled into the air coming out of hand dryer nozzles by convection,” the study states. As for how bacteria gets into bathroom air to begin with, John Ross, an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a medical doctor who is board-certified in infectious disease wrote, “Unfortunately, every time a lidless toilet is flushed, it aerosolizes a fine mist of microbes. This fecal cloud may disperse over an area as large as 6 square meters (65 square feet).” Ross reports that one type of bacteria the study found in restrooms, *Staphylococcus aureus*, causes disease in people who are healthy. According to the U.S. Library of Medicine, *Staphylococcus aureus* causes most staph infections, which most commonly include skin infections but also include illnesses like pneumonia. None of the other types of bacteria the study found in restrooms causes disease in healthy folks, however. In fact, Ross says you’re more likely to catch an infection through contact with other people than with restrooms. Just reach for the more hygienic drying option of paper towels when possible, and dry well. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | May 24, 2018 ++]

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## Prescription Drug Costs Update 02 ► Suppliers Are Hiding Their Profit

That prescription medicine pill in your palm has a story to tell. Middlemen in the drug supply chain would rather you swallow it and not ask questions. The key players historically have used their market and political clout to resist attempts to lift the veil so they can protect high prices. President Trump took direct aim at the problem when he unveiled his [plan](#) to lower drug prices on 11 MAY. “Whoever those middlemen were — and a lot of people never even figured it out — they’re rich,” said Trump. “They won’t be so rich anymore.”



**This maze of companies profiting off your prescription drugs is intentionally mysterious. That keeps profits high and scrutiny low.**

The administration’s blueprint is long on ambitious proposals about retooling the drug supply chain to benefit consumers. Even Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, a former top executive at Eli Lilly and Company, is clear about the challenge and the inevitable pushback from the industries involved – including manufacturers, pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), wholesalers and pharmacies. “It took decades to erect this very complex interwoven system,” Azar said at a White House briefing when the plan was rolled out. “We’re talking about entrenched market players, complex financial arrangements that would have to be redesigned.” To get a sense of how the price of that pill in your hand was set along its journey from drug maker to you, you need to start at \$457 billion.

That's how much the retail pharmaceutical market is worth in the United States each year. But gaining further clarity on the inner workings of the supply chain requires digging between guestimates attempted by academics or industry-funded studies that point the finger of blame conveniently elsewhere along the way.

The drug industry trade association PhRMA has launched a publicity campaign called "Let's Talk About Cost" and asserts one-third of brand drug's price is rebated back insurers and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs). PBMs negotiate discounts with drug makers on behalf of health insurance carriers and self-insured companies, unions and school systems. The largest, CVS Caremark, Express Scripts and OptumRx (a division of UnitedHealth Group, which also operates the nation's largest health insurer), currently represent about three quarters of all insured patients. Together, the companies posted \$17 billion in profits in 2017. Considering the total size of the US drug market, there is clearly more money landing somewhere. A 2017 study by the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics analyzed the financial statements of publicly traded companies along the supply chain and tried to estimate where the profits go. While an imperfect approach, the study implies that for every \$100 spent for retail prescription drugs in the United States (both generic and name brand), about \$17 covers direct production costs, \$41 goes to the manufacturer, and \$41 is split between wholesalers, pharmacies, pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and insurers as gross profit.

Under their hypothetical calculation, the authors estimate a total net profit (after expenses) at \$23: \$15 goes to manufacturers, \$2 goes to PBMs, \$3 goes to pharmacies, and \$3 goes to insurers. The gross profit margins fall differently for generic drugs, where manufacturers clear a much lower \$18. However, the supply chain — and particularly PBMs — make more money with generics. PBM's take in the generic market is \$7, a four-fold increase, according to the study. From the PBMs' perspective, it is largely up to drug makers to reduce the cost of prescription medications. "The most direct way for drug makers to reduce costs and improve access is to simply cut their own prices," said the Pharmaceutical Care Management Association (PCMA), which represents PBMs, in an email to Tarbell. bPhRMA did not respond to Tarbell requests for comment for this story. Experts say a primary problem in drug pricing is the relationship under which both powerful drug manufacturers and large pharmacy benefit management companies mutually benefit when a medicine price is high. "Right now, every incentive in the system is to increase and have high list drug prices," said Azar in comments at the White House. "Because everybody in the system, except the patient and the taxpayer, is wetting their beak along the way."

How much money moves through this rebate/discount channel and what percentage actually ends up with the consumer is a trade secret? There simply is no way to know. PBMs tightly guard their contracts with manufacturers and treat them as trade secrets, like the recipe for Coca-Cola. Many of these companies also deploy tricks to retain as much of the rebate as possible. Some in Congress are pushing for new legislation to shed light on what's really going on. One bill, the Creating Transparency to Have Drug Rebates Unlocked (C-THRU) Act (S.637), introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) in March 2017, would require PBMs to share their aggregate contract information online via the Department of Health and Human Services. It would also require a minimum percentage of rebate savings be passed through to the end consumer. Not surprisingly, the bill is unpopular with PBMs. PCMA, their trade association, warned the measure would give manufacturers and drug stores "unprecedented pricing power that could help them tacitly collude with competitors." A later, PBM-industry funded study predicted the bill would cost the government \$20 billion over 10 years. A leading pharmacist trade group dissed the analysis as "another in a long line of sketchy PBM theoretical models, more paper tiger than substantive research." "Until we can see how much the PBMs are keeping for themselves—which is precisely the type of transparency needed—health care purchasers will continue to see higher costs, and the PBMs will continue to see record profits," said Douglas Hoey, CEO of the National Community Pharmacists Association, in a statement. A PCMA spokesman declined to comment on the study.

The C-THRU bill has been sitting on the sidelines with few co-sponsors. "People are clamoring for lower prescription drug prices, but since Republicans in Congress refuse to act or even hold a hearing, Democrats are the only ones offering solutions and calling attention to this broken system," said Taylor Harvey, a Wyden aide. In

addition to the C-THRU Act, the following bills have been introduced and co-sponsored by Democrats (and one Republican – Sen. John McCain of Arizona) and are currently in legislative limbo:

- The Fair Accountability and Innovative Research Drug Pricing Act of 2017 would require manufacturers to report and justify monthly price increases of 10 percent or more to the government or face civil fines.
- The Stop Price Gouging Act would impose an excise tax on pharmaceutical companies that sell prescription that exceed the annual percentage increase in the medical care consumer price index.
- The Empowering Medicare Seniors to Negotiate Drug Prices Act of 2017 would allow the Department of Health and Human Services secretary to negotiate prescription drug prices under part D of the Medicare program.
- The Stopping the Pharmaceutical Industry from Keeping Drugs Expensive Act of 2017 would require drug makers to justify price increases to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The information would be posted on the agency’s website.
- The Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act is a catch-all bill that includes many of the requirements in the above measures.

Neither the Speaker of the House nor Senate Majority Leader press secretaries responded to Tarbell’s requests for comment about the status of the pending drug price bills. The one solidly bi-partisan bill that seeks to address drug prices is the Creating and Restoring Equal Access to Equivalent Samples (CREATES) Act (S.974). It aims to speed the arrival of cheaper medicines by requiring name-brand companies to share samples and safety protocols with generic makers for FDA approval. Many branded drug manufacturers actively thwart the process to protect their monopolies. The measure, introduced by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), has a notable list of co-sponsors including Republican Senators Charles Grassley (Iowa), Ted Cruz (Texas), Tom Cotton (AR), Rand Paul (KY) and John McCain (Ariz.) Senators Leahy and Grassley pushed hard to include the CREATES act in the must-pass omnibus spending bill to fund the government in late March. “This bill offers Congress an opportunity to take meaningful action to lower the cost of prescription drugs,” they wrote in a recent op-ed. “It would save \$3.8 billion in federal spending over the next 10 years and many billions more in costs to consumers.”

Despite a broad base of support, Republican leaders elected not to include CREATES in the final federal spending bill in March. The decision followed heavy lobbying from drug industry executives who flew into Washington to oppose the measure. There were some signals last week from House Speaker Paul Ryan that a compromise could be in the works. “Momentum continues to build behind the CREATES Act,” Sen. Leahy told Tarbell. Recently, “Senator Graham and Senator Brown were added as cosponsors, bringing the total to 22, and there is more support beyond that ... But there is no question that big pharmaceutical companies have poured a lot of resources into weakening or killing it.” The Trump plan similarly seeks to address the problem. “We also have to get after the pharma companies who engage in anticompetitive practices to try to block the entry of generics,” said Azar. Exactly how the administration is going to achieve that and other suggested goals to reconfigure the drug supply chain to lower drug prices remains unclear. [Source: Tarbell | Wendell Potter | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## Prescription Drug Costs Update 03 ► What You Can Do

Six ways to combat high drug prices and fight for transparency in our drug supply chain:

1. **Check the cash price on your prescription.** There’s a good chance that number is lower than your co-pay. You can find out fast and shop for the best local deal by visiting [Goodrx.com](http://Goodrx.com).
2. **Arm yourself with knowledge.** Physician David Belk has dug deep into the costing of American healthcare. It’s all laid out at his website [truecostofhealthcare.org](http://truecostofhealthcare.org).
3. **The Trump administration** has unveiled a plan it says will fix the high cost of drugs. Find out more [here](#).

4. **A coalition of doctors** unveiled a counter-proposal that they say will address drivers of high drug costs like Big Pharma directly funding its regulators and cost controls to make medicines affordable for all Americans. Find our more [here](#) and connect with the health care advocacy group, Physicians for a National Health Program, behind the proposal [here](#).
5. **Large hospital systems are** launching their own nonprofit generic drug manufacturing company to do an end run around middlemen and lower prices. Find out more [here](#).
6. **Medicines360 uses a hybrid** model to get affordable drugs and medical devices to poor women around the globe. Check it out [here](#).

[Source: [Source: Tarbell | Wendell Potter | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## Medicare Physicals Update 01 ► Preventive Visit & Yearly Wellness Exams

Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance) covers for all participants the following:

1. A **"Welcome to Medicare" preventive visit**: You can get this one time visit within the first 12 months you have Part B. This visit includes a review of your medical and social history related to your health and education and counseling about preventive services, including these:

- Certain screenings, shots, and referrals for other care, if needed
- Height, weight, and blood pressure measurements
- A calculation of your body mass index
- A simple vision test
- A review of your potential risk for depression and your level of safety
- An offer to talk with you about creating advance directives.
- A written plan letting you know which screenings, shots, and other preventive services you need. Get details about coverage for screenings, shots, and other preventive services.

2. **Yearly "Wellness" visits**: You don't need the 'Welcome to Medicare' preventive visit to be covered for yearly "Wellness". This visit is covered once every 12 months (11 full months must have passed since the last visit). If you've had Part B for longer than 12 months, you can get this visit to develop or update a personalized prevention help plan. This plan is designed to help prevent disease and disability based on your current health and risk factors. Your provider will ask you to fill out a questionnaire, called a "Health Risk Assessment," as part of this visit. Answering these questions can help you and your provider develop a personalized prevention plan to help you stay healthy and get the most out of your visit. It can also include:

- A review of your medical and family history
- Developing or updating a list of current providers and prescriptions
- Height, weight, blood pressure, and other routine measurements
- Detection of any cognitive impairment
- Personalized health advice
- A list of risk factors and treatment options for you
- A screening schedule (like a checklist) for appropriate preventive services. Get details about coverage for screenings, shots, and other preventive services.
- Advance care planning

3. **Costs**. You pay nothing for the "Welcome to Medicare" preventive visit or the yearly "Wellness" visit if your doctor or other qualified health care provider accepts assignment. The Part B deductible doesn't apply. However, you may have to pay coinsurance, and the Part B deductible may apply if:

- Your doctor or other health care provider performs additional tests or services during the same visit.

- These additional tests or services aren't covered under the preventive benefits.

*Note:* Your doctor or other health care provider may recommend you get services more often than Medicare covers. Or, they may recommend services that Medicare doesn't cover. If this happens, you may have to pay some or all of the costs. Ask questions so you understand why your doctor is recommending certain services and whether Medicare will pay for them.

[Source: Medicare.gov | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **Alzheimer's Update 17** ► **Sixth Leading Cause Of Death For Americans.**

From forgetting names to repeating questions, or having trouble remembering a recent event, growing older presents some challenges for an aging mind. But these symptoms can be an indication of something much more serious: Alzheimer's disease. Army Maj. Abraham Sabersky, a staff neurosurgeon at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, said Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia and the sixth leading cause of death for Americans. "The health of our service members and veterans is the paramount mission of the Military Health System," said Sabersky. "Given Alzheimer's prevalence in the general population, I believe that it is important that we highlight the lifestyle modifications that can prevent this debilitating illness." Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that affects the brain's ability to retain new information. The result is often noticed as "memory problems." The National Institute of Aging, or NIA, defines the disease in three stages: mild, moderate, and severe. Symptoms develop slowly but get worse over time.



**Up to 1.7 percent of the population, may have Alzheimer's disease. Symptoms such as memory problems, impaired reasoning or judgment, vision or spatial issues, and difficulty finding words can indicate early stages of the disease.**

As early symptoms begin to appear, people can seem healthy but may have trouble with processing, remembering, or showing good judgment. According to the NIA, some emerging signs of Alzheimer's include memory loss, getting lost in familiar settings, difficulty with money and bills, and taking longer to complete everyday tasks. The disease can become severe enough to limit a person's ability to carry on a conversation or respond to the surrounding environment, said Sabersky. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said an estimated 5.5 million Americans were living with Alzheimer's disease in 2017. Risk factors include aging, diabetes, high blood pressure, smoking, and family history. The CDC said symptoms usually begin after age 60, but Alzheimer's disease likely starts a decade or more before problems become apparent to others. "There appears to be a link between repeated head injuries and certain forms of dementia, which can overlap with the symptoms of Alzheimer's," said Sabersky, referring to a 2014 study published by the American Academy of Neurology. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that more than 750,000 veterans have Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, he added "Veterans who experienced brain trauma in the course of their service can be at higher risk for developing the disease," said Sabersky. "The diagnosis PTSD has also been associated with an increased risk of developing dementia later in life."

While no cure has been found, various types of medication are available to help lessen symptoms and improve quality of life. Sabersky said extensive interest in the subject has led to new research findings being released

consistently over time. Army Maj. Joetta Khan, registered dietitian at Walter Reed, said risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease and dementia are similar to heart disease. “There is a growing body of evidence that diet, exercise, and other interactions within one’s environment could alter brain health and mental function,” said Khan. Exercise seems to play a relevant role in brain health. Many observational studies have shown a decreased risk of dementia in people who exercise, she added. Healthy lifestyle habits, including exercise, proper nutrition, sleep, stress management, and being active, have shown the greatest benefit for preventing and slowing the progression of Alzheimer’s, said Sabersky. “Keeping physically active and eating a balanced diet should be a priority with aging,” said Khan, adding that although bodies begin to slow down, they are influenced by behaviors. “Understanding the connection between a healthy lifestyle and brain health is essential to increasing not only our quantity (years) of life, but also the quality of those years.” [Source: Health.mil | May 18, 2018 ++]

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## **TRICARE Annual Cost Increases ► What to Expect thru 2026**

Population growth, aging, and price increases for medical goods and services drive many health care costs in the U.S. In any given year, these price increases are related to rising drug costs, using new medical technology, increasing provider rates or other factors. In response, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which tracks health care costs for the federal government, estimates spending on health care is expected to grow 5.5 percent each year through 2026. TRICARE is not immune to these drivers. On Jan. 1, 2018, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) adjusted TRICARE costs. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 set some of these rates. Others were based on unique factors, like the annual cost of living adjustment or average costs of covered health care services. TRICARE cost changes vary and may change annually. Near the end of 2017, with the help of several military and veteran service organizations, DHA was able to recalculate and correct costs before 1 JAN, lowering 2018 patient costs for several types of care by \$3 to \$8. Other costs increased, like the retiree specialty mental health outpatient copayment, which changed from \$12 to \$30. As always, TRICARE costs depend on your plan and who you are (for example, whether you are an active duty family member or retiree). To make managing your health costs more predictable and transparent, DHA introduced more copayments under the new TRICARE Select program when using a TRICARE network provider. Copayments are fixed-fees; they let you know the out-of-pocket cost of a covered service before receiving a bill. Visit the TRICARE website to view [health plan costs](#) and to download a detailed [Costs and Fees Sheet](#). This is your benefit—take command of your health care by learning about the costs associated with your plan. [Source: NCOAdvocate | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **National Women’s Health Week ► Prioritizing Health**

In case you were not aware 13 thru 19 MAY was National Women’s Health Week. It was a good time to reflect whether or not you or the women in your life prioritize their health, or put it on the back burner? Being proactive about your health can help prevent disease and illness. It may also help you catch medical problems before they become serious. TRICARE covers preventive health care for women, including immunizations and screenings. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading causes of death of females in 2015 include heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease and stroke. Early detection can increase your chances of surviving treatable illnesses. Medical professionals can detect many “silent symptoms” like high blood pressure and high LDL cholesterol. The symptoms of heart disease are often silent. Regular heart, cholesterol and blood pressure screenings may take place at well-woman exams and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention exams, which are covered annually for females under age 65.

Take steps to reduce your risk for illnesses by scheduling regular visits to your health care provider. These visits will help you navigate common health issues and stay healthy. At a well-woman exam, you may get the following no-cost screenings:

- [Breast exams](#): Women age 40 or older and women age 30 or older who are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer should have annual breast exams.
- [Pelvic exams](#): All women should begin cervical cancer screenings at age 21.
- [Pap test](#): Women aged 21-29 should have a Pap test at least every 3 years.
- [HPV DNA testing](#): Performed in conjunction with a Pap test for women age 30 and older.

It's important to also talk to your health care provider about your emotions, stress, mood, anxiety, sleep patterns or any other mental health concerns. These issues are just as important as concerns about your physical health. Learn more about TRICARE mental health services and invest in preventive health to help you take command of your health. [Source: TRICARE Communications | May 17, 2018 ++]

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## **TRICARE Specialty Care ► Referral Or Prior Authorization Requirement**

At some point, you may need [specialty care](#) that your primary care manager (PCM) or general physician can't provide. He or she may refer you to a specialty provider, like a cardiologist, dermatologist or obstetrician. Under some TRICARE programs, you may need a referral or prior authorization from your PCM to seek care from a specialty provider. A referral is when your PCM or provider sends you to another provider for care. You may also need pre-approval, or prior authorization, for coverage of certain care. Prior authorization is a review of a requested health care service by your regional contractor to see if TRICARE will cover it. Under TRICARE Prime, your PCM provides your routine care. When specialty care is needed, you'll generally need to coordinate with your PCM (or other care coordinator) to see a specialty provider. Under the new rules for TRICARE Prime, your PCM may refer you to a network specialist without approval from your regional contractor. For clinical preventive services, TRICARE Prime beneficiaries can see any network provider within their region. You don't need a referral or authorization.

Without a referral from your PCM, you can get care from any TRICARE-authorized provider. An authorized provider is any individual, institution/organization, or supplier that is licensed by a state, accredited by national organization, or meets other standards of the medical community, and is certified to provide benefits under TRICARE. There are two types of TRICARE-authorized providers: Network and Non-Network., but you'll pay more out of pocket. Your claim will be subject to the point-of-service (POS) option deductible and cost-share. The maximum amount TRICARE pays for each procedure or service is 50 percent of the TRICARE-allowable charge. This is tied by law to Medicare's allowable charges. POS doesn't apply to active duty service members (ADSMs). POS doesn't apply to clinical preventive care you get from a TRICARE network provider in your region. ADSMs must get referrals for civilian care. This includes mental health care, specialty care and more. ADSMs also need prior authorizations for all inpatient and outpatient specialty services.

If you have TRICARE Prime and you live within a one-hour drive of a military hospital or clinic, your provider may refer you for specialty care at that facility. You may get [travel reimbursement](#) if referred for specialty care more than 100 miles away from your provider's office. There is no referral requirement for urgent care visits, except for ADSMs enrolled to a military hospital or clinic. POS deductibles and cost-shares don't apply when you get urgent care from a TRICARE network provider or a TRICARE-authorized (network or non-network) urgent care center or convenience clinic. Referrals aren't required for most services under TRICARE Select.

Under TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select, certain services need prior authorization. Some providers may contact your regional contractor to get you prior authorization. Prior authorizations apply to services like:

- Hospice care
- Home health care services
- Extended Care Health Option covered services
- Applied behavior analysis for autism spectrum disorder

Your PCM will work with your regional contractor for referrals and prior authorizations as needed. For more information, visit your [regional contractor](#)'s website and the [Referrals and Authorization](#) page on the TRICARE website. [Source: TRICARE Communications | May 24, 2018 ++]

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## TRICARE West Update 03 ► In Case You Missed It

1. **Prime Referral Waiver Ended.** The Defense Health Agency's temporary [TRICARE Prime referral waiver](#) ended on April 15, 2018. If you have questions about when and if you need a referral from your primary care manager for ongoing care, please review the waiver FAQs posted on our website.
2. **TRICARE West Region Beneficiary Notifications.** In the past, TRICARE West beneficiaries have had the option of receiving all processed claim and authorization notifications via postal mail. That option is no longer available. Instead, beneficiaries must be registered at [www.tricare-west.com](http://www.tricare-west.com) to view authorizations, referrals and individual Explanation of Benefits statements. We recommend setting up text or email alerts to notify you of any new messages in your Secure Inbox.
3. **UnitedHealthcare Military & Veterans (UnitedHealthcare) Call Center Closure.** The UnitedHealthcare call center closed March 31, 2018. All West Region inquiries should be directed to HNFS. Additionally, as of May 1, 2018, all West Region claims, appeals and grievances should be submitted to HNFS, even if the date of service was prior to Jan. 1, 2018.
4. **Sign-Up for Automatic Enrollment Payments.** Automated payment methods are easy and convenient. With automatic payments, there are no bills and you don't have to worry about late payments. (TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve and TRICARE Young Adult enrollment payments must be made via an automated method.) Log in at [www.tricare-west.com](http://www.tricare-west.com) to sign up.
5. **Urgent Care Guidelines.** TRICARE simplified its urgent care benefit effective Jan. 1, 2018, to make it easier for beneficiaries to access urgent care services. [Most beneficiaries enrolled in a TRICARE Prime plan](#) can seek urgent care without a referral or visit limits. Not sure if you need urgent care? Call TRICARE's Nurse Advice Line at 1-800-TRICARE.
6. **FEDVIP Dental and Vision Coverage Is Coming.** The TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP) will end on December 31, 2018. Anyone who is currently enrolled or eligible for TRDP may choose a dental plan from among 10 dental carriers in the [Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program \(FEDVIP\)](#). To enroll in FEDVIP, you must have a TRICARE health plan. Open enrollment is from Nov. 12, 2018 to Dec. 10, 2018.
7. **Wellness Education. Register Today!** Registration is now open for the following telephone-based classes, available at no charge to you.
  - What You Need to Know About Anxiety – 5/23
  - Heart Healthy Living – 6/14
  - Making Healthy Changes for Life – 6/21
  - The Essentials of Diabetes Management – 7/17
  - The Basics of Depression Management – 7/25

Teleclasses not for you? Try one of our online programs. Topics include: readiness for making change, self-care, tobacco cessation, and weight management.

8. **[Colorectal Cancer Screening: Is It Time?](#)** Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Regular screenings are the best weapon for early detection and prevention.

9. **Choosing Wisely®.** Understand your care and become a wise health care consumer with [Choosing Wisely](#).

[Source: TRICARE West Region | e-Updates | May 16, 2018 ++]

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## **Tricare Reserve Select Update 15 ► H.R.5121 Provisions withdrawn From NDAA**

Some lawmakers attempted unsuccessfully in MAY to expand access to the military's health insurance program to federal employees who serve as reservists. During the mark-up for the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act by the House Armed Services Committee, lawmakers considered attaching the provisions of the Health Coverage for Reservists and Guardsmen Act (H.R.5121), but ultimately withdrew the amendment. First introduced in March by Reps. Trent Kelly (R-MS) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV), the bill would provide reservists who are federal employees access to the military's TRICARE Reserve Select health insurance program. Under current law, federal employees who are reservists can receive government health coverage only through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. Reservists who work in the private sector, however, are not barred from enrolling in TRICARE Reserve Select, which advocates say is often more affordable than the plans offered through FEHBP. Since the bill's introduction, it has attracted 33 cosponsors, although it has not yet received a committee hearing. [Source: U.S. Medicine | Annette M. Boyle | May 7, 2018 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 450 ► Women's Health Week - Air Evacs - Identify Theft & Fraud**

**Women's Health Week** -- It's National Women's Health Week. Do you or the women in your life prioritize their health, or put it on the back burner? Being proactive about your health can help prevent disease and illness. It may also help you catch medical problems before they become serious. TRICARE covers preventive health care for women, including immunizations and screenings. Take steps to reduce your risk for illnesses by scheduling regular visits to your health care provider. These visits will help you navigate common health issues and stay healthy. At a well-woman exam, you may get the following no-cost screenings:

- Breast exams: Women age 40 or older and women age 30 or older who are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer should have annual breast exams.
- Pelvic exams: All women should begin cervical cancer screenings at age 21.
- Pap test: Women aged 21-29 should have a Pap test at least every 3 years.
- HPV DNA testing: Performed in conjunction with a Pap test for women age 30 and older.

It's important to also talk to your health care provider about your emotions, stress, mood, anxiety, sleep patterns or any other mental health concerns. These issues are just as important as concerns about your physical health. Learn more about TRICARE mental health services and invest in preventive health to help you take command of your health at [TRICARE/mil/coveredservices](#).

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**Air Evacuations** -- When medically necessary and appropriate, air evacuations are only approved to the nearest, safest location that can provide the required care. International SOS arranges air evacuations for TRICARE Overseas Program, or TOP, Prime and TOP Prime Remote beneficiaries. They also arrange air evacuations for some deployed active duty service members and all TRICARE-eligible active duty family members traveling in an overseas location, regardless of their enrollment status. TOP Select, TRICARE For Life, TRICARE Young Adult Select, TRICARE Reserve Select and TRICARE Retired Reserve beneficiaries, except active duty family members, are required to pay for air evacuation upfront and file a claim to get money back minus any cost-shares. TRICARE will only reimburse

air evacuation when it's medically necessary and to the closest, safest location that can provide the required care. TOP Regional Call Centers aren't required to schedule evacuations, coordinate with providers, obtain medical records or coordinate payment for non-TOP Prime or non-TOP Prime Remote beneficiaries. For active duty family members, TOP Regional Call Centers are required to schedule evacuations, coordinate with providers, obtain medical records or coordinate payment for non-TOP Prime or non-TOP Prime Remote beneficiaries. Contact your TOP Regional Call Center for help with coordinating an air evacuation. Find contact information at [www.tricare-overseas.com/contact-us](http://www.tricare-overseas.com/contact-us).

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**Identify Theft & Fraud** -- Did you know that health care is the number one target for identity theft and fraud? Your health information is important to you and your health care provider. But in the wrong hands, it can be valuable to someone else. Identity theft affects millions of people each year. Here are several steps you can take to make sure your health care information remains secure. First, read your medical and insurance statements regularly and completely. They can show warning signs of identity theft. Look for services you didn't receive or providers you didn't see. Next, read your Explanation of Benefits statement or Medicare Summary. Again, check the name of the provider, the date of service, and the service provided. Do the claims paid match the care you received? If you see a mistake, contact your regional contractor and report the problem immediately. Being cyber fit requires us to be mindful of our health information at all times. Remember, you are the center of your healthcare. Empower yourself to protect your information! For more information about cyber fitness, visit [TRICARE.mil/cyberfit](http://TRICARE.mil/cyberfit).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | May 17, 2018 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 451** ► **Annual Cost Increases | Drug Take Back | Summer Food Safety**

**Annual Cost Increases** -- Population growth, aging, and price increases for medical goods and services drive many health care costs in the U.S. In any given year, these price increases are related to rising drug costs, using new medical technology, increasing provider rates or other factors. In response, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which tracks health care costs for the federal government, estimates spending on health care is expected to grow 5.5 percent each year through 2026. TRICARE is not immune to these drivers. On January 1st, 2018, the Defense Health Agency adjusted TRICARE costs. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 set some of these rates. Others were based on unique factors, like the annual cost of living adjustment or average costs of covered health care services. TRICARE cost changes vary and may change annually. Near the end of 2017, with the help of several military and veteran service organizations, DHA was able to recalculate and correct costs before January 1st, lowering 2018 patient costs for several types of care by \$3 to \$8. Other costs increased, like the retiree specialty mental health outpatient copayment, which changed from \$12 to \$30. As always, TRICARE costs depend on your plan and who you are. To make managing your health costs more predictable and transparent, the Defense Health Agency introduced more copayments under the new TRICARE Select program when using a TRICARE network provider. Copayments are fixed-fees; they let you know the out-of-pocket cost of a covered service before receiving a bill. Visit [TRICARE.mil/costs](http://TRICARE.mil/costs) to view health plan costs and to download a detailed Costs and Fees Sheet. This is your benefit—take command of your health care by learning about the costs associated with your plan.

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**Drug Take Back Program** -- If you're preparing to move this summer, one area of your home you shouldn't overlook is your medicine cabinet. Now is the perfect time to get rid of items that are expired or no longer needed. With the Military Health System Drug Take Back program, you can safely and easily dispose of unwanted and

expired medications at U.S. military pharmacies. Beneficiaries have two free options to dispose of their prescription and over-the-counter drugs safely. They can drop off old or expired drugs in secure collection boxes at military pharmacies or send them by mail in a special envelope available at the military pharmacy. To find out which Drug Take Back option your pharmacy has, contact your military hospital or clinic. Practicing good drug disposal habits benefits you, your family and your community. If your medicine cabinet is full of expired or unneeded drugs, participate in a Drug Take Back option near you. While moving season is an easy time to do it, you can safely dispose of unwanted drugs year round. For more information on how to safely dispose of drugs through the Drug Take Back program, visit [TRICARE.mil/drugtakeback](http://TRICARE.mil/drugtakeback).

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**Summer Food Safety** -- Picnics and barbecues are just around the corner, so be mindful of food safety as you soak up the summer sun and fun. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in six Americans get sick from foodborne illnesses, including those associated with poorly cooked or stored foods in hot environments. Still, there are ways to keep your favorite foods safe – and your friends and loved ones healthy – this summer.

- Keep it clean. Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling uncooked eggs or raw meat, poultry, and seafood. To prevent cross-contamination, wash utensils and cutting boards with hot, soapy water after food prep too.
- Cool it. Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator, not on the countertop. Safely marinate your meats, poultry, and seafood in the refrigerator until it's time to cook. Don't reuse marinade, and don't serve it with cooked foods.
- Cook foods thoroughly and use a food thermometer to check for doneness.
- Refrigerate your leftovers. Chill your foods to stop the growth of bacteria that can cause foodborne illnesses. Refrigerate items within two hours of cooking or one hour if the outside temperature is at or above 90°F.

To boost your “BBQ IQ,” visit the CDC webpage at [cdc.gov/foodsafety](http://cdc.gov/foodsafety).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | May 24, 2018 ++]

## \* Finances \*



## **Military Retirement Pay Taxation Update 01** ► **California Study To Reduce/Eliminate**

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is calling on California to stop fully taxing military retirement pay in light of an economic analysis from the San Diego Military Advisory Council (SDMAC) and Point Loma Nazarene University's Fermanian Business & Economic Institute. The analysis, which MOAA helped to fund, is titled “Ending Taxation of Military Retiree Pay in California: An Analysis of the Costs and Benefits.” Removing the tax would result in substantial benefits for the state of California, the study found. Over 10 years, the economic gains would include:

- 12,600 more jobs
- \$830 million in additional personal income
- \$ 2 billion in additional business sales

“Military retirees are a national treasure,” said Lt. Gen. Ed Hanlon, USMC (Ret), a member of the MOAA's board of directors and a member of the board of advisors for the San Diego Military Advisory Council. “They play leadership roles in schools and civic groups, and, since the average earnings of military retirees exceed the national average, the economic gains for California could be substantial.” Capt. Randy Bogle, USN (Ret), executive director of the SDMAC, noted that newly retired military members are often in their 40s and highly likely to start a second career. “You've got a full work life ahead of you, which you can take up in the state of California,” Bogle said. “You're going to buy a home, shop. You're going to spend money here that the state wouldn't have if you lived elsewhere.”

There are nine states who still fully tax military retiree compensation. In addition to California, they are: Georgia, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia. There are 31 states that do not tax military retirement pay at all, and 10 more provide some tax relief. California has experienced a population decrease from 10.5 percent of the nation's retired military population to 7.5 percent between 2000 and 2016, according to the study. During the same period, the number of military retirees nationwide has increased by more than a quarter of a million. “The state's military population is steadily declining,” Hanlon said. “It's time for California legislators to consider the many positive effects of encouraging more military retirees to call California home when they transition from military service to civilian career success.” The full study is available at [www.moaa.org/taxstudy](http://www.moaa.org/taxstudy). [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Stacy Johnson | April 16, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Loans ► Rehabilitation**

The Department of Veterans Affairs released guidelines for 100 percent-financed rehabilitation loans for veterans that were much needed. Until recently, a VA-financed home had to be pretty much perfect, but with the new program, financing can be added to bring homes up to the standards of the VA. The rehab work is limited to repairs and upgrades and must be completed within 90 days. The funds can't be used for structural additions, but buyers could reportedly add a room as long as it doesn't involve removing a load-bearing wall. As with any loan, the appraisal must support the purchase price and value of the proposed improvements.

The loan limits are \$35,000 and can include such things as roof repairs, floor repairs, electrical and plumbing repairs and replacements, HVAC repair and replacement, foundation repairs and energy efficiency upgrades. The nice thing is that it can all be one purchase loan instead of a second loan being needed for the improvements. [Source: Source Weekly | Nick Nayne | May 30, 2018 ++]

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## **IRAs | Spouse ► Allowed With Little to No Income**

Contributions to individual retirement accounts (IRAs) must come from earned income — wages, salary, self-employment income, etcetera. But a spouse with little to no income is allowed to open and contribute to an IRA with help from the other spouse. In the tax world, a spousal IRA is known as the Kay Bailey Hutchison Spousal IRA. This IRA allows each member of a couple to save for retirement in their own separate retirement accounts even though

one spouse has little to no income. The spouse with the earned income can contribute to both their own and the spousal IRA.

This is not a joint account. There is no such thing as a joint retirement account. You open an IRA in the name of the spouse with little/no earnings. To open a spousal IRA, you must be married and you must file a joint tax return. You can choose either the traditional or Roth version of IRA or one of each. The spousal IRA tax advantages are roughly the same as any other IRA. The spousal IRA has the same contribution limit as the spouse with the earned income: up to \$5,500 a year (\$6,500 if age 50 or older). You must have enough combined earned income to justify both IRA contributions. A couple younger than age 50, for example, must have at least \$11,000 in earned income to justify an \$11,000 (\$5,500 x 2) combined annual contribution to both IRAs. If one spouse is under 50 and the other over 50, it would be \$5,500 and \$6,500 a year — \$12,000. If both are over age 50, it's \$13,000 a year (\$6,500 x 2).

The ability to deduct traditional IRA contributions can get a bit complicated under normal circumstances. The spousal IRA contribution deduction can be a little trickier. The spousal IRA deduction is affected by contributions to employer retirement plans and the contributions and deductions made by the spouse with the greater income. Required minimum distributions (RMDs) are no different for the spousal IRA. Roth IRAs do not require RMDs at any age; whereas traditional IRAs have RMDs after turning age 70½. For more details, read IRS publications 590-A and 590-B. Rules for spousal IRAs are in Publication 590-A. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Shane Ostrom | May 30, 2018 ++]

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## **Credit Card Benefits ► 10 You May Have Forgotten**

It's no secret that credit cards can lead to major financial problems if they are not used properly. But all the hand-wringing over today's [astronomical credit card debt](#) numbers can unfairly overshadow the many hidden benefits that come with your favorite piece of plastic. In fact, when used responsibly, many credit cards can be a big help and actually *save* you money. Here are a few hidden credit card benefits to consider:

### **1. Price protection**

Ever purchased an item you desperately wanted before spotting it at another store a week later for \$50 less? If a card has the price protection feature, the credit card issuer will refund you the difference between the two items. Just be sure you understand what does and does not qualify for such protection.

### **2. Extended warranty**

Many stores make a nice chunk of change by selling extended warranties. I once was asked to buy an extended warranty for \$5 on an item that cost only \$25. Fortunately, some credit card issuers offer a warranty that will double the warranty of the manufacturer by up to one year. And you get the perk for free.

### **3. Replacement for stolen or damaged items**

The card issuer may replace an item you recently purchased if it's damaged or stolen within a specified time frame. In some instances, cellphones are covered under this benefit.

### **4. Extended refund period**

Did you purchase an item that you no longer want, but the store refuses to take it back because the return period has lapsed? You may be able to seek a refund from your credit card issuer. In some cases, your lender may extend the refund period to up to 60 days.

### **5. Concierge service**

Some credit cards offer the option to call a toll-free number and get instant access to a company representative who can assist you with everyday tasks that may be a bit time-consuming, such as deliveries, travel arrangements and reservations. It's almost like having a personal assistant at your disposal, minus the fees.

## 6. Zero liability for fraud

Identity theft is real and scary. Fortunately, many credit card lenders offer zero-liability fraud protection. In a nutshell, if someone steals your card and runs up a bunch of fraudulent charges, you won't owe a dime for those phony purchases. It's tough to beat protection like that.

## 7. Travel perks

Select credit cards come with free access to travel discounts, upgrades and airport lounges. You may even be able to skip the costly coverage that rental car companies try to lure you into buying.

If things take a bad turn and the luggage with your wedding dress gets lost or delayed, your credit card may cover you. Check out its travel insurance protections.

## 8. Entertainment perks

Want awesome seats to your favorite singer's concert? It may be possible to obtain tickets for preferred seating through your credit card issuer. Many offer exclusive access to special events, sometimes at a discounted rate.

## 9. Emergency card replacement and cash disbursement

If your card is lost, stolen or damaged, you may be able to receive a replacement card or emergency cash within 24 hours. So, if you're stranded far away from home and lose your credit card, your card company may be your knight in shining armor.

## Of I10. The ability to dispute charges

Ever feel like a retailer has ripped you off? If you paid for the item with a credit card, call the issuer and dispute the charge. If you really have been wronged, chances are good that you will get your money back. A word to the wise: If you're thinking about taking this route, refer to the [Fair Credit Billing Act](#) for more details on how it works.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Allison Martin | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## Medical Debt ► How to Get Help

“What’s the best way to attack medical debt? Are medical bills which go into collections ever open to reducing the amount for a closeout price?” Consumers have gotten a couple of breaks on medical debt in recent months. Now, before a credit-reporting agency can put unpaid medical debt on your credit history, it has to wait 180 days. Prior to that change, it could go on your report immediately, which could hurt your credit. This change is only fair. As you know if you’ve ever dealt with a complex bill that bounces from you to your insurance company and back to the doctor, these debts can take months to get paid. Another change: When your insurance company satisfies a medical debt, it now has to be removed from your credit history. So, we’ve had a couple of breaks when it comes to medical billing.

The best way to deal with medical debt is to keep it down in the first place. If you’ve got a high-deductible health plan let your medical provider know that. Let them know you’re going to be paying for this out of pocket. You might find yourself getting a break. Another thing you can do: Make sure the bill is accurate. There are people called medical billing advocates who will check your bills for accuracy. Obviously, we’re not talking about something simple. But if you’re in the hospital and you’ve got a stack of bills, sometimes these medical billing advocates can help you get those reduced. Why? Because hospitals make huge errors in their bills, and often inflate bills. So, billing advocates can be an important member of your team to help you get bills reduced. They’re not free, but if the situation calls for it — if the bill is complicated enough and high enough, and you’re out of pocket enough — it might be worth looking into. One place to start your search is through [Medical Billing Advocates of America](#).

Once you’ve got a medical debt, can you negotiate it? Absolutely. You can negotiate any debt. You can go back to the hospital and say, “Hey, this is tough. Can you reduce my bill for me? How about if I give you half the amount,

but I'm going to pay it all today?" You can do this with collection agencies as well. But it's generally easier to negotiate with the hospital or doctor that originally billed you. In summary, you can and should try to negotiate any unpaid bill, including medical debt. Be careful, however, if you get contacted by a collection agency. Sometimes these companies will buy old debts for pennies on the dollar that are no longer collectible because the statute of limitations has run on them. But it's not illegal for them to try to collect a debt, even though it's not legally collectible. So sometimes they'll call you up and try to get you to restart the statute of limitations clock. How? By getting you to pay something on it. They might say, "Just send me a dollar." Do that and you've restarted the clock. A debt that was legally noncollectable is now back on the books. In short, be very careful when you're contacted by a collection agency.

If there's any doubt, check it out. See what the statute of limitations is in your state; they're not all the same. Reach out to a consumer lawyer and ask them for help. Sometimes, a first consultation is free. And if you're getting abused by a debt collector, definitely reach out to a lawyer. They might represent you for nothing, because they'll collect their fee from the debt collector who's violating the law. Where can you find a lawyer? [Right here](#). [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Home Loan Update 64 ► Leniency Sought For Delinquent HI & NC Loans**

The Veterans Affairs Department has requested leniency from lenders on behalf of veterans holding VA-backed loans on property in the path of volcanic activity in Hawaii and recent severe storms in North Carolina. In two circulars released last week, VA requested that lenders delay foreclosure proceedings for at least 90 days on VA-backed borrowers holding properties in the affected areas. The department also requested that the lenders:

- Delay any reports to credit bureaus regarding loans in the regions. VA said it would not hold lenders accountable for any such reports owed to the department.
- Take advantage of regulations that allow some loan modifications without prior VA approval, and use the policy to help veterans remain current on their payments.
- Waive any late fees — a move already made by several lenders with clients in the disaster areas.

VA also requested that lenders provide "special forbearance" for National Guard members called up to assist in disaster-recovery efforts. These members may experience financial hardship as a result of the mobilization. The suggestions contained in the circulars are just that: While VA may back the loans, the loan-holders make the final decisions on whether and when to begin foreclosure procedures or offer leniency. For more advice to VA-backed borrowers on what to do when disaster strikes, go to <https://www.militarytimes.com/home-hq/va-loan-center/2017/12/18/what-va-loan-users-should-do-when-natural-disasters-strike>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **SSA Death Month Check ► Must be Returned**

Under current law Social Security benefits are not payable for the month in which a beneficiary dies. This is so even when the beneficiary passes away on the last day of the month. However, according to the Social Security Administration the check that an individual receives in a given month is the payment for the preceding month. That means a check received during the month of a beneficiary's death does not have to be returned as it was for the previous month. This policy catches the vast majority of the public (who can't be expected to know the details of Social Security law) unawares. Understandably most people react with surprise, disgust, and upset when they learn the final payment must be returned.

The Senior Citizens League (TACL) believes this offensive policy is long overdue for a change. Social Security provides monthly income to retirees and TSCL believes retirees are entitled to every last dime, including benefits for the month in which they die. Payment for the final month is especially important because medical and funeral expenses can be significant. TSCL recently endorsed The BASIC ACT (S.1739) introduced by Senator Christopher Murphy that would pay the deceased beneficiary's Social Security benefits for each day a recipient lives. The bill would send the beneficiary's estate a check for the days lived in the final month. The legislation would also increase the size of the Social Security death payment from \$255 to 50% of the deceased beneficiary's typical monthly Social Security income with \$255 as the minimum payment. As currently structured, the legislation would cost an estimated \$800 million each year. To contact Social Security, you may call toll free at 1-800-772-1213 or visit the website at [www.SocialSecurity.gov](http://www.SocialSecurity.gov). [Source: TSCL Ask the Advisor | May/June 2018 ++]

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### **Widow(er)'s SSA Benefits Update 03 ► 9,224 Widows & Widowers Age 70+ Underpaid**

Many people start drawing their 50% spousal benefit upon reaching age 65 while their spouse is still alive. However, if that spouse were to die they may be eligible to draw a higher amount provided they themselves has been previously employed and paid into the program for 10 year or more. A recent audit report from the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General (<https://oig.ssa.gov/sites/default/files/audit/full/pdf/A-09-18-50559.pdf>) found that the Social Security Administration (SSA) failed to tell 82% of widows or widowers, at the time when they applied for benefits, that they could switch to a higher retirement benefit later. The report said that 9,224 widows and widowers age 70 and above were underpaid approximately \$131.8 billion, which works out to be an astonishing \$14,288 per person, on average! Normally when an individual files for Social Security benefits, the application includes all the benefits for which the claimant is entitled (i.e. survivors and retirement benefits). SSA employees determine eligibility for each spousal's benefits and should explain the benefit options. If an applicant opts for a "restricted" application in which their own retirement benefit is delayed, they then must document the decision in the SSA system.

According to the Inspector General's audit, when the 9,224 claimants applied for benefits, the SSA should have informed them of the option to delay their retirement application up to age 70. The Inspector General, however, did not find any evidence that SSA employees had informed the claimants or documented the filing decision in the Agency's automated system as required. If you feel you may have been affected by the lack of correct advice, you should bring it up with the Social Security Administration. If you think something went wrong, ask to see what documentation the SSA has in its system regarding the advice given on the options. If you were not advised correctly, or if you discover there is no documentation of having declined the advice to allow her a spouse's retirement benefit to grow, ask an SSA customer service representative what recourse is available. Document your meetings with the SSA. If you are not satisfied, contact the constituent services staffer for your U.S. Representative. Every Member of Congress has staffers who help resolve problems concerning Social Security and Medicare benefits. [Source: TSCL | May 18, 2018 ++]

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### **Navy Reenlistment Bonuses ► More Sailors Eligible for Re-Up Bucks**

Be aware that if you voluntarily, or because of misconduct, don't complete the term of enlistment (or reenlistment) for which a bonus was paid, or are not technically qualified in the skill for which the bonus was paid, you must refund a prorated portion of the bonus according to the time of service left on your contract. Each service's policy and guidelines for re-enlistment bonuses are different and change periodically based on the current needs of the service. If you are an active duty member you may be eligible for a reenlistment (or retention) bonus, if:

- You have completed at least 17 months of continuous active duty (other than for training) but not more than fourteen years of active duty.
- You are qualified in a critical military skill.
- You aren't receiving special nuclear-training pay.
- You reenlist or voluntarily extend your enlistment for a period of at least three years.
- You enlist in a regular component of the service concerned; or continue in a reserve component of the service concerned.

The Navy's push to retain the sailors it needs to grow the force continued 15 MAY with the release of the third update to re-up bonuses in the past five months. This round of updates adds 39 new skills in 12 ratings to the list and increases payouts for 135 skills in 48 ratings. The list contains no decreases, additions or deletions of skills. The changes are effective immediately. First- and second-term sailors in the aviation structural mechanic, aviation electronics technician and personnel specialist ratings now join ratings offering bonuses to sailors with up to 10 years of service. Meanwhile, the hull maintenance technician and machinery repairmen ratings are offering bonuses for those with up to 14 years of service. But that's not all. In February, Navy officials doubled the lead time for sailors wanting to re-up for bonuses before their end-of-service date from 90 to 180 days.

The Navy has also tweaked the rules again for sailors who have received early promote recommendations on their latest periodic evals. Transfer, concurrent or special evals don't count in this case. Even those who have advanced in the past year can use their last evaluation at their previous paygrade to qualify for this exception. Sailors in a combat zone can also re-up as much as a year in advance to take advantage of paying no taxes on either their initial or anniversary payments. Those needing to obligate service up front to take a new set of orders to their next duty station can also collect re-up bonuses as long as they are within one year of their end-of-service date. Sailors on the outside looking in at the new, expanded eligibility windows shouldn't despair, however, as the Navy not only set aside nearly \$20 million in the budget for initial bonus payments in fiscal year 2018, but has nearly \$40 million more designated in fiscal year 2019. Check out the complete list of the new additions and increases at [https://partner-mco-archive.s3.amazonaws.com/client\\_files/1526497959.pdf](https://partner-mco-archive.s3.amazonaws.com/client_files/1526497959.pdf). [Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | May 15, 2018 ++]

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## **Gasoline Savings Update 05 ► Cars That Get More Than 50 Miles Per Gallon**

Owning a vehicle which gives 40 mpg is still impressive fuel economy. Owning such a car is bound to help any driver cut the rising cost of gas. But these days, there are also vehicles that get double or even triple that fuel economy. In fact, citing the Car Book published by the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety, MoneyWatch reports that cars from the 2018 model year get as much as 136 mpg, or the equivalent. Following are 13 examples of 2018 vehicles that get more than 50 mpg or the equivalent based on their combined city/highway ratings from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In some cases, this fuel efficiency rating is expressed in the traditional "mpg." In the case of vehicles that don't run on liquid fuel, such as electric vehicles, the EPA rating is expressed in "MPGe," which is short for "miles per gallon of gasoline-equivalent." The EPA explains: "Think of this as being similar to MPG, but instead of presenting miles per gallon of the vehicle's fuel type, it represents the number of miles the vehicle can go using a quantity of fuel with the same energy content as a gallon of gasoline. This allows a reasonable comparison between vehicles using different fuels."

- Hyundai Ioniq Electric: 136 MPGe
- Tesla Model 3: 130 MPGe
- Chevrolet Bolt EV: 119 MPGe
- BMW i3: 118 MPGe
- Fiat 500e: 112 MPGe

- Nissan Leaf: 112 MPGe
- Kia Soul Electric: 108 MPGe
- Chevrolet Volt: 106 MPGe
- Tesla Model S 75D: 103 MPGe
- Tesla Model X 75D: 92 MPGe
- Toyota Prius Eco: 56 mpg
- Toyota Prius: 52 mpg
- Toyota Camry Hybrid LE: 52 mpg

At the other end of the spectrum are 2018 models like the Jeep Grand Cherokee Trackhawk, which the Car Book called out for its measly combined city/highway rating of 13 mpg. If you're curious how the fuel efficiency of your current car or next car of choice compares, check out the EPA's fuel economy website <https://fuelconomy.gov>. The "Find a Car" search tool will show you ratings for a given vehicle. [Source: MoneyTalksNews| Karla Bowsher | May 18, 2018++]

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## Chinese Consulate Robocall Scam ► Targeting Speakers of Mandarin

Speak Chinese? If not, this scam might just sound like a wrong number. But a new robocall scam is targeting speakers of Mandarin in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and other countries. [BBB Scam Tracker](#) has received several reports of this con in the past several weeks.

### How the Scam Works

- You receive a call from a number that shows up on your caller ID as the Chinese Consulate. When you pick up, an automated message plays in Mandarin Chinese. If you don't speak Mandarin, you'll probably assume it is a wrong number and hang up.
- If you do speak Mandarin, however, you'll hear a message like this: "This is the consulate. We have an important document that needs to be picked up. It may affect your status in your country of residence, press a button to speak with a specialist."
- If you follow the prompts, you will be transferred to a real person who will claim that the parcel with your name on it is connected to a criminal case. All you need to do to clear your name is to wire funds to the "consulate." The callers use threats and scare tactics to convince you to send the money. But don't be intimidated, it's a scam!

### How to Avoid Robocall Scams

- **Don't give out your number needlessly.** Businesses and social media networks may ask for your number, but providing it is usually optional. Avoid posting your phone number online unnecessarily.
- **Don't answer the phone if you don't recognize the number.** If a call is legitimate and important, the caller will leave a message.
- **Sign up for the Do Not Call Registry.** Registering your number to your country's do not call list is simple and can protect you from receiving unwanted calls.

### For More Information

Robocall scams use similar techniques to other con. Check out [BBB.org/ScamTips](http://BBB.org/ScamTips) for more common cons. If you've fallen victim to this kind of scam, help others avoid the same pitfall by filing a scam report at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker). [Source: BBB Scam alert | May 18, 2018 ++]

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## Phony Loan Scam ► Emails Offer Easy Money

BBB has been seeing a lot of scam reports about a phony loan approval email that helps con artists steal from unwitting victims.

### How the Scam Works

- You receive an unsolicited email from an unfamiliar person or company. The email states that you have been approved or pre-approved for a loan. All of the information, including installment amounts and the sum of the total payback, are included in an attached file.
- If you open the file, you'll see an official looking notice, which includes claims that BBB and several government agencies support this "loan provider." You'll also notice that this loan comes with one big catch. You need to pay a \$150 "insurance fee" upfront. If you do so, your money will disappear, but the loan will never materialize.

### Avoid Falling for Email Phishing Scams

- Never click on links or download attachments from anonymous senders. This is usually an attempt to install malware on your computer and/or steal your personal information.
- Don't take unsolicited emails at face value. Scammers often send out mass emails that contain little or no personal information. Be especially wary if the email doesn't mention you by name or include any personal information.

### For More Information

If you are in need of a loan, [this article](#) contains tips that will help you find a legitimate one. If you've fallen victim to this kind of scam, help others avoid the same pitfall by filing a scam report at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker). If you've been the victim of identity theft, go to [IdentityTheft.gov](http://IdentityTheft.gov) for a customized recovery plan.

[Source: BBB Scam alert | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## Tax Burden for Florida Retired Vets ► As of May 2018

**Note:** Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Florida:

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 6% (food, prescription and non-prescription drugs exempt). There are additional county sales taxes which could make the combined rate as high as 9.5%.

**Gasoline Tax:** 54.98 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 58.17 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$1.34/pack of 20

### Personal Income Taxes

No state income tax

**Retirement Income:** Not taxed.

### Property Taxes

All property is taxable at 100% of its just valuation. Every person who owns and resides on real property in Florida on January 1 and makes the property their permanent residence is eligible to receive a homestead exemption up to

\$50,000. The first \$25,000 applies to all property taxes, including school district taxes. The additional exemption up to \$25,000, applies to the assessed value between \$50,000 and \$75,000 and only to non-school taxes. If one spouse holds the title, the other spouse may file for the exemption with the consent of the titleholder. Below is a general list of exemptions available in the state.

- [Homestead exemptions up to \\$50,000](#)
- [\\$500 widows and widower's exemption](#)
- [\\$500 disability exemption](#)
- [\\$5,000 disability exemption for ex-service member](#)
- [Service connected total and permanent disability exemption](#)
- [Exemption for totally and permanently disabled person](#)
- [Additional homestead exemption for persons 65 and older](#)
- [Homestead property tax discount for veterans age 65 and older with a combat-related disability](#)
- [Homestead tax deferral](#)
- [Installment payment of property taxes](#)
- [Personal property](#)

The homestead exemption for all residents applies to all property taxes, not just city and county taxes. Annual increases in the assessment of homestead property are limited to 3% of the prior year's assessed value, or if lower, the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for the prior year, as long as there was no change in ownership. For more details on property taxes, go to <http://floridarevenue.com/property/Pages/Home.aspx>, then find the link for the county property appraiser for the county in question.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax and only a limited estate tax.

### **Other State Tax Rates**

To compare the above sales, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.

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To review information for new residents refer to <http://www.stateofflorida.com/moving-to-florida.aspx>. For general information on Florida taxes, visit the Florida Department of Revenue site <http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/taxes> or call 800-352-3671. [Source: [www.retirementliving.com](http://www.retirementliving.com) | May 2018 ++]  
<http://floridarevenue.com/Pages/contact.aspx>

**\* General Interest \***



**Notes of Interest** ► 16 thru 31 MAY 2018

- **Shoe Tips.** Eliminate stinky tennis shoe smell by pouring some hydrogen peroxide into shoe, slosh around, drain excess, and place in sun to dry. You can clean the outside sole sides by applying some toothpaste and scrubbing until clean.
- **Active Duty Deaths.** More service members die in training exercises than in combat, according to a report tied to the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. Old equipment and a swifter deployment schedule have been cited as reasons behind the increase in training-related deaths.
- **Counterterrorism.** Counterterrorism funding — a broad term that includes government-wide homeland security efforts, international funding programs, and the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria — totaled \$2.8 trillion between fiscal year 2002 and 2017, per the newly released Stimson Center study. That’s an average of \$186.6 billion per year over 15 years. For comparison, that figure represents more than the overall 2017 defense expenditures of Russia, India and South Korea combined. The yearly average would also top the combined yearly average spent by the United States in the Korean and Vietnam wars, according to a government estimate using FY2011 dollars.
- **USS Gerald R. Ford (CVA-78).** The US Navy will have to pay more and face another schedule delay for the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R Ford (CVN 78), the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) said on 11 May. The USN will pay another USD120 million for Ford increasing the cost to about USD13.03 billion.
- **COLA Watch.** The April 2018 CPI is 244.607 which is 2.1 percent above the FY 2018 COLA baseline. The CPI for May 2018 is scheduled to be released on 12 JUN. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers from around the country. Collectively the CPI is used to adjust annuities for other federal retirees, survivors, and Social Security recipients.
- **VA Payment Date.** VA education, compensation, pension, and survivor’s benefits are paid on a monthly basis. Normally, benefits for a particular month are paid the first business day of the following month. When the first business day of the month falls on a non-business day or a holiday, VA benefits will be paid on the last business day prior to the first of the month. Thus, your next VA pay day will be on 29 JUN.
- **Medicare Drugs.** The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services spent \$174 billion on prescription medications in 2016, or 23% of its total budget, the agency reported 15 MAY. That’s up from \$109 billion, or 17% of the budget, in 2012.
- **Trump Salary.** President Donald Trump donated his \$100,000 salary for the first quarter of 2018 to the Department of Veterans Affairs, a gesture the White House said underscores his commitment to recognizing the sacrifices to military and their families. Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said the money will be earmarked for caregiver support programs within his department, to include “mental health, peer support, financial aid, education and research” for those families. The donation is the fifth made by Trump since he became president.
- **Daily Dose of Awesome.** Check out <https://youtu.be/evKZGQ-qwEE> to see some cool water-repellent technology, a machine to clean solar panels, and a tractor that has a flame weed control attachment. If you love animals and beautiful scenery then there are some cute and awesome clips for you to enjoy.
- **Mosquito Control.** The buzz of mosquitoes in southwestern Florida has been joined by the whirring of aerial drones, which will now be deployed to help fight the biting pests as part of a FAA pilot program announced earlier this month. “Data gathered from these pilot projects will form the basis of a new regulatory framework to safely integrate drones into our national airspace,” U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao said in a [statement](#).
- **U.S. Citizenship Test.** Those who would become US citizens must apply. An important part of the application process for becoming a US citizen is passing a civics test, covering important US history and government topics. There are 100 civics questions on the naturalization test. During the interview process, applicants are asked up to 10 questions and must be able to answer at least 6 questions correctly. How would you do? For a sampling of what may be asked go to <https://www.washingtontimes.com/quiz/2015/feb/11/us-citizenship-test-could-you-pass/#question-25>.

- **Foreign Car Tax.** President Donald Trump wants to put a 25 percent tariff on imports of automobiles under a similar authority that allowed him to slap duties on imports of steel and aluminum in order to protect U.S. national security, a senior administration official confirmed. Last year, the U.S. imported \$43 billion worth of cars from Canada, \$39 billion from Japan, \$30 billion from Mexico, \$21 billion from Germany, \$16 billion from South Korea and additional amounts from other suppliers.
- **Government Employees.** President Donald Trump signed three executive orders on 25 MAY making it easier for the federal government to fire employees it considers to be poor performers, the White House said, drawing rebukes from union representatives who said the sweeping changes were a “direct assault” on the rights of millions of workers.
- **Flat Tires.** The next time you have a flat tire wouldn’t it nice if you had the ability to fix it by inflating it as you would a balloon. To see how one woman does it check out <https://biggeekdad.com/2017/02/woman-fixes-flat>.
- **VA Choice.** Patients using the Veterans Affairs Choice program for medical care won’t see appointments interrupted in the next two weeks, even if it takes the White House a few extra days to sign new funding for the service into law. The program allows veterans who face significant wait times or travel for VA care to instead visit a private doctor at taxpayer expense.
- **U.S. Base.** The Polish defense ministry said there is a “clear and present need for a permanent U.S. armored division deployed in Poland,” and is willing to provide financial backing to host the soldiers that could reach \$2 billion, according to a copy of the [proposal](#) obtained by Polish news outlet Onet.
- **Home Loans.** Interest rates for all home loans are at a seven-year high, according to data released 24 MAY by Freddie Mac, with the average 30-year fixed-rate mortgage at 4.61 percent. That figure hasn’t been reached since May 19, 2011, and it’s more than half a percentage point higher than the average from this time last year (4.02 percent).
- **Roseanne Barr.** ABC pulled the plug on the reboot of “Roseanne” after she said on Twitter that Valerie Jarrett, a former adviser to President Barack Obama, was the offspring of the Islamist organization Muslim Brotherhood and the movie “Planet of the Apes.” It is estimated that it will cost her \$3.25 million in lost income for the comment.
- **Phishing.** Karim Baratov, 23, who pled guilty last year to a massive spear-phishing operation of Yahoo employees—which ultimately resulted in 500 million accounts being compromised—has been sentenced to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

[Source: Various | May 31, 2018 ++]

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## Pillows ► What To Shop For

Been pillow shopping lately? If not, get ready for a big array of choices. You have many options, including -- Neck, Body, Memory foam, Anti-snore, “Cool”, Oxygen-promoting, and Cervical pillows Shopping for a pillow can be stressful. A wrong purchase could mean you’re stuck with a pillow you don’t want. Fortunately, a little preparation can help prevent a poor choice. A rule of thumb says pillows should be replaced every 12 to 18 months. By two years, your pillow should be headed to the dump. Good Housekeeping advises:

*“If you have a traditional fiberfill pillow, fold it in half and place a book on top of it,” says Lexie Sachs, textiles analyst in the Good Housekeeping Institute. “If it springs back to shape, it’s still good. But if it stays folded in half, it’s time for a new one.” Memory foam pillows that are crumbly or no longer hold their shape also need to go.*

The most important reason to dump an aged pillow is because of dust mites — the microscopic, creepy-looking little bugs that take up residence in bedding and rapidly multiply in homes, especially when the humidity is high.

Dust mites don't bite. The problem is the accumulation of their waste and carcasses. Many people are allergic to a substance in dust-mite waste that can cause rashes, asthma and sinusitis. If you're allergic to dust mites, you can buy protective pillow covers made of tightly woven material. They are found in bedding stores and online. Mold, mildew and fungus also build up in pillows. That is not what you want to plant your face on night after night.

### **Shopping tips**

While pillow shopping seems daunting, you can keep it simple by focusing on basics: Get a pillow that's comfortable, supportive and keeps your head and neck properly aligned while you sleep. If possible, lie down and try out pillows in a store. If that is not feasible, lean against a wall using the pillow as you would in bed. Sleep expert and author Michael Breus tells WebMD that it's a good idea to ask someone to tell you if the pillow keeps your neck lined up straight with your body. As for cost, don't feel you must spend big bucks. "Price isn't necessarily an indicator of performance," according to Consumer Reports. Take your time shopping, trying out a variety of types, shapes and sizes of pillows in your price range. Consumer Reports also suggests:

- Compare pillows for firmness: Put each on a flat surface and press with your palm until the pillow is squeezed to about half its original thickness. The harder you have to press, the firmer the pillow will be for sleeping.
- Examine the construction: Look for tidy stitches and straight seams. The fill should be spread evenly, and the zipper should be strong and work smoothly.
- Give it the sniff test: Buying a memory foam pillow? Put your nose into it and smell it. Some have a chemical odor, although it may disappear after a bit of use.

### **What type of sleeper are you?**

Here's another approach to pillow-shopping: Match your pillow with your sleeping style. Buying pillows is like buying a mattress: You can't really tell by spending only a few minutes on a mattress or pillow whether they're right for you. You can up your odds of success by noticing how you sleep. Some pillows are even labeled as best for a particular position.

- Back sleepers: Look for a slim pillow so your head won't be pushed too far forward, straining your neck. Some back sleepers like a pillow whose lower third is fatter than the rest of the pillow. The fat part fits snugly into the curve of your neck and supports it.
- Side sleepers: Kammi Bernard, physical therapist at Baylor Health Care System in Dallas, tells WebMD that she advises side sleepers find a pillow firm enough to fill the space between the ear and shoulder.
- Stomach sleepers: Use a very thin pillow or none at all for the head and consider also using a thin pillow under your stomach, which can help prevent back pain.

### **The best fill material**

The fill material you choose is a matter of personal preference. If you like a fluffy pillow, down is probably the stuff you want. If down is too expensive, look for a combination of down and feathers. Down alternatives are great for people with allergies who prefer a fluffy pillow. Fans of memory foam pillows prefer the dense support this material gives. If you do buy memory foam, make sure the pillow fits your body well, since foam won't compact and become smaller as down and polyester pillows do. If you are still undecided, consider the compromise that chiropractor Dr. Darren Pollack suggests at Good Housekeeping:

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | May 30, 2018 ++]

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## **Civil Service Update 01 ► 3 Trump Executive Orders to Save Taxpayers Over \$100M**

President Donald Trump will order a major overhaul of the civil service system on Friday via three executive orders, according to senior administration officials. One of the orders will significantly limit the amount of time of public

employees can spend working for unions while still being paid by the government. The government expects the order to save taxpayers \$100 million over the course of a year, according to a senior administration official. Nearly 1,000 employees spent at least half of their taxpayer-funded time working for unions in 2017, according to a memo by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. American taxpayers paid \$177.2 million in 2016 for the time government employees spent performing work for unions, according to the Office of Personnel Management. Trump’s executive order limits the amount of time federal employees can use for union work to 25 percent. Employees will also no longer be allowed to use taxpayer-funded time to lobby Congress on behalf of unions. The order also prohibits the use of government funds on union appeals against the firing of government workers. The federal government will also start charging union rents for the use of office space as well as travel costs incurred by employees who spend time working for unions on taxpayers’ dime.

“Dentists at the Department of Veterans Affairs, air traffic controllers at the Department of Transportation, and tax examiners at the Department of the Treasury are being paid for work they were not hired to do without doing the work they were hired to do,” states a memo from the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. For example, an employee at the Department of Transportation spent 100 percent of his or her time working for a union in 2017 and was paid \$187,000 by the government. A nurse anesthetist at the Department of Veterans Affairs made over \$190,000 while spending all of her time working for a union. The term used for time government workers use for working for unions is “official time.” In 2017, 221 government workers spent at least half their time working for unions while being paid over \$100,000 per year.

The second executive order will make it easier for government agencies to fire employees for egregious misconduct. A senior administration official cited research showing that government workers were 44 times less likely to be fired after their first probationary year compared to private sector workers. bThe order will also eliminate an Obama-era policy required agencies who did not fire one employee for a specific type of misconduct to not fire any other employee for the same type of misconduct. The order also prohibits agencies from hiding information from each other. A senior administration official explained that departments sometimes make deals with employees who they are firing to not disclose information to other agencies, which results in workers who were fired for misconduct and other issues to go on to secure job in other government agencies.

The third executive order targets union contracts. These contracts often include provisions that make it harder to fire workers. Meanwhile, the unions often negotiate these contracts while being paid by taxpayers, in effect circumventing the democratic process while using taxpayer money to ask for more taxpayer money. The order directs all government agencies to renegotiate their union contracts and require for all the contracts to be posted online for the public to review. The executive order also creates a centralized government body to review and negotiate the contracts. [Source: Epoch Times | Ivan Pentchoukov | May 25, 2018 ++]

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## Civil Service Update 02 ► Trump Executive Order on Firing

President Trump made waves in the federal community in late MAY when he signed a series of executive orders that aim to speed up the disciplinary and firing process and significantly curb the influence of federal employee unions. In announcing the order streamlining the firing process to reporters during a briefing 25 MAY, administration officials highlighted how it instructs agencies to reduce the length of formal Performance Improvement Plans to 30 days government wide. The order also encourages agencies to fire rather than suspend malfeasant employees, if their conduct warrants it. Also noted were provisions encouraging agencies to **consider performance over seniority** when processing reductions in force and requirements that agencies not withhold information related to an employee’s misconduct or poor performance from other departments.

But the executive order outlines a number of other changes to how agencies handle the disciplinary process, as well as federal employee unions' role in it. Going forward, agencies must, when possible, make decisions on proposed firings within 15 business days of the end of the employee's window to respond to such proposals, and they should limit written notice of adverse personnel actions to 30 days, the order said. Additionally, the order seeks to significantly curtail the types of agency actions that can be appealed through the administrative grievance or arbitration process. The White House instructed agencies to renegotiate collective bargaining agreements with federal unions, and in doing so, exclude a number of agency decisions from appeals. "Whenever reasonable in view of particular circumstances, agency heads shall endeavor to exclude from the application of any grievance procedures negotiated under [Title 5 of the U.S. Code] any dispute concerning decisions to remove any employee from federal service for misconduct or unacceptable performance," Trump wrote.

In addition, agencies were ordered to remove performance ratings and incentive pay, including cash awards; step increases; and retention, recruitment and relocation incentives, from the list of subjects that are open to grievances and arbitration proceedings in union CBAs. Officials also were instructed not to allow CBAs to include any provision that limits managers' discretion to employ adverse personnel actions or other performance improvement methods. The order instructed the Office of Personnel Management to collect data from agencies about the number of various personnel actions they take each fiscal year, including the number of employees removed during their probationary period, employees reprimanded in writing, adverse personnel actions, performance improvement plans authorized and removal decisions. Agencies also will be required to delineate the number of performance improvement plans that are authorized for more than 30 days, and the number of removal decisions that took more than 15 business days.

The executive order will take time for the administration to implement. OPM has 60 days to issue guidance on how to implement the reporting provisions, and within 45 days, OPM Director Jeff Pon will, if necessary, propose new regulations to change agencies' performance management policies. In addition, each agency will need time to renegotiate any collective bargaining agreements currently in place with federal unions. Further complicating matters is the fact that last week, the American Federation of Government Employees suggested it would likely initiate legal action to prevent the president's executive orders from taking effect.

In a statement 25 MAY, OPM Director Jeff Pon praised the order for helping to improve federal employee accountability. "These executive orders are about protecting taxpayers' dollars, including those of our dedicated federal employees, and putting those resources to use in the most efficient and effective way possible," Pon said. "[The] vast majority of our employees are dedicated public servants who are dedicated to their missions and service to the American people. It is essential that we honor their commitment, and these measures reflect just that."

But Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) said the executive orders, including the one expediting discipline and firing, erode federal employees' due process protections. "Rather than improving government efficiency, these executive orders will make it harder to resolve workplace disputes; report waste, fraud and abuse; and ensure a fair and safe workplace for federal employees," he said. "Instead of trying to erode the rights of federal employees and whistleblowers, the administration should focus on the abuses of Cabinet officials taking charter and first class flights and buying \$31,000 dining sets and \$43,000 soundproof booths."

The largest union representing federal employees sued the Trump administration Wednesday over President Trump's executive order significantly curbing the use of official time by union representatives, arguing the edict violates the First Amendment and exceeds the president's constitutional authority. [Source: GovEcec.com | Erich Wagner | May 29, 2018 ++]

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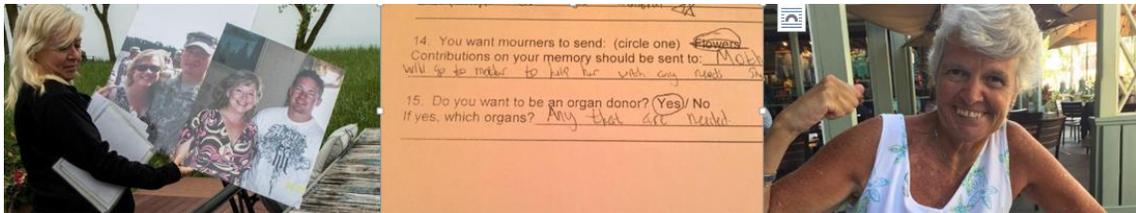
## **Memorial Day Remembrance Update 06 ► Afghan KIA Mother's Plans**

Jill Stephenson has taken heavier steps before. To hug her son goodbye each time he deployed. To step onto a plane headed for Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. To walk out of that hospital after doctors asked whether she would donate her 21-year-old's organs. So 100 miles of steps do not intimidate her. That's how many miles are in the Freedom Walk to the Wall, a Memorial Day weekend event she organized set for Friday and Saturday. Participants will walk all or part of the journey from Veterans' Memorial Park in Glencoe to a memorial wall in Marseilles in honor of service members like her son, who gave their lives in service. Despite all she has endured since her son, Benjamin Kopp, died after being shot in Afghanistan in 2009, there still is something that causes her to crumple: the phrase "Happy Memorial Day." "That's the equivalent of congratulating someone at a funeral," she said. Memorial Day weekend, Stephenson, 51, hoped not only to honor fallen service members like her son, but to also remind Americans that Memorial Day is not a holiday that revolves around barbecues and patriotic swimwear.

Veterans and service members' family members will finish the walk in Marseilles, at the Middle East Conflicts Wall Memorial. Organizers say the memorial, dedicated in 2004, is the only memorial in the United States that regularly updates a list of all the service members who have died in Middle East conflicts. The 7,933 names etched in granite begin at 1967, when the USS Liberty was attacked during the Six-Day War. Each year, more names are added during an annual dedication ceremony hosted by the Illinois Motorcycle Freedom Run, which raises funds for the memorial. When her son enlisted at 18, many people asked Stephenson, who was a single mother, "How can you let him do that?" But she had known there would be no other route. He was determined. And she was proud of him. Kopp was a "boy's boy" who played with trucks and dirt and pored over his great-grandfather's war medals in their Minnesota lake house. The death of his great-grandfather, a World War II veteran, and the Sept. 11 attacks that followed soon after, turned into a mission of grief and vindication for him.

Kopp's great-grandfather told him not to follow him into the military solely because he respected him, according to Stephenson. He told Kopp that he would find his calling eventually ... that he would feel it in his gut. And that, his mom said, was to be an Army Ranger. Kopp enlisted in the Army in 2006, after graduating from high school. She said he first deployed to Iraq in 2007, and again in 2008. "I choose to be positive," Stephenson said. "It was a great fit for him." She said she didn't worry. She knew, of course, of the dangers. But she had lost her brother, who was hit by a car, when she was 15, and a part of her, she believed, had already done her penance in life. She felt her son would be safe when he deployed a third time to Afghanistan. He was strong. He was capable. Kopp, however, confided in his mother and grandmother before leaving that he had concerns. It was a different country, and a different war. His grandmother offered to take him to Canada. When Stephenson tells this story, people often laugh. But the Canada offer was anything but a joke. Her mother was a woman who had lost a son and saw an opportunity to save a grandson. "If Ben would have agreed to it, they'd still be there," Stephenson said. "But there's no way Ben would ever, ever, ever, in his wildest dreams ... turn his back on his brothers in arms or on this country. There's no way."

Stephenson last spoke to her son by phone on July 1, 2009. He sounded, she remembers, "kind of far away, emotionally." Days later, as she was sitting at work, her phone buzzed. It was an unknown number, one she'd learned to pick up, because it could be Kopp. It was his commanding officer with news that her son had been shot. He made it out of surgery and was in recovery. He had not yet woken up. Stephenson boarded a plane to Washington, D.C., to see him. The day after she arrived, doctors told her they believed he was brain-dead and asked if she would consider organ donation, she recalled. She spent five days by his side before he was taken off life support, holding his hand. "I didn't hesitate," she said about considering whether to donate his organs. Her brother had been an organ donor. She knew what it would mean to families if their loved one received an organ. She said yes. But it was Kopp's decision, so she searched for any documentation he might have left behind. In papers he had signed, on the line about organ donation, he had checked the box "yes" and wrote: "any that are needed."



**Jill Stephenson looks at the last pictures she took with her son (left) and form he checked to allow his heart be donated to Judy Meikle (right)**

His story lives beyond his 21 years. His donations eventually benefited dozens of people, Stephenson said, from bone and tissue donations to four lives saved with his kidneys, heart and liver. Kopp’s heart was given to Judy Meikle, a Winnetka woman who had found out months earlier that she had a congenital heart condition and her only hope to live was a heart transplant. “It’s an incredible gift in one way, but a burden in another, because you know that someone has to die in order for you to live,” she said. A cousin of Stephenson’s worked with Meikle and knew about her heart problem. That cousin told Stephenson about Meikle when she found out the possibility of Kopp’s organ donations. Meikle, 65, remembers getting the phone call that would extend her life on a Sunday morning. She now wears a bracelet with Kopp’s name that reads DOW, or “died of wounds.” Her story is told in Bill Lunn’s book, “Heart of a Ranger: The True Story of Cpl. Ben Kopp, American Hero in Life and Death.” Judy Meikle. In the nine years since the transplant, Kopp’s heart has allowed Meikle countless memories — traveling to Florida with her 12-year-old cocker spaniel, Lacey, a 60th birthday party where Stephenson surprised her with a cake that read “Young at Heart,” being able to travel around Illinois to speak on behalf of organ donation. “I put their hands on my chest and say, ‘Meet Ben Kopp,’ ” she said.

This year, 37 names will be added to the Middle East Conflicts Wall Memorial in Marseilles. Stephenson is walking to remind Americans about other mothers who receive knocks on their doors and phone calls from unknown numbers about the fate of their son or daughter. “I think a lot of people would find that hard to believe,” Stephenson said. “Can we think in our minds about being notified 37 times in the last year of someone who was killed in combat?” She has visited the Ranger Monument at Fort Benning, Ga., which honors Rangers like her son. She has spent a lot of time in the nation’s capital after that first flight to Washington. She has been back to the East Coast to visit her son, buried at Arlington National Cemetery. But the memorial in an Illinois town of about 5,000 feels different, she said. “It makes sense to me that it’s in the Heartland, because that is where our men and women of the military come from,” she said. “Of course they come from big cities as well, but a lot of them don’t.”

Stephenson will walk the beginning and the end of the 100-mile trek. To prepare, she is hiking the dunes near her home in Gary, Ind., where she moved in January, after living in Minnesota, then Florida. “It’s a lot of uphill in the sand,” she said. “So a nice flat walk should be easy for me.” The feeling of feet sinking in sand summoned a memory, the day she learned her son’s heart would go to someone she knew. She received the phone call confirming the match on a street in Washington, D.C. “In that moment my feet felt like they were in cement,” Stephenson said. “But at the same time I felt like if I would have just went like this,” she said while waving her arms up and down, “I would have flown away. I felt really heavy and really light at the same time.” “And I said,” she recalled, ““That must be what a miracle feels like.”” Her eyes still glisten at the memory. She knows this weekend, she will again shoulder many emotions. Purpose. Comfort. Joy. Grief. But all she can do is put one foot in front of the other. [Source: Chicago Tribune | Alison Bowen | May 23, 2018 ++]

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**[Afghanistan Extremism](#) ► Western Consumers Fund By Buying Talcum Powder**

Islamic State and the Taliban are engaged in a bitter battle over control of mines in Afghanistan that supply much of the talcum used by European and US consumers. The mineral, used in everything from baby powder and cosmetics to paint and car parts, is mined in areas of eastern Afghanistan where the Taliban and Islamic State in Afghanistan are vying for supremacy. The struggle to control the extraction of talc and other minerals, such as chromite, has been exposed in a new report by Global Witness. The campaign group has spent months investigating how the murky trade means western consumers are effectively supporting insurgents in the country.



Nick Donovan, campaign director for Global Witness, said that while talc lacked the imaginative allure of blood diamonds, which have featured in Hollywood’s films and global rap music hits, it was nonetheless a “blood mineral”. “This report shows the insidious way in which insurgents have become involved in talc mining and the threat of groups like Isis becoming more involved,” said Donovan. He added that, while the Taliban’s involvement in talc mining is now well established, the move by the Afghan branch of Isis into mining the mineral appeared to follow a pattern whereby the group attempts to seize and exploit resources as a way of funding its efforts. The trend has been particularly marked in Iraq and Syria, where the group has moved into crude oil refining. According to the report, Isis in Afghanistan now controls large talc, marble and chromite mines in eastern Afghanistan, particularly around their stronghold in Achin district in Nangarhar province, the same area where the US military dropped the “mother of all bombs” against Isis-held caves in April 2017.

Several sources interviewed for the report said significant mining has taken place under Isis since they took control. The group has fought major battles with the Taliban over neighboring districts containing even richer deposits. One former security source told researchers they believed Isis had been involved in trying to construct a road to Pakistan to export minerals from areas controlled by the group. “The Islamic State appears to have a significant strategic interest in Afghanistan’s minerals and controls some major mining areas,” said Donovan. “Given its track record of exploiting natural resources in Iraq and Syria, this should be a wake-up call for both the Afghan government and the Trump administration. “They must strengthen control over the trade in places like Nangarhar, but just as importantly put in place desperately needed transparency and oversight reforms so that legitimate mining has a chance to provide a viable alternative.”

The findings of the Global Witness investigation follow research suggesting that the Taliban is making millions annually from talc as part of the estimated \$300m (£225m) a year they rake in from minerals across Afghanistan. Almost all of Afghanistan’s talc is exported to Pakistan, said the report, which in turn exports more of it to the US than to any other country. Pakistan provides more than a third of US imports of talc, with EU countries also major buyers. “Unwitting American and European consumers are inadvertently helping fund extremist groups in Afghanistan,” said Donovan, adding that a ban on the talc trade in Afghanistan, imposed in early 2015, had been weakly enforced – not least because of the involvement of political figures in the trade. [Source: The Guardian | Peter Beaumont | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **National Anthem Update 09 ► NFL New Policy on Taking A Knee**

Almost two years after former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick first took a knee during the national anthem, NFL owners have approved a policy to address the issue. Football players can now stay in the locker room when the “Star Spangled Banner” is played before games, but they are required to stand if they come out to the field during the song,

according to the Associated Press. The lack of policy led to some confusion, including when Pittsburgh Steelers left tackle Alejandro Villanueva stood with his hand over his heart during the national anthem in September. The former Army Ranger who served three tours in Afghanistan was applauded for standing alone while his other teammates remained in the tunnel behind him. However, the next day he said he just wanted to get a glimpse of the American flag and wasn't trying to make a statement or set himself apart from the Steelers organization.

Kaepernick, who used to play for the San Francisco 49ers, said he was kneeling during the anthem to protest racial injustice and police brutality. Many were divided on the action. Some believed Kaepernick was free to express his opinion through a peaceful statement like kneeling, but others believed he was disrespecting the flag and troops who had served and died for it. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said the change in policy was unanimously approved by the owners during their spring meeting, according to the Associated Press. However, it was met with skepticism by the players' union. "We want people to be respectful of the national anthem. We want people to stand," Goodell said. "That's all personnel, and to make sure they treat this moment in a respectful fashion. That's something that we think we owe. We've been very sensitive on making sure that we give players choices, but we do believe that moment is an important moment and one that we are going to focus on." If anyone decides to kneel on the field during the anthem, the team — not specific players — will be fined. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Charlsy Panzino | May 23, 2018 ++]

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## **Homeland Security Drone Concerns ► Preventing Emerging Threats Act of 2018**

At the dawn of the Department of Homeland Security, no one was thinking about how to manage flying robots. In the almost 16 years since its founding, air travel passengers adjusted to the swath of security changes put in place with the aim of lessening the likelihood of airline hijackings. It is the low sky, then, the space where airliners don't travel except during landings and takeoffs, that a different sort of concern has emerged: what to do about cheap, easy to pilot drones, should they ever become a threat? Last week, the Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen asked Congress for the authority to "identify, track, and mitigate drones that could pose a danger to the public and to DHS operations," reports Reuters. Nielsen cited the specific example of ISIS using armed drones, though the technique is hardly limited to ISIS; irregular forces fighting in Ukraine also adapted quadcopters into miniature bombers. The Army is already investing heavily in solving this problem.

As fits the DHS mandate, Nielsen's concern was focused not on the dangers posed by quadcopters to servicemembers fighting abroad, but that America's enemies (specifically alluding to ISIS) will use drones as weapons stateside. This is a fear that has yet to materialize, though the technology to make it happen is certainly available, should a nefarious actor decide to pursue it. Additionally, Nielsen wants tools to protect against drones doing surveillance or smuggling drugs, which are at least things people have actually done with drones inside the United States. (Notably absent from the list of threats is the drone swarm that the FBI says interfered with a hostage rescue operation, perhaps the most novel use of drones for illicit behavior so far observed.) Here's how the "Preventing Emerging Threats Act of 2018" (S.2836) aims to, well, prevent the emerging threats of 2018. The act, in essence, let DHS and the Department of Justice authorize a range of actions to counter drones, including everything from tracking drones to jamming them to even use force against the uninhabited aircraft. The range of powers, as enumerated in the text:

- Detect, identify, monitor, and track the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft, without prior consent, including by means of intercept or other access of a wire communication, an oral communication, or an electronic communication used to control the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft.
- Warn the operator of the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft, including by passive or active, and direct or indirect physical, electronic, radio, and electromagnetic means.

- Disrupt control of the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft, without prior consent, including by disabling the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft by intercepting, interfering, or causing interference with wire, oral, electronic, or radio communications used to control the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft.
- Seize or exercise control of the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft.
- Seize or otherwise confiscate the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft.
- Use reasonable force to disable, damage, or destroy the unmanned aircraft system or unmanned aircraft.

That’s a dense set of powers, but it mostly covers the full range of counter-drone technologies available today. Notably, it includes use of force at the end, though as written the bill prioritizes non-kinetic means to stop the drone at every turn, including warning the humans operating the machines in question. As for acquiring figuring out how to do that, DHS is in luck: the counter-drone market already features over 200 systems with some range of these capabilities, and unlike some other specialized technological needs, DHS can simply buy models off the shelf and evaluate them as needed.

Present FAA rules, which regulates things large and small in the sky, are already designed to ensure zones of safety around airports, people in public, and other areas deemed sensitive or risky for flying robots to roam. To get pilots on board with these rules, the FAA pushed education campaigns to teach people what the rules are and how to operate safely. Notably, though, these rules have lacked an enforcement mechanism beyond the vigilance of local law enforcement; years ago, when the FAA was asked how they planned to secure the special event airspace around the 50th Super Bowl, the FAA directed reporters to NORAD, which politely declined to comment. These new provisions would expand the ability of law enforcement and national security agencies to respond to drones within the United States, providing a more concrete answer than fanciful notions of jet-fighter interception of rogue quadcopters.

Still, the presence of a commercial technology adapted into a threat abroad does not guarantee that the threat will manifest in the same way domestically. In the meantime, should the bill pass into law, it could greatly expand the ways in which federal agents interfere with the lives and hobbies of hundreds of thousands of law-abiding drone operators. [Source: C4ISRNET | Kelsey Atherton | May 22, 2018 ++]

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## **Social Security Number ► Government Should Stop Pretending Yours is Secret**

Government and industry rely on Social Security numbers as a fail-safe way to ensure people are who they claim to be, but massive data breaches have led cybersecurity experts to argue the nine-digit identifier is past its prime. High-profile data breaches have dumped hundreds of millions of Social Security numbers into the online wilderness recently, fueling a rise in identity theft and financial fraud. In 2015, experts estimated between 60 and 80 percent of Social Security numbers have at some point been stolen by hackers, and that was before the massive breach at Equifax exposed information on 143 million Americans last year. With so many numbers floating in the online wilderness, cyber advocates on 17 MAY told a House panel agencies and companies could no longer trust them as a certain means to verify people’s identities.

“Social Security numbers are so deeply compromised and so widely available to the public...that they can no longer be used as an authenticator,” said Paul Rosenzweig, a cybersecurity expert at the R Street Institute, before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security. While he and other witnesses largely agreed the number can still work as a unique government ID, the days of using it to prove someone is who they say are long over. “Using my Social Security number as an authenticator is as stupid as using the last four letters as my last name as authenticator, or the last four digits of my phone number,” said Rosenzweig.

The government began assigning Social Security numbers in 1936 to track workers' earnings and federal benefits. Since then it's morphed into "a de facto national identifier" used by businesses, schools, hospitals and other groups in ways that were never intended, said Steve Grobman, a senior vice president and chief technology officer at McAfee. Leaving so many valuable assets bundled to one number presents ever growing privacy and security risks, and panelists argued it's time to begin exploring other ways for agencies and other groups to verify identity. Acting Social Security Administration Commissioner Nancy Berry said the agency is open to exploring new authentication methods, but noted advanced solutions often come with a high price tag. Grobman pushed back hard against this notion, highlighting the "staggering" price of doing nothing outweighs the cost of building a new system. Last year identity theft cost Americans \$16.8 billion, according to Javelin Strategy and Research. Lawmakers and witnesses debated the pros and cons of several alternative authenticators—like ID-embedded cards, biometric data and blockchain tech—but agreed on the need for change as recent breaches rendered Social Security numbers essentially public information. "It's clear [Social Security numbers] aren't a secret anymore, and it's time to stop pretending they are," said Chairman Sam Johnson (R-TX). [Source: Nextgov.com | Jack Corrigan | May 17, 2018 ++]

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## U.S. Treaty Capricity ► U.S. Has Always Broken Its Treaties, Pacts And Promises



One of the dangerous consequences of violating the Iran deal is a loss of credibility for the U.S., say critics of Donald Trump's decision including former president Barack Obama. Iran and all other parties have respected the deal's terms, they point out, making the U.S. look like an unreliable international partner. Well, the U.S. is an unreliable international partner—and it has long been one, even before the current administration pulled out from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris agreement on climate change, and threatened to end NAFTA. History is dotted with treaties that the U.S. has signed but not ratified, signed and then unsigned, and even refused to sign after pushing everyone else to sign. Capriciousness about international treaties is an old U.S. tradition. It starts with the country's very creation: hundreds of treaties signed with Native American tribes that were either broken, or not ratified. Today, the U.S. is one of the countries to have ratified the fewest number of international human rights treaties—of the 18 agreements passed by the UN, America has only ratified five. Note the following:

- **Treaties between the U.S. and American Indian Nations (1722-1869).** According to the US national archives, 374 treaties (pdf, p.4) signed between the U.S. and Native American Tribes from 1772 to 1867 were ratified. Of these, many were not respected: Only one article of the Pickering Treaty, or Treaty of Canadaigua of 1794, for instance, has been observed. Many others (18 in California alone, signed during the Gold Rush) were not even ratified. These include Treaty K, or the California Treaty, which promised reservations to American Indians within the state.
- **Treaty of Versailles, 1919.** President Woodrow Wilson was a promoter and negotiator of the treaty that ended World War I. The agreement was signed between the Allied Powers and Germany; commenting on the U.S.'s role in brokering the deal, Wilson famously said, "At last the world knows America as the savior

of the world!” However, the president encountered strong and growing opposition to the treaty in Congress, and the U.S. never ratified the Treaty of Versailles. In fact, the U.S. didn’t formally end its war against Germany and the former Austro-Hungarian empire until 1921.

- **International Labor Convention, 1949.** The oldest treaty currently pending ratification in the Senate is an international recognition of the freedom of association and protection of the right to organize. The agreement was signed by 154 countries, including the U.S., and entered in full effect in 1950. However, the U.S. never ratified it (pdf).
- **Geneva Agreement, 1954.** The Conference of Geneva in 1954 was called to put a final end to the Korean War and First Indochina War. The treaty was signed by Vietnam, France, China, the USSR, and the U.K. Although the U.S. participated in the conference and negotiations, it eventually refused to sign. However, it did agree to respect the ceasefire.
- **International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966.** Building onto the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ICESCR expands the notion of basic rights beyond civil and political provisions. The agreement has been ratified by 166 countries. The U.S. has signed, but has not ratified, the covenant.
- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW), 1979.** By signing CEDAW in 1980, the U.S. become one of 156 signatories of a landmark agreement to end gender discrimination. Shortly after signing, then-president Jimmy Carter submitted the agreement for ratification to the Senate. It’s still waiting.
- **The Law of the Sea, 1982.** The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was held in Jamaica between 1973 and 1982. It established a set of rules and responsibilities governing the way countries and international bodies act in international waters. For instance, UNCLOS details the requirements of search and rescue at sea. In 1994, the U.S. signed the agreement. However, it did not ratify it.
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989.** The CRC is a landmark human rights document for several reasons. It’s the first defining agreement on the rights of children, and it incorporate a wide range of rights (education, health, justice) for minors. It achieved broad support very quickly, with near-unanimous ratification across the globe. The U.S. signed the agreement in 1995. It is the only country that has not ratified it.
- **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, 1996.** Although the treaty banning nuclear testing was adopted by the UN Assembly General in 1996, and has been ratified by 166 countries, the agreement is not yet into effect due to eight key countries who have not yet ratified it. The U.S., which signed in 1996, is one of them—the others are China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan.
- **Mine-Ban Treaty, or Ottawa Treaty, 1997.** The mine ban’s goal is to eliminate anti-person mines, prohibiting their production, stockpiling, or use. The U.S. is one of 33 states (including Russia, India, and China) that have signed but not ratified the treaty.
- **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998.** The Rome treaty establishing an international criminal court was negotiated by 148 countries. Of them, 120 approved of the final draft in 1998 (pdf), seven opposed it, and 21 abstained from voting. Bill Clinton signed the agreement in 2000 but delayed submitting it to the Senate for ratification, on the grounds that the U.S. needed to observe how the tribunal worked. Two years later, after the treaty had come into full effect and been ratified by 60 countries, George W. Bush informed the United Nations that the U.S. no longer intended to submit the agreement to the Senate for ratification at all.
- **Kyoto Protocol, 1997.** Though the US signed the agreement limiting carbon emissions, it never intended to ratify it. The U.S. is one of just four UN member states that have not enforced the agreement, with Andorra, Canada, and South Sudan.

- **Paris Climate Accord, 2015.** The Paris deal to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions was signed by 195 member states in 2015, and became effective the following year. President Trump withdrew from the agreement on June 1, 2017. However, the U.S. is still bound to follow the Paris deal’s requirements until 2020.

Several more international treaties are pending ratification from the US Senate, for a total of 45 between 1949 and 2017. The U.S. is also notably absent from signing prominent international treaties including the Mine Ban Treaty, the Convention Against Torture, and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [Source: GovExec.com | Annalisa Merelli | May 14, 2018 ++]

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## **Tickets for Troops ► Washington Nationals**

The Washington Nationals and PenFed Credit Union are raising the bar for military appreciation at sporting events after the nation’s second largest credit union signed a three-year sponsorship deal with the Nats. As part of the agreement, Nationals Park has launched a program called “Tickets for Troops,” which will designate a select number of complimentary tickets to all home games — in a seating section aptly named the “PenFed Military Appreciation Section” — for active and reserve military personnel, veterans and DoD civilians. “PenFed has been supporting the national military community and the greater Washington community for 83 years,” James Schenck, president and CEO of PenFed said in a release announcing the partnership. “The Washington Nationals have played an integral role in these communities for 13 years.

Now we are stepping up to the plate together.” As part of the partnership, PenFed will sponsor the stadium’s family-friendly Kids’ Fun Zone, and will be giving away promotional items to those seated in the designated section. “Expanding our partnership with PenFed makes perfect sense given our shared commitment to both honoring members of the military and their families and serving the greater Washington, D.C. community,” Alan H. Gottlieb, chief operating officer of Lerner Sports said in the release. “The Washington Nationals strive to provide the best fan experience in sports and the enhanced kids play area and military ticket program announced today will both significantly add to our ballpark’s exciting game day atmosphere.” “This is our way of saying ‘thank you’ for all that these brave men and women do, and have done, to protect our freedoms as Americans,” Schenck said.

Tickets to games can be picked up in person on game day with a valid military ID with proof of service or claimed online at <https://www.mlb.com/nationals/tickets/specials/penfed>. For the complete Washington Nationals 2018 schedule refer to [https://washingtonbaseball.eventticketscenter.com/washington-nationals-tickets/353/e?utm\\_source=bing&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=B000%20MLB%20Teams%20-%20US&utm\\_term=washington%20nationals&utm\\_content=Nationals](https://washingtonbaseball.eventticketscenter.com/washington-nationals-tickets/353/e?utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=B000%20MLB%20Teams%20-%20US&utm_term=washington%20nationals&utm_content=Nationals). [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | May 21, 2018 ++]

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## **RP~China Dispute Update 24 ► Long-Range Bombers Landed for the First Time**

The Pentagon criticized what it called China’s “continued militarization” of island outposts in the disputed South China Sea, where the Chinese air force landed long-range bombers for the first time, putting entire Southeast Asia within their range. The Philippines has expressed “serious concerns” and vowed to take “appropriate diplomatic action” over Chinese long-range bombers operating in disputed parts of the South China Sea. The China Daily newspaper reported 19 MAY that the People’s Liberation Army Air Force conducted takeoff and landing training with the H-6K bomber in the South China Sea. China is pitted against smaller neighbors in multiple disputes over islands, coral reefs and lagoons in waters crucial for global commerce and rich in fish and potential oil and gas

reserves. A statement from the Defense Ministry late Friday said the exercise was conducted on an island reef, but it did not specify when or where, saying only that it took place recently at a “southern sea area.” It involved several H-6Ks taking off from an air base and making a simulated strike against sea targets before landing, the ministry said.



Chinese H-6K bomber

Wang Mingliang, a military expert, was quoted in the statement as saying that the exercises will help the air force improve its “real combat ability against all kinds of marine security threats.” The U.S., which doesn’t have any territorial claims but insists on freedom of navigation and a peaceful resolution of the disputes without coercion or threat of force, criticized the move. “The United States remains committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific,” a Pentagon spokesman, Marine Lt. Col. Christopher Logan, said in an email. “We have seen these same reports and China’s continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea only serves to raise tensions and destabilize the region.” The Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, using Chinese social media posts, identified the location of the exercise as Woody Island, China’s largest base in the Paracel Islands that are also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan. With a combat radius of nearly 1,900 nautical miles (3,520 kilometers), the H-6K bomber would put all of Southeast Asia in its range from Woody Island, AMTI said.

Farther south in the Spratly group of islands, China has constructed seven man-made islands and equipped them with runways, hangers, radar and missile stations, further cementing its vast territorial claims in the busy waterway. The U.S. and others accuse Beijing of militarizing the region to bolster its claims. Washington has said it violates a pledge by President Xi Jinping to former President Barack Obama not to militarize the area. China says it has a legitimate right to build up defenses on the islands. Adm. Phil Davidson, the new head of the Pacific Command, said recently that China had reached the tipping point in its control over the South China Sea. Beijing’s island bases can be used to challenge the U.S. presence in the region, “and any forces deployed to the islands would easily overwhelm the military forces of any other South China Sea-claimants,” Davidson wrote in recent testimony to Congress. [Source: The Associated Press | May 20, 2018 ++]

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## Sleep Update 08 ► 7 More Tips for Improving It

Few things in life are more frustrating than the inability to fall — or to remain — asleep. The average adult should get at least seven hours of sleep each night, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Doing so is necessary for your physical and mental well-being. If you have trouble getting a good night’s sleep, you aren’t alone. In fact, the Sleep Health Foundation reveals that one-third of people experience “at least mild insomnia.” And, like you, these frustrated folks are seeking a solution. According to Consumer Reports: Americans spent an estimated \$41 billion on sleep aids and remedies in 2015, and that’s expected to grow to \$52 billion by 2020, according to Natana Raj, an analyst with BCC Research in Wellesley, Mass. The rub is that certain solutions don’t work as well as claimed — if they work at all. Before you resort to pricey sleep solutions that may or may not be effective, try these seven unusual ways to summon some slumber:

1. **Conceal your clocks** -- It’s OK to lose track of time after you go to bed at night. In fact, constantly checking the clock to see how many hours remain until morning can create stress and further prevent you from catching some

shut-eye. So, cover all the clocks in the bedroom — or remove them altogether. Then, close your eyes and get ready to drift into dreamland. And don't worry. You can still practice your time-keeping skills during daylight hours.

2. **Eat bananas and cherries** -- Mom may have told you to unwind with a cup of warm milk before bed, but the beverage is loaded with sugar, which can increase levels of cortisol, also known as the “stress hormone” that is associated with the body's fight or flight response. Elevated levels of cortisol can keep you awake longer. Instead, snack on some cherries and bananas in the evening. Cherries contain natural melatonin, known for regulating the body's circadian rhythm. Bananas are rich in calming magnesium, which can help promote a relaxed, sleep-ready state.

3. **Tense your toes** -- The secret to falling asleep may lie in your feet! Believe it or not, the simple act of curling and uncurling your toes while lying in bed can release tension from your body and help you nod off. According to Everyday Health: The repetitive movement helps some people relax, shipping them off to dreamland. The exercise also works with other muscle groups like your legs, abdomen and arms.

4. **Compose your thoughts** -- Concerns keeping you awake at night? Keep a pad and a pen on your nightstand and jot down any last-minute thoughts just before bedtime, according to research out of Baylor University. It found that people who spent five minutes writing a to-do list fell asleep an average of nine minutes earlier than those who wrote of list of things they had already accomplished. So, give yourself some time to clear your mind of the day's events, then add items to your to-do list and gather your thoughts for that upcoming work meeting. You'll likely find that this method is more reliable than counting sheep!

5. **Dose your pillow** -- Essential oils can have big-time benefits when it comes to rest and relaxation. Lavender oil is particularly widely touted as a natural sleep aid. Spray some on your pillow approximately 10 minutes before bedtime to help you sleep like a baby, according to Good Health Academy: You may not want to apply the oil directly to your bedding for fear of oil stains, but you can mix up a solution which will make washing your bedding much easier at the end of the week. Good Health Academy recommends combining 20 drops of lavender oil with 50 milliliters of filtered or distilled water in a spray bottle.

6. **Blow bubbles** -- It may seem kind of strange, but blowing bubbles as you did during childhood can help you fall asleep. So, the next time you buy a bottle for the kids or grandkids, pick up one for yourself. According to a Men's Health article republished in the New York Post: It's like a deep breathing exercise, which helps calm your body and mind ... And since it's such a silly activity, it can also take your mind off of any potential sleep-thwarting thoughts.

7. **Shed your nightclothes** -- Want to have an easier time falling and staying asleep? Sleep naked. Trading in your PJs for your birthday suit boasts multiple benefits, according to Lifehack: A recent Australian study concluded that a drop in core body temperature is needed in order for sleep to initiate normally. The body pushes the heat out from the core like a radiator and releases it. If your body can't release the heat because of heavy pajamas or socks, you are more likely to suffer from insomnia, because your core won't be able to release the heat. Sleeping naked allows the heat to release more quickly, and helps you fall asleep faster. Lifehack also cited an additional study that found that “the regulation of in-bed body temperature could significantly help in reaching a deeper sleep for longer periods of time.”

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Melissa Neiman | May 16, 2018 ++]

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**Where There's a Will, There's a Way ► 17**



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## **Merchant Marine Fleet ► U.S. Decline a Matter of National Security**

The once-mighty U.S. Merchant Marine fleet has nearly collapsed under the weight of high labor costs, zigzagging federal policies and intense competition from abroad, damaging America's position as the only country in the world able to supply and sustain a long-distance war. The U.S. Merchant Marine has declined from 1,288 international trading vessels in 1951 to 81 today. "It's a matter of national security," said Maritime Administration chief Mark H. Buzby, a retired Navy rear admiral. The Merchant Marine is a fleet of U.S. ships that carries cargo during peacetime and becomes an auxiliary of the Defense Department during wartime to deliver troops and supplies to conflict zones. The Navy itself does not have enough ships to handle a large-scale supply mission on its own and has relied in almost every conflict on the Merchant Marine. "I tell people we're kind of on the ragged edge here of our ability to conduct a large-scale sea-lift operation to move our combat forces overseas. Even in an uncontested environment, we would be challenged," Buzby said.

An Air Force general warned Congress last month that the Pentagon might have to turn to foreign vessels to mobilize equipment, just as it did in the 1991 Gulf War mobilization. But in that war, the crews of 13 of the 192 foreign-flagged vessels carrying cargo rebelled and forced their ships away from the war zone. "If the fleet continues to lose ships, a lengthy, mass deployment on the scale of Desert Shield/Desert Storm could eventually require U.S. forces to rely on foreign-flagged ships for sustainment," Air Force Gen. Darren W. McDew, head of the U.S. Transportation Command, told a Senate panel 10 APR. McDew said the dwindling Merchant Marine fleet, along with an aging Navy transport fleet, "threatens our ability to meet national security requirements." U.S. troops stationed in the Middle East and Afghanistan still receive much of their supplies via U.S. flag vessels. Despite the usage of heavy lift aircraft, large oceangoing vessels remain crucial to military mobility in the 21st century.

Vessels flying the flags of places like Liberia, Panama and the Marshall Islands usually have smaller multinational crews that stay at sea for longer periods, even as the value of the cargo aboard their ships — sometimes surpassing 20,000 containers — grows ever higher. U.S. flagships have more robust crews — a minimum of 22 — and all mariners take an oath of allegiance to the United States. Foreign crews shouldn't be allowed near armaments and supplies the Pentagon uses in fighting wars, Buzby said. "They could sabotage equipment or have access to classified equipment and systems," Buzby said. Or "just be slow or nonexistent about delivering it." One member of Congress described the shortfall in merchant ships as a weak flank in the nation's defense posture, and referred to one of the epic battles from World War II, saying it would have been a lost cause in today's conditions. "It's debatable whether the Marines, if they were to land on the shores of Guadalcanal, would they be able to have supplies for the second month? The answer is, probably not," said Rep. John Garamendi, a California Democrat and the ranking member of a House Transportation subcommittee that deals with maritime issues.

Crises over the U.S. Merchant Marine date as far back as the Civil War when the North rushed to charter vessels to help blockade Southern ports. Decades later, chaotic scenes unfolded at the port of Tampa in the run-up to the

1898 Spanish-American War as authorities tried feverishly to charter vessels to transport Col. Theodore Roosevelt and his 25,000 Rough Riders to Cuba. In the end, only 16,000 men would fit aboard the limited vessels. Less than two decades later, the U.S. government found itself with little means to transport an expeditionary force to Europe in World War I, and “had to requisition, scavenge and steal to get the vessels,” said Salvatore Mercogliano, a maritime historian at Campbell University in North Carolina. The ships also often face grave danger without the armaments to protect themselves or their cargo. By the end of World War II, 1,554 U.S. vessels lay at the bottom of the ocean, many of them sunk by German U-boats. Some 9,500 merchant mariners died, a rate of casualty that rivaled that of U.S. Marines for the early part of the war. After the wartime buildup, the U.S. boasted the largest Navy and Merchant Marine fleet in the world. Yet in the intervening years, U.S. shipping companies fell behind as global oceangoing trade grew a staggering twentyfold. U.S. flag vessels today carry only 2 percent of the \$1.8 trillion in goods and material that transit U.S. ports each year.

U.S. shipping companies say they cannot meet the ever-lower costs of foreign shipping companies from nations that subsidize shipbuilding, allow skeleton crews aboard vessels and offer rock-bottom salaries. Some 50,000 oceangoing trading vessels ply the seas today. The United States is not even among the top 20 maritime nations of the world in terms of gross tonnage. “They utilize Filipino, Indian, Chinese (crews from) low cost countries where the standard of living is far below that of the United States. They’ll go aboard a ship for six months straight,” said Thomas B. Crowley Jr., chairman and chief executive of a namesake shipping company that has headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida. “Companies would love to be able to fly the American flag. They know it’s better protection for them,” Mercogliano said. He pointed to a piracy attack on the U.S.-flagged MV Maersk Alabama off the coast of Somalia in 2009, made famous in the 2013 movie “Captain Phillips.” U.S. Navy snipers killed three Somali pirates as they sought to escape aboard the cargo ship’s lifeboat with the ship’s American captain, who was uninjured. U.S. flag vessels since that incident often sail with 50-caliber miniguns and security teams, especially when traveling in dangerous waters.

U.S. shippers cite the hypercompetitive global market as one factor in their decline. But they also say they’ve been hurt by fluctuating government policies, drastically reduced shipments of U.S. food aid abroad and the sharp drawdown of U.S. military forces abroad after the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1989. “It’s been an 80 percent reduction in the overall global (U.S. military) footprint since circa 1990,” said Eric P. Ebeling, chief executive of American Roll-on Roll-off Carrier Group out of Woodcliff Lake, N.J., the third-largest U.S. flag carrier in international trade. “When cargo goes down, that’s less cargo on U.S. flagships.” Experts say the problem is not only about a dwindling number of ships. As the U.S. maritime industry shrinks, so does the number of mariners, who find fewer jobs and stay in them for fewer years, allowing mandatory periodic licensing to lapse once they leave. This makes emergency call-ups problematic. “We’ll run out of people before we run out of ships,” Buzby said. He noted that a report to Congress submitted last year by a Maritime Administration working group found that the nation would face a shortfall of 1,800 mariners once a major war dragged toward six months.

The United States is the only nation in the world that can deploy large military forces anywhere, anytime, a conflict looms. The Pentagon has positioned supplies and armaments around the world. Once a deployment occurs, a subsequent “surge” from the Military Sealift Command, which has 15 vessels, would take more supplies. Behind them would sail any of the 46 government-owned ships of what is known as the Ready Reserve Force, many of them on five- or 10-day notice, ready to load and head to war. The average ship in the Ready Reserve Force is 43 years old. While some of the ships are lightly used, sitting in harbor waiting for a future fight, 26 of the vessels are steam-powered, a largely obsolete propulsion technology that nonetheless requires a workforce of 491 steamship qualified engineers. The Pentagon has plans to keep a few specialized ships operating past age 60. “They are old, they are declining and they are rusting out,” Garamendi said. The vessels are strategically placed around the country, awaiting deployment. One of them, the Cape Washington, a roll-on, roll-off ship built in Poland in 1982, is now docked in Baltimore harbor. The ship could be packed with as many as 1,000 Humvees, hundreds of M1 tanks, or numerous Sikorsky CH-53 heavy-lift helicopters.

U.S. flag commercial vessels would be the final — but equally critical — component of sustaining foreign battle. Of the 81 commercial deep-water U.S. flag vessels in the Merchant Marine, 60 or so ships take part in the Maritime Security Program, which gives them an annual stipend of \$5 million to be ready within days if called to service. “They’ll start doing the bucket brigade of ammunition and follow-on supplies and everything else,” Buzby said. “It’s not just one push. It’s the sustainment. That’s what enables a combat force to keep going.” Over the years, legislators have crafted a patchwork of incentives to keep the Merchant Marine afloat, if on life support. Among them:

- Cargo preference laws require 100 percent of Pentagon cargo be delivered on U.S. flag vessels as well as all cargo resulting from government loans or credit guarantees. Another quota exists for other U.S. government cargo, if shipping rates are deemed fair and reasonable. In a war, many of these U.S. flag ships would be diverted from civilian activity.
- Another regulation, known as the Jones Act, requires that goods moved by water wholly within the United States or among its territories must travel on U.S.-built, U.S.-owned vessels and staffed by U.S. crew. Puerto Ricans angry at delays in the arrival of relief supplies following Hurricane Maria last September blamed the Jones Act for exorbitant shipping costs. The White House eventually waived the Jones Act for 10 days.

But shippers have voiced frustration that legislators have tinkered with the rules, making their own long-term planning difficult. In 2012, Congress reduced the quota for U.S. flag vessels from 75 percent to 50 percent for U.S. food aid headed overseas. In late 2015 it lifted a four-decade ban on the export of U.S. energy production. The move allowed foreign vessels to load their holds with U.S. crude or liquefied natural gas (LNG) and export it. “It would be helpful to have better long-term certainty of the programs we’re in,” Ebeling said, adding that the \$5 million stipend per U.S. ship is set to expire in 2025. “That’s only seven years away. When we’re going out to buy replacement ships, those are 30-year assets that we’re buying. And they may cost upwards, depending on vessel type, of \$70, \$80, \$90, even \$100 million per ship,” Ebeling said. One move is afoot to stimulate shipyards by again requiring some energy exports to sail on U.S. flag vessels. Garamendi said he will introduce a bill in the House later this month that would require a growing percentage of LNG and other energy exports to move on U.S.-built ships, starting at only 1 percent and slowly rising to 30 percent. “We would simultaneously rebuild the American fleet and the ability of our shipyards to produce blue water ships,” Garamendi said. [Source: McClatchy Washington Bureau | Tim Johnson | May 15, 2018 ++]

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## Have You Heard? ► Leo and Frank | Lessons

Two 90-year old guys, Leo and Frank, had been friends all of their lives. When it was clear that Leo was dying, Frank visited him every day. One day Frank said 'Leo, we both loved playing baseball all our lives, and we played all through High School. Please do me one favor: when you get to Heaven, somehow you must let me know if there's baseball there.' Leo looked up at Frank from his deathbed and said, 'Frank you've been my best friend for many years. If it's at all possible, I'll do this favor for you.' Shortly after that, Leo passed on. A few nights later, Frank was awakened from a sound sleep by a blinding flash of white light and a voice calling out to him 'Frank...

Frank. 'Who is it?' asked Frank sitting up suddenly. 'Who is it?'

'Leo-- it's me, Leo.'

'You're not Leo, Leo just died.' 'I'm telling you, it's me, Leo' insisted the voice.

'Leo! ....Where are you?'

'In Heaven,' replied Leo. 'I have some really good news and a little bad news.'

'Tell me the good news first,' said Frank.

'The good news,' Leo said, 'is that there's baseball in Heaven. Better yet all of our old buddies who died before us are here, too. Better than that, we're all young again. Better still, it's always springtime, and it never rains or snows. And best of all, we can play baseball all we want, and we never get tired.'

'That's fantastic,' said Frank 'It's beyond my wildest dreams! So what's the bad news?'  
'You're pitching Tuesday.'

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### **Lesson 1 :**

A priest offered a Nun a lift.

She got in and crossed her legs, forcing her gown to reveal a leg.

The priest nearly had an accident.

After controlling the car, he stealthily slid his hand up her leg.

The nun said, 'Father, remember Psalm 129?'

The priest removed his hand. But, changing gears, he let his hand slide up her leg again. The nun once again said, 'Father, remember Psalm 129?'

The priest apologized 'Sorry sister, but the flesh is weak.'

Arriving at the convent, the nun sighed heavily and went on her way.

On his arrival at the church, the priest rushed to look up Psalm 129. It said, 'Go forth and seek, further up, you will find glory.'

### **Moral of the story:**

If you are not well informed in your job, you might miss a great opportunity.

### **Lesson 2 :**

A sales rep, an administration clerk, and the manager are walking to lunch when they find an antique oil lamp.

They rub it and a Genie comes out. The Genie says, 'I'll give each of you just one wish.'

'Me first! Me first!' says the admin clerk, 'I want to be in the Bahamas, driving a speedboat, without a care in the world.' Poof! She's gone.

'Me next! Me next!' says the sales rep. 'I want to be in Hawaii, relaxing on the beach with my personal masseuse, an endless supply of Pina Colodas, and the love of my life.' Poof! He's gone.

'OK, you're up,' the Genie says to the manager. The manager says, 'I want those two back in the office after lunch.'

### **Moral of the story:**

Always let your boss have the first say.

### **Lesson 3 :**

An eagle was sitting on a tree resting, doing nothing.

A small rabbit saw the eagle and asked him, 'Can I also sit like you and do nothing?' The eagle answered: 'Sure, why not?'

So, the rabbit sat on the ground below the eagle and rested. All of a sudden, a fox appeared, jumped on the rabbit and ate it.

### **Moral of the story:**

To be sitting and doing nothing, you must be sitting very, very high up.

### **Lesson 4 :**

A turkey was chatting with a bull. 'I would love to be able to get to the top of that tree' sighed the turkey, 'but I haven't got the energy.'

'Well, why don't you nibble on some of my droppings?' replied the bull. 'It's full of nutrients.'

The turkey pecked at a lump of dung, and found it actually gave him enough strength to reach the lowest branch of the tree.

The next day, after eating some more dung, he reached the second branch.

Finally after a fourth night, the turkey was proudly perched at the top of the tree.

He was promptly spotted by a farmer, who shot him out of the tree.

**Moral of the story:**

Bull Shit might get you to the top, but it won't keep you there.

**Lesson 5 :**

A little bird was flying south for the winter. It was so cold the bird froze and fell to the ground into a large field.

While he was lying there, a cow came by and dropped some dung on him.

As the frozen bird lay there in the pile of cow dung, he began to realize how warm he was.

The dung was actually thawing him out!

He lay there all warm and happy, and soon began to sing for joy. A passing cat heard the bird singing and came to investigate.

Following the sound, the cat discovered the bird under the pile of cow dung, and promptly dug him out and ate him.

**Moral of the story:**

- (1) Not everyone who shits on you is your enemy.
- (2) Not everyone who gets you out of shit is your friend.
- (3) And when you're in deep shit, it's best to keep your mouth shut!

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**Quote for the Week:**

**“When soldiers have been baptized in the fire of a battlefield, they have all one rank in my eyes.”**

— **Napoleon Bonaparte**



I was in Kroger, and I said to this lady, "I can't find my wife, can I talk to you for a few minutes?" She said, "Sure you can, but how will that help?" I said, "I'll bet you anything she'll appear out of nowhere".



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1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,823 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.

2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addressee you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

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6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addressee [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either [www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html](http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html) (PDF Edition), [www.veteransresources.org](http://www.veteransresources.org) (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addressee from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

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