

# RAO BULLETIN

1 December 2021

PDF Edition



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## **NOTE**

1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title.
2. To read the articles, open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.
3. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written to date on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) 'or' [raoemo77@gmail.com](mailto:raoemo77@gmail.com).
4. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin or articles to other vets or veteran organizations.
5. Current and previous 2 Bulletins can be viewed at <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html>

**DoD**



## **NDAA 2022**

### **Update 07: Push to Fix OTH Discharges & Troops-to-Teachers**

The process for upgrading so-called “bad paper” discharges could get a speed boost while a Pentagon program that helps transitioning service members work as teachers could be restored if some veteran groups and lawmakers have their way. Advocates are pushing to include the changes in the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDA), currently awaiting action on Capitol Hill.

On 9 NOV, Sens. Gary Peters (D-MI) and Steve Daines (R-MT) offered an amendment to the proposed \$740 billion-plus NDA to reduce the growing backlog of discharge upgrade reviews for veterans diagnosed with post traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. Other than honorable discharges can render service members ineligible for a range of Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, including mental health treatment, GI Bill education benefits and VA home loans. Service members without an honorable discharge also are often at a disadvantage in seeking employment.

The backlog of petitions for discharge upgrades before military service review boards has continued to grow despite a 2016 law that ordered the services to give “liberal consideration” to upgrades to service members diagnosed with PTSD or TBI who received “other than honorable” discharges. In a press release, Peters charged that foot-dragging by the Defense Department and inconsistent review processes used by the military services are causing those delays. As an example, Peters said that the Naval Discharge Review Board in 2015 took an average of five

months to reach a decision on a petition, but by 2020, it took 21 months. He added that "no veteran suffering from PTSD or TBI should lose access to the benefits they've earned."

Much of the delay can be attributed to the logjam at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), on requests for records to support claims on disability, health care and other benefits, as well as the documentation needed to support discharge upgrade petitions. In a 4 OCT letter to the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform, David Ferriero, the head of NARA, said that "the backlog of public requests stands at over 550,000" at the NPRC but did not give a breakdown on how many of those requests involved discharge upgrades.

The amendment proposed by Peters and Daines would set up an "Interagency Discharge Review Board Task Force" to recommend ways of speeding up the review process. It would also require the service review boards to notify petitioners within 30 days on whether their case has been accepted for review or rejected. In the struggle to pass the NDAA, the discharge upgrade proposal would have to be approved by the Senate for inclusion in the overall bill, and the Senate version would then have to be reconciled with the House version.

Meanwhile, the American Legion and other veteran organizations also called for revival of the Troops to Teachers program, which was allowed to sunset 30 SEP 2021. Rolled out in 1994, the program provided transitioning service members and veterans seeking careers in education up to \$10,000 and help earning state teacher certificates. It was originally administered by the Department of Education but was transferred to the Pentagon in 2013. The program has put more than 23,000 veterans into classrooms nationwide. Pentagon officials announced early this year that the program would be allowed to expire and its \$15 million in annual funding reallocated to support the National Defense Strategy aimed at countering China and Russia. Service members and veterans interested in teaching were directed to programs within the Department of Education.

The American Legion said in a release that allowing that program to expire was "bad for students, veterans and the country." And in a letter last month to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and other groups urged Congress to restart the program within DoD. "Studies have shown that Troops to Teachers educators fill thousands of vacancies in high-needs schools and subject areas," and "even have a positive effect on increasing student likelihood to serve," the letter said.

In an interview, John Kamin, legislative director for the American Legion, said DoD had taken a "myopic view" in allowing the expiration of a program that was beneficial to veterans and to students, adding that "it doesn't make sense on a cost level." Retired Navy Senior Chief Jon Altman, who went through the Troops to Teachers program and now is teaching in Phoenix, said: "We're better prepared from the military to go into the classrooms. We're trained to stick with the mission. We're fulfilling a need. "Someone should look at this and kick somebody in the butt,"

Altman said. "This is a good program. There's a need for us" in the education system, and "I think we bring something to the table." Revival of that program has been approved by the Senate.

Congress early this month failed to pass the NDAA for fiscal year 2022, which began in October, on time as both the House and Senate were consumed by bitter infighting over President Joe Biden's huge spending proposals on infrastructure, social programs and efforts to fight climate change. The failure of timely passage of the NDAA was the 12th time in 13 years that Congress could not agree on a final version of the defense policy bill by the 1 OCT start of the new fiscal year, according to the Government Accountability Office. The result was yet another continuing resolution (CR) that forced DoD to keep spending at 2021 levels, set to expire on 3 DEC.

The Troops to Teachers and discharge upgrades proposals were among more than 700 amendments to the NDAA and faced long odds of surviving in the race to get agreement on a bill between the House and Senate. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) succeeded 17 NOV in getting an 84-15 vote to begin floor debate on the NDAA, but only after agreeing to delink the NDAA from a separate measure aimed at improving U.S. ability to compete with China.

In a floor speech 18 NOV, Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, acknowledged rumors that the House-Senate impasse could result in a year-long continuing resolution on the NDAA and warned of the dangers of keeping DoD spending at 2021 levels. Reed said his own estimate of the impact of a CR that dragged on for a year was that the Defense Department "would lose \$36 billion, and the consequences of that will be staggering." At a Pentagon news conference 17 NOV, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said "we're saddled with last year's budget" under the CR and as a result "can't create any new starts" on the technology upgrades and programs vital to maintain the U.S. edge over China and Russia. [Source: Mil.com | Richard Sisk | November 19, 2021 ++]

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## **AOIMSG**

### **New Organization to Search for Answers about Mysterious Sky Objects**



Faced with growing concerns about mysterious objects in the sky, especially over military installations and training ranges, the Pentagon has created a new organization to search for answers about where they came from and what threats they may pose. Formerly the purview of the Navy, the investigations into unidentified aerial phenomenon will now be conducted by the **Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronization Group**, nested in the office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence & Security.

“Incursions by any airborne object into our [Special Use Airspace] pose safety of flight and operations security concerns, and may pose national security challenges,” the Pentagon said in a statement 23 NOV announcing the change. “DOD takes reports of incursions — by any airborne object, identified or unidentified — very seriously, and investigates each one.” Special Use Airspace, according to the Federal Aviation Administration, includes areas over military bases, training ranges and national security areas. This decision to create the new organization with the unwieldy acronym of AOIMSG, was ordered by Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, “in close collaboration with the Director of National Intelligence,” the Pentagon said. It comes in the wake of a June report by the ODNI into objects in the sky that found no explanation for 143 of 144 incidents reviewed.

While investigators found no extraterrestrial links in reviewing those sightings of aircraft or other devices apparently flying at mysterious speeds or trajectories, they also came up with no conclusions. Instead, the report highlighted the need for better data collection about what’s increasingly seen by Democrats and Republicans as a national security concern. In all but one of the sightings investigated, there was too little information for investigators to even broadly characterize the nature of the incident. There were 18 cases in which witnesses saw “unusual” patterns of movement or flight characteristics, the report said. But more analysis was needed to determine if those sightings represented “breakthrough” technology, the report added.

“It is critical that the United States maintain operations security and safety at DoD ranges,” Hicks said in a 25 JUN memo. “To this end, it is equally critical that all U.S. military aircrews or government personnel report whenever aircraft or other devices interfere with military training. This includes the observation and reporting of UAPs.” The report, said Hicks, “also confirmed that the scope of UAP activity expands significantly beyond the purview of the Secretary of the Navy, who heads the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force (UAPTF), and suggested process improvements to ensure timely collection of consistent data on UAP.”

AOIMSG “will synchronize efforts across the Department and the broader U.S. government to detect, identify and attribute objects of interests in Special Use Airspace (SUA), and to assess and mitigate any associated threats to safety of flight and national security,” the Pentagon statement said Tuesday night. Overseeing that will be another organization with an unwieldy acronym within the USD(I&S), called the Airborne Object Identification and Management Executive Council. AOIMEXEC will be comprised of DoD and Intelligence Community members, and will “offer a venue for U.S. government interagency representation.”

The June report also identified the need to make improvements in processes, policies, technologies and training to “improve our ability to understand UAP,” the Pentagon said. In the coming weeks, the DoD will issue “implementing guidance,” which will provide details about who will direct the AOIMSG, as well as its organizational structure, authorities and resourcing. [Source: Howard Altman November 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Army Email Transition**

### **Update 02: No One to Go Without Email Services**

The Army’s CIO has defended his decision to buy fewer Microsoft Office 365 licenses than the number of people in the Army, saying that no one will go without email services and that the move could save the branch \$150 million. Army CIO Raj Iyer told FedScoop that the service is working on alternative solutions for junior enlisted members and others who will not get access to the full suite of services in the Army’s transition to a new Microsoft Office 365-based back-office enterprise cloud system. He also said the decision to buy only 1.2 million licenses for the roughly 1.4 million people who work in the department was intentional to save money and buy only what he said will be used. “Every user in the Army would have access to some form of communications,” Iyer said of the decision.

The Army is transitioning away from the current Defense Enterprise Email system that is set to expire in March 2022 as the Department of Defense adopts remote work-capable back-office enterprise systems across the military. It’s been branded as DOD365 — and Army 365, in the Army’s case — as the system is largely based on Microsoft’s popular Office 365 product, but with additional cybersecurity measures in place.

The DOD created its first remote work platform based on Microsoft cloud software with the creation of the Commercial Virtual Remote environment, a temporary measure to allow remote work during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to Office 365 tools was started years ago through the development of the Defense Enterprise Office Solution (DEOS) cloud contract. The DOD sunset the CVR environment over the summer in anticipation of moving users to the more robust 365 environments.

Iyer said he came to his decision to buy fewer licenses than the number of personnel after he spoke with enlisted soldiers on his recent travels, concluding that many in the Army don’t use their email tools or prefer other communication methods like chat. Iyer said data shows that about 150,000 Army email inboxes had not been accessed by users over the past six months. “Giving everyone a full-fledged Office license is not the best way to go, because it is way too expensive,” Iyer said. “Depending upon the role that you are in, you are going to get a certain type of software to get your job done.”

In the place of Office 365 licenses, the Army is working on an alternative email-only solution to provide email services to anyone who wants them, he said, adding that those alternatives might not be Microsoft-based. Iyer estimates the Army will save \$150 million by segmenting which services users are given. That money is going to be redirected to implement the service’s zero-trust strategy and new cybersecurity tools to allow users to access email and office tools from non-government devices. While some users will be on different email systems, especially until Defense Enterprise Email sunsets next year, “there should be no issues with them communicating with each other,” Iyer said, because the Army established a global address directory database to ensure seamless connections across the different systems.

In November 2022, the Army is going to be moving to a consumption-based pricing model for services that Iyer hopes will save even more. Iyer told FedScoop the Army is also developing a Bring Your Own Device policy that will allow soldiers, civilians and contractors to use their own laptops and phones to check email when working remotely. The Army is going to prioritize reservists and National Guard members in fiscal 2022 so they are not forced to report to a government building just to check email. By moving to a BYOD policy, more people will have access to email and collaboration tools, and save money on device purchases, Iyer said. “Once we get a BYOD solution in place, we no longer need to procure laptops,” he said.

On top of this, the Army is moving its email infrastructure to the cloud. Making these new systems cloud-based means the service’s email can bypass the DOD’s Non-classified Internet Protocol Router Network (NIPRNet), Iyer said. Instead of in on-premise data centers, the systems will be hosted on the Army’s cARMY cloud system, supported by the Army’s Enterprise Cloud Management Agency (ECMA). [Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | November 8, 2021 ++]

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## **Afghan Withdrawal**

### **Update 21: State Dept. Denying US Troop Afghan Family Members US Entry**



**Homeland Security Department has vetted some Afghan family members of U.S. troops and Defense Department civilians, but none so far have been eligible for legal immigration to the U.S.**

The Defense Department has received about 60 requests from service members and department civilians to get their family members out of Afghanistan and legally into the United States,

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on 15 NOV, but none of them qualify for an immediate legal residency status. The requests came through an inbox set up in early November. Over the course of the 20-year war in Afghanistan, many Afghan-born immigrants joined the U.S. military or became DoD civilians and contractors, while members of their family have remained in the country.

Information sent to that inbox is then passed onto the State Department, which is in charge of efforts to get any remaining U.S. citizens or Afghan allies out of the Taliban-controlled country. “Thus far, of the ones that have been studied and reviewed, they are not eligible for parole status,” Kirby said. State is working with DoD, the Homeland Security Department, as well as advocacy groups and non-profits to identify people who want to leave the country and help coordinate their arrival in the United States, according to a State spokesman. But details aren’t available on what kind of special consideration, if any, these family members might have in the evacuation and immigration process, or who the program is designed to benefit.

“We are not going to detail the specifics of our coordination and operations at this time,” a State spokesman told Military Times on 19 NOV, when asked whether that coordination involved physical extraction from Afghanistan or assistance for those who are able to escape on their own. In general, spouses and children of U.S. citizens are eligible to come to the U.S. under these circumstances, though State would not say whether that means physical transportation, priority in processing or any other benefit. They do get priority for State-coordinated flights out of the country, according to someone familiar with the process, along with American citizens and legal permanent residents, as well as those who are in the Special Immigrant Visa pipeline.

In order to make that happen, they need to have proper documentation, including passports. Neither DoD nor State were able to say what precisely is preventing family members from receiving temporary legal status, or whether the barriers to it are temporary, provided they can get their paperwork in order. A DHS spokesman did not return a request for information about what would qualify these Afghan family members for parole, a temporary legal status that allows immigrants to stay in the U.S. while their cases are adjudicated.

In this case, family members might qualify for a type of parole granted because of “humanitarian or significant public benefit,” which is awarded on a case by case basis, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website. The burden of proof is on the applicant to prove “whether or not the circumstances are pressing,” which includes, “the effect of the circumstances on the individual’s welfare and wellbeing; and the degree of suffering that may result if parole is not authorized.” So these family members would have to prove that they are in imminent, overwhelming danger by staying in Afghanistan, presumably above and beyond any danger the entire population of Afghanistan faces under Taliban rule.

The denials don’t mean all is lost for these family members. There are options through the State Department, including asylum status through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Programs for Afghans who were employed by the U.S. government or U.S.-based media organizations. “We

continue to receive and process submissions for Afghans who may be eligible for referral to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Programs through a P1 or P2 referral,” the spokespersons said. “We will continue to support Afghans in as many ways as we can by providing humanitarian assistance in partnership with the international community.” The challenge is that the process can take between a year to 18 months to complete, and applicants have to leave Afghanistan to start the process.

“We recognize that it is currently extremely difficult for Afghans to obtain a passport or a visa to a third country or find a way to enter a third country, and like many refugees, may face significant challenges fleeing to safety,” the spokesperson said, adding, “We continue to call for safe passage for all those who wish to leave Afghanistan, and we have been very public about advocacy to other countries to respect the principle of non-refoulement and to allow entry for Afghans seeking protection. There are a number of countries that have been very generous in supporting relocated Afghans, with which we have been coordinating.” Those countries include neighboring Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran.

As of Nov. 17, roughly 45,000 of the 80,000 Afghans evacuated from Kabul during August are still being housed at military installations as they finish screenings and wait for longer-term housing assignments. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | November 23, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Vaccination Program**

### **Update 03: Oklahoma National Guard Vaccine Revolt**

By refusing to abide by the Defense Department’s mandate that all service members get vaccinated for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the governor of Oklahoma and the head of the state’s National Guard have endangered the lives of countless troops and prolonged this miserable pandemic. Yet Pentagon leaders do not seem to appreciate that this act of defiance is extremely dangerous, especially if other states follow suit.

Army Brig. Gen. Thomas Mancino, the Oklahoma National Guard’s newly installed adjutant general, recently issued a memo at the behest of Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt that exempts Oklahoma National troops from the Defense Department’s COVID-19 vaccine mandate. Stitt has framed the issue around “personal freedoms,” arguing in a Nov. 1 letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin that the vaccine requirement forces Oklahoma National Guardsmen “to potentially sacrifice their personal beliefs in order to not lose their jobs.”

It is worth noting that Stitt has not raised objections to any of the other 17 vaccinations that service members are required to get for diseases such as Anthrax, Chickenpox, Polio, Rabies, Typhoid, and Measles, Mumps, and Rubella. The governor also wrote that up to 800 Oklahoma National Guardsmen, or 10% of the entire force, have indicated they will refuse to get vaccinated for COVID-19. “It is irresponsible for the federal government to place mandatory vaccine

obligations on Oklahoma national guardsmen which could potentially limit the number of individuals that I can call upon to assist the state during an emergency,” Stitt wrote.

But Eugene Fidell, who teaches military law at New York University Law School, described Stitt’s comments about protecting the personal freedoms of Oklahoma National Guard troops as a “dog whistle” that is meant to appeal to former President Donald Trump and his supporters. “The provocation here is from the state,” said Fidell, president emeritus of the National Institute of Military Justice. “The federal government hasn’t provoked anybody. This is a health and welfare measure that everybody knows makes sense and people are resisting this for no good reason. This is politics by other means. This is Trumpism manifesting itself in the state Guard.”

While the Defense Department could force Oklahoma National Guard troops to comply with the vaccine mandate by putting them on federal orders, federal taxpayers would end up footing the bill, Fidell said. The Pentagon has other options available to deal with National Guard troops who refuse to get vaccinated, including slowing their promotions and withdrawing their federal recognition, which affect their retirement benefits, he said. “If the federal government plays hardball, which I think it should, these people are going to pay a penalty,” Fidell said.

On 17 NOV, a defense official told reporters that the COVID-19 vaccine requirement is one of the conditions that National Guard troops must meet in order to maintain their federal recognition, but he indicated the Defense Department is not enthusiastic about exacting a penalty on Guardsmen who refuse to get vaccinated. “It’s not a question of authorities necessarily to compel and punish people,” said the defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity per the Pentagon’s rules for the discussion. “It’s establishing a requirement in order to maintain readiness and to be able to be part of and participate in the National Guard.”

So far, defense officials have said little about how they could override Stitt and Mancino. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby has told reporters the Defense Department “will respond to the governor appropriately.” “That said, Secretary Austin believes that a vaccinated force is a more ready force,” Kirby said at a 17 NOV Pentagon news briefing. “That is why he has ordered mandatory vaccines for the total force, and that includes our National Guard, who contribute significantly to national missions at home and abroad.”

While Kirby’s words here are both calm and nuanced, they are not likely to change any minds in Oklahoma City. Meanwhile, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro appeared to waffle on the Marine Corps’ requirement that all active-duty Marines be vaccinated by 28 NOV when he said recently that all unvaccinated Marines would not be separated on the day of the deadline. This is not the time for the Pentagon to equivocate on vaccines. The COVID-19 outbreak has now cost the lives of more than 764,000 Americans, including 75 service members. Of the troops who have died from the disease, 28% belonged to the National Guard, which only makes up 19% of the entire military, according to the Washington Post.

The National Guard is constantly being mobilized in response to every type of problem imaginable, including natural disasters, protests, and the U.S. military’s mission to the southern

border. National Guard troops have even driven school buses when needed. If the Guard is to continue to serve as the duct tape that can fix any problem, it needs every soldier and airman that it can muster. The COVID-19 vaccine will ensure that enough National Guard troops are ready the next time the nation dials 911. [Source: Task & Purpose | Jeff Schogol (Opinion) | November 20, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse** **Reported NOV 16 thru 30, 2021**



For the past several years, **Leonard Glenn Francis** — the figure at the center of the Navy’s worst corruption scandal in modern history — has been under house arrest in San Diego, eschewing interview requests and biding his time until his role as government cooperator is over. Now, for reasons that aren’t entirely clear, Francis has opened the floodgates. He secretly recorded a podcast with a Singapore-based journalist, offering for the first time publicly his own account of the bribery scandal that has rocked the Navy, led to the prosecution of dozens of military officials and put hundreds more under scrutiny.

The nine-part podcast, which began releasing episodes 4 OCT, came as a shock to many people involved in the ongoing case. It has also put attorneys on edge with the blockbuster criminal trial of six naval officers in San Diego — and Francis’ anticipated debut on the stand as a star witness for the prosecution — just a few months away. (An attorney indicated last week in court that a seventh officer will be pleading guilty before trial.) On 18 NOV, the San Diego federal judge overseeing the case authorized the defense team to subpoena New York-based podcast production company Audiation for all recordings from the project. Audiation, which partnered on the podcast with Project Brazen and PRX, did not respond to the Union-Tribune’s request for comment.

With the last episode expected to air this week and trial looming, defense attorneys for the naval officers declined to comment on the podcast or any of the statements made by Francis, who pleaded guilty in 2015 and has yet to be sentenced. The U.S. attorney's office also declined to comment. It is unclear how this latest development might reshape the case. The podcast, titled "Fat Leonard," is a nod to Francis' imposing physique and longtime nickname in military circles in ports across Southeast Asia. It partly repackages what has become a familiar set of facts, detailing how Francis bribed Navy officials with lavish gifts, five-star resort stays, gourmet dinners and the services of prostitutes in exchange for confidential military information to gain a competitive edge for his business, Glenn Defense Marine Asia. His ship-husbanding company supplied Navy ships with security, water, trash removal and other supplies — services for which he frequently overbilled. He's admitted to cheating the Navy out of at least \$35 million.

For those who have been closely following the ongoing legal saga, the podcast offers some new revelations, including that Francis kept sex videotapes of Navy officers with prostitutes, that he lives with his three Malaysian children while under house arrest and that Chinese spies may have hacked into his trove of secrets just before his arrest. In the recorded interviews with former Wall Street Journal reporter Tom Wright, Francis at times exudes the charisma and command that gained him access to the Navy's top brass, as well as the street cred that earned him the respect of the lower ranks. At other times during the podcast, Francis' voice is raspy and a bit labored, hinting at the battle with cancer he's been waging.

- He nonchalantly justifies those sex tapes, which he claims to still have boxed up in storage: "I'm not making porn. It's always great to see people when they're drunk, what they're capable of doing. ... I kept it more for entertainment."
- He brags about the command he held as a civilian over the Navy's 7th Fleet: "Everybody was in my pocket. I had them in my hand, rolling them around."
- And he complains about being singled out as the story's villain: "I've done a lot for the last 30 years, supporting hundreds if not thousands of ships, hundreds of thousands of sailors and Marines, in all kinds of places. I never brought any harm to the United States. This was just financial matter. It was not me hurting anybody."

One thing Francis hasn't offered in the podcast: remorse. Since Francis' arrest in a San Diego hotel room in 2013, numerous media outlets have asked for — and been denied — interviews, including the Union-Tribune. But Francis last year apparently began shopping around for someone to tell his life story. Wright and another former Wall Street Journal colleague, Bradley Hope, had just authored the book "Billion Dollar Whale" about a massive fraud against the Malaysian government, and the reporting partners were looking for a project for their new journalism studio and production company, Project Brazen.

A source from the book who also knew Francis offered to put Wright in touch. "I don't believe Leonard talked to his lawyers at all about his decision to talk to me," Wright said in a recent

interview with the Union-Tribune from his home in Singapore. The podcast asserts that Francis was prohibited from speaking as part of his plea agreement. However, nothing in the plea document filed publicly with the court prohibits him from speaking with the media or talking about the case in general. Francis' San Diego-based defense attorney Devin Burstein declined to answer several questions posed by the Union-Tribune, citing attorney-client privilege and the ongoing case. But he confirmed that Francis' decision to participate in the podcast "has no effect whatsoever on his plea agreement."

Even now, Wright said Francis' motivation for talking remains somewhat of a mystery, given the pending trial and uncertainty of his own sentence. He faces up to 25 years in prison. "Maybe it's megalomania, or partly boredom," Wright said. "I think he's trying to drop a neutron bomb on the Navy." Pulling off the podcast would have been extremely unlikely if Francis had been in a federal lockup. Phone access is iffy, depending on the detention center, and the audio quality would have been poor for a podcast anyway. In-person visits would have been out of the question during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Francis had been initially detained upon arrest, after a judge found him to be a flight risk, but he was later released on medical furlough as his health declined. He lives in an apartment in an undisclosed location and is monitored by a GPS bracelet. Burstein said Francis is living "under very stringent conditions approved by the court" but declined to provide specifics that have been spelled out in sealed court filings. To equip Francis for the podcast, the production team sent a high-quality microphone to a person who delivers Francis supplies. With a makeshift studio in place, Wright and Francis spent hours talking long-distance over a podcasting app, from February to September.

Francis frequently shifts between braggadocious storytelling and an insistence that the Navy is ultimately to blame for unofficially sanctioning a corrupt system. Through his interviews, Francis characterizes himself as a scapegoat betrayed by the Navy — an institution that has long depended on local contractors like him to be a buffer in foreign ports and get the job done, even if the means are less than savory. Kickbacks and corruption are just part of the game, and everyone knows it, he argues. "It's a huge risk for me to do what I'm doing," Francis tells Wright of his decision to do the podcast. "But I'm so upset that I'm portrayed as the bad guy when I'm not the bad guy. I've done everything they wanted me to do."

The podcast, which is interwoven with interviews of Navy whistleblowers, addresses the Navy's unwillingness early on to rein in Francis despite several red flags, as well as to correct a culture of misogyny among the ranks that continues to fester long after the Tailhook sexual misconduct scandal of the early 1990s. The podcast also looks at the fallout of the current investigation and points to high-ranking officials who were not disciplined — and even promoted — despite Francis' claims of bribing them. Many of those accused officials have adamantly denied any inappropriate interactions with Francis or his company. A Pentagon spokesperson declined to comment on the podcast, citing the ongoing case.

While Francis insists he remained loyal to the United States, Wright suggests the national security threat of a foreign contractor compromising so many military personnel was greater than has been publicly acknowledged. Francis admits to being courted by Chinese and Russian diplomats in Singapore. And later, as Francis became aware of the U.S. investigation closing in on him, he moved his files — records that potentially included U.S. military secrets — to a Chinese server. That server was hacked by the Chinese government, the podcast’s final episode will report, according to Wright. Wright said he, like many who have interacted with Francis before him, was at first charmed by the big personality. But the journalist also struck a nerve as he continued to dig into Francis’ personal life and questioned his views on women.

The tenor between host and interviewee takes a sharp turn at Episode 6, as Wright accuses Francis of being a misogynist. In the episode, Wright interviews one of Francis’ former mistresses — the mother of two of his children — who says Francis became jealous and abruptly dropped her from his life and kept her from her children. Francis’ mother took the children from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in 2013 when they were very young, and the children’s mother hasn’t seen them since or known of their whereabouts, despite two orders from foreign courts designating her as custodian, she says. At some point, the children, along with a child from another woman, came to live with Francis in San Diego while he remains under house arrest. “Everybody came legally,” Francis says in the podcast.

He says “Uncle Sam” knows what he’s doing, and suggests the U.S. government has allowed the children to live with him as a perk for his cooperation in the investigation. Burstein said that is “outright false.” Francis says the children are thriving in San Diego, but he grows increasingly angry as Wright challenges him about their mother. “I did not kidnap the kids. They were all just mistresses, and my children were legally born and they had my name and they are Malaysian citizens,” he tells Wright. The State Department, the agency that issues visas, said it does not provide information on visa holders when the Union-Tribune asked about what kind of visas the children have and if they were issued before or after Francis’ arrest. That conversation was the last between Wright and Francis.

Burstein would not disclose how his client feels about the final product, but the lawyer offered his personal opinion: “I think it lacks objectivity. I think it’s more hit piece than true journalism.” The story Wright ultimately told was likely not the one Francis had imagined, as the journalist honed in on the women affected — from Tailhook’s victims to the sex workers to the Navy wives to the mother of Francis’ children. “I see the whole podcast as a study of misogyny,” Wright said. “He’s been arrested for white collar crimes, but when it comes to the collateral damage caused by his actions — the women in this story — there has been no justice.” [Source: The San Diego Union-Tribune | Kristina Davis | November 22, 2021 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials**

**Reported NOV 16 thru 30, 2021 | 14**

“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 as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, 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 <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories> for a listing and details of the 141 accounted for in 2005. 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 1st Lt. John J. Heffernan, Jr., 24**, was assigned to 490th Bomb Squadron, 341st Bomb Group, 10th Air Force. On Feb. 22, 1944, the B-25G Mitchell bomber on which Heffernan was serving as a navigator burst into flames and crashed near Letpadaung. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. Interment services are pending. [Read about Heffernan](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2842881/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-heffernan-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2842881/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-heffernan-j> .

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Charles McMackin, 26**, of Boston, was assigned to 68th Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24 Liberator aircraft on which McMackin was serving as a bombardier crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. McMackin will be buried on April 14, 2022, in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. [Read about McMackin](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2317559/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mcmackin-c) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2317559/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mcmackin-c> .

-- **Army Cpl. Charles E. Lee, 18, Cincinnati**, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1950, after his unit was forced to retreat from the vicinity of Taejon, South Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Lee will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Lee](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2663104/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-lee-c/) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2663104/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-lee-c/> .

-- **Army Cpl. Kenneth R. Foreman, 19**, of Mount Orab, Ohio, was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, after a fighting withdrawal near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. He will be buried on Dec. 2, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Foreman](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2651162/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-foreman-k) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2651162/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-foreman-k> .

-- **Army Cpl. Leon E. Clevenger, 21**, of Durham, North Carolina, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on July 11, 1950, while involved in combat operations against the North Korean People's Army in the vicinity of Chonui and Choch'iwon, South Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Clevenger will be buried on Dec. 11, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Clevenger](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2651162/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-foreman-k) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2651162/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-foreman-k> .

[Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2011184/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-clevenger-l](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2011184/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-clevenger-l) .

-- **Army Pfc. Jack E. Lilley, 19**, was assigned to Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1950, after his unit was forced to retreat from the vicinity of Taejon, South Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lilley](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839970/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-lilley-j/) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839970/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-lilley-j/> .

-- **Army Pfc. Jimmy Rowland, 19**, was assigned to Heavy Mortar Company, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on July 16, 1950, while fighting North Korean forces along the Kum River north of Taejon, South Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rowland](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839919/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-rowland-j/) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839919/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-rowland-j/> .

-- **Army Pfc. Juan F. Gutierrez, 26**, of Santa Fe, New Mexico, was a member of 200th Coast Artillery Regiment, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands in December 1941. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of Corregidor Island in 1942. Gutierrez was among those captured and held at the Cabanatuan POW Camp, where he reportedly died on Nov. 19, 1942, and was buried. His remains were initially misidentified. He will be buried on Dec. 7, 2021, in Oakland, California. [Read about Gutierrez](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2522835/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-gutierrez-j/) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2522835/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-gutierrez-j/> .

-- **Army Pvt. Archie V. Fleeman, 19**, of Bell, California, was assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 11, 1944, after his unit was part of the Hürtgen Forest offensive, near Hürtgen, Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Fleeman will be buried in Oklahoma City. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Fleeman](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2791189/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-fleeman-a/) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2791189/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-fleeman-a/> .

-- **Army Pvt. Edward M. Ryan, 33**, was assigned to Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 105th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division, which occupied defensive positions along the northwest coast of Saipan. He was reported killed in action on July 7, 1944. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ryan](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839774/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-ryan-e/) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839774/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-ryan-e/> .

-- **Army Sgt. Howard R. Belden, 19**, of Hague, New York, was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. He will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read](#)

about Belden at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2816347/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-belden-h>

-- **Army Sgt. Larry S. Wassil, 33**, of Bloomfield, New Jersey, was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 28, 1944, after his unit was part of the Hürtgen Forest offensive, near Hürtgen, Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Wassil will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Wassil](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2725495/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wassil-l) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2725495/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wassil-l>.

-- **Army Tech. Sgt. Ross H. Thompson, 50**, was assigned to the Finance Department, U.S. Army Forces Far East, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands in December 1941. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula in 1942. Thompson was among those captured and held at the Cabanatuan POW Camp, where he reportedly died on Dec. 10, 1942, and was buried. Interment services are pending. [Read about Thompson](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2847343/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-thompson-r) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2847343/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-thompson-r>.

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 2nd Class Lawrence J. Overlay, 21**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Overlay. Interment services are pending. [Read about Overlay](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2848566/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-overley-l) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2848566/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-overley-l>.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | November 2021 ++]

\* VA \*



## VA DEA Program

### Update 08: New Law | Spouses/Kids of 100% Vets Who Die Now Eligible

Children and spouses of veterans who die from service-connected injuries will be guaranteed in-state tuition rates under new legislation approved by Congress this week. The measure — the Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act — passed without objection in the House on 15 NOV. Senate lawmakers had approved the legislation back in June. The change is expected to affect about 150,000 surviving dependents, potentially saving them tens of thousands in higher education expenses each year.

It concerns beneficiaries using Veterans Affairs' Dependents' Educational Assistance Program. Through that benefit, spouses and children of 100-percent disabled veterans receive about \$1,200 a month to help cover the costs of tuition, housing expenses and book stipends. If a veteran dies from a service-connected disability (or died while on active duty prior to Sept. 11, 2001), beneficiaries can continue to receive that support. But unlike other education benefits for military survivors, DEA recipients aren't ensured in-state tuition rates when looking at colleges.

The difference between the in-state and out-of-state costs can be significant, and erase much of the financial support from the program. Lawmakers said the change is needed to bring the benefit in line with similar veteran support programs for survivors. "Members of our military and their families sacrifice so much in service to our country," said Rep. Barry Moore (R-AL), a sponsor of the bill. "As a grateful nation, we have accepted the responsibility to ensure that the educational needs of the survivors and dependents of our fallen heroes are provided for."

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) echoed those sentiments in a statement after the House vote. "We're one step away from expanding affordable, in-state tuition to survivors who deserve this critical support." The change had been a priority of numerous veterans groups in recent years. Bonnie Carroll, president and founder of the Tragedy Assistance Program For Survivors, praised the bill as "much needed legislation" that could be life changing for thousands of veterans' families. President Joe Biden is expected to sign it into law in coming days, but no timeline for that action has been announced. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 18, 2021 ++]

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## VA Maternity Care

### Update 02: Legislation to Improve Becomes Law

The Department of Veterans Affairs will be able to invest more in maternity care for female veterans and the federal government will be required to study the health of active-duty and former service members who have had babies or are trying to get pregnant after Congress passed legislation 16 NOV. The **Protecting Moms Who Served Act**, passed by the House in a 414-9

vote and now heading to President Joe Biden for a signature, allows the VA to spend \$15 million to improve coordination between the VA hospitals that treat female veterans and the community facilities that provide their obstetrics care.



The money also is intended for the VA to provide education and support for new moms, including childbirth and parenting classes, nutrition counseling, breast pumps and lactation support, according to the bill. Most important to bill sponsor and Army National Guard veteran Sen. Tammy Duckworth, however, the new law will require the Government Accountability Office to study the maternal health of female veterans -- a comprehensive look that Duckworth said is needed, given the high U.S. maternal mortality rates compared with other developed countries. "Every time a mom dies from a preventable cause related to pregnancy or childbirth, it's shameful in the richest nation on the face of the Earth," the Illinois Democrat said during an interview with Military.com. "We need to make sure to have this comprehensive evaluation of how our growing mortality crisis among moms impacts women veterans."

The most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on maternal mortality -- the number of women who die during pregnancy or within 42 days of giving birth -- shows a rate of 20.1 deaths per 100,000 in 2019, up 16% from 2018. Duckworth noted that the rates for women of color, particularly Black females, is significantly higher than for other American women. In 2018, the rate for Black women was 37.1 per 100,000 pregnancies, two and a half times the mortality rate of white women.

Given that half a million American veterans are of child-bearing age, the VA, Defense Department, Medicaid and private insurers need to know the complications facing veterans who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant so they can reduce pregnancy-related conditions and deaths, the bill sponsors said. "The impact of this crisis on women veterans is not well understood," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, in a press release. "I'm pleased that Congress has passed this critical legislation to help ensure that the brave women who have served in our military receive the maternal care they have earned."

Duckworth, a double amputee who survived a helicopter crash while on deployment to Iraq in 2004, has openly discussed her struggles with infertility in the decade before the birth of her first child, Abigail, in 2014. While the VA covered the entire cost of her care and a week's worth of her

daughter's, she still faced unexpected bills. "I was a member of Congress at the time, but I remember thinking, 'What are the other women doing? What are the other women veterans doing?' in the face of medical debt," Duckworth said. The findings of the now-required GAO investigation would have helped the VA better serve her needs as a new mom and those of other female veterans, she said. "Within the VA, there certainly are women's health clinics ... but the program for funding maternal health is significantly underfunded," Duckworth said.

Rep. Lauren Underwood, also an Illinois Democrat, sponsored the legislation in the House. It was endorsed by more than 150 organizations, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses; Women Veterans Interactive; Wounded Warrior Project; and the NAACP. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime| November 16, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Burn Pit Program Vet Group Calls it 'Wonky Doublespeak'**



The White House directed the Department of Veterans Affairs to help veterans exposed to burn pits and other in-service toxic hazards get the care they need, but a leading veterans group says the effort is just more “wonky doublespeak that doesn’t accomplish or change anything.” During the two decades of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, a widespread practice of toxic burn pits exposed thousands of service members to carcinogens who have developed diseases decades after service separation, making the veterans ineligible for care if they cannot prove their disease was service related.

Despite high-profile efforts by the likes of Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and comedian Jon Stewart, who helped pass similar legislation for 9/11 first responders, numerous bills have floundered. Now the VA is taking another approach through a pilot program and “exposure model.” “The goal of this new model is to lower the burden of proof for veterans impacted by exposures and [to] speed up the delivery of health care and benefits they need,” a 11 NOV VA press release stated. “We are seeking more information from veterans, more evidence from more sources, and looking to take every avenue possible to determine where a potential presumptive

illness based on military service location may exist in a more expedient and holistic manner,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough in a statement. “We want all veterans who may have been impacted to file a claim even if it was previously denied.”

But a veterans group says creating another model to study possible relationships of in-service environmental hazards to medical conditions is not the promise of presumption of disease they need for immediate care. “This does nothing and is insulting,” said Mark T. Jackson, an Army veteran working on behalf of the Stronghold Freedom Foundation, which represents service members who served at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base, a secret Uzbek staging base for the invasion of Afghanistan. Veterans assigned there have since developed numerous rare cancers and other ailments. “The solution is automatic presumption of service connection for ANY veteran who presents ANY illness known to be caused by the carcinogens known to be present in burn pits, radiation, and contaminate soils,” Jackson said via e-mail. “It’s mostly wonky doublespeak that doesn’t accomplish or change anything.”

A White House fact sheet acknowledged there are “gaps and delays” in the scientific evidence showing a conclusive link to adverse health impacts, which include a range of respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments. The result is that many veterans do not have access to VA care. The new VA “comprehensive military exposure model” goes beyond what science can prove to include other scientific research and factors, but it does not require any changes. “VA developed a new model to accelerate the decision-making process to consider adding new presumptive conditions,” the statement read.

House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA.), who sponsored an omnibus bill to help veterans exposed to toxins, said in a statement 11 NOV that the new model is a good start but that legislation is also needed. “For too long, veterans have had to prove that they were exposed to toxicants by their government or face waiting decades for the science and presumption decisions to catch up,” Takano said in the statement. The move will “attempt to reduce that burden and ultimately, speed up the delivery of” benefits, he added. “We still must pass comprehensive legislation to ensure all veterans exposed to toxins during their service have access to VA’s high quality care and benefits,” he said. “Today’s announcement makes it clear—the momentum is on our side.”

Jackson worries the move just buys the VA more time to look at its own data and practices while sick veterans continue to fend for themselves. “They are going to review a few diseases with their new model and develop a new one and then give themselves 90 days to then consider a change to rulemaking,” he said. “If that works, they intend to use the model on other conditions with the same non-committal outcome.” Jackson said veterans must apply within 10 years for some conditions, while for Iraq War veterans, the grace period is just five years. The White House fact sheet calls on Congress to extend the period of coverage after separation for 3 million Iraq veterans. “This is another betrayal wrapped up in *wonktalk* and *lawyeresque* that does precisely

nothing for K2 vets or any veteran suffering—or who will one day suffer—from diseases caused by burn pits,” Jackson said.

For the Pentagon’s part, spokesperson John F. Kirby said 15 NOV that Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III would throw his weight behind the effort. “This is an issue that the Secretary takes very seriously,” Kirby said in response to a question from Air Force Magazine. “[Austin] fully supports the VA Secretary’s desire to make care for these maladies more available and to reduce the burden on our veterans of proof.” [Source: Air Force Magazine | Abraham Mahshie | November 15, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Burn Pit Program**

### **Update 01: Benefits Likely Won’t Start Before Summer 2022**

Disability payouts for new conditions related to burn pit smoke and other combat zone toxic exposure incidents likely won’t happen for another six months at the earliest, but Veterans Affairs leaders insist they’re moving as quickly as they can to address the problem. “It’s still the fastest route from here to making good on what so many of our veterans are owed,” said Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough during a press conference with reporters on 18 NOV. “We’re making this faster, we’re making it more transparent, we’re making it more responsive and more based on veterans experiences.”

On Veterans Day, White House officials announced plans to dramatically overhaul the process for approving new illnesses and injuries believed connected to military toxic exposure cases. That includes a 90-day review of numerous rare cancers believed linked to military burn pits, with recommendations on whether they should be given fast-track benefits status. But even if those conditionals are approved, it will take at least another three months before payouts to eligible veterans can begin, McDonough said. That puts checks in the mail no earlier than late May 2022, and likely later if the rulemaking process for those changes has any delays. Other illnesses — such as constrictive bronchiolitis, widely believed to be linked to breathing in toxic smoke in war zones — are expected to take several more months of research and planning.

Veterans advocates for years have pushed for immediate action on the issue of burn pit injuries for individuals suffering from unusual cancers and respiratory failure, saying some victims have suffered for a decade or more without any compensation for their injuries. Presumptive status for disability benefits allows veterans an easier path to getting financial compensation for their service-connected injuries, because it does not require individuals to prove their condition is the result of a specific incident while in the ranks. That’s particularly difficult in cases where burn pit smoke was believed to be the cause of subsequent sicknesses, because few records exist of what items were being burned in the waste fires and exactly where the toxic smoke traveled.

In August, the VA announced for the first time they would grant presumptive benefits status for three illnesses linked to burn pit exposure: asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis. McDonough said 18 NOV that since the summer, VA processors have approved nearly 4,700 cases related to those conditions and paid out more than \$14 million in related benefits. The department estimates as many as 300,000 veterans may be eligible under that change. Adding the cancers and other related illnesses could push that total even higher. Veterans Affairs officials have estimated more than 3.5 million troops were exposed to the toxic smoke from burn pits during overseas deployments over the last 20 years.

VA officials are expected to announce the results of their first new review — focused on cancers believed linked to burn pits — in mid-February. That work will also serve as a new model for how future presumptive condition reviews are conducted. McDonough said 18 NOV that officials are not looking at lowering scientific standards for making those determinations, but they will no longer defer completely to studies from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to make their decisions. In the past, VA officials have pushed off action on burn pit benefits citing a lack of specific evidence from those researchers on the topic.

“There’s a lot of other science available to us on this,” he said. “For example, firefighters spend a lot of time dealing with toxic exposure. We’re widening the aperture for available science.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 19, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Medical Care Budget Delay Could Cause Major Problems**



**Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough**

If Congress fails to pass a full-year budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs in the next few months, the funding shortfall would have “serious ramifications” for veterans medical services, according to the department’s secretary. “I’m very concerned about a full-year [budget extension], and we’ve communicated that concern to lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats,” said Secretary Denis McDonough during a press conference on 18 NOV. “There will be very serious

ramifications for community care. There'll be very serious ramifications for direct care. I am very concerned about that.”

A day earlier, House Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and the panel’s subcommittee chairs released a statement urging Republican colleagues to “come to the table” and help finalize the annual appropriations process in coming weeks. The group said a lengthy budget extension would be “nothing short of catastrophic” for numerous government agencies. In September, lawmakers approved a short-term extension of the federal budget until 3 DEC in order to give them more time to work out funding disputes between the two parties. Lawmakers are expected to do another extension when they return from Thanksgiving recess later this month, since many of those disagreements have not yet been resolved.

That has prompted discussion about simply running all federal operations on fiscal 2021 spending levels throughout fiscal 2022. White House officials have decried as dangerous for a host of defense and domestic priorities, since money for new program starts and expansions would not be made available to government agencies. The administration has requested a \$270 billion budget for Veterans Affairs for fiscal 2022, an increase of almost \$30 billion from the current yearlong spending level. Lawmakers also authorize advance appropriations each year for the department, to ensure that any budget disruptions from political infighting does not interrupt VA medical care or benefits delivery.

Members of the House and Senate have offered few objections to the White House’s planned VA budget level, but the agency’s spending is stalled alongside other more complicated issues like defense spending. McDonough said running VA at fiscal 2021 spending levels for all of fiscal 2022 would leave numerous medical care expansion efforts without adequate support at a time when the department is looking to increase health care appointments deferred during the pandemic.

Officials have planned a significant boost in mental health care spending (up 13.5%, to \$10.7 billion) and assistance programs for veterans facing homelessness (up 14.5%, to \$2.6 billion). He said that officials are making plans for the possible failure of Congress to adopt a new budget, but did not offer any specifics. The VA budget has grown significantly over the last two decades. In fiscal 2001, it totaled just \$45 billion, roughly one-sixth of the White House request for fiscal 2022. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 18, 2021 ++]

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## **VA OIG**

### **Update 08: Lawmakers Seek To Grant Subpoena Power**

Lawmakers on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee want to grant subpoena power to the federal watchdog for the Department of Veterans Affairs, allowing the office to force people to

testify under oath. The **Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act** would grant subpoena power to the VA Office of Inspector General. While the office can compel VA employees and contractors to testify, it has no authority to force former employees or other individuals to participate in its investigations.

The lack of court-enforced subpoena power has “hampered prior oversight efforts,” said Christopher Wilber, counselor to the VA inspector general. Wilber spoke 17 NOV at a hearing of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. The committee discussed 21 pieces of legislation, including the Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act. Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) along with Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and John Boozman (R-AR), introduced the bill in August, following the trial and sentencing of a former nursing assistant who confessed to using insulin to kill seven elderly patients at the VA hospital in Clarksburg, W.Va.

The VA Inspector General’s Office investigated the hospital to understand how the killings could’ve gone undetected for nearly a year. Inspectors sought an interview with a “key individual” who worked in risk mitigation at the hospital during the time of the killings, Wilber said. The person left his or her job while the investigation was underway, and the IG had no way of compelling him or her to testify. Manchin said the former employee ran for the hills. “Subpoena power is imperative to our ability to reach out to someone like that, serve the subpoena and require them to talk to us,” Wilber said. “It was a critical investigation to understand the root causes of the problems that occurred in Clarksburg so that we could make recommendations to the department.”

The VA Office of Inspector General outlined other cases that were weakened by its lack of subpoena power, including an investigation into one former VA employee who was suspected of providing confidential information to companies to help them win federal contracts. The former employee refused to testify, and the IG had to drop the investigation because of insufficient evidence. The IG was also unable to interview a former VA dentist who was accused of exposing hundreds of veterans to blood-borne pathogens because of improper sterilization practices. The dentist, as well as the dentist’s supervisor, had left their jobs at the VA during the investigation and refused to participate in voluntary interviews.

The IG was also unable to interview facility leaders at the VA in Biloxi, Miss., who hired a thoracic surgeon, despite knowing of malpractice issues. In that case, the employees also left their jobs before they could be forced to testify. “Obtaining testimonial subpoena authority would strengthen the OIG’s ability to conduct rigorous and thorough oversight of VA programs and operations,” Wilber said. The legislation would require the IG to notify the U.S. attorney general if he or she intends to issue a subpoena, giving the attorney general the opportunity to object. The bill also requires the inspector general to report to Congress regularly about the number of times the office uses its subpoena authority.

Another bill was introduced earlier this year to grant the power to all federal inspectors general, but it has yet to be considered in Congress. The inspector general’s offices at two agencies – the Defense Department and Department of Health and Human Services – already have subpoena

power. Representatives from the VA, as well as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans, gave their opinions at the hearing 17 NOV. They all expressed their support for the effort. “We believe it might be necessary to get to the bottom of issues,” said Patrick Murray, legislative director for the VFW. “We believe it can only make VA better.” [Source: Stars and Stripes | Nikki Wentling | November 18, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Sexual Trauma**

### **Update 08: Vet VA MST Claims Still Not Being Handled Properly**

Veterans Affairs officials insist they are getting better at processing disability claims related to military sexual trauma, but outside critics say more still needs to be done to restore victims’ faith in the department’s systems. “Because military sexual trauma can affect veterans’ mental and physical health, work, relationships and other aspects of their everyday life, it is imperative that VA provide veterans who have suffered MST with the full benefits and services they are due,” said Michael Missal, Inspector General for the department, in testimony before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee on 17 NOV.

“They must do so effectively, timely, and with compassion. Failure to meet these objectives can further traumatize vulnerable veterans and cause disengagement and serious harm.” Those kinds of claims have been problematic for VA processors for years, in part because those crimes often go unreported in the military. While veterans who claim post-traumatic stress disorder from combat are often only required to prove they served overseas, PTSD claims related to military sexual trauma often require veterans to detail their abuse and provide supporting evidence, even in cases where such actions could worsen a veteran’s mental health.

Research from Missal’s office in recent years has estimated that VA processors have mishandled thousands of veterans’ military sexual trauma claims, including failures to give specially trained staff enough time to fully review the cases. Beth Murphy, executive director of the Veterans Benefits Administration Compensation Service, said that most of those errors are procedural, but that improvements have been made in recent years. In fiscal 2018, about 57 percent of those claims were approved by the department. Last year, that figure rose to about 74 percent.

“VA staff have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to provide streamlined access to specialized veteran-centric care,” Murphy said. “There is strong commitment across VA to sustain and continue to enhance MST related support and outreach.” Missal said he still sees areas of concern. An investigation by his office released earlier this year found numerous uncorrected problems dating back to 2018, despite promises of changes. “Many of the military sexual trauma coordinators interviewed said they did not have enough time to fulfill all of the responsibilities of their role,” he told lawmakers. “A number of them said that other clinical duties interfered with

the time needed to complete their MST related responsibilities ... Others said that they did not have adequate resources.”

Several lawmakers called the lack of reforms unacceptable. “The Inspector General’s testimony shows a frustratingly bad situation for survivors of sexual assault,” said Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH). “It represents an unacceptable disservice to our veterans.” VA officials said they are working on more fixes. They are reviewing whether those specialists should be given more time each week for work dedicated to the military sexual trauma cases. Other improvements are expected to be unveiled in early 2022. Past department studies have suggested that as many as one in three female veterans and one in 50 male veterans experienced sexual assault while in the service. Veterans advocates said improvements in how their cases are handled need to be a priority for department leaders.

“It is imperative that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides support for MST survivors and deliver their benefits and services with dignity and respect at the forefront,” said Kristina Keenan, associate director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars’ National Legislative Service. “But feedback from our accredited representatives from across the country indicates that there are still obstacles that veterans face throughout the claims process ... They have already suffered enough.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 17, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Patient Deaths**

### **50,000+ More in 2020 Than Was Expected**

More than 50,000 Veterans Affairs patients died in 2020 than expected based on previous years - a finding that provides additional insight into the true impact of the pandemic on the veteran community, according to a new study. The study, set to be published next year in *The Lancet Regional Health - Americas* but released online 30 OCT, found that 17% more VA patients died in March through December at VA than expected from all causes, including COVID-19, compared with 2016-2018.

By the end of 2020, VA had slightly more than 7,000 confirmed COVID-19 deaths. That means that 44,000 of the deaths above the roughly 375,000 the VA averages yearly were either COVID-related but not categorized accordingly, or they were preventable, caused by something that would have otherwise been treatable in a year when hospitals weren't overwhelmed or people stayed home. VA researcher Kevin Griffith, an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University's Department of Health Policy, said statistics that focus only on confirmed COVID-19 deaths "really understate the human suffering the pandemic is causing."

"What you want to count is the number of people who would still be alive today, not just those who died of COVID," Griffith said during an interview with *Military.com*. The researcher set out

to determine the number of excess deaths in 2020 overall and for individual VA medical facilities, thinking the data could be useful for the department while it examines its pandemic response and plans for the next national emergency. They found that compared with the general U.S. population, VA had fewer excess deaths -- a data point they found surprising, given that VA serves an older patient population with complex medical issues.

According to a study published in April in JAMA Network, during the same period, the U.S. saw more than 522,300 excess deaths, up 23% from previous years, including more than 350,000 from COVID-19. "VA did better than expected, and we think a lot of it is related to its very strong response, very robust response to the COVID pandemic early," Griffith said. While the team did not explore why VA fared better during the pandemic, researchers theorized that VA patients were able to maintain access to medical services while many in the general population lost their medical insurance as the result of unemployment. VA also ramped up its telehealth capabilities, locked down nursing homes and facilities with high-risk patients and canceled elective procedures early on.

"The VA dusted off all their pandemic plans, rewrote them, stockpiled ventilators and had staff training," Griffith said. "Giving credit where it's due, [then-Secretary Robert Wilkie] had a population at high risk for severe COVID, and he managed to navigate the early days of the pandemic better than expected." The study found that areas hit hardest by the pandemic tended to have higher excess deaths -- places like the VA medical facilities in VA New York Harbor Health Care System in New York City and Beckley VA Medical Center in West Virginia, while others did not see a spike, including the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System in Las Vegas and the Chillicothe VA Medical Center in Ohio. Griffith said VA could look to those VA medical centers to determine "best practices" and shortcomings during a future crisis.

"This level of data allows us to see how well specific policies mattered, how different health system's response mitigated the pandemic," Griffith said. Since March 2020, there have been 376,424 cases of COVID-19 among VA patients, and 15,536 have died. "There's this perception that the VA is terrible for quality of care, and everyone hates it, which makes sense because any time VA does anything bad, it makes the news. But the VA in this case didn't mess around," Griffith said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | November 18, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse**

**Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2021**

**Healthcare Fraud and Kickback Scheme - Nicholas Defonte and Christopher Cirri**, both of Toms River, New Jersey, and **Pat Truglia** of Parkland, Florida, each pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud. Each defendant played a role in defrauding healthcare benefits by offering, paying, soliciting, and receiving kickbacks and bribes in exchange for completed doctors'

orders for durable medical equipment, specifically orthotic braces. The defendants then fraudulently billed Medicare, TRICARE, the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA), and other healthcare benefit programs. Cirri, Defonte, and their conspirators owned and operated multiple call centers where they obtained prescriptions for compound medications and other medical products reimbursable by federal and private healthcare benefit programs. The defendants caused losses to Medicare, TRICARE, and CHAMPVA of approximately \$50 million. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 11, 2021 ++]

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**Eire, PA -- Matthew Camera** of Erie, Pennsylvania, pleaded guilty to violating federal drug laws. From January 2017 to June 2020, while employed as the pharmacy chief at the VA medical center in Erie, he unlawfully obtained multiple dosage units of hydrocodone and oxycodone from pill bottles awaiting delivery to VA patients. Sentencing is scheduled for March 22, 2022. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 12, 2021 ++]

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**Memphis, TN -- Tiffany Lewis**, a former employee of the VA medical center in Memphis, Tennessee, was sentenced to 10 months in federal prison for assaulting two VA police officers. On November 20, 2020, VA Police responded to the scene of a disturbance on VA property. Officers observed Lewis striking another individual. VA Police attempted to detain her, but she resisted arrest and struck the arresting officer. After being escorted to a holding room on VA property, Lewis punched another officer in the face. She pleaded guilty on August 2, 2021, to two counts of assaulting federal officers. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 12, 2021 ++]

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**Miami, FL --** Five out of seven conspirators were convicted for their roles in a scheme to defraud the VA and the Social Security Administration of more than \$1.8 million. A Florida jury found **Omar Shaquille Bailey** and **Ronaldo Garfield Green** guilty following an eight-day trial, while a third codefendant, **Jamare Mason**, pleaded guilty on the second day of trial. Two other codefendants, **Kadeem Gordon** and **Mario Ricketts**, had pleaded guilty prior to trial, while two remaining codefendants have yet to be apprehended. The members of this conspiracy obtained the personally identifiable information of disabled veterans and Social Security beneficiaries and used this information to fraudulently open bank accounts and prepaid debit cards. They also forged documents in the victims' names that directed the VA and the Social Security Administration to deposit benefit payments into those fraudulent accounts. The defendants and their coconspirators withdrew these funds from ATMs and banks throughout South Florida and Georgia for their own personal use. Much of the funds were ultimately funneled to the architects of the scheme in Jamaica. The five guilty defendants are awaiting sentencing. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 16, 2021 ++]

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**Detroit, MI** -- Former VA-certified registered nurse anesthetist, **Elizabeth Prohitt** of Saline, Michigan, was sentenced to three years' probation for stealing controlled substances, including several opioids, from hospital-dispensing machines. Prohitt pleaded guilty to five counts of obtaining controlled substances by fraud, misrepresentation, or deceit. She used her position as a surgical nurse to steal more than 2,000 vials of Schedule II and Schedule IV controlled substances, which included fentanyl, hydromorphone, morphine, and midazolam. Prohitt would use protected patient information and falsify medical documents to obtain the controlled substances. Instead of using the medication on patients, she diverted the drugs for her own personal use. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 9, 2021 ++]

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**Chicago, IL** -- Two Chicago-based VA employees were charged in connection with a fraud scheme that involved pocketing cash payments from vendors in exchange for steering orders for medical equipment to those vendors. **Andrew Lee** is charged with one count of wire fraud, while **Kimberly Dyson** is charged with one count of conspiracy to commit bribery and four counts of bribery. Lee and Dyson worked as prosthetic clerks in the VHA Prosthetics Service in Chicago, where part of their duties was to select vendors to order medical equipment for VA patients using government purchase cards. The charges allege that Lee and Dyson schemed with coconspirators who owned or operated medical supply and distribution companies, in some cases placing orders for unnecessary and more costly monthly rentals of medical equipment, rather than purchasing the equipment as VA physicians had ordered. The scheme fraudulently caused the VA to overpay one company by more than \$1.38 million from 2016 to 2020. Lee and Dyson pocketed kickbacks of at least \$220,000 and \$39,850, respectively. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 17, 2021 ++]

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**Newark, N.J.** -- **Thomas Farese** of Delray Beach, Florida, and **Domenic J. Gatto Jr.** of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, were charged in connection with a multimillion-dollar scheme to defraud several healthcare benefit programs, including Medicare, TRICARE, and CHAMPVA. The scheme involved offering, paying, soliciting, and receiving kickbacks and bribes in exchange for doctors' orders for durable medical equipment without regard to medical necessity, namely orthotic braces. The companies owned by Farese and Gatto subsequently fraudulently billed the healthcare benefit programs for the orders. Gatto and his conspirators entered a related kickback scheme involving prescriptions for compounded medications. The defendants caused losses to Medicare, TRICARE, and CHAMPVA of approximately \$25 million. They were charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud, healthcare fraud, conspiracy to transact in criminal proceeds, transacting in criminal proceeds, and conspiracy to

violate the federal Anti-Kickback Statute. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 19, 2021 ++]

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**Washington, D.C.** -- **Rosemary Ogbenna** of Washington, DC, was named in a 35-count indictment for allegedly carrying out a scheme to steal more than \$400,000 in government benefit funds provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and VA. According to the indictment, Ogbenna operated a rooming house business and perpetrated the scheme to target some of her tenants. She obtained and maintained control over SSA and VA benefit funds intended for the care of elderly, mentally ill, disabled, and veteran beneficiaries, and used the funds for her own personal use and benefit. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | November 19, 2021 ++]

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**Florida** -- Two Florida residents have been charged with allegedly defrauding the federal government's largest health care programs, including a man linked to the American Mafia.

The Department of Justice announced Nov. 19 that **Thomas Farese**, 79, of Delray Beach, and **Domenic Gatto**, 47, of Palm Beach Gardens, have been charged with health care fraud, conspiracy to commit health care fraud and wire fraud and other crimes totaling \$25 million in losses by Medicare, Tricare and CHAMPVA, the Department of Veterans Affairs' health program for eligible veterans' spouses and children. The charges mark the second time in seven months the men have faced charges for allegedly engaging in health care fraud: in April, they and others were charged with conspiracy and committing fraud, allegedly bilking government health programs of \$65 million.

According to court documents, Farese and Gatto hid their ownership of several medical equipment companies and arranged orders for medical devices, namely orthotic braces. They then supposedly arranged and paid for orders, soliciting, bribing and receiving kickbacks from physicians for braces that weren't needed by patients -- orders that in turn were billed to the federal government, according to the Justice Department. The pair also were involved in a related kickback scheme involving prescriptions for compounded medications -- prescriptions that are prepared for individual patients by specialty pharmacies that have been a frequent target of scammers for nearly the past decade.

Farese is no stranger to the U.S. legal system: he was charged and convicted in 1980 of running a multimillion-dollar marijuana smuggling and distribution operation through a Fort Lauderdale shipping company, sentenced to 30 years in prison and released in 1994. Two years later, Farese was charged for laundering more than \$1 million in drug money through several Florida coast strip clubs. During his sentencing hearing in that case, federal prosecutor Jeffrey Slomar called

Farese "a capo regime [captain] in the Colombo organized crime family" with "contacts throughout the world to facilitate money-laundering transactions," according to court documents. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison and released in 2005, only to return seven years later, convicted again of money laundering. He remained in prison until 2012, according to court documents.

Gatto is the developer of a West Palm Beach hotel complex, Banyan Cay Resort and Golf. He doesn't appear to have a record of arrest prior to April. Since at least 2013, the Justice Department has doggedly pursued companies and individuals that have profited from fraudulent orders for medical devices and compounded medications, which are personalized prescriptions crafted for patients who can't tolerate certain ingredients. Both men have posted bonds of \$700,000 and were released. According to the court, Farese's bail was paid by his wife Suzanne, daughter of Alphonse Persico, an alleged underboss in the Joseph Colombo crime family who died in prison in 1989. In the case of Tricare, the Justice Department has filed charges and convicted hundreds of persons involved in the schemes, including pharmacists, doctors, marketers and salesmen, including military troops.

Farese and Gatto face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of wire fraud and 10 years per count of conspiracy and health care fraud. The charge of violating the federal Anti-Kickback Statute carries a punishment of up to 5 years of prison, according to the Justice Department. The men also face fines up to \$250,000 for each count or twice the gross profit or loss caused by the offense, whichever is greater. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | November 29, 2021 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## **GI Bill Housing Stipend**

### **Update 01: 50% Reduction for Online Students Unless Congress Acts**

Air Force veteran Ally Schroeder has had nearly everything in her education and career path planned out for the last three years, so it's stressful not to know whether she'll have enough money for housing in January. "My whole college schedule has been set since I was a junior, so I really don't have a lot of options for my last semester next year," said Schroeder, a 27-year-old clinical nutrition services senior at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. "And those classes are only being

offered remotely [because of the coronavirus pandemic], which means I may not have the in-person classes I need to qualify for the full housing benefit I rely on.”



**Air Force veteran Ally Schroeder and her husband**

Schroeder is one of hundreds of thousands of student veterans who could see their GI Bill benefits cut by hundreds of dollars a month if lawmakers don’t act within the next few weeks. In her work with the college campus’s vet center, she has heard concerns from dozens of fellow students like her who worry the issue won’t get the attention it needs from Congress before it’s too late. “It’s disheartening to have to explain to these folks why they might not get their housing stipends next year,” she said. “Next semester is coming up quickly. And I can’t tell them what will happen because I don’t know.”

At issue is how post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are paid out to students who attend college classes remotely, rather than in-person. Students using the benefit receive money for tuition plus a monthly housing stipend. Individuals enrolled in traditional in-person classes receive the full financial benefit, while students in online-only classes get half of that housing stipend. But when the coronavirus pandemic shuttered college campuses across America in spring 2020, it forced Congress to walk back those rules, giving the VA Secretary broad authority to continue paying out the expected housing stipends for students suddenly forced into online classes.

Those authorities expire on 21 DEC. Many campuses, like UNLV, are still operating with limited in-person options, meaning veterans attending classes there will qualify only for half the housing stipend rate. For Schroeder, that means about \$800 less a month, a significant hit to her family finances. At other schools — particularly ones in high-cost cities on the East and West Coast — the difference could be \$2,000 a month or more. “This is causing a lot of stress for students we’re talking to,” said John Kamin, legislative associate for The American Legion. “We’re already at the panic level. School schedules are set for next semester and many students are looking at drastic decisions about whether they can continue if the money isn’t there.”

Veterans Affairs officials for months have lobbied lawmakers to extend the pandemic authorities to ensure students’ lives aren’t disrupted. On 18 NOV, VA Secretary Denis McDonough told reporters he has been in regular contact with Capitol Hill about addressing the

issue as soon as possible. “I am worried about it,” he said. “We’re constantly looking at our programming, making sure that we’re doing everything available to us. But some of these emergency provisions are statutorily based, so we need Congress to act.”

Lawmakers have promised for months they are tracking the issue, but left town for Thanksgiving break on 19 NOV without finalizing an extension. In October, Rep. David Trone, (D-MD) introduced legislation to fix the issue, pushing those pandemic authorizations back until summer 2022. On 18 NOV, Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) offered companion legislation in their chamber in the hopes of moving on the issue quickly when lawmakers return from break. “Our veterans have devoted their lives in service to our country, and providing them with the housing resources they need to complete their education is vital to facilitating their transition from active duty service back to the workforce,” Cortez Masto said in a statement. “[This legislation] will ensure our veterans don’t have to worry about funding for housing when deciding on their academic future.”

But several barriers remain. The House bill has been held up in part by technicalities surrounding the costs of the measure. Even though the housing stipends would have been fully paid if not for the pandemic, under the law “extra” \$200 million in benefits to be given to students must be offset with other funding cuts or revenue sources. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Mike Bost (R-IL) has introduced separate legislation with a potential solution for that pay-for, but it has not yet advanced in the chamber. On the other side of Capitol Hill, when the Senate returns to town, lawmakers there will face a long list of must-pass measures beyond the GI Bill issue, including the annual defense authorization act, a federal budget extension and an increase in the federal debt ceiling.

Only two weeks of legislative work remain on the congressional 2021 calendar, although that schedule is likely to be extended given the workload. Meanwhile, students like Schroeder are forced to watch and wait from their homes-turned-classrooms. She and her husband have enough savings to cover their mortgage payments if her housing stipends are cut in half. But Schroeder said it won’t be easy to focus on her final semester of classes starting in January if those financial pressures are on her mind. “It’s all out of our hands right now,” she said. “This is money that we planned around, and now we don’t know if we’ll have it. It just kind of feels like veterans are being put on the back burner right now.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 22, 2021 ++]

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## **South Carolina Vet Cemetery**

### **Update 02: Beaufort at 158 Years Young to Get a Makeover**

Staff Sgt. John Bentley and Pfc. Esteban Villa stepped toward each other as the U.S. flag they folded grew smaller. Wearing white gloves, they tucked and patted it, just so, and communicated

in whispers — “Ready, fold.” “Ready, turn.” Then, the young soldiers from Fort Stewart turned crisply toward a couple in their 70s, Charlie Read Jr. and his wife, Alice, seated in the front row. On behalf of a grateful nation, a triangle-shaped flag as tight as a button was presented for the World War II service of Charles Read Sr. and Valerie Leyrer Read, veterans who were Read’s parents. Charlie wiped away tears but described the service afterward as a “happy event.” “They were inseparable in life,” Read, of Sun City, said of his parents. “And here they will be together for eternity.”



**In a multi-million dollar campaign, headstones are being straightened, leveled and aligned after years of settling. These headstones( right) , as seen on Nov. 9, 2021 in Section 38 of the historic cemetery, are primarily veterans who fought in the American Civil War**

Life goes on in 2021 at the Beaufort landmark, 158 years after President Abraham Lincoln created it. Here you can find 9,000 Civil war veterans, including Black troops and Confederates — who sometimes lie side by side — along with men and women from all wars. Soldiers, sailors and airmen continue to be buried here today, just as they did during the Civil War. Like the Reads, all veterans get ceremonies with military honors and secure final resting places underneath towering live oaks and palmetto trees. There is no cost. But time is catching up with the old graveyard where more than 30 U.S. flags lined “Palmetto Drive” for Veterans Day.

More than 17,000 headstones have begun to lean or sag, or both, due to the shifting ground. Those headstones are now being fixed as part of a \$3.1 million overhaul. A longer-term, age-related issue can’t be resolved as easily: Beaufort National Cemetery, spread across three city blocks and 44 acres, could be out of room in 15 to 20 years, marking its end as an active cemetery. “There’s really no area to further expand,” says Jeff Applegate of the National Cemetery Administration, the assistant director of the cemetery. The cemetery, one of the oldest final resting places for veterans in the nation, features 26,959 headstones honoring veterans from the Civil War to the war in Afghanistan. It’s located off one of Beaufort’s busiest streets, behind a brick wall.

An estimated 2,500 people visit the eternal oasis each month, making it one of the city’s biggest attractions, drawing not only families with loved ones but also historians and returning Marines who trained at nearby Marine Corps Recruit Depot-Parris Island or Marine Corps Air Station-Beaufort, Applegate says. The cemetery’s deep connection to the nation’s Civil War history, age, idyllic setting and the unusual way in which it was designed, make it a serene fixture in changing times. “It’s changed in small increments,” Applegate says, “but it really hasn’t changed since they

first designed it.” Laid out in the shape of a half-wheel, its oyster shell roads, originating at the hub, form the spokes, and live oaks, magnolias and palmetto trees tower over it.

Then came COVID-19 in early 2020. The pandemic initially ended the memorial services, with only direct burials allowed for several months to avoid the spread of the virus. Services eventually returned, but with restrictions on crowd size. Many people postponed interments or memorial services until the ceremonies were allowed again in late 2020. Now services are back to normal. In fiscal year 2021, which ended 30 SEP, interments jumped to a near-record 729, a 28 percent increase, after slipping to 567 in 2020.

“Look at it,” Read said, standing in the shade of live oak trees and gesturing to the sea of tombstones, moments before his parents’ ceremony. “It’s beautiful. It doesn’t get any nicer than this.” Charlie Read’s parents, Suffolk County, New York natives, died just four months apart in 2001 in Chester County, Pennsylvania. His mother was the first woman in the United States to become a county commander within American Legion, Read said. His father was elected commander a few years later. She was a homemaker. He was a locomotive engineer. At the end of WWII, both served in the Army stateside, he as a heavy machine gunner in the infantry, she as an x-ray technician in Army Medical Corps.

A retired Air Force major, former trooper with the New York State Police and former special agent with the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Office, Read knew almost immediately that Beaufort National Cemetery was the right place for his parents after visiting on Memorial Day. To be sure, the history and beauty stood out. But Read also noticed that husbands and wives were co-interred, with their information on each side of the headstone, which made an impression. He was so moved by the 9 NOV ceremony for his parents that he caught up with the military honor guard members afterward to offer his hand and thanks. “I know it’s a tough gig,” he told them, still teary-eyed.

Beaufort National Cemetery has been around since Feb. 10, 1863, two years before the end of the Civil War, when Lincoln created 13 national cemeteries needed for the growing numbers of war dead. Initially, interments came from Civil War soldiers who had died at hospitals or battlefields. Over time, veterans from nine additional wars, in addition to peacetime veterans and, in some cases, spouses, young children or adults who are fully dependent, joined them. Today, it is one of 155 national veterans’ cemeteries. Of those, 75 remain active. Eventually, Applegate says, cemeteries run out of room and stop allowing new burials. That process has happened more quickly at cemeteries in the East compared to larger cemeteries in the West, Applegate says.

In 2009, the 30-acre historic part of Beaufort National Cemetery, the part surrounded by the brick wall, was expanded by 10 to 15 acres in the back, outside the wall. Today, most burials are conducted there. But, hemmed in by houses, Beaufort National is projected to reach capacity in 2035 or 2040, the Cemetery Administration, which is part of the Veterans Administration, Applegate said. If it closes to new interments, the cemetery would still remain open to the public,

but a search would likely begin for 200 to 300 acres in the region for a new cemetery to be developed, he said. “But not one of those decisions has been made yet,” Applegate said.

For the immediate future, a \$3.1 million project is underway to raise and realign an estimated 17,445 markers that have settled and moved over time in the 30-acre historic section. It requires a full-time crew painstakingly removing each marker, putting aggregate below to stabilize it, then reinstalling it and making sure the alignment and height are correct. A new irrigation system also will be installed at the same time. A grass that survives better underneath the big trees also will be planted. The entire project is expected to be done by May 2022. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | November 14, 2021 ++]

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## Vet Extremism

### Extremist Crimes among Vets on the Rise for the Past Decade



The number of veterans participating in extremism more than tripled over the past 10 years, according to a report from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, totaling nearly 24 new subjects each year. The finding comes from a dive into the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States project, with details about numerous cases of extremist activity, the findings of which were released in July.

“It is important to note that the recent increase in subjects with military backgrounds in PIRUS is largely due to three years in the data—2017, 2020, and 2021,” according to the report. “Each of these years were marked by issues that mobilized comparatively large numbers of U.S. extremists.” Notably, those years saw the inauguration of President Donald Trump and the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia; the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide racial justice protests and the election of President Joe Biden; and the contentious certification of that election by Congress in January of this year.

Looking through cases from 1990 to 2021, researchers pulled 424 individuals — 415 men and nine women — with military backgrounds, including 99 who are facing charges for involvement in the Capitol Hill riot on 6 JAN. While the 8% of troops/veterans in the PIRUS data is on par

with the proportion of U.S. residents who are either currently serving or have previously served, the report found that women with military experience were significantly less likely to participate in extremism compared to their male peers. Though women make up 9% of U.S. adults with military experience, they are fewer than 2% of those who have been involved in known extremism crimes.

Of the hundreds who had military backgrounds, according to the report, 355 — just under 84% — didn't commit any crimes until after they had been separated. Of those 23, or just over 5%, committed a crime after washing out of basic training. The vast majority of those who have committed crimes were either current or former members of the active duty Army, followed by the active duty Marine Corps — more than 70% combined. With reserve duty in either of those branches, the percentage jumps to 79.

The types of crimes they were arrested for varies, but just under 60% of them were for violent plots, and only 40% percent of those were carried out. Another 10% were weapons charges, 6.5% for providing material support to extremism, followed by a few instances of harassment, financial crime, spontaneous violence and property destruction. And just over 46% of those crimes committed by veterans were targeting the U.S. government, the military or law enforcement.

“Nearly half of the subjects in PIRUS with military backgrounds adhered to anti-government views or were members of organized militias,” according to the report. Another 34% were in white supremacist groups, while 11% were identified as jihadists. Smaller percentages, between 5 and 1, included anti-abortion activists, cult/conspiracy theory believers, male supremacists, Black separatist groups or anarchist/anti-capitalist activists. That included 35 members of the Sovereign Citizen movement, 19 Oath Keepers and 15 members of the Boogaloo movement. Then there were 18 Proud Boys, 16 Ku Klux Klan members and 9 who were members of the National Alliance. In total, about 68% were aligned with a particular group, but the remainder weren't.

For the 6 JAN attack specifically, 99 military affiliations have been identified so far, 92 of whom were no longer service members at the time. Of those, nearly 59% did not belong to any extremist groups, but those who were included 16 Proud Boys, 10 Oath Keepers and 12 QAnon conspiracy theorists. In response to the disproportionate number of 6 JAN arrests of troops and veterans, about one in five, the Pentagon earlier this year called for an anti-extremism standdown, then followed it up with a working group.

That group is tasked with improving recruiting screening and education for separating troops, to both prevent extremists from joining up and to prevent veterans from radicalization. They are also set to publish a new Defense Department definition of extremism, which will expand the current regulation, which mostly targets fundraising, organizing and other activity as incompatible with military service. The initial report was due to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in mid-July. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby has said it is currently in final review stages. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | November 18, 2021 ++]

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## After Vet Death Guide

### What to Do Afterwards



Whether you're a spouse, a dependent who has recently lost your military veteran or you're a retired military veteran looking to make sure all your "ducks are in a row" for your next of kin in case you pass away — knowing what to do when a military veteran or retiree dies is important. In the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**After Vet Death Guide**" you can find:

- How to prepare for the event of a military veteran passing.
- Who you need to contact.
- Required documentation.
- What forms need to be completed and where to obtain them.
- Resources Available to Assist after a Military Veteran or Retiree Dies.

While it's hard to consider your death or that of a loved one, being prepared can ease some of the burden while you or your loved ones grieve. It may feel like a morbid task, but taking the time to discuss your wishes and organize documents can help make the process easier to handle when the time comes. [Source: Military Wallet | Jessica Gettle | November 17, 2021 ++]

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## Vet Fraud & Abuse

### Reported NOV 16 thru 30, 2021

**Rosemary Ogbenna**, 45, is facing 35 total charges against her. These charges include 12 counts of mail fraud, 16 counts of wire fraud, one count of theft of government property, two counts of aggravated identity theft, one count of representative payee fraud, one count of making a false statement, one count of tampering with documents, and one count of first-degree theft. According to court documents, Ogbenna allegedly carried out a decade-long scheme to steal government benefits from tenants staying at her housing business. The prosecution alleges that from March 2009 to February 2020, Ogbenna set herself as the Representative Payee of her tenants' Social Security benefits, allotting herself a portion of their funds for her own personal use.

Ogbenna also illegally gained control of her tenants' monthly VA benefits to use for her own personal benefit, according to court documents. When questioned by agents investigating the fraud scheme, she allegedly lied during questioning and provided agents with falsified documents. Each count of mail fraud, wire fraud and tampering with evidence holds a maximum penalty of 20-years imprisonment if she is convicted. Ogbenna also potentially faces 10 years for the counts of government property theft, two years for each count of identity theft — which would run consecutively with any sentence received for wire fraud — and five years for the count of Representative Payee fraud.

If convicted, Ogbenna will also likely face the forfeiture of any funds she took over the years while carrying out her fraud scheme. While Ogbenna has been indicted in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, it is important to note that an indictment is a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of criminal law, and is not necessarily a confirmation of guilt. Ogbenna is set to be arraigned in federal court Nov. 30. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rachel Nostrant | November 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs**

**Scheduled As of NOV 30, 2021**



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. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. Note that some of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. 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 | November 30, 2021 ++]

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## **U.S. Embassy Pakistan Afghan Vet Denied Entry & Help**

A former U.S. soldier in Pakistan said the U.S. Embassy repeatedly hung up on him as he pleaded for help and wouldn't let him enter the building to speak with a government official. The former staff sergeant, an Afghan native, said he traveled from the U.S. to Pakistan to try to help his family escape the Taliban and flee Afghanistan. He went to the embassy to request diplomatic aid for his family and for American citizens, green card holders and Afghans with special immigrant visas he said were stuck at the border. "I showed up outside the U.S. Embassy and I literally begged them to let me in," the veteran, who goes by call sign "Legend," told Fox News. "It was that embarrassing. A U.S. citizen is not permitted entry in U.S. soil."

He said no one picked up when he tried one phone number. When someone answered a second number, he told them he was a U.S. soldier and needed help. He said he wasn't comfortable discussing details over the phone, given their sensitivity. Fox News obtained and reviewed recordings of several of his phone calls, confirming his account. "They hung up the phone," the veteran told Fox News. "I called again and again, the same thing. I couldn't believe it. I was in in shock." "I gave up, I gave up," he continued. "They kept hanging up. No matter what I say, they kept hanging up." He said he "started tearing up" when he left the area. "It felt like somebody was stabbing me in my back," the veteran, who was discharged after suffering traumatic brain injuries, told Fox News.

Fox News granted him anonymity to protect him and his family from the Taliban. "We are aware of these reports, but for privacy considerations have no further comment," a State Department spokesperson told Fox News. The veteran said the Taliban, ISIS-K and al Qaeda were all at the Pakistan border, making it harder and more dangerous for anyone trying to escape Afghanistan. He said the Taliban created more checkpoints in response to the increased ISIS-K threat. "They're frisking everyone," the veteran told Fox News. "These Afghan allies that we have – U.S. citizens, green card holders – they have to get past all these checkpoints and then not only hide from the Taliban, but also ISIS-K and then al Qaeda." "And ISIS is targeting directly U.S. citizens, green card holders, anyone with an Afghan passport wanting to get out," he added. "They're in search of these guys."

Additionally, the Pakistani government won't allow anyone to cross the border from Afghanistan, even if they have the appropriate documents, according to the veteran. As a result, Afghans are stuck at the border, unable to return to cities like Kabul because of the Taliban checkpoints. Afghans can bribe their way past border guards for anywhere from \$300 to \$700 per person if they have visas, but they wouldn't receive an entry stamp, the veteran said. As a result,

there were instances, he said, when Afghans would travel some 30 miles into the country, but then get stopped and deported by Pakistani police. "But this time, now, they hand them over back to the Taliban," the veteran told Fox News. "They were running away from the Taliban to begin with."

Everyone seeking to get across the border into Pakistan are "all begging the U.S. embassy to step in," the veteran said. He also criticized the U.S. State Department for "bragging about how they're helping Afghan allies." "You're not," the veteran said. "You're lying, you're not even permitting entry to U.S. citizens." All U.S. citizens seeking to leave Afghanistan with proper documentation "have been offered an opportunity to do so," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday.

The former soldier said he's helped at least 30 at-risk Afghans, including Christians and other minorities, cross illegally into Pakistan. But, it wasn't feasible for his family of six to travel from Kabul to the border, since they'd have to pass around 30 Taliban checkpoints, he said. They feared the Taliban would kill them if they were caught, because of the veteran's work with the U.S. military as well as their own work in the Afghan government. Additionally, his niece, a journalist, was a vocal Taliban critic.

The veteran successfully helped his family escape Afghanistan through another route after his interview with Fox News, but he said they'd be deported into the hands of the Taliban if they can't secure a passage out within 28 days of their arrival. They tried to leave through the Kabul airport during the U.S. airlift but were unsuccessful. The veteran blamed the Biden administration for its failure to evacuate Taliban targets including his family. "They caused this big mess, and now they're hiding behind these walls, and they will not even agree to open the gates for a U.S. citizen," the veteran told Fox News.

He said his only remaining for recourse is to go to the media and "plead for help." "I've done everything else in my power," he told Fox News. "If there's anyone out there that can help me, help my family, help all these other individuals, U.S. citizens, U.S. green card holders, our Afghan allies, please, please help us," the veteran said. "We're in dire need of help." Those who believe they can help the veteran or his family can email [legend@awarenessties.us](mailto:legend@awarenessties.us). [Source: Fox News & [www.awarenessties.us](http://www.awarenessties.us) | Ethan Barton | November 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule**

**As of NOV 30, 2021**

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/veterans 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).

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\veternans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com). [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | November 30, 2021 ++]

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## WWII Racial Inequities

### Proposal to Pay Vet Families Denied GI Bill/Home Loan Benefits



A group of Democratic lawmakers is reviving an effort to pay the families of Black service members who fought on behalf of the nation during World War II for benefits they were denied or prevented from taking full advantage of when they returned home from war. The new legislative effort, introduced in honor of Veterans Day, would benefit surviving spouses and all living descendants of Black WWII veterans whose families were denied the opportunity to build wealth with housing and educational benefits through the GI Bill.

Since 1944, those benefits have been offered to millions of veterans transitioning to civilian life. But due to racism and discrimination in how they were granted through local Veterans Affairs

offices, many Black WWII veterans received substantially less money toward purchasing a home or continuing their education. A House version was introduced by Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, the Democratic majority whip, and Rep. Seth Moulton of Massachusetts. “This is an opportunity for America to repair an egregious fault,” said Clyburn of the bill introduced last week. “Hopefully it can also begin to lay a foundation that will help break the cycle of poverty among those people who are the descendants of those who made sacrifices to preserve this democracy.”

Moulton, a Marine veteran who served four tours during the Iraq War, said: “There are a lot of Black Americans who are feeling the effects of this injustice today, even though it was originally perpetrated 70 years ago.” “I think that restoring GI Bill benefits is one of the greatest racial justice issues of our time,” he said. A Senate bill was to be introduced later this month by Sen. Rev. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, the son of a WWII veteran. “We’ve all seen how these inequities have trickled down over time,” Warnock said, adding that the bill “represents a major step toward righting this injustice.”

The legislation, authored by Moulton, would extend the VA Loan Guaranty Program and GI Bill educational assistance to Black WWII veterans and their descendants who are alive at the time of the bill’s enactment. It would also create a panel of independent experts to study inequities in how benefits are administered to women and people of color.

Lawrence Brooks, who at 112 years old is the oldest living U.S. veteran, was drafted to serve during WWII and assigned to the mostly-Black 91st Engineer General Service Regiment. The Louisiana native, who has 12 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren, always believed that serving his country was the only way he could leave behind his life as the son of sharecroppers, said his daughter, Vanessa Brooks. But after he was discharged in August 1945 as a private first class, he did not realize his dream of going to college, working instead as a forklift driver before retiring in his 60s. “He always wanted to go to school,” his daughter said. And when he bought his home, he used his retirement fund, not GI Bill benefits, she said.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act into law in 1944, making generous financial subsidies available to 16 million WWII veterans pursuing higher education and buying their first homes. Irrespective of race, veterans who served more than 90 days during the war and had been honorably discharged were entitled to the benefits. But after returning from the war, Black and white veterans faced two very different realities. Because the GI Bill benefits had to be approved by local VA officers, few of whom were Black, the process created problems for veterans. This was particularly acute in the Deep South where Jim Crow segregation imposed racist barriers to homeownership and education. Local VA officers there either made it difficult for Black veterans to access their benefits or lessened their value by steering them away from predominantly white four-year colleges and toward vocational and other non-degree programs. Meanwhile, the nation’s historically Black colleges and universities saw such a significant increase of enrollment among Black veterans that the schools were forced to turn away tens of thousands of prospective students.

Sgt. Joseph Maddox, one of two WWII veterans Moulton and Clyburn named their bill after, was denied tuition assistance by his local VA office despite being accepted into a master's degree program at Harvard University. "When it came time to pay the bill, the government just said no," said Moulton, who himself attended Harvard on the GI Bill. "It actually is pretty emotional for vets who have gone through this themselves and, like myself, know what a difference the GI Bill made in our lives." The bill is also named for Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr., a WWII veteran from Winnsboro, South Carolina, who was brutally beaten and blinded by a small-town police chief in 1946 after returning home from the war. The acquittal of his attacker by an all-white jury helped spur the integration of the U.S. armed services in 1948.

In contrast to the treatment of Black veterans, the GI Bill helped home ownership rates soar among white veterans in a post-war housing boom that created a ripple effect their children and grandchildren continue to benefit from today. Of the more than 3,000 VA home loans that had been issued to veterans in Mississippi in the summer of 1947, only two went to Black veterans, according to an Ebony magazine survey at the time. The Federal Housing Administration's racist housing policies also impacted Black WWII veterans, undoubtedly fueling today's racial wealth gap. Typically referred to as redlining, realtors and banks would refuse to show homes or offer mortgages to qualified homebuyers in certain neighborhoods because of their race or ethnicity.

Preliminary analysis of historical data suggests Black and white veterans accessed their benefits at similar rates, according to Maria Madison, director of the Institute for Economic and Racial Equity at Brandeis University, who has researched the impact of racial inequities in the administration of GI Bill benefits. However, because of institutional racism and other barriers, Black veterans were more limited in the ways in which they could use their benefits. As a result, the cash equivalent of their benefits was only 40 percent of what white veterans received. After adjusting for inflation and for market returns that amounts to a difference in value of \$170,000 per veteran, according to Madison. Her ongoing research seeks to put a dollar amount on the wealth loss to Black families caused by racism and GI Bill inequities.

Black WWII veterans who were lucky enough to have gained full access to GI Bill benefits succeeded at building good lives for themselves and their families, said Matthew Delmont, a history professor at Dartmouth College. It's a clear argument, he said, for why the new legislation is necessary. "Because the GI benefits weren't distributed more evenly among Black veterans, we lost an entire generation of Black wealth builders," Delmont said. "After the war, we could have had even more doctors, lawyers, teachers and architects."

- Dovey Johnson Roundtree, a Black woman who was a WWII veteran, attended Howard University's law school with GI Bill benefits. She then became a nationally known Washington criminal defense attorney who played a pivotal role in the desegregation of bus travel.
- WWII veteran Robert Madison, who served as a second lieutenant in the Army, credited his GI benefits for his success as a renowned architect.

[Source: AP & MilitaryTimes | Aaron Morrison & Kat Stafford | November 14, 2021 ++]

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## **State Veterans' Benefits North Carolina 2021**

The state of North Carolina provides a number of services and benefits to its veterans. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**State Veteran’s Benefits – NC**” for an overview of those in the below categories. They are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below plus the state’s current position on veteran issues refer to MOAA’s [www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard](http://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard) & <https://dma.mt.gov/MVAD/index>:

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation
- Women Veteran Program
- Homeless Vet Programs
- Other

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/north-carolina-state-veterans-benefits.html> | November 2021 ++]

**\* Vet Legislation \***



## **Vet Bill Progress 16 thru 30 NOV 2021**

## **HCVA**

On 4 NOV the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a [Full Committee Markup](#) and passed 18 bills, many with bipartisan support. This legislation will provide parity for Guard and Reserve members, bolster VA's research capabilities, support student veterans, promote justice for women veterans, and study the inequities LGBTQ+ veterans face. Following are the bills that were passed making them ready to be sent to the House floor for debate and vote:

- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Levin to H.R. 1836 – Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2021 (Rep. Levin)
- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Pappas to H.R. 3944 – Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act of 2021 (Rep. Pappas)
- H.R. 5603, as amended – Protections for Student Veterans Act (Rep. Underwood)
- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Mrvan to H.R. 4591 – VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021 (Rep. Mrvan)
- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Bost to H.R. 2250 – VA IT Reform Act of 2021 (Rep. Rosendale)
- H.R. 5721 – VIPER Act (Rep. Takano)
- H.R. 2916 – VA Medical Cannabis Research Act of 2021 (Rep. Correa)
- H.R. 5029 – Expanding the Families of Veterans Access to Mental Health Services Act (Rep. Rouzer)
- H.R. 5516, as amended – VITAL Assessment Act (Rep. Ellzey)
- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Miller-Meeks to H.R. 5529 – Veterans Justice Outreach Improvement Act (Rep. Miller-Meeks)
- H.R. 5671, as amended – To authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish seasonal influenza vaccines to certain individuals, and for other purposes (Rep. Takano)
- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Brownley to H.R. 2385 – Justice for Women Veterans Act (Rep. Brownley)
- H.R. 5562 – To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care from the Department of Veterans Affairs to include veterans of World War II (Rep. Harder)
- A.N.S. offered by Rep. Takano to H.R. 1596 – Commission to Study the Stigmatization, Criminalization, and Ongoing Exclusion and Inequity for LGBTQ Servicemembers and Veterans Act (Rep. Takano)
- H.R. 4845 – To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the Advisory Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Veterans (Rep. Pappas)
- H.R. 3730 – To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Advisory Committee on United States Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States, and for other purposes (Rep. Sablan)
- H.R. 5607 – Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2021 (Rep. Slotkin)
- H.R. 5151, as amended – Col. James Floyd Turner IV USMC GI Bill Transfer Act of 2021 (Rep. Bilirakis)

## House

House passed three Veterans Bills which will be forwarded to the Senate for consideration. They would:

- H.R. 147 – Ensure services and benefits for separating service members and veterans with respect to apprenticeship programs
- H.R. 4233 – Require VA to furnish counseling including Vet Center access to those using specified DOD or VA educational assistance benefits
- H.R. 4626 – Require VA at least once every 10 years to enter into a contract for a private sector entity or entities to conduct an independent assessment of all medical services and care furnished by VA.

## Senate

The senate passed four veteran related bills which now head to the president's desk for signature. The bills which were previously passed by the House and forwarded to the Senate for consideration would:

- S. 796 – Improve maternal health care
- S. 894 – Increase coordination for hiring veteran health professionals at VA
- S. 1031 – Study racial and ethnic disparities in VA claims
- S. 1095 – Establish tuition fairness for those utilizing the Survivors' and Dependents' Education Assistance program. These bills were previously passed by the Senate and now head to the president's desk for signature.

[Source: HCVA Press Release & VFW Action Corps Weekly | Chairman Mark Takano | November 4 & 22, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Dental Care**

### **Update 04: S.3017 | Vet Dental Care Eligibility Expansion & Enhancement Act**

Oral health is integral to overall general health and well-being. Veterans who have chronic disabilities can be at greater risk for oral diseases that have the potential to jeopardize their overall health, compromise their ability to work and significantly diminish their quality of life. Research has also found associations between adverse dental outcomes and poor nutrition, diabetes, obesity and other chronic health conditions.

The **Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act—S. 3017** would include dental care as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) medical services package. Currently, VA is limited to providing outpatient dental services to veterans rated 100% service connected and those who were held prisoner-of-war, or to those who have sustained dental trauma in performance of military service, certain veterans in receipt of homeless services and to some veterans the Secretary determines require such care to provide effective preventative health care.

The bill would phase in the provision of dental services to all enrolled veterans over an eight-year timeframe starting with veterans with service-connected conditions rated at least 30% or greater (priority groups 1 and 2 under Title 38, United States Code, Section 1705(a)). The VA would increase the number of sites for dental services at each of the four phases of implementation, commensurate with the growth in the eligible veteran population at each phase. Each phase would take two years to implement and end when all enrolled veterans in priority groups 1-8 are eligible.

DAV believes that the long, phased-in implementation schedule outlined in the bill would allow VA adequate time to develop program capacity, obtain the necessary resources to hire dental staff or contract with dentists in the community for such services, and make any adjustments necessary to support this new proposed dental benefit for veterans using VA care. DAV is asking all readers to contact their legislators to ask them to support this important legislation or thank them for their support. Towards this they have provided the below editable letter to assist readers in that effort:

**o-o-O-o-o-**

*Subj: Support S. 3017, Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act  
I urge you to support S. 3017, the Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act.*

*Oral health is integral to overall general health and well-being. Veterans who have chronic disabilities can be at greater risk for oral diseases that have the potential to jeopardize their overall health, compromise their ability to work and significantly diminish their quality of life. Research has also found associations between adverse dental outcomes and poor nutrition, diabetes, obesity and other chronic health conditions. A recent study of New York Medicaid beneficiaries with a large burden of disease demonstrated that preventive dental care is associated with fewer and shorter inpatient admissions, which led to lower health care costs.*

*Currently, VA is limited to providing outpatient dental services to veterans rated 100% service connected and those who were held prisoner-of-war, or to those who have sustained dental trauma in performance of military service, certain veterans in receipt of homeless services and to some veterans the Secretary determines require such care to provide effective preventative health care. The Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act—S. 3017 would include dental care as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) medical services package.*

*The bill would phase in provision of dental services to all enrolled veterans over an eight-year timeframe starting with veterans with service-connected conditions rated at least 30% or greater (priority groups 1 and 2 under Title 38, United States Code, Section 1705(a)). The VA would increase the number of sites for dental services at each of the four phases of implementation commensurate with the growth in the eligible veteran population at each phase. Each phase would take two years to implement and end when all enrolled veterans in priority groups 1-8 are eligible.*

*Please let me know of your intentions to cosponsor this important bill.*

*Sincerely,  
Your Name  
Your Address*

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## Disability Indemnity Compensation

### Update 15: H.R. 5607 | Justice for ALS Veterans Act

On October 19, Representative Elissa Slotkin (MI) and Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (PA) introduced H.R. 5607, the **Justice for ALS Veterans Act**. This legislation would provide the survivors of veterans who die of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) the DIC (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation) “kicker” amount without meeting the required eight-year total disability rating time period.

Current law allows an additional DIC monthly payment of \$288.27 to survivors in the case of a veteran, who at the time of death was in receipt of or was entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability that was rated totally disabling for a continuous period of at least eight years immediately preceding death. This extra compensation installment is commonly referred to as the DIC “kicker.”

ALS is an aggressive disease that leaves many veterans totally incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. VA already recognizes ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease and due to its progressive nature, automatically rates any diagnosed veteran at 100% once service connected. Individuals diagnosed with ALS only have an average lifespan of between two to five years meaning that, sadly, many veterans are unable to meet the existing eight-year total disability requirement to become eligible for the additional “kicker” compensation benefit.

DAV supports H.R. 5607 which would provide increased DIC payments to surviving spouses of veterans who die from ALS regardless of how long they had been rated as totally disabled prior to death. DAV is asking all readers to contact their legislators to ask them to support this important legislation or thank them for their support. Towards this they have provided the below editable letter to assist readers in that effort:

o-o-O-o-o-

*Subj: Support H.R. 5607, Justice for ALS Veterans Act*

*Dear Rep . \_\_\_\_\_,*

*As your constituent, and in recognition of our fallen veterans and their survivors, I urge you to co-sponsor and support the enactment of H.R. 5607, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act. This legislation would provide the survivors of veterans who die of ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) an additional amount of monthly DIC (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation) without having to meet the existing eight-year time period requirement of a total disability rating prior to death.*

*Current law allows an additional monthly DIC payment of \$288.27 to survivors in the case of a veteran, who at the time of death was in receipt of or was entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability that was rated totally disabling for a continuous period of at least eight years immediately preceding death. This extra compensation installment is commonly referred to as the DIC “kicker.”*

*ALS is an aggressive disease that leaves many veterans totally incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. VA already recognizes ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease and due to its progressive nature, automatically rates any diagnosed veteran at 100% once service connected. Individuals diagnosed with ALS only have an average lifespan of between two to five years meaning that, sadly, many veterans are unable to meet the existing eight-year total disability requirement to become eligible for the additional compensation benefit.*

Please advise me of your position on H.R. 5607, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act and the actions you plan to take in respect to this important bill.

Sincerely,  
Your Name  
Your Address

[Source: DAV | Andrew Marshall | November 3, 2021 ++]

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## Congressional Resources

### Member's Contact Info & Vet Bill Status

If in doubt as to your legislator's online contact info or who they are, the below websites provide ALL legislator's names with contact info to facilitate the copying and forwarding of suggested letters to them, asking them questions, or seeking their assistance:

- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%7D> – **House**
- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%2C%22chamber%22%3A%22Senate%22%7D> – **Senate**

To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 117th 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. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>.

**\* Military \***



## Navy Covid Discharge Plan

### Refusers to Face Administrative Actions, As Well As Separation

Sailors who refuse the mandatory COVID-19 vaccine could face a series of administrative actions — on top of being processed for separation — according to the service. Sailors who reject the vaccine and do not have a pending or approved exemption request could lose out on education benefits, promotions and bonus pay, according to a Navy administrative message released 15 NOV. “In order to ensure a fully vaccinated force, U.S. Navy policy is to process for separation all Navy service members who refuse the lawful order to receive the COVID-19 vaccination and do not have an approved exemption,” the NAVADMIN said.

Sailors who are denied an administrative exemption, such as a religious waiver, or a medical exemption have five days afterward to take initial steps toward becoming fully vaccinated — or the Navy will start the separation process, according to the message. The announcement comes after the Navy announced last month it was standing up a COVID Consolidated Disposition Authority to “ensure a fair and consistent process” handling separation determinations for those who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine, and the new NAVADMIN outlines additional administrative actions such sailors may encounter.

Sailors rejecting the COVID-19 vaccine are not eligible to reenlist or extend their enlistment. Commanders must cancel extension agreements if a sailor has an extension agreement that hasn’t taken effect and is also refusing the vaccine, according to the NAVADMIN. The guidance also instructs commanders to delay the promotions of officers and to withhold advancements for enlisted personnel rejecting the jab. “Navy service members refusing the vaccine who are in a frocked status should be defrocked as soon as feasible,” the NAVADMIN said. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | November 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Troop Vaccine Refusal Impact**

### **Update 03: Army to Begin Forcing Out Soldiers**

Soldiers who refuse to get the COVID-19 vaccine and have not requested an exemption will no longer be allowed to re-enlist or be promoted, effectively ending their military careers. The new directive applies to active-duty troops as well as reservists and National Guardsmen, including those serving in states whose governors do not require the vaccine.

The 16 NOV memo, signed by Army Secretary Christine Wormuth, says troops’ service records will be flagged the day they make their final vaccine refusal, which follows a meeting with a medical professional and a second order to get vaccinated. This flag will bar them from being promoted, reenlisting, continuing to receive enlistment bonuses, attending service-related schools, or receiving tuition assistance. “I authorize commanders to impose bars to continued service...for all soldiers who refuse the mandatory vaccine order without an approved exemption or pending exemption request,” Wormuth wrote in the memo. “The Soldier will remain flagged until they are

fully vaccinated, receive an approved medical or administrative exemption, or are separated from the Army.”

The issue of vaccinating the force, including the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the Army National Guard, has come to a head in recent days. Oklahoma governor Kevin Stitt has rebuffed President Joe Biden’s directive that all federal employees, including troops in uniform, be vaccinated, and his state’s adjutant general has told Oklahoma National Guardsmen that they need not comply with the directive. “We are getting to this point where the federal government and state governments are essentially fighting over who has control of the force,” said Anthony Kuhn, a managing partner at the Tully Rinckey law firm and a New York State Army reservist who specializes in military law.

National Guard troops are largely under Title 32 orders, which puts them under the control of their state governors. When they are activated under Title 10, such as when they deploy overseas, they are under federal control. To retain that ready force for overseas missions—for example guard units were heavily relied upon throughout the military’s campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan—the federal government foots the bill for those troops even though they report to their governors, complicating who has authority to direct those Guardsmen to be vaccinated. In 2020, the National Guard was used more heavily than it has been since World War II, with members called up to respond to wildfires, domestic unrest, to give COVID shots and respond to flooding and hurricanes.

But the use of the Guard has become more contentious. The issue of who has ultimate authority over the Guard is likely to end up in the courts, said Eugene Fidell, a military law professor at the NYU School of Law. “There are two clauses in the Constitution, the militia clauses. We, over the decades—centuries, really—we’ve developed a kind of modus operandi, where, you know, ultimate questions have been avoidable. But we’re getting to the point where these questions are not avoidable. And that is a crisis,” Fidell said. Kuhn said the Army’s decision to cut funding for soldiers and Guardsmen who do not get vaccinated “was not surprising.” “It’s kind of a backdoor way to force this policy on the states,” Kuhn said.

About 77 percent of the total Army—active duty, Reserve, and Guard—has received at least one shot, and 72 percent are completely vaccinated, according to the latest data provided by Army spokesman Lt. Col. Terence Kelley. Many of the unvaccinated soldiers are in the National Guard or reserves. Only 51.84 percent of the Army National Guard is fully vaccinated; 60.72 percent have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to data provided to Defense One by the National Guard. There are 329,709 Army National Guardsmen serving in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories.

It has been unclear whether the Pentagon could force Guardsmen, who serve under both federal and state control, to be vaccinated if the governors they serve do not require a vaccine. The new Army guidance asserts that no service member who refuses to get vaccinated or to procure an official exemption may continue to serve without limits in the Army, and thus in the National

Guard. Soldiers flagged for refusing the vaccine will be allowed to pursue separation from the military through disability evaluation, retirement, resignation, or separation after completion of service, the Army said.

The Army apparently does not intend to immediately discharge soldiers who refuse vaccination against COVID-19, but will bar them from promotions, training opportunities and reenlistment. "At this time (22 NOV), the secretary has not authorized any separations with the sole basis being refusal to follow the COVID-19 vaccination order," said Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Gabriel Ramirez. [Source: Defense One & Military.com | Tara Coop/Steve Beynon | November 18 & 22, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Family Hunger**

### **Update 03: Thousands Struggle With Food Insecurity**

It's a hidden crisis that has existed for years inside one of the most well-funded institutions on the planet and has only worsened during the coronavirus pandemic. As many as 160,000 active-duty military members are having trouble feeding their families. That estimate by Feeding America, which coordinates the work of more than 200 food banks around the country, underscores how long-term food insecurity has extended into every aspect of American life, including the military.



**Brooklyn Pittman talks as she sits in her car with her dogs after receiving food from an Armed Services YMCA food distribution, Oct. 28, 2021, in San Diego.**

The exact scope of the problem is a topic of debate, due to a lack of formal study. But activists say it has existed for years and primarily affects junior-level enlisted service members — ranks E1 to E4 in military parlance — with children. "It's a shocking truth that's known to many food banks across the United States," said Vince Hall, Feeding America's government relations officer. "This should be the cause of deep embarrassment." The group estimates that 29% of troops in the most junior enlisted ranks faced food insecurity during the previous year. "It is what it is," said James Bohannon, 34, a Naval E4 (petty officer third class) in San Diego who relies on food assistance to keep his two daughters fed. "You know what you're signing up for in the military," he said, after emerging from a drive-thru food distribution organized by the local Armed Services YMCA branch. "But I'm not going to lie. It's really tough."

In addition to modest pay for junior enlisted ranks, the frequent moves inherent to military life make it difficult for military spouses to find steady work. Also, the internal military culture of self-sufficiency leaves many reluctant to speak about their difficulties, for fear they will be regarded as irresponsible. The problem is exacerbated by an obscure Agriculture Department rule that prevents thousands of needy military families from accessing the SNAP government assistance program, commonly known as food stamps.

“It’s one of these things that the American people don’t know about, but it’s a matter of course among military members. We know this,” said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Illinois Democrat and former Blackhawk pilot who lost both legs in a helicopter crash in Iraq. “We’re the mightiest military on the face of the earth and yet those who are on the lower rung of our military ranks are -- if they are married and have a child or two-- they’re hungry. How can you focus on carrying out the mission and defending our democracy. if you’re worried about whether or not your kid gets dinner tonight?”

Meredith Knopp, CEO of a food bank in St. Louis and an Army veteran, said the problem cuts across all branches of the military. She recalls being a young officer in Texas when she was approached by a new private with a baby. “They were getting ready to turn off his electricity because he couldn’t pay his bills,” she said. “It was shocking to me.” Perhaps the best indication of how entrenched the problem has become is that a robust network of military-adjacent charitable organizations such as the Armed Services YMCA and Blue Star Families has developed an infrastructure of food banks near most major domestic bases.

San Diego may be one of the epicenters of the phenomenon, with high housing costs and multiple military bases within driving distance. For Brooklyn Pittman, whose husband, Matthew, is in the Navy, the move to California from West Virginia this year was a financial shock. “We had a nice savings built up and then we moved out here and it was rough,” she said. “We still had student loans and everything on top of everything else.” Their savings quickly disappeared and the small income she earns from dog-sitting didn’t come close to covering the shortfall. For a while, the couple considered sleeping in their car on the base grounds until the next paycheck. Pittman was one of 320 families participating in the Armed Services YMCA’s late October drive-thru food distribution. The organization had been hosting events like this for more than 10 years, but when the pandemic struck, expanded operations from six sites to 11 around the country and doubled the frequency of the San Diego-area events.

There’s a diversity of opinion as to how much of a stigma the issue carries within military communities. Kelly Klor, who works on food insecurity issues for Blue Star Families, recalls a period of financial hardship 13 years ago as a young mother in Texas whose husband had just enlisted. The family pinched pennies at every opportunity, never eating out and relying on the local public library for entertainment. But they still depended on WIC — a similar program to food stamps that serves mothers and children — in order to afford expensive baby formula for her infant daughter. “I felt embarrassed pulling out my vouchers,” she said. “But at the same time, I was thinking ‘Should it be this hard?’ ”

Klor recalls treating her financial trouble as a taboo subject, even though she suspected many families around her were in the same situation. “It seemed like it wasn’t something that you share

with other people,” she said. But Maggie Meza, a Blue Star Families representative in San Diego, recalls the communal poverty as common knowledge and a bonding element among families. “It was like ‘Your husband’s a sergeant, my husband’s a sergeant. We’re both broke. Let’s go find some free stuff,’ ” she said.

One of the strangest aspects of the problem is a mysterious Agriculture Department regulation that prevents thousands of needy military families from receiving food stamps. Families living outside the base grounds receive a Basic Allowance for Housing to help cover most of their costs. But the 2008 Food and Nutrition Act dictates that the allowance counts as income in calculating eligibility to receive SNAP benefits, and that ends up disqualifying thousands of military families. The allowance doesn’t count as income for tax reasons or for WIC benefits. Food security activists say they’re confused by both the original rule and the fact that it has endured for more than 12 years.

“No one seems to know why it’s still a law,” said Hall, the Feeding America official. Dorene Ocamb, chief development officer for the Armed Services YMCA, speculated that the regulation is “just a case of unintended consequences.” Added Sen. Duckworth: “I couldn’t tell you where it comes from. I can only tell you that they won’t change it.” A spokesman for the USDA said in an email reply that the department is “taking a fresh look at our authorities with respect to this policy.” The issue is more than just a humanitarian problem. It directly impacts national security, said Josh Protas, vice president of public policy for Mazon, an organization that has done extensive research on military hunger.

Armed forces members enduring food insecurity are more likely to be distracted in the field and less likely to re-enlist, he said. That talent loss may be generational because military service tends to run in families. “We’re doing a disservice to future recruitment efforts,” Protas said. “We could be losing good people because they can’t support their families.” Several people involved in the issue criticized the Pentagon for turning a blind eye to the problem. “The denial by the Pentagon has been frustrating,” Protas said. “It’s embarrassing for our leaders to acknowledge the problem.” Colleen Heflin, a professor of public administration at Syracuse University, said the lack of Pentagon interest has led to a critical shortage of proper study or data. “In my experiences, it’s hard to explain this to Department of Defense officials,” she said. “They find it embarrassing and something they would not like to acknowledge.”

But Ocamb pushes back against the criticism that the military is burying the issue. She acknowledges that there are “some optics that people are trying to work around” but says most base commanders welcome the assistance and points out that the Navy literally owns the San Diego property where the ASYMCA food distributions take place. “I think the military knows this is a complex issue and they rely on partners like us,” she said. “This concept that the military wants to sweep this under the rug ... then why do they let us keep doing this on Navy-owned ground?”

Some of those who had complained about Pentagon reluctance to face the issue say the attitude has changed in recent months under the administration of President Joe Biden. Shannon Rzasadin, president of the Military Family Advisory Network, says she has felt a change in attitude from the Pentagon this year, and partially credits first lady Jill Biden for publicly championing the issue.

“They are focused on understanding it in the Pentagon,” she said. “Six months ago, I wouldn’t have said that.” Efforts to secure Pentagon comment on this issue were unsuccessful. But a Pentagon official told The Associated Press that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin would be publicly speaking on the subject in the near future.

There are fresh attempts by Congress to tackle the problem. Duckworth has sponsored a bill that would establish a Basic Needs Allowance payment for military families in need. Rep. James McGovern (D-MA) has appealed for a serious Pentagon study of the problem and a repeal of the USDA’s Basic Allowance for Housing regulation. “At this stage, there’s no excuse for anyone in the top echelons of the Pentagon to say they don’t know this is a problem,” McGovern said. “It’s not rocket science. This is solvable ... somebody take responsibility and solve it.” [Source: Associated Press | Ashraf Khalil | November 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Family Hunger**

### **Update 04: 90-Day Review to Create A Strategy For Addressing It Initiated**

Advocates and members of Congress have said for years that low military pay is threatening some troops’ ability to feed their families. On 17 NOV, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced a 90-day review to create a strategy for addressing it. The announcement of the move to strengthen economic security in the force comes as the Defense Department has temporarily raised its basic allowance for housing payouts to troops stationed in particularly competitive housing markets. The pandemic’s secondary effects have made it more difficult for many military families to find affordable housing during permanent change-of-station moves.

“Now, the steps outlined in today’s memo won’t solve all the economic worries that our military families face. But they are important steps and we’re committed to getting this right,” Austin told reporters. “Men and women in uniform and their families have enough to worry about — basic necessities like food and housing shouldn’t be among them. This is a readiness issue. And that’s why I’m focused on making sure that our servicemembers and their families have what they need to thrive so that they can focus on the hard work of defending our nation.” The 2020 Blue Star Families Military Lifestyle Survey, which included 158 respondents, found that 29 percent of junior-enlisted troops — 46 total — were experiencing food insecurity.

In addition to BAH increases, Austin’s memo calls for extending reimbursements for temporary lodging past the traditional 10 days for troops needing short-term housing during a PCS move; looking into extending some overseas assignments to avoid unnecessary moves; and extending domestic assignments past three years. The department also intends to field an economic security tool kit for military leaders that will highlight a wide range of available resources on housing availability, financial well-being and food security, available through Military OneSource. The tool kit will have specific resources for leaders on how to identify service members who are struggling to feed themselves and their families, how to engage in

difficult conversations to assess food insecurity, and how to connect service members to additional resources and support programs.

A report from the defense undersecretary for personnel and readiness is due back in mid-January. Congress has also taken some cracks at legislation that would address the issue, including making it easier for troops to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. A bill proposed earlier this year, by Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) would create an allowance for troops who would otherwise qualify for SNAP benefits based on their basic pay. Many aren't eligible now because their supplemental BAH, meant to be used for paying rents and mortgages, is used to calculate their eligibility. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | November 17, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Family Hunger**

### **Update 05: The hungry Don't Trust the Pentagon for Help**

Angela, an enlisted sailor, saw her baby daughter as a miracle when she was born two years ago. The little girl quickly took over her life, and the child's love of "Frozen" means that Angela can recite both movies from memory. Now, as a single mother on active duty, she's fighting to put food on their table, doing battle with her chain of command. The need to overdraft her bank account for baby formula, living off only chicken and rice, or applying for civilian low-income assistance, only to be rejected -- it all feels like a broken promise by the Navy, Angela, who has served for a decade, told Military.com in an interview.

"I have called my dad crying because I didn't even have money to buy bread or peanut butter and jelly because I was so broke," said Angela, whose name has been changed to protect her identity due to concerns about retaliation. But she says the Navy has offered little assistance. Instead, leaders have intensified her struggles and insisted she find some way to make do. "I've pretty much figured out that the Navy is not here to help you," she said. Angela is among thousands of service members on active duty who struggle daily with hunger related to financial hardship, though the true scope of the problem is not fully known. It's a stark reality that some troops cannot feed their families while serving in America's all-volunteer force, despite its commitments to welfare, support services and benefits.

The gap in support means some service members are forced to rely on outside help like food pantries and relief organizations like the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society. About 14% of enlisted active-duty families reported "low" or "very low" food security in an annual 2020 survey, according to Denise Hollywood, the chief community and programs officer for Blue Star Families. Enlisted troops appear to be suffering the most. A total of 29% of the most junior enlisted ranks of E1-E4, a segment that includes more than 570,000 people and more than half of all enlisted in the military, reported facing hunger over the past year, according to the advocacy group Feeding America, the largest hunger relief organization in the U.S.

In all, 160,000 service members struggled to provide food for themselves or their families, the group recently reported. A pair of Army studies found the problem was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of those studies found that on one Army base, one in three reported being food insecure in 2019. The second study, done at a different Army base, saw that out of a sample of nearly 5,000 soldiers, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the percentage of food-insecure troops to almost double from 16% to 31%. The term food-insecure means a person or family finds themselves unable to reliably get enough affordable and nutritious food. Of the 199 food banks Feeding America has across the U.S., 74 have a specific food assistance program for active-duty military families, and 34 are near a base and regularly help service members.

Military.com spoke with two other service members for this story who were struggling with hunger. Both are single mothers – one stationed in Maryland and the other in Hawaii -- who said they did not trust their chain of command to help with their problems. “I get told you need to buckle up and bear with it, you need to figure it out yourself,” the Maryland service member said. She said senior enlisted and officers would berate her with expletives wanting to know why she was complaining about her struggles. “Why are you making me look bad?” she said they would ask. All three mothers said they were forced to seek mental health help as a result of their financial struggles. Two said they considered suicide.

Data collected by nonprofit organizations going back to at least 2012 has documented the problem with hunger. However, historically the Pentagon has not been forthcoming with its own figures on the issue. “The Navy is aware of the ongoing economic challenges that Sailors face, many of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic and inflationary trends in the economy,” Priscilla Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for the service, told Military.com.

Angela’s financial struggles began after the birth of her daughter while she was stationed in Texas. “There was a time when she was first born that I was overdrafting my account every single pay period because of diapers,” she explained. The struggle to feed her child came quickly. Her daughter, who is lactose intolerant, required a specific type of baby formula, because Angela was unable to produce enough breast milk due to long work hours. That was a \$40 expense every week or two, she said. Angela tried applying for WIC – the government program aimed to help low-income parents feed their children – but “they told me that I made \$1,000 too much.” “We ran out of formula and I was overdrafted,” Angela recalled. “I had to make do with what I had, and I had to early start her on applesauce ... that way, she was satiated enough.” Eventually, Angela transferred to California, partly in an effort to be close to her daughter’s father who was also stationed on the West Coast. The cost of living there only made things worse.

Feeding America says there isn’t one cause of hunger among military families, with low salaries for enlisted members, high rates of unemployment for military spouses, and high costs of child care contributing to the broader problem. For many families, causes stack up, weaving a web of hardship that is difficult to escape. But the cost of housing plays an outsized role, Vince Hall, Feeding America’s head of government relations, told Military.com in a phone interview. “It’s

shocking to see military families lining up for food assistance because they are often stationed in some of the nation's most expensive housing markets but lack the compensation necessary to live in those markets," Hall said.

That allowance, known as the Basic Allowance for Housing, or BAH, is designed to cover costs of rent and utilities and it varies based on what region troops are stationed. "In a community like San Diego, [the BAH] is often insufficient to find housing because the cost of living is 40% higher than the national average," Hall said. Angela, who is stationed in southern California, said she also worries about two single, pregnant sailors she oversees who live on base in barracks. Navy policies don't allow families to stay in the barracks. Once they deliver their babies, "they're going to receive BAH, but they're not going to receive enough BAH to help themselves," she said. BAH is also a double-edged sword because while officially an entitlement and not considered taxable income, it counts as gross income when calculating eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which is more widely known as food stamps.

Parents like Angela also face costs for child care and transportation to and from daycare that strain finances. Angela also lives almost half an hour from her base – a location she chose for its better schools -- but the cost of the commute eats into her paycheck. "I am physically paycheck to paycheck to support myself, my child and the Navy's mission," she said. A single grocery trip can run Angela about \$180, but she's learned to make the food last up to three weeks for her and her daughter. "That way she's completely nourished, and I'm not taking anything from her mouth," she said. However, it means her own nutrition suffers. "I literally just eat chicken thighs and white rice," she said. "If I'm trying to splurge, I will get yellow rice and a rotisserie chicken, and I will mix them together and I will have a large pot that will last me the entire week."

The issue of military hunger has recently become more visible and openly discussed, especially in Washington, D.C. "It feels like there's more honesty and acceptance of the problem," Hall said. Both the House and Senate versions of Congress' annual defense policy bill have provisions for a new "basic needs allowance." It would be an additional stipend paid to service members with families near the federal poverty level. First lady Jill Biden has advocated for passage of that measure, as well as other legislation aimed at curbing hunger in the ranks. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced 17 NOV that he ordered his department to come up with a new strategy within three months to help hungry service members and their dependents. The secretary's plan also calls for an unspecified, yet temporary increase in BAH for areas that have had more than a 10% increase in rental costs.

Angela isn't holding out hope, however. "I'll believe it when I see it," she said in reaction to the announcement. Her experience feels like a failure of the military to live up to its commitment to take care of its people. The sentiment, she said, comes from treatment by toxic and unsupportive leaders. Her mentions of hardship or needing help came with threats of separation. Her status as a single mother who is struggling does not earn her any consideration with her superiors. "You're a sailor first -- your child was not assigned to you in a seabag. ... Those are the things that get said

to us on repeat,” Angela said. As a result, announcements like Austin’s efforts can fall on deaf ears.

“There's a complete disconnect between what Big Navy says, what a CO might say and then what the actual chain of command says,” Angela said. “If you don’t have a chain of command that you can trust, I guarantee no matter what, these sailors will suffer in silence.” “I have actually decided that I will not be relisting,” Angela said. “I can’t do it.” She said she has a year of service left. Afterward, she hopes to go to Florida or Texas where she has family and relatives that can help support her and her daughter. “Out here, where I have nothing ... it's just fighting for air,” she said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Konstantin Toropin | November 19, 2021 ++]

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## Arrears of Pay

### Update [03]: NDAA Amendment to Ease Financial Challenges for New Survivors



Financial concerns can be a terrible burden on top of an already stressful situation for a newly widowed spouse. When they discover the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) may take part or all of a servicemember’s last retirement check back, it can be overwhelming. The Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act (H.R. 2214 and S.1669) will allow survivors to gradually repay the amount over the next 12 months and have an opportunity to request for debt forgiveness through DoD.

Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) recently submitted the Military Survivor Comfort Act as a Senate Amendment (SA 3882) for consideration in the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). “Too many surviving spouses are financially caught off guard when their servicemember passes,” said Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), president and CEO of MOAA. “DFAS recoupment of the last paycheck can empty a banking account for a grieving survivor. MOAA strongly supports Senators Portman and Warren’s introduction of the Military Survivor Comfort Act that will ease the financial burden with a gradual repayment and option to appeal for debt forgiveness.”

In support of our survivor community, The Military Coalition (TMC), a group of organizations including MOAA that represent nearly 5.5 million members of the uniformed services community, sent a letter to Portman and Warren earlier this year in support of the legislation. Senate NDAA

amendments will be considered very soon. Because time is short, call (866) 272-MOAA (6622), MOAA's toll-free line to the U.S. Capitol switchboard, to be connected with your senators' offices and ask them to support SA 3882, the Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Mark Belinsky | November 16, 2021++]

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## **Navy BAQ**

### **Pay Delays Have Forced Some Sailors to Take Out Loans**



Navy sailors who earned increases in their housing allowances this year because they married or moved to a high-cost area are experiencing months-long delays to their pay boost – a situation that has forced some to take out loans to make ends meet. Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society Vice President Gillian Gonzalez said her organization has seen an uptick in loan requests from sailors struggling to cover living expenses. “This is happening a little bit of everywhere,” Gonzalez said in an interview with Military.com. “It doesn't seem to hit one geographic area more than another.”

Gonzalez couldn't say exactly how many affected sailors have applied for loans, because the society counts them with all who made requests for help covering basic needs. Several sailors have taken to social media to describe delays and desperate efforts to obtain loans for living expenses. According to Gonzalez, one sailor was not paid for three months as the result of an enlistment extension and pay error, and although the member's command “worked daily to resolve the issue,” the sailor drained all savings. Navy-Marine Corps Relief stepped in, delivering a \$2,500 check to the sailor's door because they were under COVID-19 quarantine, Gonzalez said.

Cmdr. Matt Knight, public affairs officer at Navy Personnel Command, said the Navy is required by the Department of Defense to process Basic Allowance for Housing change requests within 30 days, but delays do occur. He declined to answer questions on how many sailors are affected by the current backlog or why it is happening. “Navy Personnel Command and our subordinate commands take every measure to ensure the volume of transactions does not exceed

our capacity, but occasionally backlogs do occur due to a variety of reasons. These backlogs are resolved as quickly as possible to limit the impacts to sailors,” Knight said.

One sailor took to Reddit to complain about her situation, saying she and her husband were married in July and still have not received their basic allowance for housing. Military.com corresponded with the sailor but was unable to confirm the details of her posts. The couple, both petty officers third class living in the pricey Washington, D.C., area, have taken out commercial loans to cover expenses, according to the sailor’s Reddit post. “My case has been open for over a month with NO action ... I am just ... Beyond frustrated,” the sailor wrote.

Other sailors on the social media site said it took more than a year to see their issues fixed. A personnel specialist first class, who asked not to be identified because he is not authorized to speak with the press, said the root of the problem lies in the consolidation of personnel support and customer support detachments that began in 2017 and appears to be understaffed. In September, MyNavy Career Center was established as a command -- an effort to improve services to sailors.

“Shutting down dozens of processing centers took that transaction load and dropped it in one building’s worth of people,” the petty officer wrote in a message to Military.com. “Our only means of communication with them is through [MyNavy Career Center, or MNCC], which isn’t always great because it’s [mostly] civilians with a knowledge database ... all they can do is look up tickets and give a status.” MNCC is the Navy’s human resources services center, often referred to as the MNCC call center or just MNCC.

The petty officer also called the 30-day timeline “laughable,” given that personnel specialists work on a sailor’s pay package and send it through a processing system that has 30 days to act on it. That system usually takes another 30 days to process, followed by 30 to 45 days for review and release -- a course that can last three months or more. “In a Hershey and Hallmark world, 30 days would be great,” he said. Applications may be further delayed if there is an error in a sailor’s package. In the case of the sailor who posted her complaint on Reddit, her Record of Emergency Data and Dependency Application was hung up in the system for 75 days. MNCC ended up canceling the application and resubmitting it – a change that usually restarts the clock. “It essentially resets the first 30 days over and over until the personnel specialist or admin team gets it right,” the personnel petty officer told Military.com.

According to Knight, the consolidation effort of pay and personnel transactions has proven successful, having “increased standardization, reduced errors, improved pay accuracy and timeliness, and improved audit readiness.” But the Navy is aware it has issues. In a Navy town hall in June, a petty officer first class asked Fleet Master Chief for Manpower, Personnel Training and Education Wes Koshoffer when the Navy planned to consolidate the differing personnel data websites – a move that would eliminate redundancy and reduce the opportunity for error. Currently, when sailors undergo a change of status – marriage, birth, a move – they need to check

in with the Navy Standard Integrated Personnel System, the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, the Record of Emergency Data and Dependency Application and more.

“We built these 55 disparate systems over the last 50, 60 years to manage our HR, and they don’t talk to each other. They don’t translate well, and it gets dorked up,” Koshoffer admitted. But, he added, the “cavalry is coming. “We’re dangerously close to launching this one system to rule them all that we call [Navy Personnel and Pay 2, or NP2, system] ... we look to deliver early next year. It solves the vast majority of this,” Koshoffer said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | November 19, 2021 ++]

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## **USMC Recruitment**

### **Update 05: Corps Looks To Field an Older More Experienced Force**

Historically the Marine Corps has had the lowest retention rate in the Department of Defense, as it intentionally has only kept 25 percent of first-term Marines. As a result, the National Guard and other services have seen Marines fresh off a first enlistment as fertile recruiting ground, allowing the Guard to swell its ranks with already experienced troops. The practice is so common the Army National Guard even has recruiters specifically trained and tasked to recruit prior service Marines. But as the Corps looks to field an older more experienced force, it wants that to change.



**Recruits with Delta Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, run up the Reaper during the crucible at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California.**

“If we do our job right, they’ll never go to the Army or the National Guard to begin with,” Maj. Gen. Jason Bohm, the commander for Marine Corps Recruiting Command, told reporters on Monday. On 3 NOV, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger released his talent management vision aimed at improving retention by treating Marines “like human beings instead of inventory.” For those who left the Corps just to realize the grass is not always greener in the Army combat uniform, the Corps wants you back. “Quite often, not to disparage any of the other services, but we do hear from (prior service Marines) saying ‘This isn’t quite what I expected, is there any chance I can come back?’” Bohm said.

There already are methods for prior service Marines to return to the Corps, but Bohm said it was not particularly easy. The Corps will look to streamline that process and welcome the lost sheep back into the Marine Corps' fold. The Corps also will improve its efforts to inform Marines who are getting out on ways they can reenter the force if circumstances allow them to return or if they simply change their mind about getting out. "We are certainly going to maintain contact with those people," Bohm said.

At least for now the Army National Guard does not seem to expect much to change on its end. "The Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Force always seeks to recruit and retain the best available talent for the Guard," Christina Mundy said on behalf of Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention in a 23 NOV email. Marine Corps Times has previously asked the National Guard for numbers on how many prior service Marines it enlists each year and has not heard back.

While the Marine Corps is looking to improve overall retention, the Corps is planning to downsize over the next few years and has completely eliminated certain military occupational specialties. In 2021 the Corps had an authorized active-duty end strength of 181,200 Marines. By 2030 the Corps looks to shrink the active duty force to roughly 174,000 Marines, the smallest the Corps has been since 2002. To slowly reduce numbers while improving retention the Marine Corps expects that it will reduce its recruitment goals.

As part of its redesign to face off against China the Marine Corps has eliminated its tank battalions, active duty law enforcement battalions and its bridging units. Marines with military occupational specialties that were eliminated had been offered easy transfer into the Army, where tank battalions are still going strong. Berger said the Corps needs an older and more mature force to handle the increased complexities of a potential war against a near-peer opponent. On the future battlefield Marines will have more responsibilities pushed down to lower levels than ever before. "The machine gunner who is also corpsman, a medic, also has to be able to talk to MQ-9 UAVs and bring in ordnance and understand the satellite connection that is required to do that," Berger told reporters in early November.

The Corps is also leaning on updated science that shows people do not fully mature until they are in their early to mid-twenties and that peak physical performance does not happen until someone is in their late 20s. "We based our force on an assumption that (18 to 20-year-olds) were indestructible supermen," Berger said. "Turns out it's not. We don't peak physically or cognitively until our late 20s." "We can't have a force full of 18 to 21-year-olds," Berger said.

[Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Philip Athey | November 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Household Goods**

### Update 03: Families Again Caught In the Middle of Contract Protests



Two unsuccessful bidders have filed protests of the recently awarded \$6.2 billion contract aimed at fixing the long-standing problems with moving service members' household goods. U.S. Transportation Command officials confirmed that they were notified that protests were filed 23 NOV with the U.S. Government Accountability Office by American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group and Connected Global Solutions. American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group "has legitimate concerns over the award process," the company stated in an announcement of its protest filed with the GAO, which resolves disputes involving the awards of federal contracts.

ARC, as the company is known, was originally awarded the global household goods moving contract in April 2020, and that award was immediately protested. TRANSCOM pulled the contract back twice before issuing a new solicitation in November 2020. This process has been in the works since early 2019, when TRANSCOM announced plans to hire one company to manage household moves around the world. U.S. Transportation Command on 4 NOV awarded the new contract to HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture of KBR Services LLC and Tier One Relocation LLC. The \$6.2 billion contract spans more than three years, with the transition and base period beginning 1 DEC and ending Aug. 31, 2025.

The start of the transition phase will be delayed until the GAO protest decisions are issued, TRANSCOM officials said in a statement provided to Military Times. The deadline for GAO to issue a decision regarding these protests is 100 days after the protest is filed, although GAO seeks to issue a decision before the deadline. Protests can also be filed in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.

But as of now, TRANSCOM officials still plan to implement the new moving process in late 2022, which is the current timeline. The likelihood of contract protests has been factored into TRANSCOM's estimated timeline for implementation. In a recent interview, Air Force Col. Joel Safranek, director of TRANSCOM's Defense Personal Property Program, said that given the likelihood of protests and the time needed for a smooth transition, moves under the new program wouldn't begin until late 2022.

From now until then, most service members will move under the current program, in which more than 900 commercial companies move about 325,000 shipments year at a cost of about \$2.2 billion. Service members often have more than one shipment with their moves. “While U.S. TRANSCOM looks forward to delivering capabilities under the [Global Household Goods Contract], the command remains committed to providing a quality experience to customers during the transition,” officials said.

ARC was originally awarded a \$7.2 billion contract on April 30, 2020, for about the same amount of base-period time, with a potential payout of nearly \$20 billion over nine years. ARC officials note in their press release that TRANSCOM then described their proposal as “game changing.” Following protests from two unsuccessful bidders —HomeSafe Alliance and Connected Global Solutions — the government took corrective action and then re-awarded the contract to ARC on June 29, 2020. That award was also protested by the two bidders, and the GAO found in favor of the protesters, resulting in TRANSCOM issuing a new solicitation.

ARC officials said they are confident their proposal “remains superior and provides the best customer service solution for service members and their families. Team ARC stands ready to provide all personnel, equipment, technology, facilities, tools, materials, supervision and other items and services necessary to provide a turnkey, all-inclusive moving service. “ARC and its team of global leaders in the moving, logistics and technology industries, including UniGroup (United Van Lines, Mayflower), Suddath, Atlas, The Pasha Group and Deloitte, as well as a strong network of small businesses, know Team ARC has the customer-focused, high-quality moving solution that service members and their families deserve,” officials stated in their press release. “Team ARC has been purposefully and strategically assembled from leaders in the moving, logistics and technology industries to reduce the burden and stress on [those served by the global household goods contract.]”

Because of the lack of quality movers, capacity has long been a problem in the military moving arena, with shortages of truck drivers and labor for packing, loading and unloading. Service members have had trouble getting moves scheduled and having their household goods delivered on time, and the pandemic has exacerbated the delays. Damaged and lost belongings have also been a longstanding problem.

The contract outsources, for the first time, the management of relocation services now being performed by the government. While U.S. Transportation Command will oversee the program, the contractor will pull together a network of moving companies from across the moving industry, and coordinate military moves and warehouse services from start to finish, integrating functions that are currently performed by more than 900 commercial movers. The contractor will be fully responsible for these moves, bringing accountability to the program. [Source: Military Time | Karen Jowers | November 24, 2021 ++]

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## Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

### '1MC' thru 'Adrift'

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say 'tasteless?') manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor's language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: 'RN' denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

**1MC** - The basic one-way communications system on a vessel. Reaches all spaces on a ship. Used for general announcements, and to transmit general alarm system signals. Control stations are located on the bridge, quarterdeck, and central station. Other transmitters may be installed at additional points. There are other MC and JV circuits used for communications within the ship. They are typically system-specific, i.e. weapons systems, navigation communication, engineering systems, firefighting, etc.

**130-rpm fish** - A form of sea life (type unknown) which makes a sound very similar to a propeller turning at 130 rpm.

**90-Day Wonder** – Derisive term for a graduate of OCS. The derision arises from the lack of experience and naval knowledge of the typical graduate. Commonly seen as "90-Day Blunder."

**99** – (USN aviation) Used to precede a radio call which applies to a group of aircraft, e.g. "99 Guntrains" would address all aircraft with a Guntrain call sign.

**Aback** – Backing a sail is turning it so that the wind hits the front face; the effect is to slow a ship or boat. A sail which is being backed is said to be 'aback.' A sailing ship which accidentally goes aback when tacking loses its momentum and is said to be 'in irons.' A person is said to be 'all aback' when he is confused or surprised.

**Abaft** – Aft of a given point on a ship; e.g. the bridge is abaft the bow.

**ABC** – Atomic, Biological, Chemical. An early term since supplanted by NBC.

**Accelerated Stall** – (Aviation) A stall which occurs during accelerated flight, i.e. while the pilot is pulling G's. Generally a much more violent event than an unaccelerated stall.

**Acey-Deucey** – Backgammon, a board game traditionally played in off-duty hours.

**Acey-Deucey Club** – A club for E-5 and E-6 enlisted personnel (Second- and First-Class Petty Officers).

**ACM** - Air Combat Maneuvering. Dogfighting practice.

**Acockbill** – Out of alignment or awry. In original usage, if a sailing ship's yards were not all aligned, she was said to be "all acockbill." See also SQUARED AWAY.

**Active Homing** – A homing (guidance) method where the missile provides its own signal (typically either radar or sonar) transmissions and homes in on the energy reflected off the target.

**Adrift** – (1) Unsecured; scattered about; not properly stowed, or out of place. (2) (RCN) Missing in action. "Oh no, I'm adrift for the meeting and the Bossman'll be there!"

**Advance and Transfer** – Two separate terms involving a ship's turn. Advance is the forward progress made between the time that the rudder is put over and the time the ship is steady on her new course. Transfer is the horizontal displacement of the ship during the same period of time. Advance is maximized in a turn of 90 degrees or more; transfer is maximized in a turn of 180 degrees or more.

**AEF/A** – (USN submarine) Auxiliary Electrician Forward/Aft.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | November 30, 2021 ++]

**\* Military History \***



## Cold War Spys

### Six Who Betrayed Their Countries



#### 1. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

Married in 1939, New York City residents Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were devoted communists who allegedly headed a spy ring that passed military secrets to the Soviets. The scheme got underway sometime after 1940, when Julius became a civilian engineer with the U.S. Army Signal Corps. He was dismissed in 1945 once the military learned of his communist sympathies, but not before recruiting Ethel's brother, an Army machinist working on the Manhattan Project, to turn over handwritten notes and sketches pertaining to the atomic bomb. Meanwhile, other Rosenberg recruits purportedly delivered thousands of pages of documents detailing new radar and aircraft technologies. At trial following their 1950 arrest, Ethel's brother testified against them, and a judge sentenced them to death, declaring their crime "worse than murder."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower then sealed their fate by denying a petition for executive clemency. The two were sent to the electric chair at New York State's Sing Sing prison on June 19, 1953, marking the first time American civilians had ever been executed for espionage. Although worldwide protests erupted over the Rosenbergs' treatment, with many people feeling

they had fallen victim to McCarthy-era red baiting, the post-Soviet release of decrypted KGB messages proved that Julius had in fact been a spy. The evidence against Ethel is less ironclad, and her guilt remains in dispute.

## **2. Klaus Fuchs**

Following Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Klaus Fuchs fled his native Germany for the United Kingdom, where he received a doctorate in physics and eventually became a citizen. During World War II he was invited to join Britain's clandestine atomic bomb development program, despite his known communist leanings, and from there was sent to the United States to take part in the Manhattan Project. Upon returning to the U.K., Fuchs secured a prestigious post at a nuclear energy research center. In 1950, however, he was apprehended after U.S. agents discovered that for years he had been handing nuclear secrets to the Soviets, who by now had their own atomic bomb.

Fuchs confessed, telling the authorities that he "had complete confidence in Russian policy" and that "the Western Allies deliberately allowed Russia and Germany to fight each other to the death." Though Fuchs claimed not to know his American contact's true name, the FBI quickly traced a trail back to the Rosenberg spy ring, resulting in the arrest of the Rosenbergs and several co-conspirators. Compared to the Rosenbergs, Fuchs got off easy. After nine years in British prison, he immigrated to East Germany, where he continued working as a nuclear physicist until his retirement in 1979. A winner of the Karl Marx Medal, East Germany's highest civilian honor, Fuchs died in 1988 at age 76.

## **3. Ray Mawby**

Ray Mawby, a one-time electrician, served from 1955 to 1983 in the House of Commons, where he championed so-called traditional British values (he campaigned, for example, against the legalization of homosexuality). For Conservative Party members like him, hatred of communism was practically a prerequisite. Yet in 2012, a dozen years after his death, a BBC reporter unearthed a file showing that Mawby had been a mole for Czechoslovakia, then part of the Soviet bloc. Hundreds of pages of documents revealed that Mawby, who was given the codename Laval, began secretly handing over intelligence not long after Czech agents first approached him at a November 1960 cocktail party.

Lacking access to classified information, Mawby supplied them instead with political gossip, such as the existence of a confidential investigation into a Conservative Party colleague. More insidiously, he also apparently provided floor plans of the prime minister's parliamentary office, as well as details about the prime minister's security team. For each helpful tidbit, Mawby received £100, which, his handlers implied, went toward his drinking and gambling habits. In later years, they upped the total to £400 per year. Though Mawby at one point met several times a month with his handlers, their collaboration appears to have ended in 1971. Remarkably, some Labour Party politicians are also known to have been in cahoots with the Czechs.

## **4. The Cambridge Five**

Incredulous that a Conservative member of Parliament could be a communist spy, the British authorities were likewise thrown off by the elite educations and upper-class backgrounds of the so-called Cambridge Five, who were recruited into the Soviet sphere around the time they attended the University of Cambridge in the 1930s. Within a decade or so of graduation, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross had all worked their way up to important intelligence posts, which they used to pass an array of secrets to the Soviets. For example, thanks to these double agents, who were reportedly motivated by ideology, not money, the Soviet Union learned about an Allied plan to send anti-communist insurgents into Albania, as well as Allied military strategy during the Korean War.

Upon discovering that the authorities were closing in, Philby, who ironically headed the anti-Soviet section of MI6 (the British equivalent of the CIA), tipped off Maclean and Burgess, prompting them to defect to Moscow in 1951. Philby joined them there in 1963, whereas Cairncross ended up in Italy and France. Blunt, meanwhile, confessed in exchange for immunity from prosecution and was allowed to stay in Britain. None of the five ever faced espionage charges.

### **5. Aldrich Ames**

The son of a CIA analyst, Wisconsin-born Aldrich Ames wasted no time in joining the agency himself, starting there in high school as a part-time clerical worker and later becoming a full-fledged spy. Posted to such places as Turkey and Mexico, Ames spent much of his three-decade-long career attempting to coax Soviet officials into the CIA's service. Despite an obvious drinking problem and poor performance reviews, he advanced to become head of the counterintelligence branch of the CIA's Soviet division. In 1985, however, while going through a financially disastrous divorce, Ames walked into the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C., and offered to trade secrets for money.

Paid some \$2.7 million over the next nine years, he in return left classified documents at prearranged drop sites for the KGB to pick up later. He moreover disclosed the identities of virtually every secret agent working for the Americans within the Soviet Union, at least 10 of whom were subsequently executed. "[They] died because this warped, murdering traitor wanted a bigger house and a Jaguar," the CIA's director said later. Though U.S. officials had suspected the existence of a mole for quite some time, Ames avoided arrest until 1994, when the FBI finally closed in after uncovering incriminating evidence in his trash and on his computer. He is currently serving a life sentence at a federal prison in Pennsylvania.

### **6. Adolf Tolkachev**

The previous five examples notwithstanding, not every traitorous Cold War spy supported the communist cause. In early 1977, for instance, Soviet electronics engineer Adolf Tolkachev began dropping notes into the cars of U.S. diplomats, asking to meet with an American official. The CIA originally ignored him, worried that it would fall into a KGB trap. But Tolkachev, who worked at a military aviation institute in Moscow, persisted and eventually gained the CIA's trust.

From 1979 to 1985, he regularly stuffed classified documents into his coat in order to photograph them at home with a CIA-supplied camera. His CIA handlers would then intermittently pick up this film, along with handwritten messages, after taking great care to avoid KGB surveillance.

From Tolkachev, the CIA learned that U.S. cruise missiles and bomber planes could fly under Soviet radar. It also gained great knowledge of new Soviet weapon systems, thus saving the U.S. military an estimated \$2 billion in research and manufacturing costs. For this spy work, the CIA paid Tolkachev more than \$1 million—the majority of which was held in escrow pending his planned defection—and supplied Led Zeppelin, The Beatles and other Western rock albums for his son.

Yet he appears to have been motivated more by revenge than money, telling his CIA handlers about the murder of his wife’s mother and the imprisonment of her father during Joseph Stalin’s purges of the 1930s. (Tolkachev was furthermore upset by the government’s treatment of contemporary dissidents he admired.) The collaboration came to an abrupt end in 1985, when it’s believed that former CIA agent Edward Lee Howard, and possibly Aldrich Ames as well, told the Soviets about Tolkachev’s activities. He was executed the following year.

[Source: [www/history.com](http://www.history.com) | Jesse Greenspan | October 8, 2016 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Awardees

**Ty Carter | Afghanistan**



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the*

***MEDAL OF HONOR***

*To*

**Ty Michael Carter**

**Ranks and organizations:** U.S. Army SSgt, Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division

**Places and dates:** Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan October 3, 2009

**Entered service:** Summer 1988

**Born:** Jan. 25, 1980 in Spokane, Washington



When the inside of an armored vehicle is the only thing keeping you safe from a hail of gunfire, would you have the courage to rescue one of your injured comrades on the ground outside? Army Staff Sgt. Ty Carter did just that during an intense battle in Afghanistan. For his bravery and devotion, he earned the Medal of Honor.

Carter was born in Spokane, Washington, on Jan. 25, 1980, and the family moved to the California Bay Area the following year. A decade later, they moved back to Spokane, where Carter graduated from North Central High School in 1998. Within months, he'd joined the Marines as a combat engineer. After four years of service, Carter left the Marines and went to community college to study biology. However, he said he liked the sense of purpose he'd had in the military, so in January 2008, five years after he left the Marines, he joined the Army as a cavalry scout.

In May 2009, then-Spc. Carter deployed to Afghanistan with his unit, the Black Knight Troop of the 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. Not long after their arrival in the country, the unit was sent to Combat Outpost Keating, one of the country's most remote and vulnerable spots. COP Keating was near the Pakistan border in a deep valley surrounded by tall mountains and was known to the soldiers stationed there as "the fishbowl" because they were easy targets for hidden enemies.



**Black Knight Troop scout Ty Carter waiting at Outpost Keating on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border**

While COP Keating's soldiers constantly shielded themselves from enemy fire, little was able to prepare them for the events of Oct. 3, 2009, which became known as the Battle of Kamdesh. Early that morning, Carter and 52 other American soldiers were woken by the sounds of an attack. About 300 Taliban fighters hidden in the hills surrounding all four sides of the outpost fired on

them using rocket-propelled grenades, anti-aircraft machine guns, mortars and other small arms. Carter immediately jumped out of bed, threw on his boots and Kevlar vest and quickly began to do his job, which was to reinforce a forward battle position — in this case, a Humvee that housed the long-range advanced scout surveillance system. He ran at least twice through a 100-meter gauntlet of enemy fire to resupply ammunition to the men in the vehicle, and he voluntarily stayed with them to defend it.

The Humvee's tires had quickly been flattened, which meant Carter and four other soldiers were trapped there as the barrage of gunfire continued. As Taliban fighters moved onto the outpost, the men knew they had to run to safety, or they would die there. So, Carter and Sgt. Brad Larson provided cover for the three other soldiers to try to escape. Two of the men went down quickly, while the third, Spc. Stephan Mace, disappeared into a cloud of smoke. Carter and Larson stayed in the Humvee for hours, taking shots out of the windows with their rifles when they could to defend themselves. Eventually, Carter saw something on the ground — a wounded Mace, about 30 yards away from the Humvee. Carter said he wanted to help his comrade, but Larson initially refused, saying it was too dangerous.

Larson soon relented, though, and Carter began a treacherous journey outside the protections of the Humvee. The young soldier ran through a hail of rocket propelled grenades and machine-gun fire to get to Mace and tend to his devastating leg wounds. Carter then picked up his fellow soldier and carried him back through the heavy gunfire into the Humvee. Carter didn't stay inside long, though. He got back out of the vehicle to search for something that would help rescue them. He managed to recover the squad's radio, which allowed them to coordinate their evacuation with other soldiers at the outpost. Those soldiers, led by Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha, provided cover fire as Carter and Larson ran from the Humvee while carrying Mace on a stretcher. They made it through about 100 meters of withering enemy fire to get to the aid station.

While they'd made it out of a tough situation, the battle wasn't over, so Carter returned to the fight. By this point, much of the outpost had caught fire, and flames were bearing down on the aid station where they'd just delivered Mace. Several other soldiers lay wounded inside, too, so Carter left the safety of cover one more time. He grabbed a chainsaw that he'd found and cut down a burning tree, saving the aid station from being engulfed by flames. Carter then worked alongside his fellow soldiers to push back the enemy. After more than 12 hours of fighting, reinforcements arrived, and they were able to retake the outpost.

Sadly, Mace didn't survive the ordeal. He died in surgery hours later. But his mother, Vanessa Adelson, was quoted as saying that her son died at peace thanks to Carter's courage. "I'm so grateful ... because Stephan could have died in the dirt," Adelson said. COP Keating, which had been scheduled to close, was evacuated within days of the battle, then destroyed. Carter suffered several physical and psychological injuries from the ordeal, but he remained on deployment for several months. He was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, when he returned to the U.S. He even deployed a second time to Afghanistan in May 2012.

While Carter was notified shortly after the Battle of Kamdesh that he was being considered for the Medal of Honor, the official news that it had been approved didn't come through until nearly four years later. On Aug. 26, 2013, Carter received the nation's highest honor from President Barack Obama during a ceremony at the White House. Carter's wife, Shannon, their three children, and several of his family members were able to attend. Carter has always said that the honor belongs to the entire Black Knight Troop, including the eight soldiers who died that day at COP Keating. A few months before Carter's award, Romesha — the soldier who had led the cover fire that helped Carter, Mace and Larson escape the doomed Humvee — also received the Medal of Honors. It marked the first time since the Vietnam War that two living recipients earned the medal during the same battle.

Carter left the Army as a staff sergeant in 2014. He was very open about his struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder, so he decided to become a mental health advocate. In the years since his honorable discharge, he's become a motivational speaker who works often with veterans on their mental health education. Carter's actions in Afghanistan were depicted in a recent movie. "The Outpost," released in 2020, was based on the 2012 book about the Battle of Kamdesh. Carter was played by actor Caleb Landry Jones. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmoahs.org> | Katie Lange | October 4, 2021 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Awardees

Mitchell Cloud | WWII/Korea



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the*

*MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously*

*To*

**Cpl. Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr.**

**Ranks and organizations:** U.S. Army Cpl., Company E, 19th Infantry Regiment,  
24th Infantry Division

**Places and dates:** near Chonghyon, Korea November 5, 1950

**Entered service:** Aug. 11, 1941

**Born:** July 2, 1925, in Hatfield, Wisconsin



Army Cpl. Mitchell Red Cloud Jr. survived World War II as a Marine in the Pacific. After the war ended, he was discharged, but he couldn't shake the feeling that he had more to offer the military, so he re-enlisted as a soldier. Red Cloud eventually sacrificed his life in Korea in an act of bravery that earned him the Medal of Honor.

Red Cloud was born on July 2, 1925, in Hatfield, Wisconsin, to parents Mitchell and Lillian. He had a little brother named Merlin, and they were all members of the Ho-Chunk Native American tribe, also known as the Winnebago. Red Cloud attended Black River Falls High School until he was 17, when he asked his father if he could join the Marine Corps. His dad said yes, so on Aug. 11, 1941, the teen enlisted. The U.S. joined World War II a few months later, and Red Cloud was deployed to the Pacific. He fought in Guadalcanal, where he suffered from malaria but refused a medical discharge. He continued to serve through the end of the war when he was injured in Okinawa.

Red Cloud left the Marines in November 1945. He returned to civilian life, got married and had a daughter, Annita. But his family said he grew restless as a civilian, so he decided to return to active duty in October 1948, this time for the Army. His brother later said he was interested in serving in all of the military branches. Red Cloud was part of the 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. The unit was first assigned to occupation duty in Kyushu, Japan, before being deployed to Korea when war broke out in the summer of 1950.

On Nov. 5, 1950, Red Cloud's Company E was in position on Hill 123 near Chonghyon, North Korea. The 25-year-old corporal was manning a listening post at the hill's ridge, right in front of the command post, when he realized Chinese Communist forces were approaching. Those forces instantly charged at him from the brush about 100 feet away. Red Cloud immediately sounded the alarm with his automatic rifle, firing it toward the enemy as they closed in on him. He was quickly knocked down by gunfire, but he pulled himself back to standing by wrapping his arm around a tree, which he then used to steady his rifle so he could keep firing. The enemy onslaught was too much for him to bear alone, though, and he died where he fell from gunshot wounds.

Vantage Point, a Department of Veterans Affairs blog, said he was shot at least eight times during the ordeal. Other accounts said that when his comrades found his body, he was shot down

in front of the enemy forces he'd killed. Prior to the skirmish, part of that enemy force had already crept up on Company E's position from behind and killed several men, many of whom were sleeping. The company's commander credited Red Cloud with delaying the front-facing attack enough for the unit to reorganize and tighten its defenses, essentially saving the rest of them.

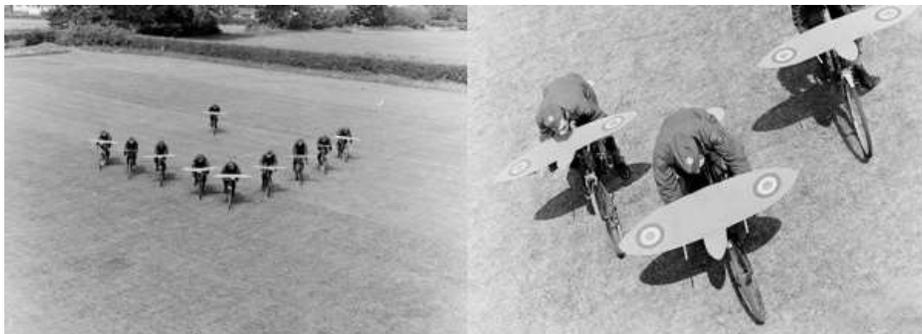
Red Cloud's fearlessness, courage and self-sacrifice earned him the Medal of Honor. On April 3, 1951, his mother received the medal from famed World War II Gen. Omar Bradley in a ceremony at the Pentagon. Red Cloud was initially buried at a United Nations cemetery in Korea; however, his body was repatriated to the Decorah Cemetery near his hometown in March 1955. His medal is currently housed at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison, Wisconsin. To honor his warrior ethos, Red Cloud's name lives on. In 1957, the Army renamed one of its Korean installations in his honor; Camp Red Cloud was used by U.S. troops until its deactivation in 2018. In 1999, the U.S. Navy commissioned a Watson-class cargo ship named the USNS Red Cloud, which was christened in San Diego by the fallen corporal's daughter.

Various military facilities and parks across the U.S. also honor Red Cloud's name. One monument that stands in his honor at Black River Falls, Wisconsin, has an inscription that reads, "The son of a Winnebago chief and warriors who believe that when a man goes into battle, he expects to kill or be killed, and if he dies, he will live forever." [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmoahs.org> | Katie Lange | October 11, 2021 ++]

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## Every Picture Tells a Story

### Formation Flying Training



“Bombers over London”. To help train air cadets in the concepts of formation flying, the Air Training Corps, a kind of kindergarten for the Royal Air Force, even tried bicycles decked out in cardboard as Spitfires. By the time this photo had been taken in August of 1942, the ATC had fed more than 75,000 British boys into the RAF maw. Though interesting and even somewhat funny, this training concept was rarely applied. The *LIFE* magazine article in which these photos were first featured stated: “... on special occasions they get a chance to show off their skill and knowledge in make-believe flying games like “Bombers over London” ... here members of the

285<sup>th</sup> A.T.C. Squadron of Sussex practice formation flying in their home-made “Spitfires”, sight a “Jerry bomber,” bank off in British “Vic” formation to attack and finally bring down the lone enemy plane. Makeshift maneuvers like this not only give valuable experience in formation flying, but lend sport and realism to A.T.C. training. English air cadets study in their spare time, for the A.T.C. is not included in any school curriculum. Their classrooms are garages, automobile showrooms and any other space, which can be borrowed for a few hours each week. More than 200,000 boys are enlisted in England’s 1,500 units. When they reach draft age they are assured of a chance to use their training, for the R.A.F. now requires that all candidates for ground crews have an A.T.C. diploma.” These photos were in fact taken at a demonstration before King Hakon of Sweden and thousands of spectators watching the 285<sup>th</sup> Coulsdon Purley Squadron cadets fly their bicycles.

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## WWII Bomber Nose Art [87] American Doll



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## Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 DEC

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 DEC**”. [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | November 2021 ++]



## Military Health Care

### Update 04: The Benefit under Threat | TFL

October 2021 marked the 20th anniversary of TRICARE For Life (TFL), one of the largest expansions of the military health care benefit and a huge win for MOAA and other military advocates who worked tirelessly to secure a robust health care benefit for Medicare-eligible military retirees. While the 20th anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect on the TFL victory and the advocacy efforts that drove it, we are also reminded of the importance of protecting the benefit for current Medicare-eligible retirees as well as future generations of TFL enrollees, all of whom sacrificed greatly in support of our nation.

TFL has been under threat for years — both for those who currently rely on the benefit and for our newest generation of military retirees, even after years of war have highlighted the risks and sacrifices associated with career military service. Here is a look at how TFL came to be, why it is more important now than ever, and what lies ahead to protect it.

#### Meeting a Need

The uniform military health care benefit was created by the Dependents Medical Care Act of 1956, which defined access to military treatment facility (MTF) care in statute. It granted space-available access to MTF care for active duty family members, retirees and their families, and survivors. From 1956 to 2001, the only military health care benefit for retirees aged 65 and older was space-available MTF care and prescription drugs from MTF pharmacies, both at zero out-of-pocket cost.

The post-Cold War drawdown led to the downsizing or closure of many installations and military hospitals. Retirees in these areas lost MTF access and, therefore, their only military health care benefit. Throughout the 1990s, advocacy groups fought for legislation to improve the health care benefit for Medicare-eligible retirees. Some organizations and individuals turned to the courts claiming breach of contract and said DoD and the services had promised career

servicemembers free health care for life. This perception was reinforced by decades of readily available free MTF care.

Federal courts have held there is no legal basis for the claim to free health care for life since it is not supported by statute and regulations and does not grant a right to MTF care, or other free medical care, for retirees and their dependents. However, an appellate court acknowledged the validity of retiree claims and urged Congress to fulfill its moral obligation to retirees.

### **The TFL Win**

Military advocacy groups achieved a long-standing goal when Congress addressed military retiree access to care by establishing TFL in the FY 2001 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). TFL provides wraparound coverage that pays out-of-pocket costs after Medicare reimbursement for Medicare-covered services. TFL beneficiaries are also eligible for all TRICARE benefits not covered by Medicare, including medical care overseas. The bill also expanded the TRICARE retail and mail order pharmacy programs to Medicare-eligible retirees who had been limited to filling prescriptions at MTF pharmacies.

Media called the TFL win a “stunning turnaround” and reported TFL would increase the lifetime value of the military health care benefit by more than a third. Senior DoD officials called TFL “the Golden Supplement.” “When Congress enacted TFL, legislators and Pentagon officials alike acknowledged the statutory omission of a cash premium for TFL was to recognize career servicemembers had pre-paid steep premiums through a career of service and sacrifice in uniform,” said Col. Steve Strobridge, USAF (Ret), MOAA’s former vice president for Government Relations. “The only requirement was to enroll in Medicare Part B, as the vast majority of Medicare-eligible retirees had been doing anyway.

“From the 1990s to 2001,” Strobridge added, “we worked hard to highlight the shameful situation that the military was the only large employer in America that provided its 65-and-older retirees no employer-paid coverage beyond Medicare. Enactment of TFL and associated pharmacy benefits transformed military retirees’ medical coverage to one of the very best.” The TFL benefit has become even more important given the specialization and subspecialization in health care. TFL allows military retirees to access the care they need with no out-of-pocket cost for most services.

Over the past two decades, the limitations of space-available MTF care for retirees have been underscored by medical provider deployments to support overseas operations and, more recently, the response to COVID-19. TFL has ensured all military retirees have affordable access to care even when MTF capacity is constrained.

### **TFL Under Attack**

Since its launch in 2001, TFL has come under budgetary attack in multiple legislative cycles. MOAA has been at the forefront, working with other advocacy groups and The Military Coalition to preserve the benefit for Medicare-eligible uniformed services retirees and their families. MOAA’s advocacy efforts, including congressional testimony, statements for the record, and

engagement with Armed Services Committee staff and member offices on Capitol Hill, successfully blocked five consecutive administration budget request proposals for a TFL enrollment fee in fiscal years 2013-2017.

The appropriate level of out-of-pocket costs for beneficiaries has been a topic of debate since the military health care benefit was passed into law in 1956. The creation of TFL has had a significant impact on DoD health care spending. Calls for a TFL enrollment fee and other beneficiary cost increases will likely continue in the future given DoD budget constraints.

### **Safeguarding TFL for a New Generation**

It would be unconscionable for Congress to increase costs for Medicare-eligible military retirees who currently rely on TFL, and MOAA has successfully made that argument for many years. Most recent proposals to cut TFL have targeted our newest generation of military retirees — equally unacceptable. Blocking proposed cuts to the TFL benefit is a top priority for MOAA. It's as true today as in 2001 when TFL was enacted that career servicemembers and their families pay far steeper premiums than any civilian for their benefits in retirement, and they pay them upfront through extended service and sacrifice.

The TFL benefit was a key component of the compensation and benefits package that sustained the all-volunteer force through two decades of war. Congress must not reduce the benefit just as the generation that served a full career amid high op tempo and repeated combat deployments reaches retirement. Our servicemembers earned comprehensive health care coverage and MOAA will continue to work to ensure it is there when they need it most. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Karen Ruedisueli | November 16, 2021 ++]

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## **TRICARE Pharmacy Network**

### **Update 02: How to Find a Pharmacy near You**

The departure of Walmart and Sam's Club from the Tricare Pharmacy program leaves many Tricare beneficiaries scrambling to figure out where they will fill their prescriptions after Dec. 15, 2021. CVS is the pharmacy reentering the Tricare Pharmacy program on that date. CVS has nearly 10,000 locations across the country, but many beneficiaries are reporting that their nearest CVS is significantly farther than their nearest Walmart or Sam's Club. Plus, CVS has just announced plans to close 900 stores over the next three years.

What's a military family to do when they need a prescription? For most of us, the answer is a lot simpler than it seems. The Tricare Pharmacy program includes not only the major players, but also local area chains, many grocery store pharmacies and a huge selection of independent pharmacies. If your small town has a mom-and-pop type pharmacy, there's a good chance it is a Tricare participating pharmacy, even if you don't think there's another military member for miles.

And you can find all these participating pharmacies using the Find A Pharmacy tool on the Tricare website at <https://militaryrx.express-scripts.com/find-pharmacy>.

To test the coverage from all Tricare participating pharmacies, the author of this article picked one of the most remote, random places he had traveled: his family's homestead in rural South Dakota. Not surprising, there isn't a Tricare pharmacy in that zip code. Or even in its county, which has an average population of less than 10 people per square mile. But the closest Tricare participating pharmacy was located in a town that is about 15 minutes closer than the nearest Walmart. By contrast, he looked up local pharmacies for his child in college in Manhattan. The closest Walmart location requires a 40-minute journey using a train and then a bus. But just within her zip code, there are 22 small-chain or independent participating pharmacy options.

As always, verify Tricare's information. As we all know, the Tricare databases aren't always completely up to date. Take a screenshot of the Tricare website showing that the pharmacy is a participating provider. Then, call the pharmacy and ask whether it is still on the Tricare participating provider list. The Tricare Find A Pharmacy tool can help you easily locate participating pharmacies that are closer to your home or work. As a bonus, you may discover that you can help support a local small business while you take care of your prescription needs. This change in major pharmacy contracts is a great time to give it a try and see what interesting options you discover. [Source: Military.com | Kate Horrell| November 19, 2021 ++]

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## Opioids

### **For the First Time Annual Overdose Deaths Exceed 100,000**

Provisional data from the National Center for Health Statistics shows that overdose deaths increased by nearly 30 percent from the 78,000 in the previous 12-month period. The 12-month period that ended in April was the first time the country's overdose deaths topped 100,000 a year. Overdoses accounted for more deaths than car accidents and guns combined. Nora Volkow, MD, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said most overdose deaths occur among Americans ages 25-55. "They leave behind friends, family and children, if they have children, so there are a lot of downstream consequences," Dr. Volkow told *The New York Times*. "This is a major challenge to our society." Since 2015, U.S. overdose deaths have more than doubled. Experts say the overdose public health crisis had been both overshadowed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts say the spike in overdose deaths can be attributed to the increasing ubiquity of fentanyl (i.e. simultaneous opioid availability) in the street drug supply, the stoppage of in-person programs for those in recovery amid the pandemic, and increased isolation and stress. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Katie Adams | November 18, 2021 ++]

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## **Diabetes**

### **Update 28: VA Study Links Statin Use with Diabetes Progression**

A database study of Veteran patients suggests that statin medications can raise the risk of diabetes progression. Based on the findings, the researchers say patients should be carefully observed when they start on statins. Common statins are atorvastatin (sold as Lipitor), fluvastatin (Lescol XL), and pitavastatin (Livalo). More than 35 million Americans take the prescription drugs to help control cholesterol.

The study, published Oct. 4, 2021, in JAMA Internal Medicine, included more than 83,000 matched pairs of patients. Each pair consisted of a patient who started taking a statin at some point during the study period, and a similar comparison patient who initiated a non-statin drug—namely, an H2 blocker or proton pump inhibitor. Those drugs treat stomach acid conditions and are known to not affect diabetes risk. The study group was mostly men, aged 30 and older. All were diagnosed with diabetes at some point during the study period, 2003-2015. All were regular users of VA health care.

Diabetes progression occurred in about 56% of statin users, versus 48% of users of non-statin medications. Furthermore, each individual component of diabetes progression — new insulin initiation, increase in the number of glucose-lowering medication classes, incidence of five or more measurements with blood glucose greater than or equal to 200 milligrams per deciliter, or a new diagnosis of ketoacidosis or uncontrolled diabetes — was significantly higher among statin users. The study also found a dose-response relationship, with higher intensity of LDL-cholesterol lowering associated with greater diabetes progression. “Patients on high-intensity statins and who were otherwise healthy had the highest risk of diabetes progression,” said lead author Dr. Ishak A. Mansi, of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and the VA North Texas Health Care System.

#### **What was known about statin-diabetes link**

The link between increased insulin resistance and statins, which help to lower cholesterol and prevent heart attacks, is well-documented. It’s substantial enough, the Mayo Clinic has observed, that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a warning on statin labels regarding blood glucose levels and diabetes. A meta-analysis of 13 studies published by The Lancet in 2010, for example, revealed that statin therapy was associated with a 9% increased risk for incident diabetes. But until recently, the clinical impact of statins’ metabolic effect in patients with diabetes wasn’t widely known outside of academic circles, or discussed with patients.

“Prior research has shown statins to be associated with increased insulin resistance,” Mansi explains. “But doctors do not routinely measure insulin resistance for their patients. Rather, it is done [in] research and academic circles only, not in everyday life. Our study took findings reported by academic studies of increased insulin resistance [linked] with statin use in research

papers and translated it into everyday language of patients' care--that is, patients on statins may need to escalate their anti-diabetes therapy.”

While no single study should change practice, “this study should alert [guideline] writers and policymakers that more studies are needed,” says Mansi. Notably, the findings are particularly relevant to Veterans: More than 30 million Americans have diabetes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and about a quarter of VA patients have the disease, including some who may have developed it as a result of exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam.

### **The case for further research**

Mansi said he hopes the study will inspire public and private organizations to dedicate funding to research about unintended adverse effects of commonly used medications. “Whereas investigating beneficial effects of drugs is funded by manufacturers—and we are grateful for them for doing that—there is no dedicated funding mechanism for a study like our study,” says Mansi. Also, based on this study’s findings, Mansi said he hopes additional studies will uncover more information about both the benefits and harms of statins in patients with diabetes. “We know well about the benefits, but the harms are much less investigated despite [the fact] that statins have been in use for more than 30 years,” says Mansi.

“Specifically, researchers should look at, what are the population characteristics that may benefit less from use of statins for primary prevention or get more harm? These types of studies should be prioritized since diabetes is very common in the United States and the world. Hence, answering these questions [could] impact hundreds of millions of patients and cannot be postponed.” [Source: VA Office of Research & Development | Marisa Torrieri || November 18, 2021

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## **Blood Pressure**

### **Update 04: Solar Activity Impact on Elderly Men**

A study, including VA Boston researchers, has found that sunspots and related geomagnetic disturbances may be linked to higher blood pressure in older men. The researchers studied blood pressure readings for 675 elderly men between 2000 and 2017. Participants were born between 1884 and 1945. They found that periods with high magnetic field activity from the sun corresponded with higher diastolic and systolic blood pressure patterns. The pattern was most evident when the number of sunspots and disturbance to Earth’s magnetic field were high 16 days before blood pressure reading. The link between solar radiation and blood pressure was independent of pollution or ambient radioactivity levels. Previous research has shown that changes in magnetic field linked to sunspots and solar wind can affect autonomic nervous system activity. The results could have implications for long-term management of blood pressure, and also may

help scientists interpret data from long studies, according to the researchers. [Source: Journal of the American Heart Association | VA ORD | November 17, 2021 ++]

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## Sleep

### Update 15: More Myths That Could Explain Why you're So Tired



This year, with everything from the pandemic to the roller-coaster economy and murder hornets, a lot of people have been losing sleep — but the good news is that there's been plenty of research on the topic. The negative effects of alcohol and caffeine on a good night's rest are fairly well-known, but myths abound. Correctives to these common misconceptions, along with free tools and tips, might help you catch a full night of sound sleep. They won't cure the pandemic or murder hornets, but at least you'll be rested enough to deal with them.

#### **Myth: Stay in Bed Until You Fall Back Asleep**

Staying in bed may not help you fall asleep again if you wake in the middle of the night, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Experts say if you don't fall back asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, it's best to get up and do something relaxing in another room. Don't switch on bright lights, a smartphone, or a laptop. Instead, read a book by lamplight or listen to calming music until you feel drowsy again.

#### **Myth: Couples Should Sleep in the Same Bed**

Tossing and turning, pillow flipping, or frequent trips to the bathroom by your partner may result in a sleepless night. Instead of trying to sleep through it, look at ways to alleviate the disruptions. Consider a memory foam mattress or topper, or even two twin mattresses in a king-size frame. Also, try using your own comforter or blanket.

#### **Myth: You'll Sleep Better if you're Alone**

Although there can be drawbacks to sharing a bed, a small University of Minnesota study reported in February that people with good romantic relationships in their 20s had less stressful life events and better sleep quality in their 30s. The study's authors aren't going overboard with their claims. Lead researcher Chloe Huelznitz suggested only that romantics may "have other relational skills and stronger social networks that help reduce their exposure to stressful life events."

**Myth: Reading Before Bedtime Is Relaxing**

This depends on the medium. Books and magazines are okay. Scrolling through social media feeds and news sites on a smartphone, not so much. The blue light from personal electronic devices suppresses melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep cycles, according to Harvard Health. Practice self-restraint and keep the phones, tablets, and laptops out of the bedroom.

**Myth: A Warm, Cozy Room Is Best for Falling Asleep**

Hot temperatures and muggy conditions may induce drowsiness during the daytime, but they're not recommended for a good night's rest. Experts agree that the best temperature for sleeping is between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit. It's neither too cold nor too warm, and lets body temperature gradually drop — as it should — as you begin to fall asleep.

**Myth: Caffeine Doesn't Affect Sleep if you're Immune to It**

Caffeine consumption should be cut off at least four hours before bedtime, according to Australia's Sleep Health Foundation, because the effects can last up to six hours. Even people who don't feel the effects should still practice moderation or abstinence. Research shows that caffeine negatively affects sleep, regardless how "immune" someone has become.

**Myth: Alcohol Helps You Sleep**

A beer or glass of wine will make you drowsy and initially may induce sleep. But research shows that the quality of sleep deteriorates gradually during the latter half of the night. A glass of red wine may be recommended for other health benefits, but abstaining from alcohol before bedtime facilitates a better night's rest.

**Myth: There Are Foods that'll Put You to Sleep**

A "sleep-friendly" ice cream called Nightfood is formulated for nighttime snacking, but it isn't going to help you sleep. Although it does have vitamins and minerals that supposedly promote sleep, the main thing is that it has less lactose, sugar, and caffeine that might keep you awake, so it may be a good choice for people who are going to have dessert in the evening regardless. There are also carbonated drinks and even coffees with additives intended to promote sleep. But AARP urges people toward natural foods including almonds or walnuts, bananas, cherries, and hummus for a more healthful bedtime snack.

[Source: Cheapism | Olivia Lin | October 12, 2021 ++]

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## Coronavirus Vaccines

### Update 39: Molnupiravir | FDA Calls Merck COVID-19 Pill Effective



The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says that while Merck's experimental COVID-19 antiviral pill is effective, the agency has yet to determine whether the medication can be safely administered during pregnancy. The FDA said a review identified several potential risks, including possible toxicity and birth defects, The Associated Press reported on 26 NOV. Advisers and experts will gather at a public meeting Tuesday to discuss concerns, and that Merck has agreed the drug would not be used in children, per AP.

The FDA says the drug, called molnupiravir, will carry a warning about risks of use during pregnancy, but it could still be prescribed by doctors if the benefits are believed to outweigh the potential for danger. Merck acknowledged that updated data shows molnupiravir is significantly less effective in cutting hospitalizations and deaths than previously reported, Reuters reported. The company said its **pill showed a 30 percent reduction in hospitalizations and deaths**, based on data from 1,433 patients. In October, the data showed a roughly 50 percent efficacy, based on data from 775 patients, Reuters added.

Molnupiravir, which is administered as a five-day treatment and was developed in association with Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, targets the enzyme that allows the coronavirus to make copies of itself. Officials say it is likely to be effective against COVID-19 variants, including the highly infectious delta variant. The FDA has also asked for expert comment on concerns over whether the drug could encourage the virus to mutate and create new strains, as well as how those concerns could be mitigated. Molnupiravir has been touted as a "game changer" with regards to the pandemic.

Former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb has predicted that the "pandemic phase" of the coronavirus would likely come to an end with the approval of antiviral pills as well as the approval of COVID-19 vaccines for children under 12. Merck requested FDA authorization for the pill last October. [Source: The Hill | Sarakshi Rai | November 26, 2021 ++]

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## **Covid-19 Variants**

### **Update 03: A Variant of Concern | Omicron B.1.1529**

The announcement of a COVID-19 variant called B.1.1529 this week by scientists in South Africa, where it was first detected, has sent governments and financial markets around the world reeling. The World Health Organization (WHO) held an emergency meeting on 26 NOV, where it designated the new strain, which it called omicron, a "variant of concern," or VOC, a label applied when a particular strain is especially virulent, transmissible or able to defeat public health measures.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average suffered its worst single-day drop of the year, plummeting more than 900 points. And multiple nations, including the U.S., quickly imposed travel restrictions as the omicron variant was also detected in Israel, Hong Kong, Botswana and Belgium. Infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci said the U.S. is "rushing" to obtain information on B.1.1529, but emphasized there is not enough data for immediate action. Here's what to know about omicron:

**U.S. restricts travel to southern Africa --** U.S. senior administration officials said Friday the U.S. would restrict travel to eight African countries starting 29 NOV due to the variant. The countries affected are South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi. Officials say the move was made out of an "abundance of caution" and was recommended by U.S. government medical experts and the COVID-19 Response Team. The restriction does not apply to American citizens or lawful permanent residents.

Fauci said in an interview with CNN 26 NOV U.S. and South African scientists will have a meeting regarding the new variant and its molecular makeup. Although Fauci says no cases have been detected so far in the U.S., he added scientists need more information on the variant's molecular makeup to test for it. "Right now, we're getting the material together with our South African colleagues to get a situation where you could actually directly test it. So, right now you're talking about sort of like a red flag that this might be an issue — but we don't know," Fauci said. "Once you test it, you'll know for sure whether or not it does or does not evade the antibodies that we make — for example against the virus, through a vaccine," he added. "The answer is we don't know right now, but we're going to find out for sure."

**Omicron has a high number of mutations --** "This variant has a large number of mutations, some of which are concerning," the WHO said in a 26 NOV statement. "Preliminary evidence suggests an increased risk of reinfection with this variant, as compared to other VOCs." Tulio de Oliveira, a bio-informatics professor at two universities in South Africa, said during the press conference there Thursday the new variant is "clearly different" than past ones such as delta. De Oliveira said at least 50 B.1.1529 mutations have been identified, with more than 30 in the spike protein, the region that interacts with human cells prior to cell entry.

Fauci said in an interview with CNN on Friday the variant is spreading at "a reasonably rapid rate." One hundred new cases so far have been linked to the B.1.1529, said Anne von Gottberg, a clinical microbiologist and head of respiratory diseases at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases. Although it is unclear whether the current coronavirus vaccines will be as effective against the new variant, many scientists appear confident they will, as was the case for other variants such as the highly contagious delta.

**Spike protein leads to concerns --** A particular concern in the new variant are the mutations affecting the spike protein, which could potentially make it more contagious. Fauci told the outlet the mutations in the spike protein "are raising some concern, particularly with regard to possibly transmissibility increase, and possibly evasion of immune response." The U.K. Health Security Agency has also recognized the potential for the mutations in the spike protein to make the variant more transmissible; however, more evidence is needed to support the conclusions.

**First found in South Africa, but now appearing elsewhere --** The first case of the B.1.1529 variant was detected in South Africa, which has struggled to contain the coronavirus along with its ongoing AIDS/HIV concerns. Francois Balloux, director of the UCL Genetics Institute, said the new variant likely developed in an immunocompromised person since the virus can last longer than normal in those individuals. It is possible the variant occurred in an individual who was untreated for AIDS/HIV, as South Africa has the world's highest AIDS rate. The number of cases rapidly increased in South Africa as only 100 were found earlier this month and more than 1,200 cases in the country were known as of Wednesday, Axios reported. As a result, at least 10 countries have banned travel from southern African regions in an attempt to keep the virus from spreading. Cases, however, have already been identified in Europe and Eastern Asia.

**It is tanking markets --** The announcement of the new variant has tanked markets across the world as concerns raise on how much longer the B.1.1529 could make the pandemic last. On 26 NOV, the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 900 points with stocks in oil, technology and electric vehicle companies dropping significantly. Japan's Nikkei and China's Hang Seng index each fell by 2 percent as countries move to restrict travel.

[Source: The Hill | Lexi Lonas | November 26, 2021 ++]

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## **Consumer Health**

**NOV 16 thru 30, 2021**

### **Stem-Cell Clinics**

The U.S. marketplace for unproven stem-cell interventions has exploded An investigation has found:

- In March 2021, 1,480 U.S. businesses operating 2,754 clinics were selling purported stem-cell treatments for various indications. More than four times as many businesses than were identified five years ago are selling stem-cell products that are not FDA-approved and lack convincing evidence of safety and efficacy. The increases occurred during a period when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration limited enforcement of federal regulations to provide businesses with time to come into regulatory compliance.
- Only 56 of the businesses listed prices for services on their websites. The prices ranged from \$1,200 to \$28,000 with an average price of \$5,118 and a median price of \$4,000.
- The conditions these treatments most commonly claimed to treat were: pain (85%), orthopedic conditions (47%), sports injuries (23%), neurological diseases (9%), immunological conditions (8%), cosmetic problems (8%), hair loss (7%), lung and respiratory conditions (6%), erectile dysfunction and other sex-related conditions (6%), skin conditions and wounds (6%), cardiovascular diseases and conditions (6%), aging (6%), diabetes (2%), spinal cord injury or paralysis (2%), and vision loss or impairment (2%).
- About one-third of the clinics were located in California, Florida, and Texas.

The report concludes: The possibility of increased enforcement activity by the FDA does not appear to have deterred most of the businesses identified in this study from continuing to market purported stem cell therapies. Rather, a review of their activities following the end of enforcement discretion reveals that most of them are still selling such products. Furthermore, additional businesses and clinics are entering the marketplace. This trend seems likely to continue absent substantial increases in enforcement activity by FDA, FTC, and other regulatory bodies and law enforcement agencies. Whether such regulatory action will occur now that the FDA's era of enforcement discretion has ended is uncertain.

### **Vaccines**

The American Medical Association House of Delegates has approved a resolution stating that only licensed physicians should have the medical authority to determine whether a person should receive a medical exemption from vaccines. Noting that the definition of "medical authority" varies from state to state and that some states allow "alternative practitioners" to approve exemptions, an AMA spokesperson explained that surveys have shown that naturopaths, homeopaths, and chiropractors are less likely to recommend vaccines and more likely to recommend against them despite scientific evidence of safety and efficacy.

### **Mercury-Containing Skin Products**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is warning consumers to immediately stop using skin creams, beauty and antiseptic soaps, and lotions that are labeled as containing mercurous chloride, calomel, mercuric, mercurio, or mercury on the label. These emit mercury vapors that can have serious health consequences when inhaled, especially by pregnant women, nursing babies, and young children. Such products are usually manufactured abroad and sold illegally in the United

States in shops catering to the Latino, Asian, African, or Middle Eastern communities. They are also sold through mobile apps. They are usually marketed to lighten skin or remove age spots, freckles, blemishes, and wrinkles, but are also used by adolescents as acne treatments. The FDA also warns consumers to be wary of skin products that are labeled without an ingredient list in English, which federal law requires.

[Source: Consumer Health Digest #21-47 | Stephen Barrett, M.D. | November 28, 2021 ++]

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## **COVID-19 Analytics**

### **Update 04: 2021 vs. 2020 | 4 Stats**

A lot has happened in one year, yet as the holiday season approaches, Americans are still facing similar challenges amid the ongoing pandemic. Below, Becker's zoomed in on COVID-19 numbers from the same day in 2020 and 2021. Counts reflect data from Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center as of 8:25 a.m. CST Nov. 19, 2020, and 8:20 a.m. CST Nov. 24, 2021, unless specified otherwise.

#### **Cases**

- 2020: New COVID-19 cases were rising in 46 states, holding steady in three and decreasing in only Hawaii, according to the COVID Tracking Project. In total, the U.S. had recorded 11,531,743 known virus cases.
- 2021: New COVID-19 cases were rising in 37 states and decreasing in 13, according to Nov. 24 local and state data cited by The New York Times. In total, the U.S. has recorded 47,944,266 known virus cases.

#### **Hospitalizations**

- 2020: The nation broke its COVID-19 hospitalization record reported one day prior, with 79,000 known virus hospitalizations Nov. 18, according to the COVID Tracking Project. On Nov. 19, the seven-day national daily hospitalization average was 83,100, according to the Times.
- 2021: On Nov. 23, the most recent data available, the seven-day national daily hospitalization average was 50,942, with 52,073 COVID-19 hospitalizations reported Nov. 23, according to the Times.

#### **Deaths**

- 2020: The U.S. surpassed 250,000 COVID-19 deaths Nov. 18, with 250,579 deaths reported Nov. 19.
- 2021: In total, 774,580 COVID-19 deaths have been reported in the U.S. since the pandemic began.

## Vaccinations

- 2020: At this time last year, there were no vaccinations authorized by the FDA and available to the American public.
- 2021: As of Nov. 23, 69.5 percent of Americans (230,669,289 people) have received at least one vaccine dose, according to CDC data. Fifty-nine percent (195,973,992) have gotten two doses, and 18.7 percent of that total (36,640,102) have also received a booster dose.

[Source: Becker's Hospital Revue | Gabrielle Masson| November 24, 2021 ++]

## \* Finances \*



## College Tuition & Fees

### Update 02: Amazon \$1.2 Billion Investment

Amazon's more than 750,000 operations employees in the U.S. are eligible for fully funded college tuition, including cost of classes, books, and fees. The company plans to expand the education and skills training benefits it offers to its U.S. employees with a total investment of \$1.2 billion by 2025. Through its popular Career Choice program, the company will fund full college tuition, as well as high school diplomas, GEDs, and English as a Second Language (ESL) proficiency certifications for its front-line employees—including those who have been at the company for as little as three months.

Starting in January 2022, Amazon front-line employees will have access to even more education benefits through their Career Choice program:

- **Funding for college tuition.** More than 750,000 operations employees across the U.S. will be eligible to have their full college tuition paid for at hundreds of education partners across the country. In addition to funding associate and bachelor's degrees, Amazon's Career Choice will also fund high school completion, GEDs, and ESL proficiency certifications.
- **Pre-paid fees.** Amazon will pay employees' tuition and fees in advance rather than offering reimbursement after coursework completion, ensuring employees don't need existing funds to start accessing the education options they want.

- **Limitless learning.** Amazon front-line employees will have access to annual funds for education as long as they remain at the company, with no limit to the number of years they can benefit.
- **Fast starts.** All 750,000 U.S. hourly employees are eligible to participate in Career Choice 90 days after starting at Amazon. This makes all 400,000 employees who joined the company since the start of the pandemic eligible to access Amazon-funded education opportunities.

Amazon has seen a surge in applications to participate in education programs since the start of the pandemic, reflecting increased interest from employees to fortify their skillsets. Amazon Technical Academy, an upskilling program that helps Amazon employees from all backgrounds become software engineers in nine months, received thousands of applications over the past 18 months. To accommodate a surge in demand, Amazon scaled all of its upskilling programs, adapting to work-from-home schedules, and welcomed more participants by pivoting from in-person to virtual training. Refer to <https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/workplace/amazon-to-pay-full-college-tuition-for-front-line-employees> for more details on what the company is offering. [Source: Axios D.C| November 16, 2021 ++]

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## **Student Loan Debt**

### **Update 09: Things Potential or Current Holders Need to Know**



Whether you have a college degree or are pursuing one, chances are high your diploma carries thousands, tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. Student loan debt is painfully common in the United States — but so is ignorance about how to make the best of it, and what mistakes to avoid when handling it. Those currently indebted are considering becoming indebted should be aware of the following:

#### **America Is Drowning in Student Loan Debt**

Around 43 million Americans hold a collective \$1.6 trillion — with a "t" — in student loan debt. Total student loan debt is expected to exceed \$2 trillion by 2024 and \$3 trillion by 2038, according to resources cited by My Credit Summit. It's all the more astonishing considering that student loan debt was \$345 billion in 2004, but the debt grows student by student: At a public university,

the average attendee borrows \$30,030 for a bachelor's degree, and it's worse for private, nonprofit university attendees (\$33,900) and private, for-profit students (\$43,900). More than 11 percent of debtors are delinquent or in default.

### **Federal Loans Are Almost Always Better**

Although private and public money is available to students for college, virtually all experts advise pursuing federal aid before going to a bank. Federal aid offers borrower protections most private loans do not. And private loans often come with risky variable rates and an even riskier lack of borrowing limits.

### **There Are a Variety of Loans Available**

If you're looking for federal student loan money, you've got options. Direct loans are exactly what they sound like: loans paid directly to a student. Perkins loans turn schools into the lenders, which are then owed the money. For borrowers who demonstrate extra need, some direct loans are subsidized. Direct PLUS loans are issued to parents who need help paying for their children's education.

### **Don't Neglect Retirement to Pay Loans Early**

It's natural to want to climb out from under student loan debt as soon as possible. But if early payment comes at the cost of a neglected retirement account, you could short yourself hundreds of thousands of dollars by age 65. Experts advise making larger loan payments only after contributing enough to a 401(k) to get the full company match.

### **Income-Driven Repayment Plans Can Help**

Traditional student payment plans are structured through fixed payments for 10 years, a strategy designed to reduce the amount of interest the borrower pays at the expense of higher monthly payments. Income-driven plans, on the other hand, formulate payments based on factors such as the borrower's family size and, of course, income. This might lead to more interest paid in the long term, but with monthly payments that are much more manageable.

### **There Are Other Ways to Pay**

Traditional and income-driven plans are just two ways to repay loans. Other structures include graduated repayment plans, which start with lower payments that rise over time. Extended payment plans can run for 25 years. Revised pay-as-you-earn plans are based on discretionary income.

### **Loan Forgiveness is Possible**

Borrowers can seek student loan forgiveness in a variety of ways. Some people who perform public or nonprofit work, for example, will qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. People who took out Perkin Loans can seek to have the loan canceled if they work in an eligible field. Nurses, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and military personnel all have special forgiveness programs, as well. Since President Joe Biden said on the campaign trail that he would consider significant loan forgiveness measures, Democrats have pushed for that figure to be set

at \$50,000 per person; Biden says he's willing to do more like \$10,000. Still, his administration has approved more than \$9.5 billion of student loan relief in a year, and the debate is ongoing.

### **Bankruptcy Is Rarely a Way Out**

Student loans are technically counted among debt that borrowers can wipe out by declaring bankruptcy. In reality, however, that almost never happens, because the standards of proof are so high. Borrowers have to display hardship that would deny them a basic standard of living, and also prove they honestly tried to pay.

### **Deferment Is Possible, but Risky**

Borrowers can request loan deferments, which temporarily suspend payments, when they lose a job or encounter some other hardship. Unless the loan is subsidized, however, interest continues to accrue and is added to the total cost of the loan. The other risk is that deferment often renders the borrower ineligible for loan forgiveness plans.

### **Getting Hitched Could Change Things**

When people get married, they often learn that their student loan situation changes right along with their Facebook relationship status. First of all, spouses can act as co-signers for refinancing applications. In some cases, couples may be able to refinance their loans together. Also, eligibility for some repayment plans may change once you get married.

[Source: Cheapism | Andrew Lisa | October 29, 2021 ++]

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## **Medicare Part B Premiums**

### **Update 11: Things to Know About 2022 Hike**

CMS announced 13 NOV that Medicare Part B premiums and deductibles will see the largest hike in the program's history next year. Seven things to know:

1. The CMS rule boosts the standard Medicare Part B premium to \$170.10 a month, up \$21.60, or 14.5 percent. It also increased Part B standard deductibles by \$30, up 14.8 percent to \$233 in 2022.
2. The increase translates to nearly \$14,000 in annual costs for the wealthiest senior couples, according to Forbes.
3. Despite a boost in emergency Medicare spending last year, CMS raised Part B premiums less than \$4, according to CNN.
4. Part B premiums have risen 226 percent since 2000, making them one of the fastest growing costs for older Americans, according to Forbes.

5. This year, CMS attributed the Part B price hikes to rising healthcare prices and utilization, congressional efforts to limit 2021's increase and the potential to cover Biogen's expensive Alzheimer's drug, Aduhelm.

6. CMS said the price hikes will be mitigated by a higher annual Social Security cost of living increase. But CNN reported that the Medicare increase will eat up most of the record-high Social Security cost-of-living jump.

7. CMS also is increasing the Medicare Part A deductible, upping the cost per benefit period \$72 to \$1,556, a 4.9 percent increase.

[Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Nick Moran | November 15, 2021 ++]

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## **SGLI/VGLI**

### **Update 21: How to Invest Your SGLI Payout without Taxes**



If you're a survivor of a fallen service member and don't have an immediate need for your ServiceMembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) payout, you can invest your life insurance money to provide for your retirement or your child's education. The HEART Act, passed in 2008, expanded tax relief options for service members, their families and survivors. Under the law, SGLI investments aren't subject to normal contribution limits and taxes. So, you can accrue significant tax benefits by investing all or part of the insurance payout into a Roth IRA or a Coverdell Education Savings Account (ESA).

#### **Investing Your SGLI Payout in a Roth IRA**

A Roth IRA is an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) where your contributions and earnings can grow tax-free. Normally, Roth IRAs have contribution limits, but the HEART act relaxed the rules for survivors of fallen service members. You may be able to invest your entire military life insurance payout – up to \$500,000 if you received the maximum \$400,000 SGLI benefit and the \$ 100,000 death gratuity. You don't need to worry about losing access to your SGLI benefit by investing it. Under the law, the normal five-year waiting period to withdraw your money doesn't apply to your SGLI contributions.

“(Survivors) can be nervous about not having access to their SGLI proceeds if they put it in a Roth IRA,” said Mark Dunlop, a certified financial planner and financial counselor for Survivor

Outreach Service. “I assure them that they can always take out their basis without penalty or taxes.” You can immediately withdraw these contributions, but earnings from your initial contribution must remain in your IRA until you turn 59 ½ to avoid taxes. (You may qualify for tax-free withdrawals for birth or adoption expenses, the purchase of your first home, or other circumstances.)

### **Investing Your SGLI Payout in a Coverdell ESA**

A Coverdell ESA is an Education Savings Account (ESA) used solely to fund a beneficiary’s education. As with the Roth IRA, the Heart ACT relaxed the contribution rules for survivors while contributions and earnings grow tax-free. If you are looking at funding some or all a child’s education, the Coverdell ESA may make sense. Coverdell ESAs allow you to avoid taxes on investments, so long as the distributions fund students’ qualified education expenses. Qualified education expenses include tuition, fees, books, school supplies and other equipment. An ESA can cover expenses from the time a student is in kindergarten all the way through college. Coverdell ESAs can also be used for graduate school, but the student must empty the account by age 30.

### **Rules for Investing Military Life Insurance**

- You must invest your SGLI proceeds in a Roth IRA and/or a Coverdell ESA within one year of receiving them.
- Your total contribution to both can’t exceed the SGLI proceeds received.

The Roth IRA and Coverdell ESA are great options to reduce your tax liability, but they have different purposes and limitations. Survivors should plan based on their individual goals. When in doubt, consult a qualified tax professional (EA, CPA, etc.) or a Certified Financial Planner. [Source: The Military Wallet | Tony Rich | November 19, 2021 ++]

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## **Forced Arbitration**

### **Update 02: Advocacy Groups Seek Ban in Servicemember Contracts**



A coalition of military and veterans advocacy groups is urging Congress to protect service members from forced arbitration agreements, legal clauses that prevent troops from taking

companies that violate their rights to court. In a letter 17 NOV to leaders of the Senate Armed Services and Veterans Affairs committees, 15 groups urged the lawmakers to support an amendment to the annual defense policy bill that would bar employers, financial institutions and other companies from including forced arbitration clauses in contracts with service members. Such agreements, which are often buried in the fine print of employment, credit card, cellphone and other contracts, force people to handle a dispute through arbitration, a process that often favors the business.

"Forced arbitration is a one-sided, non-transparent process in which service members have very little chance at achieving a favorable outcome," the groups wrote in their letter, obtained exclusively by Military.com. The problem has become particularly acute for reservists and National Guardsmen in recent years as they get called up for active duty more and more, and employers who are upset their employees are stepping away turn to forced arbitration, said Patrick Murray, legislative director at the Veterans of Foreign Wars and one of the signatories on the letter. "This isn't something they talk about in the recruiting offices," Murray said in an interview with Military.com. "They might talk about things like the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act or the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment [Rights Act]. They might tell you that those things have protections for you."

But Murray said that the arbitration clauses are often snuck into contract language by companies. "Some of this stuff is in the fine print," he said. "Your employer may have that in their contract, and you might not know that until you're faced with it." The Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, or SCRA, which was passed in 1940 and last updated in 2003, is supposed to provide legal and financial protections for troops and their families, while the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, or USERRA, is a 1994 law meant to protect troops from employment discrimination based on their service. But in 2012, the Government Accountability Office found at least 15,000 instances of financial institutions failing to properly reduce mortgage interest rates for service members who qualified and 300 illegal foreclosures annually in violation of the SCRA.

"The perpetrators of these illegal violations are not being held accountable as they simply hide behind forced arbitration clauses," the organizations wrote in the letter. "Service members need their legal protections restored without delay, not another study to show what they already know -- that forced arbitration hurts them and their families, and renders rights granted by SCRA and USERRA virtually meaningless." Stand-alone bills to bar forced arbitration agreements for service members have been introduced in the House and the Senate. Sens. Richard Blumenthal, (D-CT) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) have also introduced an amendment to the upper chamber's version of the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, mirroring the stand-alone bill.

There have been similar legislative efforts for at least the last four years, Murray said. The Senate began consideration of its NDAA the week of 15 NOV, but even amendments with bipartisan support rarely get votes because of broader disputes among senators over which

amendments to vote on. Even if the amendment makes it into the Senate version of the bill, it still must survive negotiations with the House before becoming law. Murray expressed some concern that companies will lobby against the amendment, but was hopeful more attention would get the problem solved. "No one wants to get very loud about stripping protections from service members," he said.

In November 23, 2021 ++] addition to the VFW, representatives from the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States, Chief Warrant and Warrant Officers Association of the United States Coast Guard, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, Fleet Reserve Association, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Marine Corps Reserve Association, Military Officers Association of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, National Guard Association of the United States, Non-Commissioned Officers Association, TREA: The Enlisted Association, U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association, and U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association and Enlisted Association signed the letter. [Source: Military.com | Rebecca Kheel | November 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Hospital Charges**

### **Update 06: Higher Penalties Won't Sway All Hospitals to Comply w/CMS Rule**

While CMS' move to increase the penalty for hospitals that don't publish their prices will make some facilities more likely to comply with that requirement, it may not sway the country's largest health systems, Caroline Znaniec, a managing director at advisory firm CohnReznick, told Becker's Hospital Review. The CMS final price transparency rule, which took effect Jan. 1, aims to make hospital pricing information readily available to patients to compare costs and make more informed healthcare decisions. To aid with this, hospitals in the U.S. are required to post both a machine-readable file with the negotiated rates for all items and services and display the prices of 300 shoppable services in a consumer-friendly format.

A recent analysis of 500 hospitals conducted by nonprofit Patient Rights Advocate found that 94.4 percent of hospitals haven't met at least one of the requirements since the rule took effect. To boost compliance, CMS in November released a final rule modifying the hospital price transparency noncompliance penalty, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2022. Hospitals with 30 beds or fewer would continue to pay up to \$300 per day of noncompliance, but hospitals with more than 30 beds will pay \$10 per bed each day. The maximum penalty will be capped at \$5,500 per day. A full year of noncompliance with the regulation would result in a maximum penalty of \$2 million per hospital.

According to Ms. Znaniec, the new noncompliance fee of up to \$2 million per year will likely persuade mid-sized hospitals and health systems to comply with the regulation, but not the larger facilities and health systems. "For the extremely large health systems, that amount is not really

that large of a fine," Ms. Znaniec said. "I'm hearing from some systems that \$2 million is nothing to them. They may be weighing the risks." However, for mid-sized facilities with 100 to 250 beds, the boosted noncompliance fee has their attention as it's going to be a bigger hit to their bottom line, Ms. Znaniec said.

The main reason larger hospitals and systems are not complying with the regulation is that they don't want to disclose their negotiated rates, Ms. Znaniec explained. "They have the resources to comply," Ms. Znaniec said. "They don't want to lose market share." There's also the perspective that providers are worried because payers want to see what their health system has negotiated with rival insurers to determine whether they are paying more for certain services and if they can drive reimbursement down.

Overall, the higher noncompliance fee from CMS will make more mid-sized hospitals comply, but it may not sway the larger facilities that may think keeping their rates private will improve their market share, Ms. Znaniec said. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Alia Paavola | November 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Online Sales Scam**

### **Update 01: Selling Something Online? Watch For This Trick**

Selling items on an online marketplace like Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace can be an easy way to make extra money and get rid of things you don't need. However, scammers are using a clever trick to target sellers and set up a phone number in their name.

#### **How the scam works**

- You list an item and get an immediate response from a potential buyer. The "buyer" claims to be very interested in your item, but they want to make sure you are legitimate first. The scammer asks for your phone number, so they can text you a verification code. They instruct you to reply with the 6-digit code on the platform where your item is listed.
- Sounds reasonable, right? However, here's what's really happening. The scammer is setting up a Google Voice number linked to your phone number. If you send the verification code, the scammer will be able to complete the account set up. Then, the scammer can then use that phone number to conceal their identity. Or, if a scammer gets your Google Voice verification code and other information about you, they can pretend to be you and open new accounts in your name.
- One seller told BBB Scam Tracker about their experience listing and item on Facebook Marketplace and getting a response from an interested buyer. "He asked if he could call/text me. Then, I agreed and he said, 'Ok first I want to verify you. If you're real I will trust and

meet you. Can I send the verification code to your phone number?” At that, the seller got suspicious and asked if it was a scam. He didn’t hear from the man again.

### **How to avoid online marketplace scams:**

- *Guard your personal information.* You don’t need to give someone your phone number to make a sale on an online marketplace. Be sure you know who you are speaking with before you share it. Never give out your phone number in public social media posts.
- *Watch out for red flags.* Avoid making transactions with people who offer you deals that sound too good to be true (i.e. overpaying for an item you listed for sale) or people who pressure you to make a deal quickly.
- *Understand marketplace policies.* Most online marketplaces encourage you NOT to take transactions outside of the platform. If someone asks you to carry out transactions elsewhere, be wary. Understand how the platform you use verifies both sellers and buyers and stick to their guidelines when selling and buying items.

### **For more information**

Get more tips by reading the [BBB Tip: Selling used items online](#). Read more about this scam on the Federal Trade Commission [website](#). If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it at <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>. Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/8767>. [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | November 19, 2021 ++]

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## **Survey Scams**

### **Update 04: Don't Fall for This Holiday Scam**

Scoring a great deal on Black Friday or the upcoming Xmas period is exciting. Unfortunately, con artists are using that same feeling of excitement to lure shoppers into scams. These text messages and fake surveys can steal valuable information from unsuspecting victims.

### **How the scam works**

- Scammers send you a text message that appears to be from a well-known chain store. As part of a Black Friday or other holiday deal, the “store” offering a free product, discount, or gift card to anyone who completes a short questionnaire or survey. Of course, they explain, this is a limited time offer so you’ll need to act fast if you want to receive your gift.
- If you click the link, you won’t go to the store’s official website. Instead, it will take you to a third-party website where you’ll be asked to fill out a form that asks you for personal information, such as your full name, address, email, and more. By clicking on the link, you may even download malware onto your device, giving scammers access to even more

personal information. While this scam has a Black Friday twist, watch out for similar survey scams this entire holiday season.

### **How to avoid fake survey scams:**

- Know the signs of a phony text message. Unsolicited text messages are usually not from trustworthy sources. Reputable businesses will get your permission to send you a text before sending anything to your inbox. Fake texts often contain suspicious-looking links and contain typos and other errors, too.
- Watch out for rewards that sound too good to be true. Remember that legitimate businesses run surveys to understand their customers. They may offer a modest discount to encourage participation, but the reward is not the focus. If someone offers you a valuable product or gift card in exchange for completing a two-minute survey, it's probably a scam.
- Limited time offers could be a red flag. Scammers often use a sense of urgency to get their victims to hand over valuable information without thinking. If a text message says something like, "If you complete this survey in the next 10 minutes....," don't let yourself be pushed into action without really examining the message first.
- Remember that scammers conceal their identity. Many scam surveys are very vague about their purpose and who is running them. If you can't figure out who or where the survey is coming from, don't take it.
- Do some research. If you aren't sure about a survey, do an internet search to find out more information. Look for links to the survey on a business's official website. You can also do a search using the survey name and the word "scam" to see if there are any reports about it being a fake.

### **For more information**

Visit BBB's new Spot a Scam page at <https://www.bbb.org/all/spot-a-scam?> to familiarize yourself with common tactics and learn the signs of a fake survey. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>. Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/8767>. [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | November 26, 2021 ++]

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## **Tax Burden on Rhode Island Vets**

**As of NOV 2021**

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, excise, and

property taxes can more than offset the lack of or a low state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you move to Rhode Island in 2021:

### **Sales Taxes**

The Rhode Island state sales tax rate is 7%, and the average RI sales tax after local surtaxes is also 7% which is a lower tax than 59.6% of states.

- Groceries, precious metal bullion, some burial-related items and prescription and over-the-counter drugs, newspapers and periodicals are exempt. The tax on clothing applies to each sale of apparel and footwear totaling more than \$250.
- Counties and cities are not allowed to collect local sales taxes
- Rhode Island has no special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- The sales tax was raised 1% in the 1970s and again in the early 1990s from 5% to the current rate of 7%. Both raises were supposed to be temporary debt-cancelling measures, but in both cases the raise was later made permanent by the state legislature.

### **Excise Taxes**

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise taxes collected by the state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. An excise tax is not the same thing as the state Sales Tax which is collected as a percentage of the final purchase price of all qualifying sales, and is collected directly from the end consumer of the product. The state's excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the state government by the merchant before the goods can be sold. Merchants may be required to attach tax stamps to taxable merchandise to show that the excise tax was paid. Other general taxes, similar to excise taxes, may be collected on other items including tanning salons, vehicle sales, firearms, gas guzzlers, transportation tickets, and more.

Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. The state collects an average of \$554 in yearly excise taxes per capita, higher than 72% of the other 50 states.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.12 per gal | Wine: \$1.40 per gal | Liquor \$5.40 per gal. The excise tax on beer is one of the lowest beer taxes in the country. The beer excise tax is ranked #41 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on wine is ranked #10 out of the 50 states being one of the highest wine taxes in the country. Rhode Island's excise tax on Spirits is ranked #28 out of the 50 states. The Rhode Island liquor tax applies to all hard alcohol (alcoholic beverages)

other than beer and wine), and is already included in the purchase price by the retailer. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from your alcohol taxes in the final purchase price.

- **Cannabis:** Rhode Island’s “compassion centers” are required to pay the state a surcharge of 4% on a monthly basis. These centers may choose to pass along this surcharge, which is effectively a tax, to their patients.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Rhode Island is \$14.62 per phone service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. Rhode Island's average cellphone tax is ranked #6 out of the 50 states. The Rhode Island cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your monthly bill.
- **Cigarettes:** The Rhode Island excise tax on cigarettes is \$4.25 per 20 cigarettes, one of the highest cigarettes taxes in the country. Rhode Island's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #3 out of the 50 states. The Rhode Island cigarette tax is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The Rhode Island excise tax on gasoline and diesel fuel is 35¢ per gallon, higher than 78% of the other 50 states. Rhode Island's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #11 out of the 50 states. The Rhode Island gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in the state and is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020.
- **Vehicle:** Rhode Island collects a registration fee and a title fee on the sale or transfer of cars and motorcycles, which are essentially renamed excise taxes. Unlike standard excise taxes, however, the end consumer must pay the tax directly to the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid. For the latest rates refer to <https://dmv.ri.gov/registrations-plates-titles/registration/registration-title-fees>.

### **Personal Income Taxes**

The average family pays \$788 in state income taxes which is ranked 39<sup>th</sup> of 51 states.

**Tax Rate Range:** Low 3.75% - High 5.99%

**Income Brackets:** Lowest up to \$65,250 – Highest \$148,350+

**Number of Brackets:** 3 - Bracket levels are adjusted for inflation each year.

**Personal Exemptions:** \$4,150 each

**Standard Deduction:** Single – \$8,900; Married filing jointly or Qualifying widow(er) – \$17,800;  
Head of Household \$13,350

**Additional Deductions:** None

**Itemized Deductions Allowed:** No

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** None

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Rhode Island does offer a general tax break of up to \$15,000 for residents that are:

- Over 65 years old
- Receives a federally taxable pension or annuity
- Meet income limits:
  - Single, Head of household or married filing separately - \$84,700
  - Married filing jointly, qualifying Surviving Spouse - \$105,850

**Tax Credits:** Refer to <https://tax.ri.gov/tax-sections/credits>. Email [Tax.Credits@tax.ri.gov](mailto:Tax.Credits@tax.ri.gov) for questions

**Retired Military Pay:** Military retired pay follows federal tax rules

**Military Pay:** Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard non-retirement income is taxed for state residents.

**Military Disability Retired Pay:** Received as a pension, annuity or similar allowance for personal injury or sickness resulting from active service in the U.S. Armed Forces should not be included in taxable income

**Social Security Benefit:** Seniors with a federal adjusted gross income over \$104,450 pay tax on Social Security benefits.

**VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation:** Tax-free monetary benefit paid to eligible survivors of military Service members who died in the line of duty or eligible survivors of Veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease.

**Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP:** All fully taxed in Rhode Island.

**Website:** Rhode Island Department of Revenue: <https://dor.ri.gov/>

**Questions:** <https://tax.ri.gov/guidance/information-and-faqs>

**Tax Forms:**

- [file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/2020\\_1040WE\\_w.pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/2020_1040WE_w.pdf) RI 1040 -- Resident Individual Income Tax Return
- [file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/2020-Resident-Instructions\\_03282021.pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/2020-Resident-Instructions_03282021.pdf) RI-1040 Instructions
- <https://tax.ri.gov/forms/individual-tax-forms/personal-income-tax-forms> All Tax forms

**Penalties.** Any tax not paid when due is subject to interest at the annual rate of 18%. A late filing penalty will be assessed at 5% per month on the unpaid tax for each month or part of a month the return is late. The maximum late filing penalty is 25%. A late payment penalty will be assessed at 1/2% per month on the unpaid tax for each month or part of a month the tax remains unpaid. The maximum late payment penalty is 25%.

**Other:** Rhode Island requires its residents to maintain health-care coverage. The Rhode Island law requires you and your family to have minimum essential health-care coverage throughout the year, unless you qualify for an exemption. Failure to have health coverage or qualify for an exemption will result in a “shared responsibility payment” (in other words, a penalty) when you file your Rhode Island personal income tax return. To learn about:

- Health insurance options: <https://healthsourceri.com>.
- The mandate: <http://www.tax.ri.gov/healthcoveragemandate/index.php>

### **Property Taxes**

The median property tax in Rhode Island is \$3,618 per year for a home worth the median value of \$267,100. Counties in Rhode Island collect an average of **1.35%** of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Rhode Island has one of the highest average property tax rates in the country, with only four states levying higher property taxes. Rhode Island's median income is \$73,579 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by Rhode Island residents amounts to approximately 4.92% of their yearly income. Rhode Island is ranked 7th of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income. The exact property tax levied depends on the county the property is located in. For more localized property tax rates, find your county at [http://www.tax-rates.org/rhode\\_island/property-tax#Counties](http://www.tax-rates.org/rhode_island/property-tax#Counties).

- State property taxes are not imposed directly by the state, but a portion of the city and town taxes are set aside for state purpose. Taxes are assessed and collected by the local jurisdiction. Fire district taxes are collected in some rural communities.
- Homeowners 65 and older who earn \$30,000 or less can get a property tax relief credit of up to \$385. Call 401-222-2280 for details. Local municipalities may offer a property tax exemption or property tax break for seniors or veterans.
- Go to <https://joeshimkus.com/RI-Tax-Rates.aspx> for a listing of tax rates for all towns in Rhode Island
- <https://municipalfinance.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur546/files/documents/data/exemptions/Veterans-Senior-Exemptions-Report.pdf> lists Veteran, Senior, and Other Tax Exemption Programs

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax. Rhode Island imposes a tax on the transfer of the net value of the assets of every resident decedent and the value of real and personal property of nonresident decedents located within this state. The tax is apportioned in accordance with the location of the assets with actual situs (both real and personal property) in another state. The fraction is Rhode Island assets over total estate assets.

The Rhode Island estate tax is in effect for estates with gross value of more than \$1,595,156 for decedents dying on or after January 1, 2021. It falls on the estate of the person who died, the beneficiaries, or heirs. The gross value of an estate is determined by the combined total of cash,

real estate, vehicles, certificates of deposit, investment accounts, life insurance proceeds, retirement accounts and personal property. The maximum Rhode Island estate tax rate is 16%. The Rhode Island estate tax is in addition to the federal estate tax. If someone dies in Rhode Island with less than the federal exemption amount of \$5,450,000, their estate doesn't owe any federal estate tax. Or, if someone dies in Rhode Island with an estate worth less than \$1,595,156, there is no Rhode Island estate tax. For further information, visit the Rhode Island Division of Taxation site or call (401) 222-1111.

### Other State Tax Rates

To compare the above sales, excise, 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>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-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>.
- Income Tax: <https://taxfoundation.org/state-individual-income-tax-rates-brackets-2019>
- State Tax Comparisons <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>

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For further information visit Rhode Island Department of Revenue: <https://dor.ri.gov>. [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#Rhode-Island> | November 2021 ++]

### \* General Interest \*



## Notes of Interest

NOV 16 thru 30, 2021

- **Insurance Coverage.** Federal regulations cap how much people pay out of pocket for in-network care, but no such limit exists for out-of-network care. Something to strongly consider if you doctor recommends seeing a specialist.
- **Covid Deaths.** The United States passed yet another sobering milestone in the COVID-19 pandemic as the number of 2021 coronavirus deaths surpassed the 2020 total of 385,343. About 69 percent of the U.S. population are at least partially vaccinated, while 59 percent are fully vaccinated, according to CDC data.

- **Navy.** About 99.7% of all active-duty sailors were at least partially vaccinated against the coronavirus less than two weeks ahead of the Navy's deadline, the service announced 24 NOV.
- **Pentagon Weapon.** Check out the Saturday Night Live skit on DOD's new military weapon at <https://youtu.be/n45nrfwX1H4>.
- **USMC Vaccine Compliance.** With only four days until the Marines Corps' vaccine deadline hits, only 94% of active duty Marines are partially or fully vaccinated against COVID-19 — putting the Marine Corps on track to have the lowest vaccination rate in the Department of Defense. If, at the end of the day, 6% of the force refuses the vaccine, the Marine Corps may see around 11,000 Marines booted from its ranks.
- **Winston Churchill.** Go to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMuw\\_BsfmV4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMuw_BsfmV4) to view a 10 minute clip how close he came to being a casualty during his visit to the Rhine in 1945 while fighting was still ongoing.
- **Omicron.** The omicron coronavirus variant first identified in South Africa on 9 NOV has spread to at least 19 countries as of 30 NOV, according to CNN.
- **Medicare Payment Rule.** Several justices on the Supreme Court seemed reluctant 29NOV to reinstate changes HHS made to how Medicare payments are calculated for hospitals that serve a disproportionate number of low-income patients, according to Bloomberg Law. During oral arguments 29 NOV, several justices expressed frustration with the complicated Medicare payment rule that has spawned litigation. Justice Clarence Thomas said the language in the rule is "indecipherable," and Justice Stephen Breyer said he was exhausted by the dispute.
- **Diabetes.** In a Vertex Pharmaceuticals clinical trial, an experimental treatment may have cured type 1 diabetes for the first time in a 64-year-old patient, The New York Times reported 27 NOV.

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## Climate Change

### Update 05: Impact Potential of RAF 100 Percent Synthetic Fuel Use



Britain's Royal Air Force has taken a landmark step towards slashing carbon emissions from its aircraft, announcing 17 NOV that the service had completed the world's first flight using 100 percent synthetic fuel together with commercial partner Zero Petroleum. Using the company's UL91 fuel the flight of the Ikarus C42 microlight plane from Cotswold Airport on 2 NOV lasted 21 minutes. The successful voyage by senior RAF test pilot Group Captain Peter Hackett has been logged by Guinness World Records as a world first for an aircraft using only synthetic fuel.

The initiative, part of a wider effort to reduce carbon emissions known as Project Martin, is partly funded by the RAF. Work on the role of synthetic fuels in reducing RAF emissions is being led by the air service's Rapid Capabilities Office. In a statement the MoD said the technology "has the potential to save 80-90% of carbon per flight, supporting the RAF's vision that synthetic fuels will have a major role in powering the fast jets of the future." The RAF has previously signaled its intention to start replacing petroleum-based fuels on aircraft later this decade. The replacement of 90 piston-powered Grob Aircraft T1 Tutor elementary flying trainers could be one of the first aircraft to be carbon emission free.

Zero Petroleum is a small British company founded by the hugely successful Formula One racing engineer Paddy Lowe and Nilay Shah, head of chemical engineering at Imperial College London. Lowe said the aviation fuel, known as **ZERO SynAvGas**, was "developed in five months and ran successfully in the aircraft as a whole-blend without any modification to the aircraft or the engine. "The engine manufacturer Rotax's measurements and the test pilot's observations showed no difference in power or general performance compared to standard fossil fuel," said the Zero Petroleum chief executive.

The fuel is manufactured by extracting hydrogen from water and carbon from atmospheric carbon dioxide. Using energy generated from renewable sources like wind or solar, these are combined to create the synthetic fuel. Zero Petroleum and its technology partner IGTL designed and built a production plant in record time in Peterhead, Scotland. The plant was then positioned at Billia Croo, in the Orkney Islands, for fuel manufacturing operations during September and October. British Defence Procurement Minister Jeremy Quin said the development illustrated the military's determination to pursue "net zero" alongside meeting operational commitments.

- "Whilst green technologies like electric and hydrogen power generation are viable for many RAF platforms, high-performance aircraft require a liquid fuel alternative, like the UL91, to maintain operational capabilities," he said.
- "This is the first innovation of many, with a range of research and development activities underway to consider the viability of synthetic fuels without compromising aircraft performance," Quin added.

The RAF plans to have its first net zero emissions airbase by 2025, and has set a goal of a net zero force by 2040. Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Sir Mike Wigston is due to make a keynote speech in London Nov. 23 detailing the air service's plans to achieve net zero emissions. [Source: DefenseNews | Andrew Chuter | November 17, 2021 ++]

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## **Battle at Lake Changjin**

### **Chinese Propaganda Movie Top Film of 2021 Globally**



Already the top film of 2021 globally, Chinese war epic *The Battle At Lake Changjin* is taking over the title of highest grossing movie ever in China, edging the previous leader, 2017's *Wolf Warrior 2*. Through Wednesday evening local time, *Lake Changjin* had reached an estimated RMB 5.693B (\$890M) after 56 days in release. The movie is set during the Second Phase Offensive of the Korean War (or the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, as it's known locally) and tells the story of the People's Volunteer Army entering North Korea for the titular battle which was a turning point in the conflict

Timed to the occasion of China's National Day holiday, the state spared no expense in making a most lavish and expensive slab of self-congratulatory movie propaganda with *The Battle At Lake Changjin*. Clocking in at nearly three hours, and spectacularly presented on an enormous IMAX screen, this is a gargantuan account of how Chinese troops outfoxed the Allied brass and pushed American and United Nations forces out of North Korea near the border of China in late 1950. The ultimate result of the fighting, which included great loss of life on both sides after three years of fearsome combat, was a North/South stand-off that continues to this day. So, whether you consider the film's finale happy or tragic depends entirely upon where you were born and grew up.

Financially, its ending is emphatically a welcome one for everyone concerned with its production. After its world premiere at the Beijing Film Festival on 21 SEP, the epic opened nine days later to over \$230 million across its first weekend, and is currently at \$707 million as it looks to finish its commercial run with around \$836 million, making it the biggest film worldwide of 2021 — solely from China.

Since there's absolutely no question what point of view this \$200 million-plus epic propagates, Western viewers are thus offered an opportunity to see what it feels like to be on the opposite side of a good guy/bad guy narrative, one in which the villains are the Yank soldiers

who just a few years earlier crucially helped save the world from Hitler and Tojo. So it's an unusual feeling to watch a film celebrate the vanquishing of a Western military force by a theoretically far less capable opponent — a sneak peak, if you will, of Vietnam not too many years in the future.

Like the highly successful 1962 account of the D-Day landing, *The Longest Day*, *The Battle At Lake Changjin* required not one, not two, but three directors — Chen Kaige, Tsui Hark and Dante Lam — to pull it off, and the logistics are of similar high order. Possibly teeming with more extras than any film since the Russian War And Peace over a half-century ago, this is a film bursting at the seams with manpower, explosions, casualties and drastic physical challenges. A good deal of sometimes obvious CGI is used to fill in the backgrounds with boats, planes, trains and distant troops, but the epic feel is palpable throughout. Size-wise as well as quality-wise, the closest Western comparison to this film is undoubtedly Pearl Harbor.

The emphasis here lies almost entirely on robust combat embedded in ideological commitment. There's a high-end video game quality to some of the big action and since the film itself is molded more with an eye to maximizing spectacle than to elucidating history, it seems rather beside the point to complain about the general lack of geo-political detail. In brief, five years after the end of World War II, North Korea lit the fuse again by invading the South in June, 1950; officially marking the beginning of the Korean War. For a time, it looked as though all of Korea would fall to the communists (just imagine, no South Korea, no Squid Game).

But a United Nations command led by General Douglas MacArthur prevailed at Incheon in mid-September, followed by the re-capture of Seoul two weeks later. Suddenly, the prospect of a communist regime taking hold throughout Korea looked very remote. None of this background is provided in the new film, which is overwhelmingly dominated by its illustration of the Korean communists' pride in their country and their single-minded mission of pushing out the foreigners. But faced with a stalemate at best, a chain-smoking Mao Zedong (Tang Guoqiang, who has played the chairman a half-dozen times) decided it was time to make a daring move and mobilized 120,000 Chinese troops to reverse the tide and, he hoped, send the foreigners home.

From here on, it's pretty much all-battle, all the time. Logistics and strategy are shunned in favor of massive movements of men, anything that moves being shot at, soldiers forced to adapt, suffer, sacrifice, make bold and brave moves and otherwise trick and prevail over the well-equipped adversaries. Among the main hallmarks of the battle, which took place in mountainous terrain between November 27 and December 13, 1950, were the bitter cold — nighttime temperatures went down to as low as minus-30 degrees — and lack of heavy clothing and rations; many froze and/or starved to death. But fortune favored the defenders, who were ultimately able to encircle the roughly 30,000 U.N. troops. They had to fight their way out, and what was initially imagined as a "Home By Christmas" happy ending for the Allies ended up as a push-back to the 38th Parallel, which is where things remain today, 71 years later.

This Battle is a staggeringly enormous thing, lavishly staged, indulgent in allowing a few characters to pop here and there without really establishing much audience connection, relishing its opportunities to achieve maximum speed and impact, and fully trumpeting a nationalistic and societally optimistic outlook. Anyone into big-time action cinema on the largest possible screen will more than get their money's worth, even if the film is simplistic and entirely predictable in its goals, both as action and politics. But it doesn't matter how big your screen is at home — if you want to see this at all, see it on a really big screen. [Source: Deadline | Todd McCarthy & Nancy Tartaglione | October 15 & November 24, 2021 ++]

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## **RP~China Dispute**

### **Update 29: China's Demand to Remove Ship from Shoal Rejected**



The Philippines' defense chief rejected on 25 NOV China's renewed demand that it remove its outpost on a disputed South China Sea shoal and said Chinese coast guard ships should leave the area and stop blocking Manila's supply boats. Philippine forces use a grounded warship, the BRP Sierra Madre, as an outpost on the submerged but strategic shoal that is at the center of an ongoing dispute with China. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Second Thomas Shoal lies within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines under the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, which China has ratified. He said a 2016 ruling by a U.N.-backed arbitration tribunal also invalidated China's claims to the busy waterway, leaving them without any legal basis.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the Philippines 24 NOV to "honor its commitment" and remove its grounded vessel on Ren'ai Jiao, the name Beijing uses for the shoal, which Filipinos refer to as Ayungin. Chinese coast guard ships have allowed Manila's boats to bring food and other supplies to Filipino forces at the shoal for humanitarian reasons, it said. But defense chief Lorenzana told reporters he was not aware of any Philippine government commitment to remove its navy ship, which has been grounded upon the shoal since 1999. "We can do whatever we want there and it is they who are actually trespassing," he said.

Chinese coast guard ships have surrounded the shoal in a years-long territorial standoff and tried to block Philippine supply boats in past years. In the latest confrontation, Chinese coast

guard ships used water cannons to forcibly turn back two supply boats manned by Philippine navy personnel last week, sparking outrage and warnings from Manila. Following the Chinese blockade, the United States said it was standing by the Philippines and reiterated that an armed attack on Philippine public vessels in the South China Sea would invoke U.S. mutual defense commitments under the two allies' 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.

The Philippine navy successfully transported supplies and fresh personnel to the Sierra Madre this week then left without any major incident after Lorenzana talked with China's ambassador to Manila. President Rodrigo Duterte, who has nurtured close ties with Beijing, angrily condemned the Chinese blockade in a video summit of Southeast Asian leaders with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi did not specifically react to Duterte's remarks but said China will not bully its smaller neighbors. It was the latest flareup of long-simmering disputes in one of the world's busiest waterways, where China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have overlapping claims.

President Joe Biden has assured U.S. allies that American forces will continue to patrol the disputed waters to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight and regional stability. China has warned the U.S. to stay away from what Beijing considers a purely Asian dispute. Greg Poling of the U.S.-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, which closely monitors the South China Sea conflicts, said China's recent move may have been aimed at testing the response of the Philippines and its allies if it blockades the Sierra Madre anytime. "I expect this will happen again and, eventually, China will make a concerted effort to maintain a blockade to force Manila to withdraw," Poling said.

The World War II-era Sierra Madre is now effectively a shipwreck but the Philippine military has not decommissioned it. That makes the rust-encrusted ship an extension of the government and means any assault on the ship is tantamount to an external attack against the Philippines. [Source: Associated Press | Jim Gomez | 27 November 2021 ++]

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## **Korean War End**

### **Update 05: Discussions over Formal End Are 'Coming to a Finish**

Discussions over an end-of-war declaration with North Korea will soon come to a close, a South Korean government official said. The country's Ministry of Unification chief, Lee In-young, made the remarks during an academic conference at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies' campus in Seoul on 19 NOV. The Unification Minister said Seoul and Washington, D.C., "have been holding deep discussions very seriously" regarding a declaration to formally end the war, adding that it "is coming to a finish to some degree."



Lee said an end-of-war declaration “is a reasonable approach” to the ongoing impasse on the Korean Peninsula. “South Korea, North Korea and the U.S. can form trust amongst one another after putting down their antagonism and confrontations without any drastic situational changes,” he said. Lee also qualified his remarks by addressing the uncertainty surrounding North Korea reciprocating a potential end-of-war declaration. “It is yet not transparent whether North Korea would respond to some degree in its relations with South Korea and the U.S. in the future,” he said. “But North Korea seems to be trying to come out with its response strategies, while seeing follow-up responses with South Korea and the U.S.”

Diplomats from the U.S. and South Korea have been holding talks in recent weeks to officially end the 1950-53 Korean War. The war ended with the signing of an armistice agreement that stopped the immediate conflict without the long-term resolution of a peace treaty. The armistice was intended to be a temporary agreement. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, whose term ends next year, broached the topic during a speech before the U.N. General Assembly in September. He called for the signatories to come together and declare that the war on the Korean Peninsula is over. “When the parties involved in the Korean War stand together and proclaim an end to the war, I believe we can make irreversible progress in denuclearization and usher in an era of complete peace,” Moon said in reference to the U.S., North Korea and China.

Former officials who oversaw the U.S.’s role in South Korea have viewed the possibility of an end-of-war declaration with caution. Defense experts have widely called into question whether Pyongyang would change the course of its weapons program and open up to the international community following such a declaration. Former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris, during a discussion panel in New York on Wednesday, reiterated that the U.S. “must not relax sanctions or reduce joint military exercises just to get North Korea to come to the negotiating table.” “Our treaty obligations to defend South Korea will still be extant,” Harris said. “And North Korea’s missile, nuclear and conventional capabilities will still be extant.”

Retired Army Gen. Robert Abrams, the former commander of U.S. Forces Korea, said during the discussion that “we ought to be really careful and proceed deliberately” in declaring a formal end to the war. “That declaration ... is not an end-state or an objective unto itself, but rather a way to achieve that end-state,” he said. [Source: Stars and Stripes | David Choi | November 22, 2021 ++]

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## West Point

### Update 08: Cadets Nab Wrong Navy Mascot Goat

U.S. Military Academy cadets traveled this weekend to a farm near Annapolis, Maryland, that is home to Navy mascot Bill, who belongs to a [long line of goat mascots](#) with the same name. Cadets gave chase to the spooked goats. And instead of grabbing Bill No. 37, they came away Bill No. 34, a one-horned, 14-year-old retiree, according to The New York Times. West Point officials would not confirm details of the incident 23 NOV, but said the animal was returned safely and that they were investigating those responsible. “The U.S. Military Academy and the U.S. Naval Academy are disappointed by the trust that was broken recently between our brothers and sisters in arms. These actions do not reflect either academy’s core values of dignity and respect,” read a prepared statement attributed to superintendents Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams and Vice Adm. Sean Buck.



Nabbing mascots is a decades-long service academy tradition, typically viewed by the perpetrators as a prank. But it has been officially off-limits since the early 1990s. In 2018, Army officials at West Point apologized after a falcon belonging to the [Air Force Academy](#) was injured during a prank. The Army-Navy game is on Dec. 11. [Source: The Associated Press | November 23, 2021 ++]

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## Beetroots

### Update 01: Selection, Storage, & Preparation

If you have decided to add beets to your diet because of their health benefits, the following is provide to give a little guidance on how to proceed:

#### **How to choose beets at the market, and how to store them**

Beets store really well, which is why you see them year-round and why they're often thought of as a fall and winter food. But they're at their best when truly in season, from early to mid-summer through mid-autumn. When you find them with the tops still attached, look first at how the greens

look. If they're vibrant, deep green, bright and firm, that's a great sign; it means these are freshly dug. And it means the tops themselves will be great for eating — treat them as you would Swiss chard or other cooking green.

Don't fret too much if the greens are missing or look a little yellowed or sorry, though; the beet can still be great. In this case, focus on the root itself. It should be smooth-skinned, not wrinkly. It should be firm, actually hard to the touch. Try to avoid ones with really hairy-looking stems. And you want the size to be between 1½ and 3 inches in diameter. Larger beets may still be good, but they take a long time to cook through, and worse, they may be old and woody. (Eating an old, woody beet is a torture.) When you get home, cut the greens off, up to about an inch from the root; if left on, they will draw moisture away from the beet. If the greens are in good condition, they will keep for a few days in the fridge; the root can keep for weeks (though they're best within the first week or so).

### **How to peel beets**

Don't. What is meant by that is not to peel them until after cooking, when the skins should slip off easily. The skin also protects the juice and color (and your hands and clothes) from bleeding all over the place.

### **Flavors to pair with beets**

Beets, walnuts, goat cheese and a light vinaigrette are classic. Beets are surprisingly versatile; if you add something acidic to heighten their sweetness and/or something rich to round it out, lots of flavors from lots of culinary traditions work great — from the Mediterranean to northern and eastern Europe and beyond. Some combinations or below; of course, all of these can be adjusted to your personal taste:

- Mint, olive oil, sherry vinegar or another aged-wine vinegar
- Melted butter and ginger
- Lime, honey, dill
- Oranges and olives
- Yogurt and parsley
- Pine nuts, raisins and vinegar

### **Roasted Beets**

Here is a technique learned at Higgins restaurant in Portland, Ore. It's a great basic method for cooking beets, though it doesn't, on its own, give you the caramelized flavors one often expects from "roasting." Because beets are so hard and dense, it's best to cook them with a little steam to keep them from burning. If you want that caramelization, follow the steps below. The spices, too, add a subtle background note to the beets but are not strictly necessary.

#### **INGREDIENTS**

- Beets, preferably all the same size (if not, you'll just have to pull the smaller ones out when they're done first)

- Toasted, whole sweet spices: 1 cinnamon stick, 5 allspice berries, 3 cloves per pound of beets, or to taste
- Salt and pepper, to taste

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees.
2. If the tops are on, cut them off, leaving about 1 inch of their stems. Gently wash the beets of any obvious dirt or mud under cold running water. If the thin root coming off the beet is very long, trim it to an inch or so, but this isn't strictly necessary.
3. Place the beets in a pan big enough to fit them all with a little room between them. If using, scatter the spices around the beets. Add a little water, just enough to cover the bottom of the pan by 1/8 to 1/4 inch. This creates steam and helps to keep the beet juices from burning.
4. Wrap the pan tightly in foil and place in the oven. Depending on the size of your beets, this can take from 45 minutes to well past an hour. If your beets are 1½ to 2 inches wide, check on them at 45 minutes, being very careful of the hot steam that will come billowing out when you unwrap the foil. They are done when a skewer or paring knife can slip through them easily. If they're not, re-cover tightly and keep cooking. When they're ready, take them out and uncover to cool.
5. When the beets are cool enough to handle, the skins should slip and peel off rather easily; just rub them a bit to get them going. You can wear gloves for this to not stain your hands, but I like using paper towel, which gets a nice grip on the skins.
6. You can cut the beets now, season them with salt and pepper, dress them however you like, and serve. Or, if you want to put the roastiness back into roasted beets, fire up a big, heavy pan over medium-high heat. Add a little vegetable oil, and when it is shimmering, add the peeled cut beets in one layer and sear them until you get some nice caramelization. Flip to color the other side. Or, if you have a large quantity of cooked beets to caramelize, toss them with some oil, lay them on a sheet tray, and roast them in the oven at 425 until they've taken on some color. Love them.

[Source: [https://www.salon.com/2010/09/11/how\\_to\\_roast\\_beets](https://www.salon.com/2010/09/11/how_to_roast_beets) | Francis Lam | November 2021  
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## Lies

### Update 02: Ten More Untruths You Learned in School

Mark Twain famously said, "Don't let school interfere with your education." Although the famed author [who quit school](#) at age 12 had more meanings in mind than calling out specific educational

untruths, it turns out plenty of the "facts" learned in school are actually myths, propaganda, misinformation, or downright lies.

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### **Touching Frogs or Toads Gives You Warts**

You should definitely avoid touching frogs or toads, some of which secrete powerful toxins from their skin. But if the poison doesn't kill you, you're not going to have to worry about getting warts. In fact, the bumps that cover some frogs and toads aren't warts at all, and even if they were, warts can only be caused by a human virus.

### **The Great Wall of China Is Visible From Space**

Since it's the same color, texture and made from the same materials as the surrounding landscape, the Great Wall of China is nearly impossible to see with the unaided eye in low-Earth orbit. It is absolutely not visible from the moon, as many kids were taught in school. A 2004 image from the International Space Station might appear to show a tiny segment of the world's longest defensive fortification, but even Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei confirmed he couldn't see it while in orbit.

### **Elephants Have Graveyards**

There is a common schoolhouse misconception that old elephants nearing death instinctively wander away from the herd to meet their end at the same site that their ancestors went to die. According to the BBC, "elephants clearly show interest in the remains of the dead," but there is no instinctive homing device that draws them toward collective staging areas for death, or elephant graveyards — and also, elephants are not afraid of mice.

### **In Australia, Water Swirls Down Drains in Reverse**

It's likely you were told growing up that in Australia, water runs down sink, toilet and bathtub drains in the opposite direction — and even that storms swirl in reverse — because Coriolis forces tug in the opposite direction on different sides of the Earth. Coriolis forces are real, but they apply only on a scale much larger than toilets or even hurricanes can produce. According to a tweet from superstar astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, "toilet bowls drain however they're designed to circulate water. It's irrelevant whether you live above or below the equator."

### **George Washington Sported Wooden Dentures**

When he gave his first inaugural address in 1789, George Washington had just one remaining natural tooth. It is a fact he wore a series of dentures, some made from ivory, gold, and even lead. The common schoolhouse myth that the first president wore wooden teeth, however, is exactly that — a myth.

### **Washington Admitted He Chopped Down a Cherry Tree**

For generations, teachers have been telling students that George Washington was so virtuous that he couldn't tell a lie. The author of Washington's bestselling original biography was not bound by such moral hang-ups, and took significant artistic license with the facts. The cherry tree story is among the biggest whoppers.

### **Chameleons Change Color for Camouflage**

Chameleons have the remarkable ability to change color, but it's not to blend in with surroundings while hiding from predators. Some chameleons change with the temperature or amount of stress they're experiencing. Others change colors to warn other lizards of danger. And of course, some males brighten things up to attract female chameleons.

### **You Can't End Sentences with Prepositions**

The question "Where are you at?" would make any English teacher cringe — and for good reason. It's grammatically incorrect to end sentences with prepositions when the sentence would have the same meaning without it. But otherwise, it's perfectly fine. Not only is there no rule anywhere that says you can't, but sometimes not ending sentences with prepositions makes writing clumsy and unnatural ("On what did you step?" vs. "What did you step on?").

### **An Apple Fell on Newton's Head**

Kids learn in school that scientific pioneer Isaac Newton had his eureka moment about gravity when an apple fell on his head. It never happened. Newton did observe apples falling in his family's orchard, but there's no evidence one bonked him on the head and turned on a lightbulb.

### **The Tongue Map**

One part of the tongue senses bitter tastes. Another detects sweetness, and others sense salty and bitter tastes, according to the tongue map. The tongue map drawn back in 1901 is a lie. Scientists now know that the tongue works in concert to detect all tastes and sensations.

[Source: Cheapism | Andrew Lisa | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Alcohol Consumption**

### **Update 03: Eight Facts to Know About It**

No other intoxicant is as widespread as alcohol. It is hardly surprising that everybody has an opinion about it, and that prejudices and misconceptions are also commonplace. Here are eight facts about alcohol that might surprise you.

#### **Fact #1: Alcohol is harmful to our health – including the heart**

It is a widespread misconception that one glass of red wine a day is good for your heart. The influence of alcohol on our health is actually well studied. One thing is clear: People who drink a glass of red wine for pleasure every now and again needn't be worried about their health. But you're not doing your health any good.

Systematic reviews of studies involving millions of people show that people who drink a little alcohol do indeed suffer a heart attack somewhat less frequently. However, the opposite is true for all other cardiovascular diseases such as heart failure or arrhythmia. Even moderate alcohol consumption increases their risk. The main thing to keep in mind is that alcohol can make us more

prone to a lot of other diseases, including various cancers. Accidents also occur more frequently because of alcohol. Overall, it is fair to say that the more alcohol that is involved, the more harmful it is.

**Fact #2: Alcohol problems affect all social classes**

It is prejudiced to think that mainly poor and uneducated people drink too much alcohol. In fact, the opposite is true for women. Studies by the Robert Koch Institute show that women with a university-level degree drink risky amounts of alcohol almost twice as often as women who only have a secondary school leaving certificate. A similar trend can be seen amongst men, although the differences between the various educational groups are smaller. Incidentally, the same is true of age distribution. Drinking behavior in adults differs only slightly, regardless of whether they are 20, 40 or 60 years old. Alcohol dependence can also be found in all levels of society and education.

**Fact #3: Beer and wine are just as harmful as spirits**

Some people assume that drinks with lower alcohol content are less harmful. This is also reflected by the language we use, referring to spirits as “hard liquor.” But experts agree that the overall amount of alcohol consumed is what counts, not the form in which you drink it. In other words, it doesn't matter whether you drink 300 ml of beer, 125 ml of wine or 40 ml of whiskey; all three drinks contain the same amount of pure alcohol.

**Fact #4: Binge drinking is also widespread among adults**

Heavy alcohol consumption is sometimes viewed as mainly being a problem in young people. Studies by the Robert Koch Institute show that binge drinking occurs in all age groups, though. Binge drinking refers to somebody having six or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion, for instance at a party or in a bar. That is the equivalent of at least 60 ml of pure alcohol, which is how much is in three large bottles of beer (1.5 l in total) or three large glasses of wine (600 ml in total). In surveys, 25% of women and over 40% of men said that they drink that much alcohol at least once a month.

**Fact #5: Alcohol disrupts sleep**

It is a common belief that because alcohol makes you tired, it also helps with sleeping problems. That is not correct. In fact, the opposite is true. People who drink large amounts of alcohol before going to bed often do fall asleep more quickly, but their body doesn't get its nightly rest. Rather than recovering while asleep, the body is busy breaking down the alcohol. That shortens your phases of deep sleep, causing you to sleep restlessly and wake up frequently. Alcohol also makes you more likely to snore, which can be disruptive to your partner. Note that needing alcohol to fall asleep is a sign of an alcohol problem. That is a good reason to rethink your drinking habits.

**Fact #6: You can have an alcohol problem without getting drunk**

Not everybody with an alcohol problem gets drunk. Some people drink moderate amounts every day, but don't manage to go for one day without alcohol. They need a certain amount of alcohol in their blood to prevent withdrawal symptoms. This is referred to as delta alcoholism. Alcohol

problems can come in all shapes and sizes. One decisive factor is whether somebody has lost control of their own drinking behavior or uses alcohol to ignore problems or to get through daily life.

**Fact #7: People often drink alcohol for reasons other than pleasure**

Lots of people do indeed enjoy the taste and stimulating effect of alcohol. People often enough drink for quite different reasons though, for instance:

- Because everybody else is drinking and they don't want to stand out, like if a toast is raised at a party. In addition to social pressure, self-image can also play a role among men. They might worry about not seeming manly if they don't drink alcohol. It is also not always easy to turn a drink down. Alcohol is so widespread in our society that it can become a chore to have to say no or explain why you aren't drinking time and again.
- To forget problems: It's not uncommon for people to drink alcohol to forget personal problems or trouble at work for a while. Some people try to calm themselves down that way to be able to get through daily life. Of course, the problems don't just disappear; and the alcohol itself can then become an additional problem. After all, alcohol makes both positive feelings and negative emotions more intense.

**Fact #8: Alcohol is harmful to infants**

Most people know that alcohol is harmful to unborn babies during pregnancy. But it's recommended that parents of infants and breastfeeding mothers steer clear of alcohol for various reasons. The most important reason is that alcohol can be passed on to the baby through the mother's milk. Alcohol is especially harmful for infants because they can barely break it down. Studies have also found that consuming larger volumes of alcohol (more than two alcoholic drinks per day) can increase the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, for instance through falling asleep on the sofa together with the baby.

If parents don't want to completely avoid alcohol, it makes sense for them to stick to a couple of rules:

- Preferably only drink alcohol on one or two days a week, and limit yourself to 10 grams of alcohol (e.g., 100 ml of wine).
- Ensure a long enough gap between drinking alcohol and breastfeeding so that the alcohol in the breastmilk can be broken down again: If a mother has drunk 100 ml of wine, she should wait two to three hours before breastfeeding or expressing milk again. Otherwise, there's a risk of alcohol still being in the breastmilk.
- Put the child into the care of a sober person you trust if you do drink a little more alcohol on occasion, for instance the child's grandparents or your partner.

[Source: <https://www.informedhealth.org/eight-facts-about-alcohol.html> | November 2021 ++]

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## Covid-19 Misinformation

### Update 08: Harmful Treatments They Claim Can 'De-Vaccinate' People



On social media channels devoted to anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, a new craze is spreading. In a video hosted on Bitchute, a platform known for its extremist content, a man applies electrodes, a strong magnet and "55 percent Montana whiskey" in the hope of removing a COVID-19 vaccine from a US military veteran. In another, a gory variant of the "cupping" technique to draw blood from an injection site, a man makes extra incisions with a razor to extract a significant amount.

Neither method had any hope of working. It is impossible to undo vaccination, a process which works by teaching the body to fight infection itself, and which doesn't rely on substances that can be isolated or removed. But, with millions of people now vaccinated against COVID-19, some anti-vaccination advocates are pivoting to a new narrative aimed at those who took vaccines and regret it. They claim it is indeed possible to "de-vaccinate" people, recommending a host of methods which range from quaint to potentially dangerous.

The "de-vaccination" movement is spreading in Telegram groups with thousands of members, as well as other fringe platforms used by extremists, which Insider monitored while researching the trend. Users repost videos beaming them to large audiences not reflected in view counts on the sites where they are hosted. Advocates have also established a presence on mainstream platforms that purport to restrict such activity, such as Facebook and TikTok, experts told Insider. In response to Insider flagging their presence, Facebook removed a de-vaccination group and several pages from its site for violating its COVID misinformation policies.

Joe Ondrak, a disinformation expert and the lead researcher at Logically AI, told Insider that beliefs in "de-vaccination" have roots in older conspiracy theories. Ondrak linked it to claims — also untrue — that vaccines are magnetic. (The theory fueled a subgenre of videos in which people claimed metal objects started sticking to them after they got vaccinated.) "As that claim went viral, people were looking for scientific reasons to back that up. And people sort of started latching on to this idea of graphene oxide as a magnetic material that was in the vaccines," he said.

Graphene oxide is a substance used in high-tech manufacturing, with some potential medical applications. Some claim that the substance is being implanted via the vaccines to transform humans into machine-like entities who can be easily controlled.

Public health bodies say there is no graphene oxide in any of the COVID-19 vaccines. (Fact-checking site Full Fact linked the narrative to a disputed study by a scientist at the University of Almería in Spain. The university has since distanced itself from his work.) Some advocates claim to be able to purge vaccine-implanted graphene oxide. The benign suggestions to do this include protein supplements and pine-extract capsules, albeit sold at high prices.

Others are potentially dangerous. People promoting the toxic bleach chlorine dioxide as a miracle cure have reached a vast new audience during the pandemic, claiming it can cure or prevent the disease (it cannot). Some of those people now also advocate it as part of a "de-vaccination" treatment. De-vaccination conspiracy theories have been spreading in the movement for months, Fiona O'Leary, an activist who tracks chlorine dioxide misinformation told Insider. Chlorine dioxide is a kind of bleach used to treat paper products, and can be fatal if consumed in large doses. Its use as a "miracle cure" has been linked to several deaths during the pandemic.

Andreas Kalcker is a leading chlorine dioxide advocate, who is under investigation in Argentina after a child died from drinking the bleach to treat a cough. Kalcker in videos on Bitchute pushes graphene oxide conspiracy theories and claims that chlorine dioxide can purge it. His new book further expanded on his groundless belief in the power of the bleach to "de-vaccinate." The book was on sale on Amazon, but was removed after Insider flagged it to the company. In a statement to Insider, he defended his view that COVID vaccines contain graphene oxide, citing the disputed Spanish study.

The de-vaccination movement has spread to establish a growing presence on mainstream platforms. A recent NBC News investigation found anti-vaccine influencers on TikTok pushing unproven de-vaccination cures. They included taking baths in water infused with the chemical irritant borax, or trying to use a syringe to "un-inject" the vaccine — neither of which have any prospect of undoing the vaccination process. Advocates are also using private and public groups on Facebook to discuss "de-vaccination", said Ondrak. Insider viewed several such large groups during its research, which have tens of thousands of members.

Ondrak noted that due to the opacity of Telegram and Facebook's private groups, it is hard to get a true sense of how far misinformation is spreading. Meta, Facebook's parent company, told Insider that its goal was to promote accurate information about COVID and vaccines, and explained why it had removed one de-vaccination group flagged by Insider. "We removed this group for violating our policies and will continue to remove any group, page, or post that repeatedly violates those policies," said a Meta spokesman.

The de-vaccination movement though is unlikely to gain much wider traction, said Ondrak. But the emergence of the movement has a deeper significance, he said. He said it was one of the core narratives now linking disparate groups on the political fringe — such as alternative health

advocates and far-right extremists — into a supercharged anti-vaccine movement. "It's here in this idea of being de vaccinated, where they are really overlapping quite tightly," said Ondrak. [Source: Insider | Tom Porter | November 27, 2021 ++]

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## **News of the Weird**

**NOV 16 thru 30, 2021**

**Accidents Happen** – A Georgia woman working as a webcam model for a popular pornography site accidentally shot herself in the vagina earlier this month, a police report chronicling the bizarre incident reveals, in what a witness says was a pornographic video gone horribly wrong. According to the report, e-girl Lauren Hunter Daman, 27, accidentally discharged the weapon, a 9mm handgun, while alone in her bedroom the morning of 9 NOV while several of her housemates were on the property. Around noon, cops were called to the scene of the Thomaston home, after receiving a report of an 'accidental gunshot wound.' Upon arriving at the scene, Upson County Sheriff's Deputy Zachary Wall immediately encountered an EMS worker in the woman's driveway clutching the handgun, as well as a spent bullet casing. The paramedic notified the officer that 'the female had shot herself in her vagina, accidentally,' the report reads. Daman, wounded but in stable condition, was subsequently carted off to the parking lot of the Upson County Sheriff's office. [Daily Mail, 11/25/2021]

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**Toys Online** – An Ontario grandmother who bought an educational toy for her 15-month-old granddaughter was shocked when the dancing cactus started swearing and singing about doing cocaine. "This toy uses swear words and talking about cocaine use," Ania Tanner told CTV News Toronto. "This is not what I ordered for my granddaughter." The cactus was sold on Walmart's website as an educational toy for about \$26 and sings songs in English, Spanish and Polish. Walmart says it will remove sexually explicit toys from children's section of website after mother complains. But Tanner, who is Polish, said when she listened to the Polish lyrics, the cactus was singing about doing cocaine, drug abuse, suicide, depression and used profanities. "It just so happens that I am Polish and when I started to listen to the songs and I heard the words," she said. "I was in shock. I thought what is this, some kind of joke?" The song is by Polish Rapper Cypis, who is reportedly unaware his song was used by the Chinese manufacturer of the children's toy. "It's about taking five grams of cocaine and being alone ... It's a very depressing song," Tanner said. This singing cactus toy was also sold in Europe through Amazon and in July 2021 other families also noticed and complained about the lyrics that many felt were inappropriate for a children's toy. The Polish artist said he planned to take legal action against the Chinese company for using his song without permission. [CTV News Toronto, 11/23/2021]

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**Airpod Misuse** – A TikTok user shared how she mistook one of her AirPods for Ibuprofen and accidentally swallowed it. Saying on TikTok that she was sharing this information "for educational purposes," the Boston-based user named @iamcarliiib, explained that she had the pill in one hand. "I was crawling into bed," she says in her TikTok video, "I had Ibuprofen 800 in my right hand and I had my left AirPod in my left hand." "I like threw something back, took my water bottle and took a sip... then realized it wasn't the Ibuprofen," she said. "I tried puking it up and it won't come out." It did come out through the normal course of events, though @iamcarliiib says that she had an x-ray to confirm it. And also that she won't be trying to use that AirPod again. Separately, she has also revealed in a separate video that the swallowed AirPod was still connected to her iPhone while she was making a call. Consequently, a voice memo she sent a friend included gurgling sounds recorded in her stomach. It's not the first time that an AirPod has been swallowed. A Massachusetts man managed to swallow one in his sleep, and a seven-year-old from Georgia was taken to an emergency room after eating one. [appleinsider.com, 11/21/2021]

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**Alien Encounter** – Religious author Sharon Gilbert has claimed an "alien" visited her in the form of her husband and asked to have sex with her. She discussed the encounter in detail while speaking on the Jim Bakker Show, a self-described Christian "prophetic Bible show." A clip from the show of Gilbert's story was posted on Twitter at [pic.twitter.com/aBqC2IMSqn](https://pic.twitter.com/aBqC2IMSqn) by writer and Friendly Atheist contributor Hemant Mehta. He posted the video with the caption: "End Times preacher Sharon Gilbert says that an alien imitated her husband, and then it tried to have sex with her. "Then it claimed to be Xerxes, and then Jesus got involved, and then the alien turned out to be a reptile with a posse of gargoyles." The video has been viewed over 2.6 million times, with many noting their disbelief in the replies.

Speaking on the show, Gilbert said: "After Derek and I got married this other Derek appears in our bed. "The real Derek is lying down next to me, other Derek sits right up out of him. It startled me. "I knew that was not Derek and so I asked this critter, who are you? Because he clearly wanted to have sexual relations. "He said: 'I am your husband.' I said: 'Who are you?' "He had the nerve to claim to be, Xerxes. Other Derek seriously wanted to invite me, to use my free will to do something that was going to pull me away from God." She also noted that this "other Derek" was joined by other smaller creatures. She continued: "This last time I knew he was really desperate and I asked him again 'who are you?.' He told me the same answer and I said 'I am not going with you.'

"This was an internal dialogue, finally I said I have had enough, in my mind. "I reached up, I grabbed his face and I said: 'You are a liar and Jesus is real.' I pulled that face off and beneath it was a reptile. "He had little creatures with him this time, he brought these little halfling creatures and they looked like, gargoyles and they were very reptilian as well. Beneath the face of Derek

was a reptilian serpentine creature." The hosts then moved the conversation on and it is not clear whether Gilbert meant this story metaphorically or literally. [Oplendia, 11/29/21]

[Source: <https://www.reddit.com/r/NewsOfTheWeird> | November 30, 2021 ++]

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## Vocabulary

### Some Words to Enhance Yours | 211130

Which word best matches these example sentences?

- (a) The film reviewer was shockingly \_\_\_\_\_ in his review of the popular new film.  
(b) *Peristyle – Teutonic – Libertine - Censorious*
- (a) Hard-working is a quality commonly \_\_\_\_\_d to top bosses.  
(b) *Copious – Coiffure – Threnody - Ascribe*
- (a) She was unable to contain her \_\_\_\_\_ impulses and spent thousands of dollars in the store each week.  
(b) *Polypod – Acquisitive – Camaraderie - Antediluvian*
- (a) No one can quite comprehend the \_\_\_\_\_ of time.  
(b) *Abyss – Inordinate – Theorem - Morass*
- (a) She ran like an \_\_\_\_\_ coward instead of facing her issues head-on.  
(b) *Tyro – Prosaic – Abject - Extant*
- (a) The slideshow of memories her children put together had her \_\_\_\_\_ and inconsolable.  
(b) *Maudlin – Legerity – Cognoscente - Scythe*
- (a) Let's \_\_\_\_\_ the tally marks to determine who won the game.  
(b) *Vignette – Concatenate – Enumerate - Tome*
- (a) The judge ruled a 15-year sentence to fit her \_\_\_\_\_ crimes.  
(b) *Obelus – Baksheesh – Contemptible - Wanton*
- (a) The bride's \_\_\_\_\_ was grand in splendor and extravagance.  
(b) *Akimbo- Abyss – Trousseau - Ricochet*
- (a) The gentlemen decided to all sport \_\_\_\_\_s for their friend's wedding.  
(b) *Williwaw – Peristyle – Cravat - Pontificate*

### Answers

- Censorious [*sen-sawr-ee-uhs*] - severely critical; fault-finding; carping.
- Ascribe [*uh-skrahyb*] - to attribute or think of as belonging, as a quality or characteristic.
- Acquisitive [*uh-kwiz-i-tiv*] - tending or seeking to acquire and own, often greedily; eager to get wealth, possessions, etc.
- Abyss [*uh-bis*] - anything profoundly unfathomable or eternal.

5. Abject [*ab-jekt*] - completely without pride or dignity; self-abasing
6. Maudlin [*mawd-lin*] - tearfully or weakly emotional; foolishly sentimental
7. Enumerate [*ih-noo-muh-reyt*] - o ascertain the number of; count.
8. Contemptible [*kuhn-temp-tuh-buhl*] - deserving of or held in contempt; despicable.
9. Trousseau [*troo-soh*] - an outfit, clothing, or linen for a bride.
10. Cravat [*kruh-vat*] - a short, wide strip of fabric worn by men around the neck and tucked inside an open-necked shirt

[Source: <https://www.wordthirst.com> | November30, 2021 ++]

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## **Have You Heard or Seen?**

### **Potpourri #5 | Think Toons | Military Humor #23**

#### **Potpourri #5**

A vet goes into the U.S. Postal service to apply for a job. The interviewer asks him, “Are you allergic to anything?” He replies, “Caffeine. I can’ drink coffee.”

Okay. Have you been in in the military service? He says. “Yes. I was in Afghanistan for one tour.” The interviewer says, “That will give you 5 extra points toward employment.” Then he asks, “Are you disabled in any way?” The vet says, “Yes. A bomb exploded near me and I lost both my testicles.”

The interviewer grimaces and then says, “Disabled in your country’s service! Well that qualifies you more extra bonus points. Okay.” Looking at the regulations you have enough points for me to hire you tight now. Our normal working hours are 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. You can start tomorrow at 10:00 AM.

The vet is puzzled and asks, “If the work hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, why don’t you want me here till 10:00 AM?”

“This is a government job,” the interviewer says. “For the first two hours we just stand around drinking coffee and scratching our balls. No point in you coming in for that.”

-o-o-O-o-o-

A pastor dies and is waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him is a fellow who’s dressed in sunglasses, a loud shirt, leather jacket, and jeans. Saint Peter addresses him, ‘Who are you, so that I may know whether or not to admit you to the Kingdom of Heaven?’ The fellow replies, ‘I’m Jack, retired pilot from Houston.’

Saint Peter consults his list. He smiles and say to the pilot, “Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter the Kingdom. The pilot goes into Heaven with his robe and staff.

Next, it's the pastors turn. He stands erect and booms out, 'I am Bob, Pastor for the last 43 years.' Saint Peter consults his list. He says to the Bob, 'Take this cotton robe and wooden staff and enter the Kingdom.'

'Just a minute,' says the Bob. 'That man was a pilot and he gets a silken robe and golden staff and I get only cotton and wood. How can this be?' 'Up here – we go by results,' say Saint Peter. 'When you preached – people slept. When he flew, people prayed.'

-o-o-O-o-o-

A flat chested young lady read an article in a magazine that stated Dr. Bumbutu in Africa could enlarge breasts without surgery. So she decided to go see Dr. Bumbutu to see if he could help her

Dr. Bumbutu advised her, "Every day after you shower, rub your chest and chant, "Scooby doobie doobies. I want bigger chest". She did this faithfully for several months and to her utter amazement she grew to a terrific D-cup rack.

One morning when she was running late, she got on a bus and in a panic realized she had forgotten her morning ritual. Frightened she might lose her progress if she didn't recite the little rhyme, she stood right there in the middle aisle of the bus, closed her eyes and said, "Scooby doobie doobies. I want bigger chest".

A guy sitting nearby looked at her and said, "Are you a patient of Dr. Bumbutu?" She responded, "Yes I am ... how did you know?" He winked and whispered, "Hickory dickery dock ..."

### **Think Toons**





I wanna be 14 again and ruin my life differently. I have new ideas.



I don't always go the extra mile, but when I do it's because I missed my exit.

Military Humor #23

An Army ranger, Navy seal and Marine recon were walking in Iraq. They came across a sheep tangled in barb wire. The Army ranger says, "I wish that was Holly Berry", the navy seal say's "I wish that was Jennifer Lopez", the Marine looked around and said, "I just wish it was dark"

-o-o-O-o-o-

Three companies of army rangers were on training humping through the hills. They were marching along and see a lone Marine standing on a hill staring at them. They all stop and the Marine flips them off and walks behind the hill.

The first company of rangers charge the hill, explosions and gun fire erupts, and then there is silence. The Marine again stands on the hill and flips off the last two companies and walks back down other side.

The second company charge the hill, explosions and gunfire erupts, then there is silence. A lone army ranger comes tumbling done the hill the last company commander says what the hell is going on?

Dont go sir its a trap. What do you mean it's a trap? There is two of them don't go there's two Marines!!!!

-o-o-O-o-o-

An Army NCO and Captain have been in the field all day playing war games in preparation for a big deployment. It's the end of the day, both men are completely dirty and exhausted and looking forward to hitting their cots.

As they lay on their cots looking up at the sky the NCO asks the Captain, "Sir, what do you think of when you look up?" There's a long pause before the Captain speaks. "Well, when I look up and see all those stars, I can't help but feel pretty small in the grand scale of things. I mean, compared to this galaxy and who knows how many other galaxies, I feel pretty insignificant here on earth and it makes me ponder what my purpose on life is really all about"

Satisfied with his thought provoking response and picturing himself being patted on the back for his exceptional perception of things, he turns to the NCO and says "What do you think when you look up Sergeant?" Without hesitation the NCO replies "I think someone stole our tent Sir!"

-o-o-O-o-o-

Having passed the enlistment physical, Jon was asked by the doctor, "Why do you want to join the Navy, son?"

"My father said it'd be a good idea, sir."

"Oh? And what does your father do?"

"He's in the Army, sir."

-o-o-O-o-o-

- Why does the navy use powdered soap? Because it takes longer to pick up
- A doctor told his patient, "You can't cure stupid"

- They say if you put a Marine in a round room with a steel ball they will either loose it, break it, or get it pregnant.
- Just because there are no complaints, doesn't mean all parachutes are perfect.
- When the bogey man goes to sleep he checks his closet for us marines
- You know what ARMY stands for? Aren't Ready for Marines Yet.

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## Thought of the Day

“Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”

-- Mao Tse-Tung

-o-o-O-o-o-

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