

RAO

BULLETIN

15 July 2017

PDF Edition



All Hands: I anticipate moving 29 & 30 JUL and it is likely I will not have time to publish the 1 AUG Bulletin or at best a delayed one. Hopefully, now that I have reached age 77, this will be my last move FOREVER!

Lt. James "EMO" Tichacek, USN (Ret)
Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin

THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

| Pg | Article | Subject |
|---------|---------|---------|
| * DOD * | | |

- 04 == NDAA 2018 ----- (House \$631B | Senate \$700B)
- 05 == NDAA 2018 [01] ----- (Civilian Workforce)
- 06 == NDAA 2018 [02] ----- (Valor Awards Retention)
- 06 == NDAA 2018 [03] ----- (TRICARE Fee Increases)
- 07 == NDAA 2018 [04] ----- (Transgender-Related Medical Treatment Funding)

- 07 == NDAA 2018 [05] ----- (BRAC Ban)
- 08 == Transgender Troops [06] ----- (Enlistment Plan Opposed by House)
- 09 == Recruiting Non-citizens [02] ----- (Opposition to Contract Cancellations)
- 09 == Exchange Online Shopping [11] ----- (Beta Test Results)
- 11 == DoD Budget 2018 [05] ----- (Congress Divided on Pay & BAH)
- 12 == Project 112 & SHAD [09] ----- (What Happened - Who Suffered?)
- 13 == DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ----- (Reported 1 thru 15 JUL 2017)
- 15 == Pentagon Spending ----- (\$33.6 Billion In Missed Savings)
- 15 == POW/MIA Recoveries ----- (Reported 1 thru 15 JUL 2017 | Eighteen)

*** VA ***

- 20 == VA Caregiver Program [43] ----- (DAV Unsung Hero Initiative)
- 21 == Gulf War Syndrome [41] ----- (Claim Denial Rate)
- 21 == VA Vet Choice Program [55] ----- (Congress Running Out of Time)
- 22 == VA Prosthetics [17] ----- (First 2 Vets Receive 'LUKE' Arms)
- 23 == VA Cancer Policy [03] ----- (Bile Duct | Vietnam Liver Fluke Worm Link)
- 24 == Fisher House Expansion [18] ----- (Bronx NY)
- 25 == VA Hospice Care [05] ----- (Increased Care Campaign Showing Results)
- 26 == VA Adverse Employee Actions ----- (New Weekly Accountability Report)
- 27 == GI Bill [232] ----- (Recruitment Impact From Changes)
- 29 == VA Did You Know - (Death Confirmation | Ferry Rides | Separation Pay)
- 29 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ----- (Reported 1 thru 15 JUL 2017)

*** Vets ***

- 31 == GI Bill [233] ---- (Reform Bill Receives Initial Congressional Agreement)
- 32 == Burn Pit Toxic Exposure [44] ----- (Lawsuit Ruling Pending)
- 34 == Medicaid Eligible Vets [05] ----- (GOP Health Care Bill Impact)
- 35 == Vet Jobs [224] ----- (Veterans Innovation Partnership)
- 36 == Massachusetts Vet Bonus [05] ----- (OTH Vet's Lawsuit)
- 37 == Taps [03] ----- (Vet Faces \$300 Fine for Daily Playing)
- 37 == Vet Cemetery Arkansas [04] ----- (Fayetteville Land Donation)
- 38 == AFL Q & A ----- (Death Benefits)
- 39 == Retiree Appreciation Days ----- (As of 15 JUL 2017)
- 39 == Vet Hiring Fairs ----- (16 JUL thru 15 AUG 2017)
- 41 == Vet State Benefits & Discounts ----- (Maine JUL 2017)

*** Vet Legislation ***

- 42 == VA Health Care Access [53]----- (Serve Veterans First Act)
- 42 == VA Appeals Backlog [09] ---- (Appeals Improvement & Modernization Act)
- 43 == Military Retirement Pay [08] ----- (HR 3011 | Survivor Pay Upon Death)
- 43 == VA Caregiver Program [44] - (S.591/HR1472 | Expand Caregiver Benefits)
- 44 == GI Bill [234] ----- (Lifetime Benefit for New Recruits)
- 45 == VA Nursing Home Care --- (S.683 | Keeping Our Commitment to DAV Act)

*** MILITARY ***

- 46 == USAF MQ-9 Reaper ----- (First Successful Combat Mission)

- 46 == USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) [01] -- (CO temporarily relieved of command)
- 47 == Award Devices [01] ----- (C & R Criteria Announced)
- 48 == Department of the Navy ----- (Name Change Proposed)
- 48 == Navy Lingo ----- (19 Terms Only Sailors Will Understand)
- 50 == Navy Fleet Size [04] ----- (Smaller Carriers Proposed)
- 50 == Army Hydrogen Fueled Vehicles ----- (Testing Begun)
- 53 == KIA LCpl Joseph R. Giese ----- (A Father's Grief)
- 53 == Navy Peacoat ----- (Will It Become Optional Attire)
- 54 == Recruiting Non-citizens [02] ---- (Opposition to Contract Cancellations)
- 54 == THAAD ----- (14 of 14 Tests Successful)
- 55 == Military Recruiting [07] ----- (GI Bill Changes Impact)
- 57 == Trump 355 Ship Fleet [01] ----- (Navy Plans in Motion to Meet Goal)
- 59 == Trump 355 Ship Fleet [02] --- (Composition | Thinking Outside the Box)
- 59 == Navy Discipline ----- (Confinement On Bread & Water)

*** MILITARY HISTORY ***

- 61 == WWII Vets 105 ----- (Cole~Richard 01)
- 62 == Maryland Vet Cemetery [03] ----- (Loudon Park National Cemetery)
- 63 == China Submarine Program -- (Abacuses Used in Design of 1st Nuclear Sub)
- 64 == USS Laffey (DD-724) ----- (Kamikaze Attack 1945)
- 64 == Abandoned Military Bases [02] ----- (109th Iman Fortified)
- 64 == Insanely Daring Air Raids ----- (No. 2 | The Sinking Of the Tirpitz)
- 65 == Future of War ----- (Battle of Mosul's Impact)
- 66 == Civil War Soldier Heroism ----- (United States Colored Troops)
- 67 == Military History Anniversaries ----- (16 thru 31July)
- 68 == Medal Of Honor Story ----- (Sal Guinta | Afghanistan)
- 68 == Medal of Honor Citations ----- (Eugene B Flukey | WWII)

*** HEALTH CARE ***

- 71 == Heart Disease [03] ----- (Men's)
- 72 == Flu Shots [10] ----- (Dissolving Microneedle Patch Alternative)
- 73 == Sleep Apnea [06] ----- (Don't Let It Steal Your Sweet Dreams)
- 74 == Biosensors ----- (What's Your Body Trying to Tell You)
- 75 == Prostate Cancer [16] ----- (Overdiagnosed and Overtreated)
- 76 == TRICARE Podcast 404 ----- (Prostrate Cancer | Child Obesity | Vitamin D)
- 77 == TRICARE Podcast 405 ---- (Updating DEERS | Oral Health | Heart Disease)

*** FINANCES ***

- 79 == Linkedlin Scam ----- (Bogus Connection Requests)
- 80 == Wi-Fi Scam ----- (Beware Free Connection Offer)
- 80 == Debt Collection [12] ----- (Harassment | How to Deal with It)
- 82 == State Retirement Income Tax [01] ----- (North Carolina Senate Action)
- 82 == Medicare Coverage Rates ----- (2017)
- 82 == Gig Economy ----- (A Means for Seniors to Available Funds)
- 83 == Credit Reports [08] ----- (Changes Will Help Some Consumers)
- 84 == Tax Burden for Rhode Island Retired Vets ----- (As of JUL2017)

*** GENERAL INTEREST ***

- 86 == Notes of Interest ----- (01 thru 15 JUL 2017)
- 87 == China Overseas Bases ----- (First in Djibouti Being Manned)
- 88 == Battle of Mosul ----- (Victory Declaration | Iraqi Forces Brace for Future)
- 89 == Aging [01] ----- (End of Life Decisions)
- 90 == Grocery Stores ----- (Things You Should Not Buy There)
- 92 == Driving Tickets ----- (Car Insurance Impact)
- 94 == Toilets ----- (One Way to Deal with Stench)
- 94 == GTMO Detainees ----- (Omar Khadr | Awarded \$8M in Lawsuit)
- 95 == Coca Cola [02] ----- (23 more ways It Can Be Used)
- 97 == PRK Nuclear Weapons [12] ----- (Cost Impact on Troops)
- 98 == PRK Nuclear Weapons [13] ----- (First Successful ICBM Test)
- 99 == Garage Door Billboards ----- (Making Yours Stand Out (5)
- 100 == Have You Heard? - (Old Man, Boy & Donkey | Dr. Young vs Dr. Geezer)

Note:

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

*** ATTACHMENTS ***

- Attachment - Maine Vet State Benefits & Discounts JUL 2017
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 July
- Attachment - Mosul's Impact On the Future of War

*** DoD ***



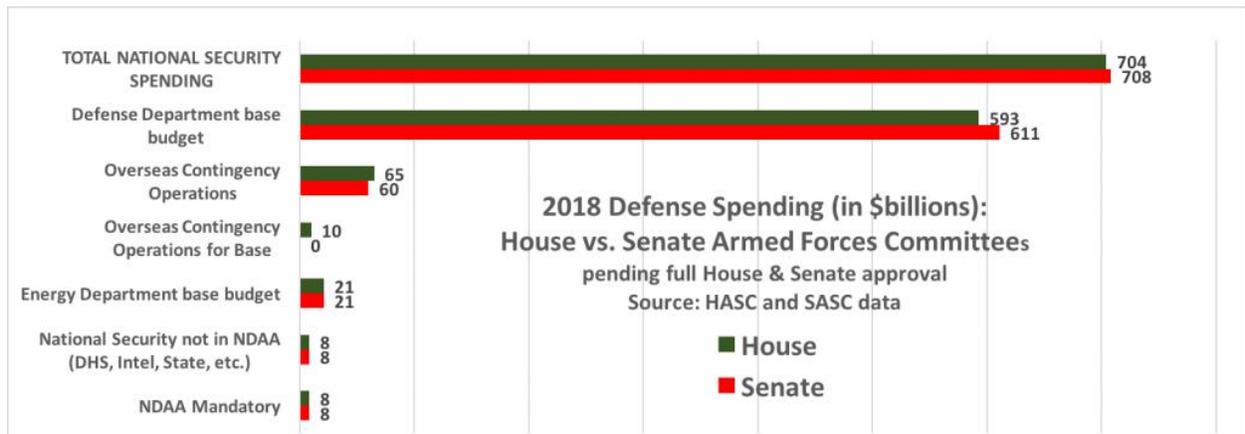
NDAA 2018 ► House \$631B | Senate \$700B

The House and Senate Armed Services Committees convened this in late JUN to markup their respective versions of the FY18 NDAA. The House version was approved 60-1 after almost 14 hours of debate, and authorizes funds for a base budget requirement of \$631 billion, including a \$28.5 billion increase for essential readiness recovery above the president's budget request. Included in the House version are provisions that address quality of life and retention issues, such as:

- A 2.4 percent pay increase for service members;

- A prohibition against the closing of military medical treatment facilities outside of the continental U.S.;
- The expansion the UCMJ to cover the wrongful broadcast of nude or intimate photos;
- Health care benefits parity for service members on 12304a and 12304b orders; and a temporary moratorium on BAH reductions for military families who live in on-post housing.

The Senate version authorizes a total of \$700 billion, roughly \$60 billion of that being authorized for overseas contingency operations. Like the House version, the Senate version focuses on rebuilding the military’s readiness, but does not include the same troop level increases as the House version, nor does it include the 2.4 percent pay increase. The Senate version also places special emphasis on cyberwarfare, and creates a “chief information warfare officer” who would be presidentially-appointed and Senate-confirmed, to lead DOD in cyber operations, intelligence and space issues. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on these important bills as they move through the legislative process. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | June 30, 2017 ++]



NDAA 2018 Update 01 ► Civilian Workforce

House lawmakers are intent on protecting the Defense Department’s civilian workforce from unnecessary cuts, voting this week to require the Pentagon to submit a plan to ensure it retains a sufficient number of civil servants. An amendment added to the Fiscal 2018 National Defense Authorization Act H.R.2810 would require the report in an attempt to “address the chronic disconnect between budget and strategy,” according to its author, Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA). The workforce plan would require Defense to employ at least enough civilian employees to support the National Military Strategy.

The department needs an “analysis of the impact of changes in the size of the civilian workforce to the size and readiness of military force structure,” Moulton said, adding the House Armed Services Committee had heard from Pentagon leaders about the difficulty of “budgetary tradeoffs” happening at Defense stations around the world. Military personnel are being overworked due to a lack of civilian support staff, Moulton explained. The report would identify the impact of civilian workforce reductions underway and where staffing should be increased. If the Pentagon decides to move forward with workforce reductions anyway, another provision of the NDAA would boost their separation compensation. While the rest of the federal government offers employee buyouts up to \$25,000, Congress last year allowed Defense to pay any of its workers accepting Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay up to \$40,000. That was set to be a one-year pilot, though the new bill would extend the increased maximum to 2021. The \$25,000 cap has not otherwise changed since Congress first authorized the VSIP program in 1994.

The authorization bill also contains some reforms in case Defense goes in the opposite direction with its workforce. The measure would allow the Pentagon to immediately appoint retired military members into civil service positions to “meet emergency needs.” Currently, those individuals would have to be retired for six months before receiving such an appointment. The department would also retain direct hire authority until 2021 for depots and ranges, which is currently set to expire in 2018. The Armed Service Committee approved the bill this week in a 60-1 vote. It now heads to the House floor. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | June 30, 2017 ++]

NDAA 2018 Update 02 ► Valor Awards Retention

A House proposal would severely limit defense officials’ ability to revoke battlefield valor awards, which supporters say rightly preserves the record of their wartime heroism. As part of the annual defense authorization bill debate, House Armed Services Committee lawmakers last week approved new rules that would allow military valor awards to be rescinded only if later evidence shows the honor was given improperly, or if the service member is later convicted of a serious violent felony. “We’re talking about hijacking an airplane, rape, murder and so on,” said amendment sponsor Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA). “Then the valor award can be revoked.”

Hunter, who served with the Marine Corps in Iraq and Afghanistan, argued the change is needed because defense officials can — and do — rescind valor awards for unrelated infractions later in troops’ military careers. He called that unfair and absurd. “Essentially, if a warfighter is awarded the Silver Star for actions on the battlefield, that award can be subsequently stripped away from him or her for the reasons that have nothing to do with the earning of that award,” he said. “This is unacceptable. No matter what decisions they may make upon returning, that doesn’t change the fact that (they) acted heroically on the battlefield.”

In recent years, service commanders have sent out reminders to troops that their awards and ribbons can be taken away if they fail to maintain “professional standards” in the ranks. Hunter has long been a critic of the move, and found several high-profile cases of troops punished and stripped of honors for actions that happen far from their combat heroics. Military commanders have argued the issue is a matter of professionalism and good order. Hunter has characterized it as bureaucratic overreach. If officials revoke a valor award because of a criminal act, they must also prove that crime was not the result of any “extenuating factors,” such as combat-related traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | July 2, 2017 ++]

NDAA 2018 Update 03 ► TRICARE Fee Increases

The Senate Armed Services Committee has yet to release its complete version of the 2018 defense authorization bill after markup. The lack of transparency in the hearing process leaves us wondering what controversial provisions might be included to prompt such secrecy. However, if “past is prologue,” we do have a few clues as to which way the wind will blow in the Senate - and you can expect higher TRICARE fees. In most cases, health care costs will be much higher and probably more in line with [DoD’s recent budget proposal](#).

With regard to higher TRICARE fees, pharmacy copayments are once again in the crosshairs of the budget writers. These provide an especially ripe target for increases, because the pharmacy benefit consists of mandatory spending for beneficiaries over the age of 65. The savings resulting from these potential fee hikes can then be used to fund other accounts and programs, including measures like the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) to remedy [the SBP/DIC Widows Tax](#), which offsets a military survivor’s monthly Survivor Benefit Plan annuity by any Dependency and Indemnity Compensation they receive. MOAA has a long-standing record of advocating for a

permanent fix for the widow's tax/SSIA situation. However, taxing beneficiaries' earned benefits is not the way to fix it. Keep in mind, many of those affected by the Widows Tax also use the pharmacy benefit.

TRICARE enrollment fees, as well as other fees, most likely will get hit with hikes, too. DoD is looking for ways, in their words, to “plow savings back into readiness.” Raising fees by repealing the grandfathering clause for TRICARE fees contained in last year's law which shielded currently serving members from new fees, as is currently proposed by the DoD, is one way they aim to supplement readiness or other unspecified projects.

“We do not think raising TRICARE fees through the repeal of last year's grandfathering, which is now law, is in any way fair to beneficiaries,” says Capt. Kathy Beasley, USN (Ret), MOAA's Government Relations Director for Health Affairs. “The House saw fit to maintain the existing grandfathered fee structure and to maintain focus on the implementation of current TRICARE reform efforts. MOAA strongly agrees with the House.” [Source: MOAA Leg Up | July 07, 2017 ++]

NDA 2018 Update 04 ► Transgender-Related Medical Treatment Funding

Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO) has introduced an amendment to the annual defense policy bill that would prohibit Pentagon funding for gender transition-related medical treatment. The amendment comes after she introduced a much more wide-reaching one in the Armed Services Committee to reverse the Pentagon's transgender policy. An email to a Hartzler spokesman seeking comment was not immediately returned on 7 JUL. Transgender troops already in the military have been able to serve openly since last year. The policy also allows them to receive any treatment deemed medically necessary, including surgery.

Meanwhile, transgender people interested in joining the military have not been able to enlist. That was supposed to change last week, but Defense Secretary James Mattis delayed the end of the ban for six months following a request from the service chiefs. During last week's House Armed Services Committee markup of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDA), Hartzler introduced an amendment that would rescind the entire transgender policy and direct the Defense secretary to honorably discharge transgender troops. Hartzler withdrew the amendment, but vowed to bring it back when the bill comes to the House floor if the Pentagon does not act on its own.

The new amendment, filed 7 JUL in advance of the NDA coming to the House floor, would make it so that “funds available to the Department of Defense may not be used to provide medical treatment (other than mental health treatment) related to gender transition to a person entitled to medical care.” During last week's markup, Hartzler claimed the cost of surgeries alone could reach to \$1.35 billion over the next 10 years. It's unclear where Hartzler's figure originates. In an interview with USA Today, she suggested she and her staff did their own research on the issue. The RAND Corporation estimated medical costs for transgender service members would be between \$2.4 million and \$8.4 million annually. The amendment must make it past the Rules Committee before coming to a vote on the House floor. The Rules Committee will consider NDA amendments on 12 JUL. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | 07/07/17 ++]

NDA 2018 Update 05 ► BRAC Ban

The White House on Wednesday issued a detailed list of objections to provisions in the fiscal 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2810, S. 1519) that is headed to floor votes in the House and Senate this month. Among the complaints—which did not prompt a veto threat—is the prohibition in both the House and Senate versions on another round of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission process. Though the bill authorizes

\$285.8 million for activities based on the 2005 BRAC round, the current Section 2702—“would affirm that nothing in this act shall be construed to authorize an additional Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round.”

The administration “strongly objects” to section 2702, the White House wrote, and “strongly urges Congress to provide BRAC authorization as requested so that DoD can ensure it is not wasting scarce resources on unneeded infrastructure. The department estimates that a new BRAC round in 2021 would save it an additional \$2 billion annually—resources it could apply to higher priorities such as readiness and modernization.” The White House argued that a new BRAC would “allow DoD to align infrastructure with force structure,” and help with an ongoing strategic reviews. It said it is willing to work with Congress on addressing the issues.

The Trump administration has support for its pro-BRAC position from many in the outside defense policy community. But Congress for years has been protective of its prerogatives in planning any base closures without submitting to the process of having an outside panel propose closures on an unamendable list that requires an up-or-down vote. “In the past, BRAC rounds have been used without appropriate study, incur significant costs, and jeopardized valuable military communities,” said Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) last month. “I am grateful that this year’s NDAA specifically prohibits the consideration of a BRAC round.” House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-TX) on 22 JUN told reporters he is not necessarily opposed to a new BRAC if data justify one.

Other White House objections to the current NDAA include the bill’s prescriptions requiring greater use of private audits at the Pentagon to back up the Defense Contract Audit Agency. And the White House cited “constitutional concerns” about the bill’s elaborations on last year’s NDAA restructuring of the Defense Department’s top acquisition officials to create a chief management officer. “Section 1232 would interfere with the president’s exclusive authority to recognize foreign nations,” the statement said, “and section 921(b) would contravene the Appointments Clause by authorizing incumbent officials to serve in new offices without further appointments.” [Source: GovExec.om | Charles S. Clark | July 12, 2017 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 06 ► Enlistment Plan Opposed by House

Republican House lawmakers want Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to reverse military plans to allow transgender individuals to enlist in the military, and on 28 JUN threatened legislative action if he moves ahead with the idea. “This policy is not only costly, it's also a threat to readiness,” said Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO) during debate on the annual defense authorization bill before the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday. “Military service is a privilege, not a right. It is predicated on the singular goal of winning the war and defeating the enemy. All decisions on personnel and funding should be made with this in mind.”

Supporters of the new transgender policy insist that it does improve force readiness, by not restricting the talent pool of military recruits based on outdated stereotypes. But conservative lawmakers decried the rules, written by former President Barack Obama’s Pentagon, amount to social engineering with little real benefit for the services. Last week, officials from the Human Rights Campaign objected to reports that Mattis and senior Pentagon officials are considering a six-month delay in the new policy, scheduled to be implemented 1 JUL. Transgender troops are already allowed to serve openly, based on military changes implemented last year. But the new recruiting push now appears to face a significant delay while service officials grapple with questions about its implementation.

Hartzler and other opponents said it should be dumped completely. They promised action from the committee in coming weeks if Mattis does not halt the new order. “This (policy) doesn't make (troops) more effective or efficient or deadly. What it does is distract everybody,” said Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) who served with the Marine Corps in Iraq and Afghanistan. “I couldn't imagine having to share showers with somebody that was a girl and didn't have a surgery to become a man but kept the girl stuff and now she's with a bunch of guys.” Democrats blasted those comments as inflammatory and ignorant. Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) noted the decision to change the policy came

after “rigorous” department debate and study. “The working group concluded that there would be minimal readiness impacts allowing the service members to serve openly,” she said. “They signed off on an inclusive policy because they concluded on the basis of the research that inclusion wouldn't compromise readiness.

“Secretary (M Mattis) indicated he will not revisit the decisions in positions in the previous administration absent concrete readiness at this point. We know of no such evidence.” No language regarding the policy was included in the final draft of the House Defense authorization bill. But Hartzler said she was sidelining her objections “with the understanding and plea to the secretary to take the steps needed to restore readiness and make sure we do not waste precious taxpayer dollars” on the policy change. “If that doesn't happen, we need to take action on (this bill) once it gets to the House floor,” she said. Advocacy groups estimate that roughly 15,500 transgender service members are currently in the ranks. Defense officials are expected to announce an update on the policy in coming days. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Michael Abramowitz | June 28, 2017 ++]

Recruiting Non-citizens Update 02 ▶ Opposition to Contract Cancellations

The top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee warned Defense Secretary Jim Mattis that any attempt to cancel enlistment contracts with thousands of noncitizen military recruits will be met with "strong, swift action" on Capitol Hill. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) said recruiting and military readiness could be harmed by a proposal circulating in the Pentagon to pull out of a deal with about 1,800 foreign-born recruits to fast-track their U.S. citizenship in exchange for needed language and cultural skills. The proposal memo to Mattis cites security risks posed by the recruits under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, or MAVNI, including links to foreign intelligence services and insider attacks, according to the Washington Post, which obtained a copy. "If we fail to uphold the contracts we have made with MAVNI applicants, this will not only have a significantly deleterious effect on recruiting, it will also be met with a strong, swift congressional reaction," said Warner, who is vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The MAVNI program recruits foreign residents who are in the U.S. with a legal immigration status or fall under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. The "non-citizens must possess unique, in-demand abilities otherwise in short supply, such as medical expertise or fluency in a foreign language like Mandarin Chinese or Pashto – skills described by the Department of Defense as critical and vital to the national interest," Warner wrote. About 1,000 of the recruits contracted under the MAVNI program have had their visas expire while in the military and could be at risk for deportation if the Pentagon curtails the program, he said. [Source: Washington Examiner | Travis J. Tritten | July 06, 2017 ++]

Exchange Online Shopping Update 11 ▶ Beta Test Results

The last time Forrest Cornelius, 51, shopped in a base exchange was in 1989, when he completed his six-year stint in the Marine Corps. He recalls saving 10 to 15 percent on department store goods and that shoppers paid no sales tax. Last month, Cornelius began to enjoy those advantages again as one of 12,000 or so “beta test” participants for veterans' online exchange shopping, which is to open for millions of honorably discharged veterans on Veterans Day, 11 NOV 2017.

All veterans are being encouraged to take the same first step Cornelius did by confirming veteran eligibility status at <https://www.vetverify.org>. It might be a multi-step process, if the Defense Manpower Data Center lacks information to verify a veteran served and received an honorable discharge. But for Cornelius, it went smoothly. He

also got an email inviting him to be a test participant and begin to shop immediately through four exchange service portals:

- www.shopmyexchange.com for Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES);
- www.mynavyexchange.com for Navy exchanges;
- www.mymcx.com for Marine Corps stores; and
- www.shopcgx.com for Coast Guard exchanges.

Cornelius said his email invitation was timely. He had lost his sunglasses and the replacement pair of Ray-Bans, priced at a local retail outlet near his Texas home, would cost \$180. Using AAFES online to comparison shop, he found a special sale, \$20 off any pair of sunglasses costing \$100 or more. “So I got that discount,” he said, “plus it was 10 to 15 percent cheaper than retail, plus tax-free, plus free shipping. I wound up paying about \$120 total, saving me quite a bit.” His wife then used his benefit, shopping for undergarments that were on sale with a major retailer, but out of stock in the sizes and colors she wanted. AAFES had them, and she saved money too, he said. Soon they were buying sportswear for their son. Every item was timely shipped, he said, and arrived three days later. “It was great. It was super easy. And the vetverify.org process took five minutes. I entered my full name, the last four of my social [security number], and it said ‘You’ve been verified.’”

By early July, 90,000 veterans had attempted to register to exchange shop online starting Nov. 11. Twelve percent of them got invitations to shop immediately. AAFES was monitoring shopping patterns to ensure their online portal and distribution system are ready for waves of new shoppers this fall, said Ana Middleton, president and chief merchandising officer for AAFES. “My worst fear,” said Middleton, “is a tsunami on November 11th, if everybody decides, ‘Hey, I’m going to check this out’ and they sign on that day” and also at the same moment. AAFES is building website capacity to allow for 30,000 simultaneous shoppers at any given time. A lot of shoppers “would have to be signing on at that exact same millisecond to stress it out. So yes, I feel that we are sized appropriately.”

Of “beta” veterans shopping, surveys showed their top reason was the tax break. But a surprisingly close second reason, said Middleton, was an appreciation that exchanges support military quality-of-life and base support programs. The Exchange uses profits to pay staff salaries, fund store operations, and ensure adequate website capacity - but even more profits are distributed to on-base Morale, Welfare and Recreational activities including child development centers, fitness centers, outdoor recreation, and, overseas, on-base school lunches. “Everything is just turned back to our customers,” Middleton said, and “not paying anything to any shareholders” as retail stores must.

Besides discounts and tax breaks, AAFES online promises a price match. “If we are not the lowest price -- say you found a vacuum cleaner below our price at Walmart -- you can challenge our price, and we will match it,” she said. Shoppers will find prices particularly attractive on certain items like premium running shoes and children's clothing. Profit margins on electronics are narrow everywhere, so exchange prices “are close to comparable,” Middleton said.

Exchange services aren't sure how many veterans ultimately will shop online. AAFES will be pleased if one to two million do so, Middleton said, though “we probably don't need that many” to declare the effort a success. In its business plan, as leading advocate for opening exchanges online to veterans, AAFES estimated its annual sales would climb by \$185 million to \$525 million and earnings would increase by \$18 million to \$72 million, easing budget pressure on the Army and Air Force, which have had to divert more and more appropriated dollars to family support programs as on-base store sales have been hit by force drawdowns and store closures overseas.

Veterans with only Reserve or National Guard experience have asked if they too will be viewed as “veterans” for online shopping. That remains unclear. Last December, Congress did bestow honorary “veteran” status on Reserve and National Guard retirees who completed careers of drill time but had not completed an active duty period under Title 10 to meet the legal definition of “veteran” and receive a DD-214 “Certificate of Release or Discharge from

Active Duty.” Reserve retirees 60 and older do have exchange shopping privileges. But what about Reserve and Guard veterans who didn't retire or didn't receive a DD-214? Here's what AAFES could tell us:

“The litmus test for access to the veterans online shopping benefit resides with each veteran's electronic records. All honorably discharged veterans, according to official government sources such as the Defense Manpower Data Center, are considered authorized to shop military exchanges online via the veterans online shopping benefit. Veterans can confirm their eligibility by visiting VetVerify.org”

Veterans who do shop online, said Middleton, will find products “competitively priced. Are we across the board lower than everybody? No.” Beta shoppers so far have focused, as expected, on “male-dominated” categories such as electronics, running shoes, and sports apparel. Baby care, children's clothing, and cosmetics, however, also are selling briskly. “The reality is [married couples] share in the purchase-making decisions,” Middleton said. “It's like if I had a Costco card, and my husband didn't -- would he still want to make buying decisions with me if I came home and said, ‘Hey there's a great price on a TV?’ Probably. But this benefit is afforded to the [veteran] military member. ... If your spouse is using your password we have no way of knowing.” Merchandise selection is wider online than in base stores. The only goods veterans are barred from purchasing are military uniform items.

Exchanges are delighted to be offering this new benefit, Middleton said, particularly to so many veterans who didn't get to enjoy it more while serving. “The sad reality is so many of these kids went to basic [training] and then to war, so their recollection of who we are is a Coke and bag of chips in a war zone. Do they have an understanding of the breadth of products we sell?” Soon, many more of them will. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | Tom Philpott | July 07, 2017 ++]

DoD Budget 2018 Update 05 ► Congress Divided on Pay & BAH

The Armed Services committees of the House and Senate finalized their draft defense bills. The House proposes a 2.4-percent pay raise, consistent with the Employment Cost Index; the Senate is calling for 2.1 percent, consistent with the budget request submitted by DoD. If the Senate's version is passed, it will mean about \$58 less in pay each year for junior enlisted, \$118 less for senior enlisted, and \$178 less for new field-grade officers. This 0.3 percent difference also would widen the cumulative gap between military pay and private-sector growth to 2.9 percent.

While the House does not reference Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) in its bill, the Senate includes a reduction in BAH for dual-military marriages where dependents are involved. The plan is to eliminate the with-dependent rate for one of the two spouses. The details will be clearer once the Senate releases its bill next week. While the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing was closed to the public, some reporters were granted access and have shared some significant information with MOAA in advance of the bill's release. “Any attempt to garner funds through reductions in pay or allowances is quite concerning,” says Col. Dan Merry, USAF (Ret), vice president of Government Relations at MOAA. “It is our government's responsibility to fund operations, readiness, and personnel costs - putting those costs on the backs of the member and their families is just not right.”

This is not the first time we have seen an attempt at culling funds from BAH accounts at the expense of those currently serving. The impact goes beyond affected families - it also has a direct effect on communities with a military presence. Take a look at the losses for an O-3 and O-5 across the five largest military installations in the U.S. as a result of the Senate bill's BAH reduction proposal, using the 2017 pay charts:

| | State | O-3 with dependents | O-3 without dependents | Difference | Annual loss |
|------------------|-------|---------------------|------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Fort Bragg | N.C. | \$1,446 | \$1,305 | \$141 | \$1,692 |
| Fort Campbell | Ky. | \$1,788 | \$1,389 | \$399 | \$4,788 |
| Fort Hood | Texas | \$1,395 | \$1,176 | \$219 | \$2,628 |
| JB Lewis-McChord | Wash. | \$2,028 | \$1,824 | \$204 | \$2,448 |
| Fort Benning | Ga. | \$1,734 | \$1,488 | \$246 | \$2,952 |

Source: Defense Travel Management Office

| | State | O-5 with dependents | O-5 without dependents | Difference | Annual loss |
|------------------|-------|---------------------|------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Fort Bragg | N.C. | \$1,881 | \$1,410 | \$471 | \$5,652 |
| Fort Campbell | Ky. | \$2,085 | \$1,641 | \$444 | \$5,328 |
| Fort Hood | Texas | \$1,629 | \$1,326 | \$303 | \$3,636 |
| JB Lewis-McChord | Wash. | \$2,214 | \$1,761 | \$453 | \$5,436 |
| Fort Benning | Ga. | \$2,109 | \$1,671 | \$438 | \$5,256 |

Source: Defense Travel Management Office

The current military compensation system has been reviewed and studied, most recently by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC), which completed its report in January 2015 and recommended no changes to the system. In the coming year, the secretary of defense will conduct a congressionally mandated Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC). The QRMC will review the potential for a one-salary system that takes into account allowances like BAH. Targeting BAH now for any level of cuts preempts the QRMC and bypasses the level of analysis necessary to avoid unintended consequences.

Time is running out on what you can do to help. House lawmakers are scheduled to vote on their version of the defense bill on 14 JUL. Senate aides confirmed to MOAA they anticipate a floor vote on their version of the bill the following week. To help avoid this ill-conceived and poorly timed plan readers are encouraged to contact their members of Congress. One way to do this is via t MOAA's Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/alert/?alertid=78078626> where you can send a preformatted editable message to your legislators on the subject. [Source: MOAA Legislative Update | July 07, 2017 ++]

Project 112 & SHAD Update 09 ► What Happened - Who Suffered?

The Pentagon conducted a series of secret chemical and biological weapons tests involving military personnel in the 1960s and 1970s. Veterans groups and members of Congress are demanding to know exactly what happened – and who has suffered. The tests, known as Project 112 and SHAD (Shipboard Hazard and Defense) involved some 6,000 military personnel between 1962 and 1974, the Vietnam War era. Most served in the Navy and Army. The purpose was to identify any weaknesses to U.S. ships and troops and develop a response plan for a chemical attack.

The tests involved nerve agents like Sarin and Vx, and bacteria such as E. Coli. Sarin and Vx are both lethal. According to DOD documents, death can occur within 10 to 15 minutes of exposure to a fatal dose of Vx. After exposure to a sufficient amount of Sarin, symptoms include, “difficulty breathing, dimness of vision, confusion, drowsiness, coma, and death.” “Veterans were exposed to some of the most extreme and hazardous agents... and they now suffer from debilitating health care conditions,” said Ken Wiseman, senior vice commander of the Virginia branch of The Veterans of Foreign Wars, one of the nation’s largest veterans groups, at a press conference outside the Capitol Wednesday. They want to know more about the extent to which service personnel were exposed. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to request for comment.

Information about the tests first surfaced in 2000. At the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Pentagon released some limited data about the nature of the tests, including the locations and the agents used. Since then, the VA has sponsored studies by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine in 2007 and 2016 to look at the tests' effects. While they found no significant difference in the health of veterans involved in the tests and those who were not, the authors acknowledged the difficulty of studying this issue. "Our task was challenging because of the passage of time since the tests, and because many of the documents related to the tests remain classified," last year's report said. "Our requests for declassification of additional documents were not approved." A VA spokesperson did not immediately respond to request for comment.

Lawmakers from both parties are pushing the House to endorse their demand this week when it considers a defense policy bill. Reps. Mike Thompson (D-CA), Don Young (R-AK), and Walter Jones (R-NC). are trying to require the secretary of defense to declassify and disclose documents about the tests or tell Congress why he can't. "It's been over 50 years since these tests were conducted and the DOD has yet to provide a complete accounting of what truly happened to our service members," Thompson said. "Veterans can't wait any longer." Veterans say they need answers to get the proper medical care.

"This amendment would help veterans exposed to chemical and biological agents get the access to care and benefits they've earned through their service," said John J. Gennace, assistant director of the American Legion's national legislative division. In the Senate, Jerry Moran (R-KS) plans to push the veterans' agenda. "We have a duty to make certain our service members' health is protected both in and out of service, and providing access to classified military records that may prove exposure to toxic substances is critical to veterans applying for VA benefits and service-connection," Moran said in a statement. [Source: Mbltchey DC Bureau | Anshu Siripurapu | July 12, 2017 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 JUL 2017

U.S. Army -- The Army wasted \$53.6 million over six years because officials mismanaged commercial transport contracts that were used to move equipment throughout the Middle East, according to a recently released audit. Auditors with the Defense Department Inspector General noted in the 26 JUN report that Army officials ordered nearly 40 percent more transportation assets than they needed during the period from 2011 to 2016 and failed to analyze or continuously evaluate transportation requirements. Army officials also failed to identify or correct inefficiencies in their planning and execution of transportation missions, according to the report.



Those practices resulted in \$53.6 million in wasted money among four contractors who were paid a total of \$207.2 million. Auditors identified 36 instances in the six-year period when Army officials ordered more than double the number of assets it used. They noted nine instances when officials ordered at least "10 times the number" of 25-passenger buses, freezer vans and baggage trucks than it actually used. Efficient use of the contracts rose and fell from a low of 26 percent wasted assets in 2015 to a high of 48 percent wasted in 2012. The Army used the following contractors used between 2011 and 2016:

- El Hoss Engineering & Transport for \$57.3 million.

- IAP Worldwide Services for \$30.3 million.
- KGL Transportation Company for \$105.6 million.
- PAE Government Services for \$14 million.

The contracts were part of the Heavy Lift program that supports Operation Inherent Resolve and the Trans-Arabian Network. The original contracts were used to provide transportation in Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This period reviewed was the seventh iteration of the program and is referred to as HL7. In 2016, officials with Army Contracting Command-Rock Island expanded those contracts to move cargo between Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates. An earlier audit this year also found that Army officials did not provide effective oversight or administration of the HL7 contracts.

The IG auditors recommended in their report that the commander of U.S. Central Command direct units to use the Trans-Arabian Network, establish measurements and conduct quarterly assessments of the network's performance and effectiveness. They also recommended that the commander of U.S. Army Central develop procedures so that review boards would both confirm the need for commercial transportation and the number of heavy lift assets that are requested. The report recommended that the commander of 1st Sustainment Command use a system and schedule to track heavy lift usage to identify poor planning or execution to update standard operating procedures.

The Army Contracting Command-Rock Island executive director did not respond to recommendations that would ensure the Army “does not pay for services that it will not use” in future heavy lift program contracts. But the command's contracting officer told auditors that they would use more conservative “guaranteed minimums” when awarding contracts. That move has resolved the auditor's concern, according to the report. CENTCOM officials agreed to implement the recommended changes, as did officials with 1st TSC. The G-4 of Army Central agreed in part but did not explain how or when procedures would be updated. Auditors marked that portion unresolved until Army Central officials provide the additional information and timeline. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | July 11, 2017++]

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TRICARE -- Justice Department officials have charged at least four people in connection with schemes to defraud Tricare as part of a larger fraud “takedown” that resulted in charges against 412 people involving \$1.3 billion in taxpayer dollars. It's the department's largest health care fraud enforcement action ever, according to Justice officials. The Defense Criminal Investigative Service was one of several agencies involved in the effort, which was spearheaded by the Medicare Fraud Strike Force. The charges, announced 13 JUL by Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, accused the 412 defendants of allegedly participating in schemes to submit claims to Medicare, Medicaid and Tricare for treatments that weren't medically necessary, and often were never provided. Of the 412 people charged across 41 federal districts, 115 were doctors, nurses and other licensed medical professionals.

- In one Florida case, a defendant was accused of falsely representing himself to be a “retired lieutenant commander of the U.S. Navy Submarine Service,” according to a Justice Department news release. He allegedly made this false claim to gain the trust and personal information from Tricare beneficiaries, many of whom were military members and retirees, for use in a fraudulent billing scheme.
- In another case investigated by the Southern Louisiana Strike Force, a pharmacist was charged with submitting and causing the submission of \$192 million in false and fraudulent claims to Tricare and other health care benefit programs for dispensing compounded medications that were not medically necessary, and were often based on prescriptions originating from illegal kickback schemes. Information was not immediately available about how much of that \$192 million involved Tricare.

“Our enforcement actions underscore the commitment of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service and our partners to vigorously investigate fraud perpetrated against the DoD's Tricare program,” said Kelly P. Mayo, deputy

DCIS director, in the announcement. “We will continue to relentlessly investigate health care fraud, ensure the taxpayers’ health care dollars are properly spent, and endeavor to guarantee our service members, military retirees, and their dependents receive the high standard of care they deserve.” The Medicare Fraud Strike Force is a partnership between the Justice Department’s criminal division, U.S. attorney’s offices, the FBI and the HHS Office of Inspector General. In 2016, the task force charged 301 people in a nationwide sweep, alleging \$900 million in fraud. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | July 13, 2017 ++]

Pentagon Spending ► \$33.6 Billion In Missed Savings

The Department of Defense’s inspector general believes it has found \$33.6 billion in missed savings for the Pentagon, and that some can be recovered — if the department follows through on 58 suggestions made by the IG’s office, many of which have been sitting unfulfilled for years. Glenn Fine, the acting IG, released 13 JUL the Compendium of Open Office of Inspector General Recommendations, an omnibus effort to sum up 1,298 open recommendations made by the IG’s office over the past decade.

Included is a list of 58 reports that the IG believes could net the Pentagon significant savings — although in many cases the services may not agree, and in others, the potential for savings may have passed. For example, the IG identified capping procurement of the CH-53K helicopter at 156 platforms, 44 less than the U.S. Marine Corps has requested, on the basis that the Marine Corps has not actually made a case for why it needs the extra rotorcraft. Doing so could save \$22.2 billion, but the recommendation was made in May 2013. Another big saving identified by the IG involves \$8.8 billion spent as part of an increased buy of the MQ-9 Reaper in fiscal year 2015 — a procurement decision that has already occurred.

In both the CH-53K and RQ-9 examples, the money is gone for good. But the IG has also identified some recommendations that could bear fruit down the line. For example, a recommendation that the head of Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support attempt to “initiate corrective actions to recover premium transportation fees” could net \$631.7 million back to Pentagon coffers. Another recommendation urges U.S. Transportation Command to recoup past overpayments to commercial vendors, which could net another \$157 million. In addition to the dollar figures, the IG’s office highlights 30 high-priority recommendations that have not been dealt with by Pentagon leadership. [Source: Defense News | Aaron Mehta | July 13, 2017 ++]

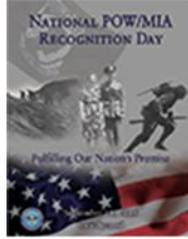
POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2017 | Eighteen

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust“ and “No one left behind“ are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II more than 73,000, Korean War more than 7800, Vietnam War more than 1600, Cold War (126), Iraq and other conflicts (5). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/> and click on ‘Our Missing’. 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 remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Vietnam

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 2 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Air Force Col. Roosevelt Hestle, Jr.**, was a pilot assigned to the 388th Tactical Fighter Squadron. On July 6, 1966, Hestle led a flight of four F-105s on a strike mission against surface-to-air missile sites in northern Vietnam. As they approached the target, Hestle issued a missile launch warning, and all aircraft began evasive action. Hestle's maneuvers took him close to the ground near the town of Thai Ngyuen, where the plane came under antiaircraft fire. Another aircraft then reported a large ball of fire rising from the ground in the area. Due to hostile conditions in the area, search and rescue attempts could not be initiated and an aerial search of the area produced no results. Based on this information, Hestle was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. For more on Col. Hestle go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1225781/pilot-killed-in-vietnam-war-identified-hestle>.



-- **Air Force Capt. Robert E. Holton** was an F-4D pilot assigned to the 497th Tactical Fighter Squadron. On Jan. 29, 1969, Holton flew an armed reconnaissance mission over southern Laos. The flight lead cleared Holton to engage a target, and ordnance was seen impacting the ground. Aircrews reported seeing a large fireball on the ground in the vicinity of the target immediately thereafter. No radio transmissions were received, and no parachutes were seen. Efforts to make contact with the crew continued until the remaining planes were forced to leave the area due to low fuel. Holton was subsequently declared missing in action. Interment services are scheduled for later this summer. <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1231982/pilot-missing-from-vietnam-war-accounted-for-holton> for more on Capt. Holton.



Korea

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 7 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from the Korean War Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Sgt. James W. Sharp**, 24, of Mannington, W.Va., was buried June 29 in Grafton, W.Va. Sharp was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Sharp was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 6, 1950. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1226559/soldier-missing-from-the-korean-war-accounted-for-sharp> for more on Sgt. Sharp.

-- **Army Cpl. Thomas H. Mullins** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In November 1950, his unit engaged with Chinese forces near Unsan, North Korea. Approximately 600 men were killed, captured or missing. Mullins was declared missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950. He was later reported to have died while being held in POW Camp 5, Pyokdong, North Korea. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1233045/soldier-captured-in-the-korean-war-accounted-for-mullins> for more on Cpl. Mullins.

-- **Army Pfc. Charlie H. Hill** was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Self-propelled Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Hill was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1233032/soldier-missing-from-the-korean-war-accounted-for-hill> to read more about Pfc. Hill.

-- **Army Master Sgt. George R. Housekeeper, Jr.**, was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Housekeeper was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 12, 1950. Interment services are pending. To read more about MSgt Housekeeper go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1233011/soldier-missing-from-the-korean-war-accounted-for-housekeeper>.

-- **Army Cpl. Clarence R. Skates** was assigned to Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. Positioned between the towns of Kunu-ri and Sunchon, Skates' regiment was attacked by Chinese forces and suffered many casualties. Skates was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1232999/soldier-captured-in-the-korean-war-accounted-for-skates> for more on Cpl. Skates.

-- **Army Cpl. Frank L. Sandoval**, 20, of San Antonio, will be buried July 11 in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Sandoval was a member of Battery A, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Sandoval's unit, part of Support Force 21, provided artillery fire support for South Korean forces from Changbong-ni. On Feb. 11, 1951, Chinese forces launched a massive counter offensive, forcing the support force to withdraw. Sandoval could not be accounted for after the unit reassembled in Wonju on Feb. 13. He was later reported to have been captured and held in Camp 3, a prisoner of war camp near Changsong, North Korea. He was declared deceased July 7, 1951. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1235060/soldier-captured-during-korean-war-accounted-for-harris> for more on Cpl. Sandoval.



-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Max E. Harris** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Harris was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 12, 1950. A returning American prisoner reported that Harris had been captured and died while en route to POW Camp 3, near Changsong, North Korea, in September 1951. Based on this information, the U.S. Army declared him deceased on Sept. 30, 1951. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1235060/soldier-captured-during-korean-war-accounted-for-harris> to read more about Sgt Harris.

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 9 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Reserve Lt. William Q. Punnell** was the acting commanding officer of the VF-14 Fighter Squadron, operating from the aircraft carrier USS Wasp. On July 25, 1944, Punnell flew his F6F-3 "Hellcat" with several other aircraft on a strafing mission against Japanese targets on the islands of the Republic of Palau. Punnell was in the lead position when the tail of his aircraft took a direct hit from antiaircraft fire. His fellow pilots witnessed his plane crash into water and immediately sink; no bailout was reported. Interment services are pending. to read more on Lt. Punnell go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1234417/soldier-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-punnell>

-- **Army Technician 4th Grade John Kovach, Jr.**, 21, of Gypsum, Ohio, will be buried July 10 in Port Clinton, Ohio. Kovach was assigned to Company C, 192nd Tank Battalion, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands on Dec. 8, 1941. After months of intense fighting, Corregidor fell and American forces surrendered on May 6, 1942. Kovach was one of the thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members taken prisoner and eventually moved to Cabanatuan POW camp. Kovach died Nov. 19, 1942, after being admitted to the camp hospital. Read more about Kovach at <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1235037/soldier-captured-in-wwii-accounted-for-kovach>



-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Paul S. Raimond**, 20, of Converse, La., will be buried July 11 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the "Punchbowl," in Honolulu. Raimond was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Raimond was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Read about Raimond. <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1237768/uss-oklahoma-sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-raimond>

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Monroe Temple**, 19, of Des Moines, Iowa, will be buried July 12 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the "Punchbowl," in Honolulu. Temple was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7,

1941. Temple was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. To read more about Seaman Temple go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1237771/uss-oklahoma-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-temple>

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. William J. Gray, Jr.**, 21, of Kirkland, Wash., will be buried July 14 in Kent, Wash. Gray was a member of the 391st Fighter Squadron, 366th Fighter Group. In April 1945, Gray flew his single seat P-47D aircraft on a dive-bombing mission in the vicinity of Lindau, Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany. After strafing a truck, Gray's aircraft clipped a tree and crashed. Gray was declared killed in action on April 16, 1945. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1239823/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-gray-w> to read more about Lt. Gray.



-- **Army Staff Sgt. Gerald L. Jacobsen**, 27, of Little Canada, Minn., will be buried July 14 in Fort Snelling, Minn. Jacobsen was a member of the 134th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division. On July 15, 1944, Jacobsen's unit participated in the siege of Saint-Lô, France. Jacobsen and another service member were manning a mortar compound post near La Forge, approximately two kilometers northeast of Saint-Lô, when they went missing. Jacobsen was subsequently declared deceased as of July 16, 1945. To read more about Sgt. Jaconson go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1239844/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-jacobsen>.



-- **Marine Sgt. James J. Hubert**, 22, of Duluth, Minn., will be buried July 15 in his hometown. Hubert was assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. Hubert's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Hubert was killed 21 November 1943. To read more about Sgt Hubert go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1239847/marine-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-hubert>.



-- **Army Sgt. Richard G. Sowell** was a member of the 295th Joint Assault Signal Company, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 106th Infantry. In July 1944, his unit participated in the battle for the island of Saipan, part of a larger operation to secure the Mariana Islands. On July 6-7, Sowell was serving as a spotter for the signal company in the vicinity of Hill 721, while under heavy attack by Japanese forces. Sowell's commanding officer reported him killed in action on the morning of July 7. Interment services are pending. To read more about about Sgt Sowell go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1235086/soldier-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-sowell>.

-- **Army Pfc. Gerald F. Wipfli** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry. In early November 1944, his unit engaged with German forces in the town of Schmidt, Germany, within the Hürtgen Forest. After the intense fighting, it took the unit several days to account for its personnel. Wipfli was one of 33 unaccounted-for soldiers and was declared missing in action on Nov. 4, 1944. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1235077/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-wipfli> to read more about Pfc Wipfli.



[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> & <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm> | July 15, 2017 ++]

* VA *



VA Caregiver Program Update 43 ► **DAV Unsung Hero Initiative**

On 20 JUN, DAV launched its "Unsung Heroes Initiative," a public awareness campaign to honor the dedication and sacrifice of veterans' family caregivers. The successful Capitol Hill event was attended by more than 100 congressional staffers, veterans and military groups and other nonprofit organizations. During a panel discussion at the launch event, Iraq War veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, DAV National Commander Dave Riley and his wife and caregiver Yvonne, as well as two other pre-9/11 disabled veteran-caregiver couples, shared personal stories related to the challenges and needs of caregivers. DAV released its new report, *America's Unsung Heroes: Challenges and Inequities Facing Veteran Caregivers*, which features results from DAV's Veteran Family Caregiver Survey. Some of the findings from DAV's Caregiver Survey were:

- Most caregivers are female and more than three fourths are spouses; many are concerned aging will limit their abilities to perform care giving duties.
- Over 80 percent of caregivers believe their role has limited their financial stability, friendships, family life, physical and mental health, and career.
- About 75 percent indicate that without their assistance their loved one would be institutionalized now or in the future.
- Nearly 90 percent of respondents indicate they have no access to respite care, home health aides, educational tools for care giving, stipends, or medical training-but most indicate such services would be helpful to them in better managing the care of their loved one.

To access the America's Unsung Heroes: Challenges and Inequities Facing Veteran Caregivers report and for more background on the inequity of federal support provided to veterans injured prior to 9/11, go to www.unsungheroesinitiative.org. As part of this initiative, 43 veterans, military and other nonprofit organizations joined DAV in writing Congress a letter urging passage of the bipartisan Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act. To support this critical legislation (H.R. 1472/S. 591) and send a message to your representatives refer to www.dav.org/can/?vvsrsrc=%2fcampaigns%2f52515%2frespond. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | June 16, 2017 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome Update 41 ► Claim Denial Rate

Veterans claiming “Gulf War illness” are about three times less likely than other veterans to have their disability claims approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs, according to a new watchdog report 10 JUL that recommended the agency beef up its response to the illness. The Government Accountability Office said the VA handled about 11,400 claims for Gulf War illness (GWI) in fiscal 2015, more than double the number of claims filed in 2010. But approval rates for GWI were about three times lower than all other veterans’ claimed disabilities, GAO said. Among the possible reasons for the lower approval rate are that GWI claims “are not always well understood by VA staff, and veterans sometimes file for benefits without medical records to adequately support their claim,” the report said.

The GAO said the department’s ability to accurately process GWI claims “is hampered by inadequate training, and its decision letters for denied claims do not communicate key information to veterans” about why a claim was rejected. Veterans who served in the Gulf War, which often included exposure to a toxic environment from oil fires and chemical weapons, have been at increased risk for several illnesses including joint pain, gastrointestinal problems, fatigue and neurological disorders. Since 1994, the VA has automatically presumed a connection between those illnesses and Gulf War service, a move that should enable veterans to receive a disability rating and benefits more quickly. Late last year, the government extended the deadline for veterans to apply for GWI benefits through the end of 2021.

GAO said the VA’s claims staffers often rely on the agency’s medical examiners to assess a veteran’s disability before a decision is made on a claim. But VA medical examiners told investigators that “conducting Gulf War general medical exams is challenging because of the range of symptoms that could qualify as GWI.” VA has developed elective GWI training for its medical examiners, but only 10 percent of examiners had taken the training as of February, GAO said. The VA said all its pension and compensation examiners will complete a mandatory 90-minute course on GWI by November, and it will make necessary changes in the notification process by August.

[Source: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/10/va-denies-claims-gulf-war-illness-more-often-study> ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 55 ► Congress Running Out of Time

When they return from legislative recess next week, lawmakers will have only a few days to address financial problems with the Veterans Affairs Choice program before users start to see significant problems. Last month, in testimony before the Senate, VA Secretary David Shulkin warned lawmakers that money in the Choice program funds was being spent at a faster rate than officials expected, threatening to bankrupt the program before the end of the fiscal year. Available funds dropped from about \$2 billion to less than \$850 million in three months.

Shulkin has asked for authority to move money from other outside care initiatives to the program to cover the funding gaps, ensuring that veterans medical appointments aren't disrupted while VA officials work on an update of the Choice program. But Congress left town for the 4 JUL recess without addressing the issue. VA officials have warned that the money will run out in early August, and the program will face 22 JUN, acting VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Poonam Alaigh predicted longer wait times for veterans seeking care, fewer available appointments for veterans with physicians outside the VA system, and layoff of some private-sector staff working with the Choice program. "There will be unintended consequences if we continue down this path because the Choice accounts will start to be used very judiciously," she said.

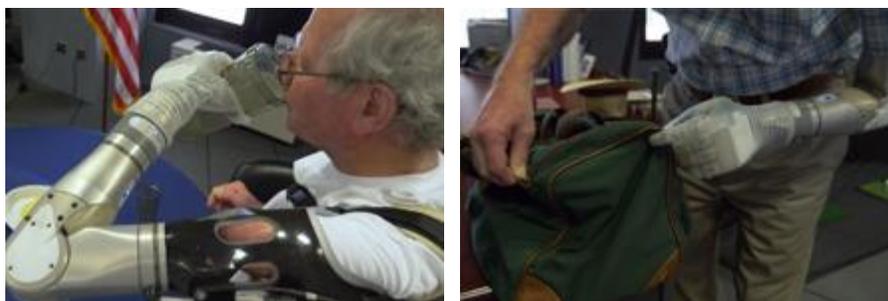
The Choice program has been at the center of several VA controversies since Congress created it three years ago in the wake of the department's 2014 wait times scandal. It was billed as a response to access and timeliness problems within the VA system, but has been criticized by some conservatives for being overly restrictive and some liberals for appearing to be the first step towards privatizing department health services. Among veterans groups, the main complaint has been the bureaucratic nature of the program. Veterans who live at least 40 miles from a VA clinic or face a 30-day wait at department facilities are eligible for the outside care funding. Shulkin has proposed significant changes to the program next fiscal year, and is expected to detail specifics at a Senate hearing on 11 JUL. But before they can be approved by Congress, he wants the authority to more easily move VA funds among similar accounts, an authority that his predecessor, former VA Secretary Bob McDonald, also repeatedly requested.

Lawmakers have been receptive to the idea but slow to make the change. In a letter to the leaders of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees on 28 JUN, nine of the largest veterans organizations petitioned lawmakers to fix the issue but added that "in order to prevent these problems from recurring in the future, we call on you to equally invest in modernizing and expanding VA's capacity to meet rising demand for care." The groups noted that the Choice program was originally envisioned as a temporary fix for VA access issues, not an enduring initiative. They want more investment in VA infrastructure if Congress decides to make the program permanent.

"There are at least 27 VA health care facility leases awaiting funding in order to be activated," the veterans organizations wrote. "In addition, there are dozens of minor and major construction projects that require billions of dollars in funding to sustain and expand VA's capacity to provide timely care to enrolled veterans. "Furthermore, VA has tens of thousands of vacant positions which will require not just funding, but innovative new programs to recruit and retain hard-to-fill clinical positions in many areas of the country." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | July 5, 2017 ++]

VA Prosthetics Update 17 ► First 2 Vets Receive 'LUKE' Arms

At a ceremony in New York 30 JUN, two veterans living with arm amputations became the first recipients of a new generation of prosthetic limb that promises them unprecedented, near-natural arm and hand motion. The modular, battery-powered arms, designed and developed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), represent the most significant advance in upper extremity prosthetics in more than a century.



The prosthetic “LUKE” arm system—which stands for “Life Under Kinetic Evolution” but is also a passing reference to Luke Skywalker of Star Wars fame, who was endowed with a futuristic bionic arm—enables dexterous arm and hand movement through a simple, intuitive control system. The system allows users to control multiple joints simultaneously and a variety of grips and grip forces by means of wireless signals generated by sensors worn on the feet or via other easy-to-use controllers. Years of testing and optimization in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) led to clearance by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and creation of a commercial-scale manufacturer, Mobius Bionics of Manchester, N.H. More than 100 people living with amputation were involved in initial studies, which led to a product whose natural size, weight, and shape provides unparalleled comfort and ease of use.

At the 30 JUN ceremony, held at the VA’s New York Harbor Health Care System Manhattan campus, VA Secretary David Shulkin presented LUKE arms to Fred Downs and Artie McAuley. Downs is a prosthetics consultant for the Paralyzed Veterans of America and retired Chief Procurement and Logistics Officer for the Veterans Health Administration who lost his left arm above the elbow during the Vietnam War. McAuley is an Army veteran whose arm was amputated as the result of an accident while stationed at Fort Drum, N.Y. He went without a prosthesis for years because earlier-generation devices did not work well for individuals whose loss extended all the way up to the shoulder.

“DARPA’s mission within the Defense Department is to make seminal investments in advanced technologies that can have outsized impacts on national security and help those who have stepped up to serve our nation,” said Justin Sanchez, Director of DARPA’s Biological Technologies Office, who manages the Revolutionizing Prosthetics program that developed the LUKE system. “It has been an honor to work side by side with the VA to bring this life-changing technology from concept to capability.” Compared to other commercially available prosthetic arms, the LUKE system has a fully functional, articulated shoulder joint, which offers unprecedented mobility and quality of life even for individuals with total arm loss.

DARPA’s work on prosthetic arms continues today through a range of programs, including one that is providing users a natural sense of touch by means of signals transmitted from mechanical hands directly to the brain, and another that is using signals from the brain’s motor cortex to directly control a robotic limb. For more information about DARPA’s Revolutionizing Prosthetics program, please visit: <http://www.darpa.mil/program/revolutionizing-prosthetics>. For technical details of the LUKE system, please visit: <http://www.mobiusbionics.com/the-luke-arm.html>. For downloadable b-roll video of testing in the lab, please visit: <http://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/b-roll-training-with-the-luke-arm>. [Source: DARPA | June 30, 2017 ++]

VA Cancer Policy Update 03 ► Bile Duct | Vietnam Liver Fluke Worm Link

Veterans who survived bullets, bombs and booby traps a half century ago in Vietnam say they are now threatened by a one-inch worm that hid for decades inside their liver, and may have left them battling a rare cancer. “There are no symptoms,” said Jerry Chiano, who showered in river water infested with the parasite while stationed in Vietnam in 1969, and who was diagnosed with bile-duct cancer three years ago. “Maybe now Vietnam veterans will get checked before it’s too late.” Veteran advocates are demanding that a form of cancer of the bile duct associated with the parasitic worm be included among diseases presumed by the Department of Veterans Affairs to be connected to service in Vietnam. That would make Vietnam veterans diagnosed with the disease automatically eligible for disability benefits, which would go to a surviving spouse should they die of the disease.

Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) visited Chiano at his Valley Stream home 5 JUL, where the Democratic senate minority leader called for a federal study examining potential links between the silent parasite and bile-duct cancer. Schumer said of 60 veterans-benefits claims based on the disease filed with the VA nationwide in 2015, almost all

were rejected. “There is a lot of evidence that bile-duct cancer, a very rare disease here in America ... was very much related to Jerry’s service risking his life for us in Vietnam,” Schumer said. “But the VA has denied Jerry’s benefit claims because the feds unfortunately and wrongly do not recognize bile-duct cancer as service related. They say there is not enough evidence.”

The VA medical center at Northport conducted a first-in-the-nation pilot study beginning in May, in which 50 Vietnam veterans were tested for signs that they had carried the parasite. Alarm spread in the Vietnam veterans community, after Northport doctors began sharing test results with participants in June. “I’m full blown with this stuff, and am going downhill,” said Jim Deljiorno, 68, of Smithtown, who has bile-duct cancer. Deljiorno said he was informed that he had been infected by the parasite, and that he has only months to live. Deljiorno said he served with the 101st Airborne Division near the Laotian border of Vietnam. “We all drank the water from the rivers. It was hot, and you drank water where you could find it.”

The parasite, called liver fluke, is transmitted by the eggs of the mature worm, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The eggs mature inside freshwater snails, which release larvae that can be ingested directly or passed in the flesh of undercooked fish or crabs. Once inside humans, the parasite can go undetected for years, creating inflammation in the bile duct. It is believed that this inflammation often results in cancerous tumors. “Vietnam veterans began asking if they could be screened for this because they had friends who were also Vietnam veterans who died from this disease,” said Dr. George Pseudos, who organized the pilot study. “They had no knowledge that they were exposed to this parasite.” [Source: Newsday | Martin C. Evans | July 05, 2017 ++]

Fisher House Expansion Update 18 ► Bronx NY

Borough president Ruben Diaz Jr. and NYC commissioner, Department of Veterans’ Services Loree Sutton joined Ken Fisher, chairman and CEO of the Fisher House Foundation, and James J. Peters VA Medical Center director Dr. Eric Langhoff to break ground on the first two Fisher Houses that will be built in the city. Fisher Houses are facilities that provide free temporary lodging to families of service members and veterans who are receiving medical care at military and VA medical centers. The two new houses will serve nearly 12,000 families a year, saving them up to \$3 million.



The non-profit Fisher House Foundation, a national leader serving the families of veterans and military, funds and constructs the houses, which are gifted to VA or Defense upon completion. The two Fisher Houses, which will cost \$14 million to build, will be gifted to VA. "For nearly three decades we've seen firsthand how important it is to the well-being and recovery of our veterans and service members to have loved ones near as they receive treatment," said Fisher. "Members of our Armed Forces and veterans have made such tremendous sacrifices for us, it is our duty to do everything we can to contribute to their speedy recovery. We are honored to build these Fisher Houses in the Bronx that will serve the veterans and their families who travel to the Bronx VA for medical care."

Each of the two Fisher Houses at JJP will be 14,000 s/f, contain 16 living suites with private bedrooms and bathrooms, and families share common kitchens, dining rooms, living rooms, and laundry facilities. "We are proud and appreciative to have received favorable consideration of our Fisher House application" said Dr. Langhoff, director at JJP. "This home-away-from-home will be a tremendous comfort for our wounded warriors and their families. We look forward to the coming months with anticipation and gratitude to the Fisher House Foundation."

Delta Air Lines has made the largest contribution to the construction of the Bronx Fisher Houses, with a gift of \$1 million. The airline has also been a leading partner of the Hero Miles program in which Fisher House provides free airline tickets to wounded, injured, and ill service members and/or their families who are undergoing treatment at a military or VA medical center. "With more than 10,000 veteran and active military employees in our own workforce, Delta is a longtime supporter of the U.S. Armed Forces and proud partner of Fisher House Foundation," said Chuck Imhof, vice president-New York sales, Delta Air Lines. "We are honored to have played a role in the opening of these Fisher Houses in the Bronx, and we know they will be valuable resources for military families and this community for years to come."

Since 1990, the Fisher House Foundation has provided 7 million days of free lodging to more than 305,000 military families, saving them more than \$360 million in travel and lodging expenses. [Source: New York Real Estate Journal | July 4, 2017 ++]

VA Hospice Care Update 05 ► **Increased Care Campaign Showing Results**

A new study in the July issue of Health Affairs finds that a U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) initiative to improve care at the end of life led to a substantial increase in the use of hospice among U.S. veterans. The V.A. contracted with lead author Susan Miller, a professor of health services, policy and practice in the Brown University School of Public Health, to study the effect of the department's four-year Comprehensive End-of-Life Care (CELC) initiative, which began in 2009. Not only did the initiative encourage more hospice use among military veterans, Miller found, but also the growth outpaced the rate of increase among demographically comparable members of the public receiving Medicare. Through the initiative, the V.A. invested in new inpatient hospice units, palliative care staff, palliative care training and mentoring for leaders and staff, a systematic quality monitoring program, and outreach to community providers outside V.A. medical centers through the "We Honor Veterans" campaign.

To conduct the evaluation, Miller and her co-authors at the V.A., including the Geriatrics and Extended Care Data Analysis Center, analyzed the trend in hospice use among more than a million male veterans age 65 and older between 2007 and 2014, and compared the rate of growth with what was happening among hundreds of thousands of demographically similar Medicare beneficiaries not enrolled in V.A. health care. "Compared to enrolled veterans' hospice use in the years before CELC began, their use of hospice after the initiative increased substantially, and rates of increased use were approximately two percentage points higher than the increases observed for Medicare beneficiaries not enrolled in V.A. health care," Miller said. "Based on population data, we estimated that this increase resulted in an additional 17,046 veterans receiving hospice care in fiscal years 2010 to 2014."

The V.A. began work to establish a system-wide hospice and palliative care program in 2002, Miller said. "Palliative care, in the form of palliative care consults and visits and hospice care, has been found to improve care at the end of life and to result in care more aligned with patient and family preferences," she said. "Thus, palliative care results in less aggressive (and undesired) care such as emergency room visits and hospitalizations near the end of life. The V.A.'s efforts to improve veterans' end-of-life care arose from the recognition that improvement was needed and the belief that greater access to palliative care and hospice could help to achieve this improvement." Over the decade, the V.A. saw clear growth in hospice use. In 2008, for example, 30 percent of inpatient deaths in V.A. medical centers were in hospice beds, Miller wrote, but by 2011 that proportion had climbed to 44 percent.

A careful comparison

But during the same timeframe, hospice use had been growing among the general population, too. Miller and her colleagues therefore structured the study specifically to determine whether the CELC initiative drove growth beyond any trend in the general Medicare population. That wasn't a simple task given that older veterans are eligible for Medicare as well as V.A. benefits. "Some veterans receive care in their last year of life reimbursed by the V.A. or Medicare or both," Miller said. "So our evaluation compared differences in changes in hospice use for groups of veterans with differing combinations of health care use."

The study reports that nonveterans (with only Medicare) increased hospice use by 5.6 percent between the pre-initiative period (fiscal year 2007 and 2008) and the post-initiative period (fiscal years 2010 to 2014). Meanwhile the growth was 7.6 percent among V.A.-only veterans, 6.9 percent among dually enrolled veterans who used V.A. care, 7.6 percent among veterans who blended the V.A. and Medicare and 7.9 percent among dually enrolled veterans who used Medicare.

"Additionally, we did a sub-analysis including only veterans and nonveterans with any hospitalization in the last year of life because we believed that if indeed the CELC initiative drove the observed two percentage point population-level differences, we would see even greater effects for veterans with exposure to V.A. medical centers since most of the CELC investments occurred in these settings," Miller said. "The validity of our findings was supported as we found that veterans who used only V.A. health care and had V.A. hospital exposure, compared to similar Medicare beneficiaries, had a greater increase in hospice use of four percentage points."

More improvement needed

Despite their relatively large increases in hospice use, the small V.A.-only population of veterans not enrolled in Medicare (about 1 percent of the study population) remained the least likely users of hospice care by a gap of about 10 percentage points throughout the study period. Miller said the data may in part reflect a socioeconomic disparity but may also result from the study's inability to determine if hospice was received through another payer such as Medicaid.

"Research has shown that African Americans and lower-income individuals use hospice less and since this [V.A.-only] group of veterans tend to have lower incomes and are more often African American, this is likely part of the reason for lower use," she said. "However, there are likely other factors at play that need to be identified. The V.A. is continuing to evaluate the reasons for this observation of underutilization so interventions for improvement can be enacted, as needed." [Source: Brown University | David Orenstein | July 05, 2017 ++]

VA Adverse Employee Actions ► New Weekly Accountability Report

On 7 JUL, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is taking a further step on transparency and accountability as a follow-on to the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act signed by the president less than two weeks ago. Beginning 7 JUL the department is making public a list of adverse employee actions taken since 20 JAN This information is posted at <http://www.va.gov/accountability> , and will be updated weekly.

Secretary Shulkin pointed to the move as another step in long-sought transparency and accountability actions at VA, and noted that **VA is the first federal agency to make such data public**. “Under this administration, VA is committed to becoming the most transparent organization in government,” Shulkin said. “Together with the Accountability bill the president signed into law recently, this additional step will continue to shine a light on the actions we’re taking to reform the culture at VA. “Veterans and taxpayers have a right to know what we’re doing to hold our employees accountable and make our personnel actions transparent,” he continued. “Posting this information online for all to see, and updating it weekly, will do just that.”

For privacy reasons, the adverse action list will not include employee names, but will give information on the position, VA region or administration and type of adverse or disciplinary action taken. The list includes terminations, demotions and suspensions over 14 days since the new administration came into 20 JAN. Additional categories of accountability actions will be included in upcoming releases. In addition to posting the adverse action information, Secretary Shulkin announced that he is requiring approval by a senior official of any monetary settlement with an employee over the amount of \$5,000. Any settlement above this amount will require the personal approval of the Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary or equivalent senior-level official within the organization in which the dispute occurs.

“Taxpayers need to know that we will engage in good faith settlement negotiations, where required by third parties, but will look to settle with employees only when they clearly have been wronged or when settlement is otherwise in Veterans’ and taxpayers’ best interests, and not as a matter of ordinary business,” Secretary Shulkin said. “We’re changing to a culture of accountability at VA, and this is an important step in that direction.” [Source: VA News Release | July 07, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 232 ► Recruitment Impact From Changes

Changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other education benefits may have little impact on military recruitment and retention, a new study suggests. That’s because many new recruits and service members don’t have a good grasp on how they work, according to a RAND Corporation report evaluating military education benefits. “I think that service members have a general understanding that the military will help them pay for college,” said Jennie Wenger, a senior economist at RAND, an organization tasked with researching this topic by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. “They’re weaker on the details.”

So, if military education benefits are a draw, it’s likely not because of the specifics. But that doesn't diminish the value of education benefits, maintain veteran services organizations. “The fact that recruits and service members don’t know or fully appreciate the details of the benefit is less important than supporting their intention to pursue education through the military lifecycle,” Student Veterans of America said in a statement.

Changing education benefits

The report comes as veteran advocacy groups have been pushing Congress to make changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill that would, among other things, expand eligibility for wounded service members and reservists. SVA recently proposed a controversial pay-in structure that would harken back to older versions of the GI Bill, though a spokesman for the group said that the pay-in is no longer a priority.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill covers school tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance and a stipend for textbooks and supplies, representing what Wenger called a “significant expansion of education benefits” from its predecessor, the Montgomery GI Bill. The latest version, which went into effect in 2009, also got rid of the requirement that service members pay in to the program to access the benefits. But the changes from one version of the GI Bill to the next don’t seem to be widely known among service members, Wenger said. RAND researchers polled 165 new Air Force, Army, Marine and Navy recruits who had not yet attended boot camp to see how much they knew about

education benefits. Less than a quarter of recruits were familiar with tuition assistance, a federal benefit that covers the cost of tuition – up to particular limits – for active-duty service members. The recruits also expressed confusion about the Post-9/11 GI Bill, including its value, the length of service needed to qualify for the benefit and its housing stipend.

Yet education was among the recruits' commonly cited reasons for joining the military, which also included employment, maintaining family traditions and patriotism, the study notes. In addition to new recruits, researchers also sought the perspectives of college advisors on campuses with a significant proportion of military students, as well as analyzing Google search trends, Status of Forces Surveys of Active Duty Members and other data.

Affects on recruitment

Veterans, too, “lack a complete and nuanced understanding” of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, especially of the differences between it and the Montgomery GI Bill, according to the report, which cited this as the most likely explanation for the “muted effects” of the Post-9/11 GI Bill’s passage on recruitment. The Post-9/11 GI Bill did appear to be responsible for a small -- but not negligible -- increase in high-quality active-duty and reservist recruits, as measured by performance on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Still, researchers write that their motivations for enlisting are likely mainly for reasons other than the GI Bill’s increased benefits, since they don’t have a good grasp on the details.

The benefit had a slightly negative impact on retention. When comparing service members with similar characteristics who served in the military before and after the Post-9/11 GI Bill went into effect, researchers found a decrease in overall retention after the first term – something many feared early on. The decrease was smaller among service members with dependents, however, suggesting that the option to transfer benefits to spouses or children is an incentive to continue in the service. Per the Department of Veterans Affairs, service members must have already served in the military for six years to transfer benefits to a dependent and must agree to serve four more years after a transfer is approved.

“The impacts on recruiting and retention appear to have been modest to date. Therefore, changes to the structure of the existing benefit, such as changes to the pay-in or changes to the living allowance, also would be expected to have small impacts,” Wenger said, noting that she was speculating. The report’s results should not be interpreted as a reflection of the value of the benefits themselves, she said. A spokesperson for the VA said the department does not have data to support the study’s key findings and deferred to the DoD for comment. DoD did not provide comment by press time.

Beyond recruitment

Representatives for veteran service organizations promoting GI Bill reforms said the lack of detailed knowledge about education benefits isn’t surprising. But the GI Bill could still be improved. VFW Director of National Veteran Service Ryan Gallucci said education benefits are not solely about recruitment. “It’s more about quality programs for veterans when they leave the military,” he said. About 67 percent of student veterans are first-generation college students, according to Student Veterans of America, and they generally have limited insight into higher education in general. And, the organization posits, good or bad experiences with the GI Bill would ultimately impact recruiting - - if the word got out that the GI Bill wasn’t covering costs or that the housing stipend wasn’t adequate, for example.

The new recruits surveyed for the RAND study who were well informed about TA and the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were generally older, more likely to have college experience, more likely to be female, and less likely to be joining the Marines, according to the report.

In addition to other recommendations that new recruits and first-time benefit users get better guidance, researchers write that DoD should continue to focus on traditional tools, such as bonuses, to manage the force. The report states, “Indeed, while DoD should do as much as possible to ensure that education programs serve to benefit the Department and assist service members in obtaining their goals, our results suggest that changes to education benefits are unlikely to have large, substantial impacts on key aspects of force management (namely, recruiting and retention).” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gros | June 27, 2017 ++]

VA Did You Know ▶ **Death Confirmation | Ferry Rides | Separation Pay**

New Death Confirmation Policy

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has implemented a new policy change that affects all veterans. The VA is currently in the process of updating its procedure to request further confirmation of a veteran's death before it terminates any and all payments to the veteran. Basically, the process will now involve more exhaustive confirmation of a veteran's death before payments are stopped. For instance, when VA officials believe that a veteran has died, the VA will send a letter to his or her address on file and request confirmation of the death from a surviving family member. If the VA doesn't receive a response from the family — or from a veteran erroneously believed to be dead — only then will the VA terminate payments permanently.

Free Ferry Rides

- Local veterans riding the Inter-Island Ferry Authority will benefit from a federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grant recently awarded to the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. According to the IFA, the grant allows veterans to travel free on the ferry when the veteran travel is in conjunction with health care needs. Area veterans who wish to take advantage of the service will need identification showing that they are qualified. That can be an Alaska driver's license with a VA endorsement, an Armed Forces of the United States retiree card, a VA healthcare card, VA Veteran's Choice card or Veteran ID Card.

Veterans Who Receive Separation Pay Will Not Receive VA Compensation

- Under federal law, until veterans pay back their involuntary separation pay, they can have their VA disability compensation withheld. The reason for this is due to 10 USC 1174, a federal law precluding duplication of benefits. The law requires that the VA recoup military separation benefits paid by the Department of Defense in cases where a veteran is subsequently awarded VA compensation. VA disability benefits can be withheld if a veteran receives readjustment pay, non-disability severance pay, separation pay, reservist involuntary separation pay, special separation benefits, voluntary separation pay, or disability severance pay. The VA is required to withhold some or all of a veteran's monthly compensation until recoupment is complete. The process can take months or years to complete.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | July 10, 2017 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ▶ **Reported 1 thru 15 JUL 2017**



St. Louis, MO — **Tamara Jones** pleaded guilty to embezzling more than \$30,000 from a disabled veteran between 2014 and 2015. According to the plea agreement, Jones stole the money from a financial account of A.W., a

disabled veteran for whom she had been appointed fiduciary through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Jones was to spend A.W.'s money only for his benefit, and Jones was to be compensated by the VA. Jones pleaded guilty to one felony count of embezzlement by a Veteran's fiduciary and faces a sentence of up to 5 years imprisonment, a fine of \$250,000 or both. Restitution of the embezzled funds is also mandatory. Chief Judge Rodney W. Sippel accepted Jones' plea and set her sentencing for September 22, 2017. [Source: U.S. DoJ | Eastern Dist. of MO | June 23, 2017 ++]

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Bangor, ME — Acting United States Attorney Richard W. Murphy announced that Victor Lawrence, **63, of Chelsea, Maine** **pled guilty yesterday in U.S. District Court to theft of travel reimbursement** benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). According to court records, Lawrence submitted 77 claims from 2015 through 2016 to the VA for travel reimbursement, falsely claiming that he had driven nearly 100 miles to obtain treatment from the Togus VA Medical Center while he was in fact residing less than six miles away. Lawrence faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. He will be sentenced after completion of a presentence investigation report by the U.S. Probation Office. [Source: DoJ District of Maine | U.S. Attorney's Office | July 07, 2017 ++]

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Albany, NY — **Nathan Baum**, age 32, of East Greenbush, New York, was sentenced today to serve 38 months in prison for tampering with a consumer product and obtaining controlled substances by deception. The announcement was made by United States Attorney Richard S. Hartunian; Special Agent in Charge Donna L. Neves of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Northeast Field Office; and Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Ebersole of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigations, New York Field Office. Senior United States District Judge Lawrence E. Kahn also imposed a \$2,000 fine and a 3-year term of supervised release, to begin after Baum's release from prison Baum was originally sentenced, on June 22, 2016, to 82 months in prison. With the government's consent, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit vacated the sentence in May 2017 and remanded the case for resentencing. Baum has been in custody since his original sentencing date.

Baum pled guilty in February 2016 to tampering with a consumer product and obtaining controlled substances by deception and subterfuge. Baum, a licensed practical nurse who worked at the hospice ward of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, in Albany, improperly accessed syringes that contained oxycodone hydrochloride. These syringes were stored in locked containers that Baum was able to access using his individually assigned password. Between April 8, 2014 and May 16, 2014, Baum removed the oxycodone hydrochloride from at least 25 syringes and replaced it with haloperidol. Oxycodone hydrochloride, a Schedule II controlled substance, is a highly addictive narcotic analgesic used to treat moderate to severe pain. Haloperidol, often marketed as Haldol, is an anti-psychotic medication used to treat certain mental/mood disorders and to treat uncontrolled movements or agitation. [Source: DoJ Northern Dist of NY | U.S. Attorney's Office | June 28, 2017 ++]

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Madison, ME — A Maine man has been sentenced to 16 months in federal prison for conspiring to illegally obtain more than \$48,000 in veterans' compensation benefits for a relative. Fifty-six-year-old **David Watson Sr.**, of Madison, was sentenced in Bangor on Monday. He also has to pay back the money. Court records say he submitted documents to the Department of Veterans Affairs on the relative's behalf, claiming she had suffered from mental disabilities that were connected to her service in the U.S. Army and told her how she should falsely describe her condition to VA doctors. The investigation was conducted by the Criminal Investigation Division of the VA Office of the Inspector General. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | July 11, 2017 ++]

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Morganville, NJ — The owner of a New Jersey computer training center has admitted stealing \$2.8 million from a program designed to help veterans find employment. **Elizabeth Honig** pleaded guilty 21 JUN to theft of government funds. The 52-year-old Morganville, New Jersey, resident faces up to 10 years in prison when she's sentenced Sept.

25. Honig owns the Eatontown-based Computer Insight Learning Center. Federal prosecutors say she helped 182 veterans enroll to receive federal funding under a program designed to help older, unemployed veterans receive training and find employment in high demand occupations. But the vast majority of these veterans were either not eligible or not actually attending the training. Honig admitted logging on to the applications system more than 100 times and certifying that she was the actual veteran who was applying for benefits. [Source: The Associated Press | June 21, 2017 ++]

* Vets *



GI Bill Update 233 ► **Reform Bill Receives Initial Congressional Agreement**

Congressional Republicans and Democrats have reached initial agreement on the biggest expansion of college aid for military veterans in a decade, removing a 15-year time limit to tap into benefits and boosting money for thousands in the National Guard and Reserve. The deal being announced early 13 JUL is a sweeping effort to fill coverage gaps in the post-9/11 GI Bill amid a rapidly changing job market. Building on major legislation passed in 2008 that guaranteed a full-ride scholarship to any in-state public university — or the cash amount for private college students similar to the value of a scholarship at a state college — the bill gives veterans added flexibility to enroll in college later in life. Veterans would get additional payments if they complete science, technology and engineering courses.

The Associated Press obtained details of the agreement in advance of a formal bill introduction 13 JUL. For a student attending a private university, the additional benefits to members of the Guard and Reserve could mean \$2,300 a year more in tuition than they are receiving now, plus a bigger housing allowance. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-A) praised the bill as a major effort to modernize the GI Bill, better positioning veterans for jobs after their service in a technologically sophisticated U.S. military. "It's really about training the workforce in a post-9/11 GI Bill world," he told The Associated Press. "Veterans are being locked out of a whole new economy." House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe, the bill's lead sponsor, said he would schedule a committee vote next week.

Pledging more VA reforms to come, McCarthy said the full House will act quickly, describing the bill as just the "first phase to get the whole VA system working again." "We'll move it out this month," McCarthy said. Sen. Johnny Isakson of Georgia, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said he would introduce a companion bill, while Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, the panel's senior Democrat, said he was "encouraged" by the bipartisan plan. Veterans' issues have been one of the few areas on which Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill have found some common ground, as they remain sharply divided on health care, tax reform and other issues. The education benefits would take effect for enlistees who begin using their GI Bill money next year.

Kristofer Goldsmith, 31, says he believes it would benefit many former service members who, like himself, aren't ready to immediately enroll in college after military service. Goldsmith served in the U.S. Army as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2005, reaching the rank of sergeant, but returned home to constant nightmares and other PTSD symptoms. He was kicked out of the military with a general discharge after a suicide attempt, barring him from

receiving GI benefits. Now an assistant director for policy at Vietnam Veterans of America, Goldsmith advocates for veterans with PTSD and is appealing his discharge status. He's heading to Columbia University in the fall. "I feel extremely lucky I have found my passion in veterans' advocacy," Goldsmith said. "But I've taken out tens of thousands of dollars to go to school. GI benefits are something service members earn while they serve. They shouldn't lose it just because they aren't transitioning back the way the government wants."

According to Student Veterans of America, only about half of the 200,000 service members who leave the military each year go on to enroll in a college, while surveys indicate that veterans often outperform peers in the classroom. The bill is backed by the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, which says hundreds of thousands of former service members stand to gain from the new array of benefits. "This is going to be a big win," said Patrick Murray, associate director at VFW. The legislation combines 18 separate House bills, also providing full GI Bill eligibility to Purple Heart recipients. Previously, those individuals had to serve at least three years. The bill also would restore benefits if a college closed in the middle of the semester, a protection added when thousands of veterans were hurt by the collapse of for-profit college giant ITT Tech.

The bill hasn't been free of controversy. A draft plan circulated by Roe's committee in April drew fire after it initially proposed paying for the \$3 billion cost of upgraded benefits over 10 years by reducing service members' monthly pay by \$100 per month. Veterans' groups sharply criticized that plan as an unfair "tax on troops," noting that Army privates typically earn less than \$1,500 per month. "The GI Bill is a cost of war, and Congress needs to pay for it as long as we are at war," said Paul Rieckhoff, IAVA's founder and CEO. The latest proposal would be paid for by bringing living stipend payments under the GI Bill down to a similar level as that received by an active-duty member, whose payments were reduced in 2014 by 1 percent a year for five years.

Total government spending on the GI Bill is expected to be more than \$100 billion over 10 years. Rep. Tim Walz, the senior Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee and a bill co-sponsor, praised the plan, saying it will "improve the lives of future generations of veterans ... without asking our troops or American taxpayers to pay more." [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | July 13, 2017 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 44 ► Lawsuit Ruling Pending

Hundreds of veterans and their families who have spent eight years in federal court trying to prove that burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan made U.S. troops sick are worried they'll hit a legal dead end if a Maryland judge decides the company that ran the smoke-belching disposal sites can't be sued because it was working on behalf of the government. "It's been a living hell, emotionally, financially and physically," said Rosie Torres, whose husband, LeRoy, a former Army Reserve captain, was diagnosed with a debilitating, progressive lung disease after he returned home to Texas following a deployment to Iraq. "It is the war that followed us home."

For Dina McKenna, the case represents hope for long-delayed justice from a military contractor. The widow, who now lives in Tennessee, initially survived on charitable donations until Veterans Affairs benefits kicked in after her 41-year-old husband, former Army Sgt. William McKenna, died in 2010 from a rare form of T-cell lymphoma. He had served in Iraq. "What do I want out of this lawsuit? I want the rules changed so soldiers don't go through this again. I want to see money distributed to families who lost their homes ... because their spouse suffered or is suffering," McKenna said.

Torres and McKenna are among 735 plaintiffs waiting for U.S. District Court Judge Roger W. Titus to decide whether to let a massive lawsuit continue against Houston-based KBR Inc., a defense contractor and former subsidiary of Halliburton that ran burn pits to dispose of waste on U.S. bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. KBR has asked the judge to dismiss the burn pit case — a collection of more than 60 individual suits filed in multiple jurisdictions by military family members, veterans or former KBR employees — arguing that the federal courts lack

jurisdiction to rule on a military decision to use the burn pits, and as a military contractor, it should be shielded from litigation. The company released a statement June 29 saying its employees operated burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan “safely and effectively at the direction and under control of the U.S. military.” “The government’s best scientific and expert opinions have repeatedly concluded there is no link between any long-term health issues and burn pit emissions,” the statement read.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs and defendant wouldn’t comment on the case. But those suing the company say the smoke from burning millions of pounds of trash in open pits, sometimes around the clock, caused acute and chronic health conditions for those working and living nearby. KBR burned all kinds of refuse at the sites — some as large as 10 acres — including canvas, wood, paint, batteries, computers, fuel, plastic water bottles, animal carcasses and even human medical waste. The plaintiffs say they suffer from a range of diseases caused by exposure to the burning: respiratory illnesses, gastrointestinal disorders, neurological problems and cancers. In one Washington, D.C., class action, a dozen of the plaintiffs have died since the cases were consolidated in October 2009.

Titus, who held a hearing in March, has not said when he will announce his decision on whether the court has jurisdiction. But he tossed the case once before, in 2013, when he agreed with KBR that military contractors should share the same immunity from litigation over war injuries that the U.S. government has. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Titus’s decision in 2014, saying more evidence was needed to determine whether KBR had met its contract conditions. KBR unsuccessfully petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case in 2015, sending it back to Titus. Eight years in, the plaintiffs remain determined to see the case to its end. Jill Wilkins’ husband, Air Force Maj. Kevin Wilkins, died in 2008 at age 51 of glioblastoma, a type of brain cancer. Wilkins receives lifelong benefits because her husband was on active duty when he died, but other plaintiffs are without compensation or health care, she said. “It would be extremely sad if the case is dismissed,” Wilkins said. “There are a lot of people looking for help from the [Department of Veterans Affairs] and not getting it.”

The debate over the potential health effects of the burn pits goes back almost to the start of their use on U.S. bases. KBR began managing waste operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003. The company took over trash burning from the U.S. military, according to retired Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the former coalition ground forces commander, who testified as a witness for KBR during the March hearing. KBR ran the operations under a contract with the Defense Contract Management Agency. In court papers, the company said the Defense Department authorized continued use of the pits. But James Leidle, an attorney for the plaintiffs, noted in court that by 2004, the department had purchased 41 incinerators for U.S. bases in Iraq, though a contract dispute delayed their construction.

As early as 2006, Air Force Lt. Col. Darrin Curtis warned senior Air Force officials that the burn pit at Joint Base Balad, 40 miles north of Baghdad, presented an acute health hazard and “the possibility for chronic health hazards associated with the smoke.” But a 2008 U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine report contradicted that, saying that an air sampling from Balad showed exposure levels were not “routinely above” guidelines and weren’t likely to cause short-term health effects. Results also indicated an “acceptable” health risk for both cancer and non-cancerous diseases long-term. By 2010, 39 incinerators had been installed in Iraq but burn pits remained in use at small outposts and in Afghanistan. In a review conducted for the VA in 2011, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine found inadequate or insufficient evidence to link burn pit exposure to cancer, respiratory disease or neurological diseases.

At the insistence of Congress, the VA created the Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Registry in 2014 to keep track of veterans’ claims of exposure. Nearly 105,000 veterans have joined. But Bill McKenna’s not on the list. Neither is his widow. Dina McKenna said she’s not allowed to register as a family member of a deceased veteran. “When we got the diagnosis, the doctor immediately asked whether he had been exposed to chemicals,” said McKenna, a plaintiff. “The doctor called it a ‘Third World disease.’ No non-smoking American will have this type of cancer this aggressive other than dioxin exposure.”

And for Rosie Torres, watching the physical and emotional toll illness has taken on her husband has been devastating. She won't look at videos of him from early in their marriage or from when he was a highway patrolman. Once fit and robust, he now suffers from chronic pain, unexplained bloating and exhaustion in addition to respiratory disease. "Another wife said this, and it's true: If I knew he wouldn't be coming back the same man, I would have held him a little longer when he left," Torres said. "It's not the person you walked down the aisle with. There has to be accountability somewhere for that." [Source: The Wichita Eagle | Patricia Kime | July 13, 2017 ++]

Medicaid Eligible Vets Update 05 ► GOP Health Care Bill Impact

Air Force veteran Billy Ramos, from Simi Valley, Calif., is 53 and gets health insurance for himself and for his family from Medicaid — the government insurance program for lower-income people. He says he counts on the coverage, especially because of his physically demanding work as a self-employed contractor in the heating and air conditioning business. Now self-employed, Ramos relies on Medicaid for his family's health insurance needs. "If I were to get hurt on the job or something, I'd have to run to the doctors, and if I don't have any coverage they're going to charge me an arm and a leg," he says. "I'd have to work five times as hard just to make the payment on one bill."



Air Force veteran Billy Ramos, now 53, in a 1982 photo from his basic training days as an Airman in Texas, at Lackland Air Force Base.

There are about 22 million veterans in the U.S. But less than half get their health care through the Veterans Affairs system; some don't qualify for various reasons, or may live too far from a VA facility to easily get primary health care there. Many vets instead rely on Medicaid for their health insurance. Thirty one states and the District of Columbia chose to expand Medicaid to cover more people — and many of those who gained coverage are veterans. The GOP health care bill working its way through the Senate would dramatically reduce federal funding for Medicaid, including rolling back the expansion funding entirely between 2021 and 2024. Medicaid coverage recently has become especially important to Ramos — a routine checkup and blood test this year showed he's infected with hepatitis C. California was one of the states that chose to expand Medicaid, and the program covers Ramos' costly treatment to eliminate the virus. "Right now, I'm just grateful that I do have it," he says. "If they take it away, I don't know what I'm going to end up doing."

The Senate health plan — which proposes deep cuts to federal spending on Medicaid — has veterans and advocates worried. Will Fischer, a U.S. Marine who served in Iraq, is with VoteVets.org, a political action group that opposes the Republican health plan. "If it were to be passed into law, Medicaid would be gutted. And as a result hundreds of thousands of veterans would lose health insurance," Fischer says. It's too early to know just how many

veterans might lose coverage as a result of the Medicaid reductions. First, states would have to make some tough decisions: whether to make up the lost federal funding, or to limit benefits or to restrict who would get coverage.

But Dan Caldwell thinks those concerns are overblown. He's a Marine who served in Iraq and is now policy director for the group, Concerned Veterans for America. "The people who are saying that this is going to harm millions of veterans are not being entirely truthful," Caldwell says. "They're leaving out the fact that many of these veterans qualify for VA health care or in some cases already are using VA health care." About a half million veterans today are enrolled in the VA's health care program as well as in some other source of coverage, such as Medicaid or Medicare. Andrea Callow with the non-profit group, Families USA, wrote a recent report that shows one in ten veterans are enrolled in Medicaid. "Oftentimes veterans will use their Medicaid coverage to get primary care," Callow says. "If, for example, they live in an area that doesn't have a VA facility, they can use their Medicaid coverage to see a doctor in their area."

Whether a particular veteran qualifies for coverage through the VA depends on a host of variables that she says leaves many with Medicaid as their only option. But Caldwell says rather than fighting to preserve Medicaid access, veterans would be better served by efforts to reform the care the VA provides to those who qualify. "We believe that giving veterans more health care choice and restructuring the VA so that it can act more like a private health care system will ultimately lead to veterans who use the VA receiving better health care," he says.

The Urban Institute found that the first two years after the enactment of the Affordable Care Act saw a nearly 44 percent drop in the number of uninsured veterans under age 65 — the total went from 980,000 to 552,000. In large part that was the result of law's expansion of Medicaid. [Source: NPR| Stephanie O'Neill | June 28, 2017 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 224 ► Veterans Innovation Partnership

Members of the military contribute in many ways to our national security, and once they leave the military, they have a unique and nuanced perspective that can add tremendous value to our foreign policy. The Veterans Innovation Partnership Fellowship provides a valuable on-ramp for Veterans interested in careers at the State Department and in foreign policy more broadly.



The U.S. Department of State launched the Veterans Innovation Partnership (VIP) in October 2013, a public-private alliance that serves America's returned service members by preparing them for meaningful diplomacy and development careers. VIP enhances America's global leadership and provides education, employment resources, and expertise to returned Veterans. The program is highly competitive and open only to Veterans who have received a master's degree within the last two years (except for Veterans precluded from doing so due to their military service obligation, who have up to six years after master's degree completion to apply).

Veterans who are accepted into the program serve on the front lines of diplomacy at State, where they have the opportunity to work in many different departments for a full year as part of the paid fellowship. VIP Fellows bring their real world experience from the military and academia to the hands on practice of policy making. In celebration of this year's Independence Day, applications will open for the fourth class of VIP Fellows on July 5. The State Department will select eligible Veterans to serve as foreign affairs officers, addressing important matters such as refugees and migration, conflict stabilization, and countering violent extremism, to take the lessons learned in the battlefield and apply them to advance our diplomatic efforts, thereby helping our country avoid future conflicts.

The secretary's Office of Global Partnerships taking applications on 5 JUL through www.usajobs.gov with a maximum capacity of 500 submissions, therefore qualified Veterans should be prepared to submit on that ASAP. Veterans can find more information about the application process at www.vipfellowship.org/application-process and FAQs (<http://www.vipfellowship.org/faq>). The deadline for application submission is July 17, 2017. For questions on VIP, email us at vipfellowships@state.gov [Source: Vantage Point | Christine "CJ" Johnson | June 30, 2017++]

Massachusetts Vet Bonus Update 05 ► OTH Vet's Lawsuit

The Massachusetts legislature created the "Welcome Home Bonus" in 2005 for post-9/11 servicemembers. Under the program, those who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan — and lived in Massachusetts for a period of least six months before enlisting — are eligible to apply for a one-time, tax-free \$1,000 bonus. The program, run by the state treasury, is for veterans with honorable discharges. The two veterans named in the lawsuit enlisted multiple times, and they're arguing that the honorable discharge they received before their later, other-than-honorable discharge should make them eligible. "Both of these members deployed and were honorably discharged and re-enlisted. From a plain reading of the statute, they should be eligible," said Dana Montalto, the senior fellow at Harvard Law School's Veterans Legal Clinic working on the case.

Chandra Allard, a spokeswoman for Massachusetts Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, said 29 JUN the office could not comment on pending legal matters. One of the plaintiffs in the case, Army veteran and Massachusetts native Jeffrey Machado, deployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2012-13, received an honorable discharge and immediately re-enlisted. The complaint filed in Massachusetts Superior Court states his military service ended in an other-than-honorable discharge in 2014 that was "given out after the wounds of war and the stress of service became too great." Machado was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. He applied for the bonus during a particularly tough time, Montalto said, after the business he worked for closed and he was facing the possibility of homelessness. "He turned to this program as a lifeline, as a little bit of money to put some food on the table, and he was denied it," Montalto said.

The Veterans Legal Clinic estimates there are 4,000 veterans in Massachusetts who met the criteria for the bonus but, like Machado, ended their service with an other-than-honorable discharge. Though the case centers on several thousand veterans in Massachusetts, Montalto contended it was characteristic of a broader trend of veterans with "bad paper" being denied benefits. Discharges that are other-than-honorable, including a "general" discharge, are known as "bad paper" and can prevent veterans from receiving federal assistance, such as health care, disability payments, education and housing.

Lawmakers and veteran advocates have long argued servicemembers with bad paper were, in many cases, unjustly released from the military because of mental health issues. According to a report from the Government Accountability Office in May, more than 13,000 servicemembers separated from the military for misconduct in recent years suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or another disorder. "This is a state program that affects a smaller percentage of people, but it's really indicative of the much larger issues that affect veterans programs nationally, where there are criteria that exclude veterans with bad paper," Montalto said. "What this case is about is thousands of Massachusetts veterans who did volunteer to serve their country in a time of war, and ensuring they get the recognition they earned."

Machado and the other veteran named in the lawsuit, Herik Espinosa, appealed the treasurer's denial of their bonuses in March to the Massachusetts Veterans' Bonus Appeal Board. In both instances, the appeals board affirmed the treasury's decisions. A document outlining the board's ruling states Machado's other-than-honorable discharge supersedes his honorable one. The board made the same conclusion in Espinosa's case. Espinosa enlisted in the Army in 2004 and deployed to Afghanistan in 2011-12. After receiving honorable discharges for two

enlistments, he enlisted again in 2015. At the time, he had recently been treated for cancer. He was given an other-than-honorable discharge in 2016. A release from Harvard Law School states Espinosa was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The treasury will now have time to respond to the veterans' complaint, and the case could lead to oral arguments before a Superior Court judge. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | June 30, 2017 ++]

Taps Update 03 ► Vet Faces \$300 Fine for Daily Playing

A Navy officer in Glen Rock, Pennsylvania, may face a \$300 fine for a daily audio memorial that honors the men and women who served in the U.S. military, according to CNS News. Lt. Cmdr. Joshua Corney has played the classic bugle song "Taps" every day at 7:55 p.m. for nearly two years. Earlier this week, though, the Glen Rock Borough Council sent Corney a letter saying that his musical tribute constitutes a noise violation. Corney is still allowed to play the 57-second long tune on Sundays and select holidays, said CNS News.

Corney served in the military for 20 years and made eight deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, according to an April story from Penn Live. While on tour, Corney made a promise to himself that he would pay homage to his fellow service members who were not lucky enough to make it home. "When I was in Afghanistan and Iraq, I told myself, I had a conversation with God, and I said, if I made it home, I would do this," Corney said in a video filmed by the York Daily Record. When he returned to Glen Rock, Corney equipped his back porch with a three-speaker sound system. The system never exceeds 80 decibels, roughly equivalent to a hair dryer, Corney said. People from throughout the community routinely stop in Corney's driveway to take part in the ritual, according to Penn Live.

However, many of Corney's neighbors don't share the same sentiment — at least noise wise. His neighbors say the song is disruptive and that, at the very least, Corney should respect their wishes. "I don't think that's how a serviceman should behave," Victoria Ribeiro told Penn Live. "I don't think that's how a real soldier should behave. This is not a military base. This is not a church bell. It's not a train whistle that serves a public safety purpose or a police siren." Corney says he intends to fight for the bugle call and will take legal action if necessary. He has created a Change.org petition to garner support for the nightly tribute. More than 1,000 people have signed the petition so far. [Source: NavyTimes | Peter Rathmell | June 30, 2017 ++]

Vet Cemetery Arkansas Update 04 ► Fayetteville Land Donation

JUL third marked the 150th Anniversary of the Fayetteville National Cemetery. Since the cemetery holds veterans from numerous states, having enough space for every veteran can be a problem. But The Regional National Cemetery Improvement Corporation (RNCIC) is taking steps to change that in the form of a donation. "It's 150 years of history that we're standing on. It's hallowed ground. This is 150 years of heroes right here. Our nation's heroes." Albert Maxwell, Director of the Fayetteville National Cemetery, said.

THE R.N.C.I.C. donated 2.4 acres of land to the Fayetteville National Cemetery. "Our mission is to make sure there is never a veteran that doesn't have a burial place in this cemetery that wants to." Ronald Butler, President of the R.N.C.I.C., said. For over 28 years, the organization has purchased over a dozen acres for the cemetery. Donations that came at a time when it was desperately needed. "We were down to just 7 or 9 burial spots left so it was just in time." Butler said.

Today's donation is the largest yet and ensures veterans around the community will have a final resting spot. "The donation is very important because it allows us to stay open to give the veterans in the Northwest Arkansas

area, also southern Missouri and eastern Oklahoma to service our veterans so they can be interred at a national level and we can continue to serve them." Maxwell said. The director of the cemetery served in the Air Force for 26 years. He says he's proud to be a part of a community that's so supportive of veterans like himself. "As a whole, this is a great reflection on Northwest Arkansas because their purchasing this land was through donations. That's a great testament to Northwest Arkansas' patriotism." Maxwell said. Around 10,000 veterans and family members are currently buried at the Fayetteville National Cemetery. [Source: NB KNWA | Charity Chambers | July 03, 2017 ++]

AFL Q & A ► Death Benefits

Q. A friend of mine who is 80% disabled passed away recently and his wife asked me if she is entitled to any benefits. Any help would be very appreciated.

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A1: He would be entitled to some burial benefits and if he died from or some portion of his disability his wife would be eligible for \$1254.00 a month for the rest of her life get in touch with an veteran advocate either DAV, VFW, American Legion and they can guide her thru the process. (MH) 11/30/16

A2: If he retired he may have a Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) which is annuities. (DW) 12/1/16

A3: The wife could apply for her share and she should do just that. The VVA or any of the Service Groups is where to start and soon. Also, she should check with Her Rep in Congress. (JK) 12/5/16

A4: If his death was service connected, she may be entitled to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation(DIC). She may also be entitled to burial benefits. The key is, his death has to be service-connected. The requirements for this benefit are:

- The Veteran died from an injury or disease deemed to be related to military service, OR
- The Veteran died from a non service-related injury or disease, but was receiving, or was entitled to receive, VA Compensation for service-connected disability that was rated as totally disabling
 1. for at least 10 years immediately before death, OR
 2. Since the Veteran's release from active duty and for at least five years immediately preceding death, OR
 3. For at least one year before death if the Veteran was a former prisoner of war who died after September 30, 1999 (AP) 12/6/16

A5: Dependent's Indemnity Compensation is based upon the veteran's death being caused by or partially caused by a service connected disability. That cause must be put on the veteran's death certificate. The good thing about this is that the death certificate can be amended if the disability is known by the doctor and the doctor can reasonably say that the disability was more likely than not a contributing factor to the death. It does not have to be the sole cause of death. Also, if the veteran died of a SC disability the burial benefits go from \$350 to around \$2,000. (CP) 12/19/16

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Armed Forces Locator is an offline computer-based search system. It was developed to help veterans, active duty, servicemembers, Reservists, National Guard members and ROTC members locate old friends, current colleagues, and family members who serve or have served in the armed forces. Their mission is to provide an opportunity for those who served to reconnect again with war buddies. Also, locate many topics that are of interest to veterans, active duty servicemembers, and veterans organizations. [Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com> | July 1, 2017 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 15 JUL 2017

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2017 is available at:

== HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html

== PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf

== Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veteterans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\veteterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at milton.bell126@gmail.com.

(NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.”@“ indicates event requires registration\RSVP.)For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Counry listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

AK AL AR AS AZ CA CO CT DC DE FL GA GU HI IA ID IL IN KS KY LA MA MD ME MI MN MO MS MT NC ND NE NH NJ NM NV NY OH OK OR PA PR RI SC SD TN TX UT VA VI VT WA WI WV WY Belgium Germany Italy Japan Korea Netherlands Thailand

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | July 15, 2017 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ►

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events> . Vet Job Fairs being conducted in the next 30 days in state order include:



Recruit Military Listings *Note: Click on site for details*

| | |
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| Eastern Region Virtual Career Fair | July 18 |
| Sacramento CA Veterans Job Fair | July 20 |
| Tampa FL Veterans Job Fair | July 20 |
| Joint Base Lewis-McChord Job Fair | July 26 |
| Dayton OH Veterans Job Fair (Wright Patterson AFB) | July 27 |
| Fort TX Hood Job Fair | July 27 |

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| San Diego CA Veterans Job Fair | August 3, 2017 |
| New Orleans LA Veterans Job Fair | August 3, 2017 |
| Fort Stewart GA Job Fair | August 9, 2017 |
| Philadelphia PA Veterans Job Fair | August 10, 2017 |
| Fort Stewart GA Job Fair | August 10, 2017 |

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

[First Annual Tri-State New England Hiring Event](#) July 19 - 10:00 am to 2:00 pm
Portsmouth, NH [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Atlanta Hiring Expo with the Atlanta Braves](#) August 2-9:00 am to 2:00 pm
Atlanta, GA [Details](#) [Register](#)

Veteran Career/Job Fairs

[Herndon, VA](#) July 19, 2017, 3pm - 7pm [More information](#) (see August 02)
Security University, 510 Spring Street, Herndon, VA 20170

[Portsmouth, NH](#) July 19, 2017, 10am - 2pm [More information](#)
Great Bay Community College, 320 Corporate Drive, Portsmouth, NH 03801

[Enterprise, AL](#) July 27, 2017, 8:30am - 1pm [More information](#)

Enterprise High School, 1801 Boll Weevil Circle, Enterprise, AL 36330

- 8:30-10 a.m. | LinkedIn workshop
- 10 a.m.-1 p.m. | Hiring fair

Atlanta, GA August 2, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm [More information](#)

SunTrust Park, 755 Battery Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30339

ATLANTA HIRING EXPO WITH THE ATLANTA BRAVES

- 9:30-10:15 a.m. | Financial readiness workshop
- 10:15-11 a.m. | Personal branding workshop
- 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | Hiring fair

All registered veterans and military spouses are eligible to receive up to two free tickets to attend that evening's game between the Braves and the Dodgers.

Herndon, VA August 2, 2017, 3pm - 7pm [More information](#)

Security University, 510 Spring Street, Herndon, VA 20170

QUALIFIED CYBERSECURITY HIRING EVENT

Rescheduled from July 19.

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs> & <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | July 15, 2017 ++]

Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Maine 2017

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

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Recreation Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits> | July 2017 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



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

VA Health Care Access Update 53 ► Serve Veterans First Act

Legislation introduced in the Senate would prohibit the use of official time at the Department of Veterans Affairs unless veterans are able to get an appointment within a 30-day period. The Serve Veterans First Act was introduced by Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ). It would ensure that no VA employee is paid for union or labor-organizing activities unless all veterans seeking hospital care or medical services from the VA are able to receive an appointment within the 30-day wait-time goal of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. “The VA should not pay employees for union work while veterans are forced to wait for medical care,” said Flake. “The VA exists to serve veterans and their families, period. If that wasn’t apparent to some VA employees, the Serve Veterans First Act will make it crystal clear.”

Flake cited data from the Government Accountability Office as fodder for the bill, noting that in 2015 GAO found VA employees used almost 1.1 million federal work hours for official union activities. That investigation also uncovered 346 VA employees who spent 100 percent of their working hours on union activities. Flake noted, however, that the figures could actually be higher due to the fact that the VA does not consistently track official union time. The reality is that nobody really knows how much time and money is spent by the federal government on official time for union representatives, at the VA or anywhere else. Part of the problem, at least at the VA, is that there is not a reliable time keeping system for tracking official time. The Secretary of the VA, David Shulkin, has said that he wants to reform the use of official time for some of the aforementioned reasons. However, any efforts to do so would have to wait until labor union contracts at the agency are re-negotiated in the future.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union and represents many employees at the VA. At a recent hearing on official time use at the VA, AFGE defended the use of official time, saying that it improves decision making and helps to resolve problems within the agency. The VA has been a prime target for legislation attempting to reform the agency. In addition to looking at the use of official time, the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 was recently signed into law which makes a number of reforms including an expedited process for firing VA employees for misconduct or poor performance. [Source: FedSmith.com | Ian Smith | June 29, 2017 ++]

VA Appeals Backlog Update 09 ► S.1024 Appeals Improvement & Modernization Act

Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee members quickly passed a comprehensive overhaul of the veterans benefits appeals process on 28 JUN, setting up what they hope will be a flurry of major advances on veterans issues before the August congressional recess. The legislation, dubbed the **Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act**, was approved unanimously by the panel and could face a full Senate vote in early July. The House passed similar legislation in May, but would need to vote on the Senate measure because of technical changes in the bill.

If it becomes law, the new plan would create new options on how veterans can appeal benefits decisions they think are too low or missed critical health evidence. In some cases, veterans in the new system would waive the chance to submit new evidence or official hearings in favor of quicker resolutions. In others, they’d retain those rights, but face more reasonable timelines for submissions and decisions. The average wait for an appeals decision today tops five years. Nearly 500,000 appeals cases are currently pending in the VA system, a number that lawmakers have called appallingly high. VA officials have asked for major changes to the benefits appeals process

for more than a year, but have only seen legislative progress in the last few months. That's due in part to lingering concerns among veterans groups that have now been addressed, but also due to the politics surrounding a host of other veterans issues.

Last year, Senate officials tried to tie the appeals overhaul to new accountability legislation for the department and an expansion of numerous VA services, a move that effectively stalled all of those priorities. This year, an accountability overhaul was passed as a stand-alone measure by the House and Senate, and signed into law by President Trump earlier this month. Congress has also passed a series of smaller veterans measures, including an extension of the VA's Choice program, which provides funds for veterans to seek medical care outside the department's health system. On 28 JUN, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA) said he hopes the Senate will vote on the appeals legislation shortly after the July 4th congressional break. If House leaders can move on the measure quickly as well, it could become law before the month-long August congressional recess.

Isakson said he's hopeful his committee can also advance several other pending VA issues before the end of July. The committee has scheduled a hearing on pending VA leadership nominations on 19 JUL, and will hear from department officials on proposed changes to the Choice program in a 11 JUL hearing. Both chambers also need to pass a funding transfer agreement before the start of August to make sure veterans using the Choice program aren't affected by a shortfall of available funds, a problem that VA Secretary David Shulkin has told lawmakers is potentially disastrous for thousands of veterans using those services. But those moves will likely be affected by the ongoing health care overhaul fight in the Senate, which has snarled a host of other unrelated business earlier this week and could do the same when the chamber returns. When the House and Senate come back from the July 4th week-long recess, they'll have only 15 legislative days left before the start of September. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 28, 2017 ++]

Military Retirement Pay Update 08 ► H.R. 3011 | Survivor Pay Upon Death

At the request of FRA, Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC) has introduced the "*Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act*" (H.R. 3011) which would authorize the retention of the full final month's retired pay by the surviving spouse (or other designated survivor) for the month in which the member was alive for at least 24 hours. Surviving spouses who are unaware that the Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) should be notified immediately on the death of the military retiree are surprised to learn of this requirement. Those who had joint bank accounts, in which retirement payments were made electronically, gave little if any thought that DFAS could swoop down and recoup any overpayments of retirement pay from such accounts. This action could easily clear the account of any funds remaining whether they were retirement payments or money from other sources.

Readers are encouraged to contact their legislators and ask them to support this important legislation. A quick and easy way to do this is to go to the FRA or NCOA action lines and utilize their preformatted editable messages at [http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=78091626&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=78091626&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) and https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/mraSpBQq2U0peTvYe_Ajhg [Source: FRA Making Waves & NCOA DC | July 06 & 07, 2017 ++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 44 ► S.591/H.R.1472 | Expand Caregiver Benefits!

Caregivers of military veterans, the overwhelming majority of whom are family members, put their lives and careers on hold, often accepting great emotional and financial burdens to ensure their veterans have a meaningful quality of

life and stay in their homes instead of having to receive institutional nursing home care. The family caregivers of post-9/11 veterans are eligible for comprehensive support to include a living stipend to alleviate the financial burden of being a full-time caregiver. Unfortunately, veterans of previous eras are unjustifiably denied eligibility simply based on the era in which they served. *The Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2017* would correct this inequity by expanding eligibility for the Caregivers Program to veterans of all generations.

Readers are encouraged to contact their legislators and ask them to support this important legislation. A quick and easy way to do this is to go to the VFW action alert site and utilize their preformatted editable messages at <http://capwiz.com/vfw/issues/alert/?alertid=78102641>. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | July 7, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 234 ► Lifetime Benefit for New Recruits

A bipartisan bill was introduced in the House of Representatives on 13 JUL to make the GI Bill for post 9/11 veterans a lifetime education benefit for new recruits who go on to serve three years of active duty. Current post 9/11 veterans who qualify for the GI Bill would still be subject to the use-it-or-lose-it time limit of 15 years for the education benefit under the proposed "Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017," named for the late American Legion national commander who wrote the original GI Bill in 1944. The proposed bill also included reforms and changes to the qualifications for the GI Bill for Purple Heart recipients, National Guard and reservists, the dependents of veterans, and victims of for-profit school closures.

At a news conference, Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said he expected to hold a hearing 17 JUL on the GI Bill proposal ahead of quick passage by the full Committee. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) told the Associated Press that he also expected quick passage by the full House. "We'll move it out this month," he said. On the Senate side, Sen. Johnny Isakson, (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said he was preparing to introduce a companion bill to the House version. Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN), the ranking member on HVAC, said the bill would "enhance one of the best programs ever to come out of Congress," a reference to the original GI Bill that gave a college education to many returning World War II vets.

Proponents of the bill stressed the "forever" provision that would allow new recruits to use the GI Bill whenever they choose and not be bound by the 15-year limit. "This takes off that 15-year window," said Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI), a member of HVAC and a retired Marine lieutenant general. If passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump, the new bill would take effect recruits who enlist after Jan. 1, 2018. Veterans service organizations enthusiastically backed the bill. "This bill, as currently written, would launch a new era for all who have honorably served in uniform, and for the nation as a whole," said Charles Schmidt, national commander of the American Legion.

The new bill would address what were seen as shortcomings in the GI Bill of 2008 which guaranteed full-ride payment to any in-state public university -- or the cash amount for private college students similar to the value of a scholarship at a state college. The old bill left out Purple Heart recipients who had not completed three years of active duty. The new bill would make Purple Heart recipients eligible for the education benefits no matter how long they served on active duty. "This is going to mean a lot for a lot of wounded vets," said Aleks Morosky, legislative director of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. He estimated that 1,500-2,000 Purple Heart recipients had been ineligible for the education benefits because of the three-year active duty qualification.

The new bill would also restore educational benefits for vets who were enrolled in for-profit schools that shut down. Under the new provisions, those vets would be able to recover their educational assistance for future use. In addition, National Guard members and Reservists who were involuntarily activated would become eligible for the full benefit received by their active duty counterparts. In cases where a veteran transfers the education benefits to a

dependent child, the new bill would eliminate the current prohibition against transferring the benefit to a second child should the first child die.

"This beefed-up Post-9/11 GI Bill recognizes the long service and sacrifice of the one percent of Americans who have voluntarily put their personal lives on hold to fight an unimaginable multi-front war for 16-plus years," Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander Brian Duffy said. "The strong congressional support also proves that taking care of veterans and their families is the most bipartisan issue there is in Washington," Duffy said. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 14 Jul 2017 ++]

VA Nursing Home Care ► S.683 | Keeping Our Commitment to DAV Act

Hawaii's Senator Mazie Hirono introduced S. 683, the **Keeping Our Commitment to Disabled Veterans Act of 2017**. This bill would extend the requirement for VA to provide nursing home care to veterans with service-connected conditions rated at 70 percent or more, as well as those who need such care for a service-connected disability, or who have a rating of total disability based on individual Unemployability.

DAV Resolution No. 142 calls for support of legislation to expand the comprehensive program of Long-Term Support Services (LTSS) for service-connected disabled veterans irrespective of their disability ratings. The resolution notes that there is a subset of service-connected veterans with chronic or terminal illnesses who need LTSS and will require institutional placements. According to a recent DAV family caregiver survey, most caregivers indicated that their loved one would need care in an institution now (26%) or would need institutional care in the future without their support (49%). Without family caregivers, institutional care is the only alternative for many veterans with severe disabilities.

According to VA, there were around 21,300 veterans nationwide who met the legislative mandate for nursing home care in fiscal year (FY) 2016. VA estimates there will be over 21,800 veterans treated under this legislative mandate in 2017 and this number is projected to increase to over 22,200 in FY 2018 and over 22,600 in FY 2019. Without extension of the current mandate by Congress beyond December 31, 2017, VA would no longer be required to provide this critical LTSS coverage to service-disabled veterans.

DAV is requesting veterans to ask their Senators to cosponsor and to support passage of the Keeping Our Commitment to Disabled Veterans Act of 2017, S. 683. To facilitate this they have provided a preformed editable message for veterans to send your senator. To access the message and forward it go to <https://www.dav.org/can/?vvsrsrc=%2fCampaigns%2f53624%2fRespond%3fvvcgUT%3do8JELJAxQ3ibXycZZwd5wQ%26vvcgRD%3dBzbbQtGUzr688R9%26vvsbr%3d71R-AFMziaqcuFbPdGEjoA>. [Source: DAV | David W. Riley | July 14, 2017 ++]

*** Military ***



USAF MQ-9 Reaper ► First Successful Combat Mission

The Air Force's latest version of the MQ-9 Reaper flew its first successful combat mission on 23 JUN, according to the service. The Block 5 variant of the unmanned aerial vehicle flew a sortie of more than 16 hours in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, according to an Air Force news release. The MQ-9 Reaper flew the mission with a full payload of weapons ranging from Joint Direct Attack Munitions to Hellfire missiles. The aircrew from Creech Air Force Base in Nevada employed three strikes — one Joint Direct Attack Muniton and two Hellfire missiles — that destroyed two defensive fighting positions, two vehicles and a mortar tube, the release said. Creech Air Force Base received the newest version of the Reaper in late February, and additional modifications were completed in April. The Reapers were flown locally in May for further testing before being shipped to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.



The Air Force has flown the MQ-9 Reaper for the past 10 years, but the Block 5 variant offers improved electrical and communications systems. The service has said that the MQ-9 is better equipped than the MQ-1 Predator, which will be retired in early 2018, because of its increased speed, high-definition sensors and ability to carry more munitions. The Predator has been in use for the past 21 years, but the service will exclusively use the Reaper by next summer. In the past, RPAs were mostly used for intelligence gathering and reconnaissance, but current threats require more precise close-air support. The MQ-1 wasn't originally designed to carry weapons, which resulted in a 200-pound payload. The MQ-9, however, boasts a nearly 4,000-pound payload. [Source: AirForceTimes | Charlsy Panzino | June 29, 2017 ++]

USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 01 ► CO Temporarily Relieved of Command

The commanding officer of the destroyer Fitzgerald has been temporarily relieved of command so he can recover from the injuries he sustained when his ship collided with a container ship last month, Navy officials said 11 JUL. Cmdr. Bryce Benson was reportedly trapped in his quarters after the Fitzgerald collided with the hulking ACX Crystal cargo vessel off the Japanese coast in the early hours of 17 JUN. The collision ripped a massive gash in the destroyer and killed seven sailors, who were later found dead in the ship's berthing area.

Navy officials stressed Benson's temporary relief was conducted to give Benson time to recover. "We're focused on supporting Cmdr. Benson -- getting him the resources he needs -- during the recovery process," 7th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Clay Doss said in an email. Cmdr. John Fay, currently assigned to Commander, Task Force 70 staff, will assume command of the Fitzgerald, which was slated to go into dry dock 11 JUL as investigators continue to assess what happened and prospects for repairing the destroyer. Several investigations into the fatal mishap continue.

Sources told Defense News last month that there was no indication a collision alarm sounded before the Crystal collided with the Fitzgerald's starboard side. Such an alarm would have alerted sleeping sailors. Sailors had about a minute to evacuate their berthing, and several were awoken to sea water flooding their rack, two sources with knowledge of the accident told Defense News. Benson reported as the Fitzgerald's executive officer in November 2015, and assumed command of the destroyer in May. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | July 11, 2017 ++]



Award Devices Update 01 ► C & R Criteria Announced

Airmen can now be considered for two new devices that emphasize actions performed remotely or in combat. The Air Force announced the criteria for the "R" and "C" devices, which can be awarded with 12 military awards, on 22 JUN. The "R," or remote, device is reserved for those "not directly exposed to hostile action or significant risk." The "C," or combat, device signifies meritorious performance "under combat conditions."



The “R” device was established to distinguish military awards earned for direct hands-on employment of a weapons system that had a direct or immediate impact on combat or military operations, Air Force spokesman Col. Patrick Ryder told reporters at the Pentagon on Thursday. The device may be awarded to airmen who served in the cyber, remotely piloted aircraft or intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance fields. “RPA pilots, cyber warriors and our ISR troops [have] had a significant impact in fights like the ISIS fight and other operations,” Ryder said. “From our perspective, it’s really good news that we’re now able to recognize those achievements through these devices.” A commander can submit an airman for consideration for one of the devices on an achievement or commendation medal, Ryder said. This is retroactive to Jan. 7, 2016, so airmen can be approved for the devices on awards they received going back to that date. Awards approved before that are not eligible.

There are no Air Force nominations yet for the “C” or “R” devices given the novelty of the criteria, according to the Air Force. There are also no pending “V” devices. The new devices stem from a series of changes the Pentagon implemented to its awards policy for troops involved in combat. The Army released its criteria for the devices in March, and the remaining services will roll out the new policy by the end of this year. This guidance also establishes new eligibility rules for awarding medals with the “V” device, intended to recognize valorous combat actions taken at great risk and under duress. Service specific Achievement Medals are no longer eligible for a “V,” only a “C” or “R.” That’s true now, too, for the Legion of Merit, which before now was awarded with a “V” only by the Navy and Marine Corps. However, each of the services is clear to award the Distinguished Flying Cross with “V,” as the Air Force has done for heroism dating to the Korean War. [Source: AirForceTimes | Charlsy Panzino | June 25, 2017 ++]

Department of the Navy ► Name Change Proposed

A North Carolina congressman is continuing in his quest to rename the Department of the Navy, reports the Jacksonville Daily News. U.S. Rep. Walter Jones has been trying to rebrand the department as the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps since 2001, according to the Daily News. Sixteen years later, the rebranding is included as an amendment to the House Armed Services Committee’s version of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018. Jones is a member of the committee. “The Marine Corps is an equal member of this department, and therefore, deserves equal recognition in its title,” Jones said in a statement. Not all of Jones’ constituents are in favor of the name change, however. Some see it as merely a symbolic change and an empty gesture that won’t impact the relationship between the Navy and the Marines. “Why change the name? What does it achieve? At the end, I can’t think of anything that would improve the stature of the Marine Corps,” Retired Marine Col. Pete Grimes, who lives in Jones’ district, told the Daily News. The House is expected to vote on the defense bill later this month, said Jones. [Source: NavyTimes | Peter Rathmell | July 6, 2017 ++]

Navy Lingo ► 19 Terms Only Sailors Will Understand

All sailors from the “old salts” to the newly initiated are familiar with the following terms:

Chit: A chit in the Navy refers to any piece of paper from a form to a pass and even currency. According to the Navy history museum, the word chit was carried over from the days of Hindu traders when they used slips of paper called “citthi” for money. Sailor term chit

Scuttlebutt: The Navy term for water fountain. The Navy History Museum describes the term as a combination of “scuttle,” to make a hole in the ship’s side causing her to sink, and “butt,” a cask or hogshead used in the days of wooden ships to hold drinking water; thus the term scuttlebutt means a cask with a hole in it.

Crank: The term used to describe a mess deck worker, typically a new transferee assigned to the mess decks while qualifying for regular watch.

Cadillac: This is the term used to describe a mop bucket with wheels and a ringer. When sailors are assigned to cleaning duties, they prefer the luxurious Cadillac over the bucket.

Knee-knockers: A knee-knocker refers to the bottom portion of a watertight door's frame. They are notorious for causing shin injuries and drunken sailors hate them.

Comshaw: The term used when obtaining something outside of official channels or payment, usually by trading or bartering. For example, sailors on a deployed ship got pizza in exchange for doing the laundry of the C-2 Greyhound crew that flew it in.

Gear adrift: The term used to describe items that are not properly stowed away. The shoes in this picture would be considered gear adrift. Also sometimes phrased as "gear adrift is a gift."

Geedunk: The term sailors use for vending machine and junk food.

Snipe: The term used to describe sailors that work below decks, usually those that are assigned to engineering rates, such as Machinists Mates, Boilermen, Enginemen, Hull Technicians, and more.

Airdale: These are sailors assigned to the air wing — everyone from pilots down to the airplane maintenance crew.

Bubble head: The term sailors use to describe submariners.

Gun decking: Filling out a log or form with imaginary data, usually done out of laziness or to satisfy an inspection.

Muster: The term sailors use interchangeably for meeting and roll call.

Turco: The chemical used for washing airplanes.

Pad eye: These are the hook points on a ship's surface used to tie down airplanes with chains.

Mid-rats: Short for mid rations. The food line open from midnight to 6:00 a.m. that usually consists of leftovers and easy-to-make food like hamburgers, sandwich fixings, and weenies.

Roach coach: The snack or lunch truck that stops by the pier.

Bomb farm: Areas on the ship where aviation ordnancemen men store their bombs.

Nuke it: The term used when a sailor is overthinking a simple task. Here's how the Navy publication, All Hands describes the term: "The phrase is often used by sailors as a way to say stop over thinking things in the way a nuclear officer might. Don't dissect everything down to its nuts and bolts. Just stop thinking. But that's the thing; sailors who are part of the nuclear Navy can't stop. They have no choice but to nuke it."

[Source: We Are The Mighty | Adam Weinstein | June 21, 2017 ++]

Navy Fleet Size Update 04 ► Smaller Carriers Proposed

Enormous supercarriers like the carrier Gerald R. Ford may be the future of the Navy's fleet, but Congress doesn't want the Navy to leave smaller, light aircraft carriers behind too hastily, reports Popular Mechanics. The Senate Armed Services Committee designated \$30 million in its version of the proposed 2018 National Defense Authorization Act — released last week — to create a "preliminary design" for a light aircraft carrier, says Popular Mechanics. For decades, the Navy has focused on churning out large supercarriers — like the Ford which will be

commissioned later this month — because they can carry more aircraft and hold more fuel, says Popular Mechanics. However, they can be expensive and have experienced their share of issues during construction. The Ford cost \$13 billion to build and was supposed to be commissioned two years ago.

As a result, John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has become a strong advocate for switching gears to lighter and smaller aircraft carriers, according to his white paper on defense in January. “The goal should be a future fleet and air wing comprised of larger numbers of smaller and relatively cheaper systems that can operate in denied environments, rather than smaller numbers of larger and more expensive systems that our adversaries can increasingly locate and target,” he wrote. Though still in the early planning stages, the light aircraft carriers would likely be a modified version of the America-class amphibious assault ship, according to the U.S. Naval Institute. The U.S. Navy has not fielded a light aircraft carrier since the carrier Midway was retired in 1992, according to Popular Mechanics. McCain says that he hopes the next generation of light aircraft carriers will be commissioned by the mid-2030s. [Source: NavyTimes | Peter Rathmell | July 6, 2017++]

Army Hydrogen Fueled Vehicles ► Testing Begun

The Army recently began testing a Chevrolet vehicle powered by a hydrogen fuel cell at Fort Carson, Colorado, reports USA Today. The Chevrolet Colorado ZH2 features a silent engine that could provide the Army with a stealth mode of land transportation. It was developed by General Motors in cooperation with U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development and Engineering Center in Warren, Michigan.



During trials at Fort Carson, the Army will be testing for noise, detectability, torque, fuel economy and water vapor discharge. In addition to its near-silent engine, the ZH2 also features reduced acoustic and thermal signatures, low fuel consumption across operating range and water by-product for field uses, according to General Motors. “The Colorado ZH2 is a terrific example of GM’s engineering and design skill in creating an off-road vehicle relevant to a range of potential users,” said Charlie Freese, executive director of GM Global Fuel Cell Activities. “Over the next year, we expect to learn from the Army the limits of what a fuel cell propulsion system can do when really put to the test.”

Developed from the body of the gas-powered Chevrolet Colorado, the ZH2 will go through a year of field tests with the Army. “The speed with which innovative ideas can be demonstrated and assessed is why relationships with

industry are so important to the Army,” said Dr. Paul Rogers, director of TARDEC. “Fuel cells have the potential to expand the capabilities of Army vehicles significantly through quiet operation, exportable power and solid torque performance, all advances that drove us to investigate this technology further.” In addition to the ZH2, GM has also been working on the fuel cell-powered Unmanned Undersea Vehicle (UUV) that is currently in pool testing before eventual deployment for the Navy. The UUV uses fuel cell technology similar to the ZH2. [Source: ArmyTimes | Christopher Diamond | July 11, 2017 ++]

KIA LCpl Joseph R. Giese ► A Father's Grief

Goose was on his last foot patrol. He was 24 and had been in the Helmand Province in Afghanistan — "the worst of the hellhole" — for maybe five months, his dad said. The proud Marine had a new wife back in Georgia, and he was going to be shipping home to her soon. But an improvised explosive device changed the ending to the story. One step and Lance Cpl. Joseph Ryan "Goose" Giese was gone. A world away in Las Vegas, his dad Larry Giese was on the computer at exactly 9:03 a.m. Jan. 7, 2011, booking flights to go see his son's battalion return to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

At 9:04 a.m., his world split apart forever. It started with a knock. The retired Lorain, Ohio, police officer saw a Marine captain and a gunnery sergeant at his door. Giese, a former Marine himself, automatically saluted the captain. "We got to the door and he didn't really realize what was going on. He was more or less happy, like 'Hi guys, I was a Marine, too' — and then it sunk in, all of a sudden," recalls now-Maj. Bob Stevenson, who was the captain at Giese's door that morning. Giese, who had served a tour in Southeast Asia, remembers thinking "that was how they delivered the message when I was in Vietnam." "And I said, 'Just tell me he's wounded,'" Giese said. "And they said, 'No. He's been killed.'"



Lance Cpl. Joseph R. Giese

That wound — of losing his only son, of having to tell his daughter that her little brother was not coming back — went to the bone. But in the nearly seven years since his son died, Giese has found a salve of sorts in the signs he believes his son is sending him. There's a reason Marines say "once a Marine, always a Marine." The camaraderie doesn't end on the battlefield; it doesn't end at deployment or retirement. Semper fi — from the Latin "semper fidelis," always faithful — extends over lifetimes, even over generations, any Marine will tell you. And it certainly doesn't end at death.

"Six and a half years. Can you imagine finding a dog tag in the middle of the desert and it's my son's?" Larry Giese can't quite get over the package he received in the mail on 14 JUN, sent by a stranger. Inside was a single dog tag, dented, dulled and hard to read. Somewhere in Afghanistan — he still doesn't know much of the details — an Army grunt found the tag, read the name, and sent it to his father, Pete Metzger, asking him to find the man's family. Metzger tracked down Ryan's widow in Atlanta, where Ryan had lived since his parents divorced when Ryan was 10. She sent Giese a Facebook message: Call this man. If this is actually what I think it is, I want you to handle it.

All Giese knows is that the tag was found nowhere near where his son was killed in the Sangin River Valley. Ryan was part of the notorious "Green Hats," Echo Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Marines (the "2/9"). The 2/9 was deployed to Marjah, Afghanistan, in July 2010. By that December, Echo Company was sent to join the 3/5 Marines — which was taking higher casualties than any other Marine unit in Afghanistan — in Sangin.

Echo Company came to be known as the "Green Hats" after they chose to turn their hats inside out, with the green liners showing rather than the desert camouflage, while patrolling the heavy vegetation of the Helmand Province. They continued wearing their green hats once they met up with the 3/5, which didn't go unnoticed by the enemy. According to company lore, a letter between two Taliban leaders was discovered in the area, discussing the reputation of the deadly green hats. The attachment was to be short-lived, arriving in December and returning to North Carolina by 8 FEB. But within days, Echo Company lost three men. Ryan was the last.

Much of this history is written in stone — literally inscribed in granite slabs at the Pioneer Saloon in Nevada — and written on the body: tattoos Giese now wears. Ryan, who was sleeved in tattoos, used to rag on his dad to get inked, too, and they had plans to go together for tattoos when Ryan returned. The first anniversary of his death, Giese got his first tattoo — Ryan's face. On Ryan's birthday, he added another — an exhausted Marine kneeling, with Jesus over his head. The only thing green is the helmet. A Marine buddy of Ryan's told Giese the single tag would have been his "boot tag," the one worn in a soldier's boot instead of around the neck. It makes sense to Giese. "We couldn't find his left leg and his right arm," Giese said. "Who knows, after all these years and the desert storms and winds, what took place."

The tag arrived just in time for Father's Day. "I sat down at the kitchen table and opened it up. I didn't know what it would look like. He had it presented nice in a little box but I had to get it out of there. I had to hold it," Giese said. It has been sitting on his desk for a week now. Such a tiny thing, it is able to fit easily into the palm of his hand but big enough to hold so many memories. Giese has an entire room in his house full of signs of Ryan — photographs, his basic uniform shirt, his dress blue hat. "I never got to see him in his dress blues. Always wanted to, I just never got the chance," he said. "Well, except in his coffin."

Giese first started noticing what he considers signs from Ryan almost as soon as he knew of his death. He was on an airplane to Atlanta for his son's funeral, listening to one of his favorite songs, an instrumental called "Europa." As they prepared to land, the flight attendant called for all devices to be turned off. When Giese glanced at his iPod, the screen listed the definition of the song's title. "It means 'earth cries; heaven smiles.' I never knew that. So they got him, you know," he said. He got into Atlanta late and was checking into his hotel when he noticed the clerk's nametag said "Ryan." Then his girlfriend called him over to see something that caught her eye. In the middle of a couch in the otherwise deserted lobby was an empty box of Reese's Pieces. A few weeks before, Giese had sent a care package full of Ryan's favorite candy, Reese's Pieces. One package — just one — wouldn't fit into the box, no matter how much he tried, so he set it aside for a future package. Weeks after Ryan died, Giese received a notice that a package was waiting at the post office for him. It was the package Giese had sent, now marked "KIA" — killed in action.

In life, both men carried similarities far beyond genes. Both men were Marines. Both picked up the nickname "Goose," a play on their last name. Giese's softball jersey number was 3 — and his son became No. 33. When Ryan's unit returned home in early February, Giese was in California. He was outside eating breakfast at a hotel when a flock of geese flew overhead. The gardener was nearby and told Giese he had never seen geese fly overhead in all the years he had worked there. The next morning it happened again. Giese snapped a quick shot of the geese, a group of at least 15 or so. He intended to set it as the screensaver on his phone — but when he opened it, only three geese appeared in the picture.

The morning his son would have returned — Feb. 8 — Giese took an early morning walk alone on the beach. "I said 'Ryan, Dad's hurting. Can you give me a sign you're OK?' And then I said 'And if you can't, God can you give me a sign he's OK?' " he said. "I took two steps and I stepped over something green and it was like a voice said, 'Pick it up.' I turned around and picked it up and it was a little toy soldier. I picked it up and I was crying like a

baby." It was a tiny infantryman, leaning over his rifle. Ryan was in the infantry, volunteering to be a grunt "because somebody's got to do it, Dad."

Last year, another package arrived in the mail. It was a pocket-sized Bible Ryan carried with him into war. A Marine he had served with ended up back in Afghanistan again, and spotted the Bible. It was being carried by another soldier, who didn't recall how it had come into his possession and didn't know the soldier whose name was inside. The Marine told him about Ryan and took the Bible with him, forgetting it at the bottom of his gear for a while. When it resurfaced, he mailed it to Giese. The corners of a few pages were creased, marking spots Ryan would often turn to.

Giese stays in touch with Ryan's Marine buddies and became good friends with Stevenson since they met at Giese's front door that awful morning. Stevenson, who just took over command of the Marine recruiting station in Chicago this month, forged an unusually close relationship with Giese in the days following Ryan's death. In his role as a casualty assistance calls officer — the Marine who goes to your door to personally tell you the worst news about your loved one — he has made too many of those visits. At that time, however, Ryan's was only the fourth one he had done, and he personally attended Ryan's funeral in Georgia as well as his arrival with full military honors in Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.

He visits Giese in Las Vegas and continues to call every year on the anniversary of Ryan's death. When asked if he thinks Giese's experience is uncommon following the death of a loved one, he pauses. "I wouldn't say it's unusual. My dad passed away a year ago and that changed my perspective in ways. You start to find glimmers of things," Stevenson said. "When it happened, Larry started putting things together here and there. It was uncanny. It was significant to him and I thought that was helpful." Giese has heard there is some talk of eventually putting his son's tag in a Marine museum, but he's not going to part with it any time soon.

Ryan already had survived a stint in Iraq, and was within weeks of coming home when he was killed. The Marines had been preparing to cross the Sangin River when their soldier senses were alerted — something didn't feel right. Their leader chose to move further down the banks and cross at another point. That's when Ryan stepped on the IED. Ryan's commander called Giese weeks after the explosion. The bomb that killed Ryan also wounded others on his team, including the commander. The man broke down, questioning his decision that day. With that one step, all of their father-and-son plans were gone. "It's weird, you know? Here I am, I'm a big, bad Marine, I was a cop — but boy oh boy, that emotional part just kicks my butt. In boot camp he made copies of his dog tag to give me and his sister. But now I have an original," Giese said. There is a long silence and a muffled "hang on a minute" before he continues. "I really thought he was going to make it back. I really did." [Source: The (Elyria, Ohio) Chronicle-Telegram | Rini Jeffers | July 2, 2017 ++]

Navy Peacoat ► Will It Become Optional Attire

House lawmakers are pushing back against a Navy plan to make the iconic peacoat an optional piece of attire in a sailor's seabag. Navy Personnel Command announced last summer that the peacoat, all-weather coat and reefer coat would become optional items as of Oct. 1, 2018. The Navy plans to transition to the black cold-weather parka for the service and service dress uniforms to reduce up-front costs for sailors and offer more versatile outerwear. But language in the House Armed Services Committee's draft of the fiscal 2018 defense bill expresses concern that the Navy policy change will harm the American textile industry that pumps out the peacoats.

The draft also calls on the Secretary of the Navy — currently a vacant position — to explain the peacoat change. "The committee is concerned this decision was made without considering upgrades or alternatives to the traditional peacoat or the impact to the nation's domestic textile industrial base," the draft states. The House defense bill directs the Secretary of the Navy to provide a briefing by Oct. 1 explaining why the Navy removed the peacoat from

mandatory seabag requirements and what alternatives were considered regarding peacoat improvements and upgrades. It also calls for any cost evaluations of the cold-weather parka compared to the peacoat and all-weather coat, as well as an assessment of how changes will impact the domestic textile industry. A stable domestic textile industrial base will be important as the Department of the Navy works to streamline its uniforms, the draft bill states.

It remains unclear whether lawmakers' concerns about the peacoat will make it into the defense bill that is eventually passed into law. The House still must vote on the draft, which is expected later this month. That legislation must be reconciled with the Senate, which has yet to pass the Senate Armed Services Committee draft. Either way, the peacoat means big money. Sterlingwear of Boston received a contract worth up to \$48 million in 2015 to manufacture the coats. Sterlingwear Vice President and Chief Operating Officer David Fredella said in March that the phasing out of the traditional peacoat could cost hundreds of jobs and herald the end of New England woolen manufacturing. "We believe that the U.S. Navy was unaware of the collateral damage of their decision to phase out the wool Peacoat," he told the East Boston Times-Free Press. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | July 6, 2017 ++]

Recruiting Non-citizens Update 02 ► Opposition to Contract Cancellations

The top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee warned Defense Secretary Jim Mattis that any attempt to cancel enlistment contracts with thousands of noncitizen military recruits will be met with "strong, swift action" on Capitol Hill. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) said recruiting and military readiness could be harmed by a proposal circulating in the Pentagon to pull out of a deal with about 1,800 foreign-born recruits to fast-track their U.S. citizenship in exchange for needed language and cultural skills. The proposal memo to Mattis cites security risks posed by the recruits under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, or MAVNI, including links to foreign intelligence services and insider attacks, according to the Washington Post, which obtained a copy. "If we fail to uphold the contracts we have made with MAVNI applicants, this will not only have a significantly deleterious effect on recruiting, it will also be met with a strong, swift congressional reaction," said Warner, who is vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The MAVNI program recruits foreign residents who are in the U.S. with a legal immigration status or fall under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. The "non-citizens must possess unique, in-demand abilities otherwise in short supply, such as medical expertise or fluency in a foreign language like Mandarin Chinese or Pashto – skills described by the Department of Defense as critical and vital to the national interest," Warner wrote. About 1,000 of the recruits contracted under the MAVNI program have had their visas expire while in the military and could be at risk for deportation if the Pentagon curtails the program, he said. [Source: Washington Examiner | Travis J. Tritten | July 06, 2017 ++]

THAAD ► 14 of 14 Tests Successful

The U.S. Army's missile defense system capable of taking out targets in the last phase of flight intercepted a threat target on 11 JUL in a Missile Defense Agency test out of Kodiak, Alaska, according to Lockheed Martin, the system's manufacturer. The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system at Pacific Spaceport Complex — Alaska "detected, tracked and intercepted" a threat target designed to represent an intermediate-range ballistic missile, a first for THAAD, according to a company statement. The interceptor "destroyed the target's reentry vehicle with sheer force of a direct collision," the statement reads. The test marks the 14th successful intercept in 14 attempts for THAAD since 2005.



A U.S. missile defense system called Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, is seen at a golf course in Seongju, South Korea,

THAAD has recently made its way into the news in more ways than one. Its deployment to South Korea to protect its border with North Korea has angered China, one of the North's biggest trading partners. Its continued presence there is on shaky ground. And THAAD was listed as one of the weapon systems Saudi Arabia would like to buy as part of U.S. President Donald Trump's reported \$110 billion arms deal with the Middle Eastern nation. The country wants seven batteries, which is the same number the U.S. Army plans to procure.

Lockheed experienced some recent difficulties building the interceptors for the THAAD system — one related to a U.S. government-requested firmware upgrade to its mission computer and another stemming from an issue with a subcontractor manufacturing process — that resulted in delays delivering interceptors. Yet Lockheed recently told Defense News those challenges are behind them and the company is now increasing production and deliveries of THAAD interceptors, with plans to complete the fiscal 2016 deliveries by August of this year. [Source: Defense News | Jen Judson | July 11, 2017 ++]

Military Recruiting Update 07 ► GI Bill Changes Impact

Changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other education benefits may have little impact on military recruitment and retention, a new study suggests. That's because many new recruits and service members don't have a good grasp on how they work, according to a RAND Corporation report evaluating military education benefits. "I think that service members have a general understanding that the military will help them pay for college," said Jennie Wenger, a senior economist at RAND, an organization tasked with researching this topic by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. "They're weaker on the details."

So, if military education benefits are a draw, it's likely not because of the specifics. But that doesn't diminish the value of education benefits, maintain veteran services organizations. "The fact that recruits and service members don't know or fully appreciate the details of the benefit is less important than supporting their intention to pursue education through the military lifecycle," Student Veterans of America said in a statement.

The report comes as veteran advocacy groups have been pushing Congress to make changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill that would, among other things, expand eligibility for wounded service members and reservists. SVA recently proposed a controversial pay-in structure that would harken back to older versions of the GI Bill, though a spokesman for the group said that the pay-in is no longer a priority. The Post-9/11 GI Bill covers school tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance and a stipend for textbooks and supplies, representing what Wenger called a "significant expansion of education benefits" from its predecessor, the Montgomery GI Bill. The latest version,

which went into effect in 2009, also got rid of the requirement that service members pay in to the program to access the benefits.

But the changes from one version of the GI Bill to the next don't seem to be widely known among service members, Wenger said. RAND researchers polled 165 new Air Force, Army, Marine and Navy recruits who had not yet attended boot camp to see how much they knew about education benefits. Less than a quarter of recruits were familiar with tuition assistance, a federal benefit that covers the cost of tuition – up to particular limits – for active-duty service members. The recruits also expressed confusion about the Post-9/11 GI Bill, including its value, the length of service needed to qualify for the benefit and its housing stipend.

Yet education was among the recruits' commonly cited reasons for joining the military, which also included employment, maintaining family traditions and patriotism, the study notes. In addition to new recruits, researchers also sought the perspectives of college advisors on campuses with a significant proportion of military students, as well as analyzing Google search trends, Status of Forces Surveys of Active Duty Members and other data.

Veterans, too, “lack a complete and nuanced understanding” of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, especially of the differences between it and the Montgomery GI Bill, according to the report, which cited this as the most likely explanation for the “muted effects” of the Post-9/11 GI Bill's passage on recruitment. The Post-9/11 GI Bill did appear to be responsible for a small -- but not negligible -- increase in high-quality active-duty and reservist recruits, as measured by performance on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Still, researchers write that their motivations for enlisting are likely mainly for reasons other than the GI Bill's increased benefits, since they don't have a good grasp on the details.

The benefit had a slightly negative impact on retention. When comparing service members with similar characteristics who served in the military before and after the Post-9/11 GI Bill went into effect, researchers found a decrease in overall retention after the first term – something many feared early on. The decrease was smaller among service members with dependents, however, suggesting that the option to transfer benefits to spouses or children is an incentive to continue in the service.

Per the Department of Veterans Affairs, service members must have already served in the military for six years to transfer benefits to a dependent and must agree to serve four more years after a transfer is approved. “The impacts on recruiting and retention appear to have been modest to date. Therefore, changes to the structure of the existing benefit, such as changes to the pay-in or changes to the living allowance, also would be expected to have small impacts,” Wenger said, noting that she was speculating. The report's results should not be interpreted as a reflection of the value of the benefits themselves, she said. A spokesperson for the VA said the department does not have data to support the study's key findings and deferred to the DoD for comment. DoD did not provide comment by press time.

Representatives for veteran service organizations promoting GI Bill reforms said the lack of detailed knowledge about education benefits isn't surprising. But the GI Bill could still be improved. VFW Director of National Veteran Service Ryan Gallucci said education benefits are not solely about recruitment. “It's more about quality programs for veterans when they leave the military,” he said. About 67 percent of student veterans are first-generation college students, according to Student Veterans of America, and they generally have limited insight into higher education in general. And, the organization posits, good or bad experiences with the GI Bill would ultimately impact recruiting - - if the word got out that the GI Bill wasn't covering costs or that the housing stipend wasn't adequate, for example.

The new recruits surveyed for the RAND study who were well informed about TA and the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were generally older, more likely to have college experience, more likely to be female, and less likely to be joining the Marines, according to the report. In addition to other recommendations that new recruits and first-time benefit users get better guidance, researchers write that DoD should continue to focus on traditional tools, such as bonuses, to manage the force. The report states, “Indeed, while DoD should do as much as possible to ensure that education programs serve to benefit the Department and assist service members in obtaining their goals, our results

suggest that changes to education benefits are unlikely to have large, substantial impacts on key aspects of force management (namely, recruiting and retention).” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | June 27, 2017 ++]

Trump 355 Ship Fleet Update 01 ► Navy Plans in Motion to Meet Goal

The Navy is quietly setting in motion plans to dramatically expand the size of the fleet by adding thousands of sailors who would be needed to meet the Trump administrations goal of a 355-ship Navy. Internally, the Navy is targeting a force as large as 350,000 sailors – up more than 10 percent from today’s end strength of approximately 322,000, according to several Navy officials who spoke on condition of anonymity. While the timeline for that growth remains unclear, it tracks with widespread hopes across the Trump administration that the Navy will be able to add dozens of ships to today’s fleet of 276 and expand its presence around the globe.

Recruiting goals are expanding rapidly, and on 21 JUN, the Navy announced a big change to the “up-or-out” rules, a policy formally known as “high-year tenure,” which forces underperforming sailors to leave the active-duty force if they fail to earn promotions on rigid timelines. The new policy will raise those limits by two years for all sailors in pay grades E-4 through E-6, allowing the Navy to retain thousands of additional experienced sailors during the next several years. This policy change will officially go into effect 1 AUG. For the Navy at large, pushing toward a fleet of 350,000 sailors would mark the the most dramatic manpower increase in decades. And for individual sailors, the new policy change and the planned growth will open career opportunities and make the path to promotion — and full retirement — easier than it’s been in a long time.

“This does set the Navy up to grow — if that’s what the continued mandate calls for — because increasing ship numbers, a.k.a. increasing force structure, takes years,” said Bill Hatch, a retired Navy commander who now teaches manpower policies at the Naval Postgraduate School in California. “But if you wait until the ships are built, you will not have the right quality of people to man ship requirements correctly — you have to be thinking about that.” Targeting these specific paygrades may also be a great opportunity to address the fleet’s recent material conditions by keeping around those with experience in maintenance. And by allowing more senior petty officers to stay in the ranks, they are more assured of the quality people in the force they need, too.

“A big positive in increasing high-year tenure over growing new sailors from scratch is that these sailors have all been vetted,” Hatch said. “They’ve been through boot camp, so you don’t have to worry about attrition there. And also, they’ve been through one to three enlistments and already made the decision to stay, as well as have the training and experience needed in the fleet.” Yet increasing high-year tenure won’t work properly unless you also maintain or increase accessions, too, to sustain that growth over time. That’s why the Navy is also ratcheting up its recruiting mission for enlisted sailors. The goal to recruit 31,000 new enlisted sailors in 2016 rose to 35,000 in 2017 and now the Navy hopes to bring in 37,700 recruits for fiscal year 2018, Navy officials said.

SHORT-TERM IMPACT

Officially, the Navy says the immediate need for the policy change is to mitigate a temporary drop in sea-duty manning levels caused by a larger-than-normal cadre of sailors rotating from sea duty to shore over the next few years. Navy officials are reluctant to speculate publicly about future force and manpower plans beyond the current budgetary cycle that extends through fiscal year 2018. This year’s budget calls for the Navy to expand in 2018 to about 328,000 sailors, a near-term uptick of 5,500 troops. Raising the high-year tenure caps for petty officers is expected to keep nearly 3,000 more sailors in the ranks in the near term. Specifically, the changes include:

- Increasing E-4 high-year tenure limits to 10 years, up from 8 years.
- Increasing E-5 high-year tenure limits to 16 years, up from 14 years.
- Increasing E-6 high-year tenure limits to 22 years, up from 20 years.

The changes to up-or-out rules do not directly impact the chiefs mess. Navy personnel officials say the cadre of sailors at the paygrades E-7, E-8 and E-9 who are bumping up against high-year tenure limits is relatively small and can be addressed with individual waivers. The shift in policy will have both short and long-term implications for the Navy. It will help the Navy's recent effort to keep sea-duty manning at high levels. The change comes on the heels of a February deal that Navy personnel officials offered to sailors already on sea duty. For those willing to voluntarily extend in their current sea-duty billets for up to two years, the Navy agreed to waive traditional up-or-out rules. That incentive prompted about 1,500 volunteers who agreed to spend on average about 15 more months at sea. That program remains in effect, for now, and officials say they'll continue to consider high-year tenure waivers for sea duty volunteers.

"We are concerned about the potential impact on future fleet manning if we don't take proactive action now to keep more sailors at sea to finish their first sea tours and thus avoid a significant decline [in fleet manning]," said Lt. Cmdr. Nathan Christensen, spokesman for the chief of naval personnel. "Extending our high-year tenure policy for journeyman sailors is part of the larger strategy to ensure we are able to mitigate the effects caused by the FY12-13 cohort groups rotating to shore duty," Christensen said. "We are aggressively using all force-shaping levers to man the fleet." The Navy has endured two drawdowns since the end of the Cold War that took the Navy from nearly half a million sailors down to a low point of just 317,000 a few years ago.

The dwindling need for sailors in recent years made advancements especially competitive and resulted in the forced separation of thousands of sailors under the up-or-out rules. The force cuts also led to the 2011 Enlisted Retention Boards that cut nearly 3,000 mid-grade petty officers in a period of about six months. But now, an expansion like the one under discussion would be mostly good news for those serving in today's Navy. With a Navy on the verge of increases in ships and sailors over the next couple decades, those manpower trends would reverse and usher in an era of steadily increasing advancement and reenlistment opportunities.

LONG-TERM IMPACT

Among President Trump's top campaign promises related to national security was a vow to increase the size of the Navy's surface fleet, which today is less than half the size of the nearly 600-ship force of the late 1980s. Yet Trump's plan remains hazy. Current budget plans provide no details on how the Navy will pay for dozens of additional ships. While the proposal is popular at the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill, it doesn't come with a timetable. Support inside the Navy for growing the force predates Trump. Former Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, before he left office earlier this year, announced the results of a year-long "Force Structure Assessment" that determined the Navy needs to grow to a fleet of 355 ships over the next 30 years. "All of the analysis done to date, inside and outside of the Navy, recognizes, as we have for nearly the last eight years, the need for a larger Fleet," Mabus said shortly before leaving office in January.

The force structure assessment would help plan a 2018 budget that puts the Navy on an "upward glide slope" toward the near-term goal of 308 ships, with a long-term goal set for 355. This 30-year plan calls for increases of one more aircraft carrier, 16 more large surface combatants and 18 more attack submarines. Also included are four more amphibious warfare ships, three more expeditionary support bases and five more support ships. Yet Mabus's plan appears to have focused on ships and hardware and did not include projections about the increased personnel needed to man the increasing numbers of ships. Multiple Navy officials told Navy Times that the conventional wisdom is that a future 355-ship Navy would require between 340,000 and 350,000 sailors. Additional studies may be needed to address the number of personnel required for the increased fleet size, officials said.

"The drawdown is over and all the services are now growing again," said Larry Korb, a retired Navy Captain and former Pentagon personnel chief who is now a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. "The Navy is already increasing to 305 ships and it's safe to assume they'll need more sailors as they now move in the direction of a larger force." Korb said that he's not sure the Navy will get to 355, soon or even at all, but that it's clear the service will grow not only in ships, but in people. "It's not happening overnight and to grow that much in people

will take at least a decade,” he said. “But this does help position them to grow in a measured manner over time as they need.” [Source: NavyTimes | Mark Faram | June 26, 2017 ++]

Trump 355 Ship Fleet Update 02 ► **Composition | Thinking Outside the Box**

When people talk about President Trump’s plans for a bigger military, the 355-ship Navy is often the first thing they cite. Shipbuilders say they’re ready and lobbying groups have flooded email inboxes with cries for more, more, more. The man who would oversee the effort to grow the fleet is Richard Spencer, Trump’s nominee for Navy secretary. At his Senate confirmation hearing this week, Spencer hinted that at least some of those new warships might not carry human sailors.

“People have asked, ‘What do you think of the 355-ship Navy?’ And I said: It is a great goal to have. I can’t tell you what the construct of that would be, sitting here today, because I think unmanned — both below the water, on the water and in the air — is an area we’re just beginning to chip away at. And that’s going to provide some great yield for us,” Spencer told the Senate Armed Services Committee. Here’s another thing: all of those new ships might not be new. “If we take the full gamut of what’s available to us to tackle the 355-ship goal, we should be thinking outside the box,” Spencer said. “We should be thinking, possibly, bringing things out of the ready reserve. [Perhaps some recently decommissioned FFG-7 class frigates, CNO Adm. John Richardson said in June.] We should be looking at ways to construct better, faster, cheaper.”

Capital Alpha analyst Byron Callan notes that a mix of crewed and unmanned ships “sync up” with firms’ acquisitions over the past year. We’ve been keeping an eye on related developments such as the new teaming agreement between Huntington Ingalls and Boeing, or L3 Technologies’ April acquisition of underwater drone maker OceanServer. Callan notes that Spencer’s comments “may suggest a different fleet mix than just 355 ships and submarines.” Spencer also mentioned a new frigate, which the Navy this week took some steps toward defining. The request for information paints a picture of a ship with SM-2 and/or Evolved Sea Sparrow missiles and an advanced radar.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain (R-AZ), who has pounded away on the Navy’s Littoral Combat Ships for their relatively light armament and other perceived flaws, said he is “cautiously optimistic” about the new frigate. “This new frigate must be more capable than the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) program, with minor modifications,” McCain said. “For example, the new frigate’s ability to perform local area air defense for convoys of ships would provide a necessary and clear capability improvement over the LCS program.” [Source: Defense One | Marcus Weisgerber | July 13, 2017 ++]

Navy Discipline ► **Confinement On Bread & Water**

Confinement in the brig on bread and water is arguably the most antiquated and arcane punishment since walking the plank. But whether it will continue to be a disciplinary option for today’s Navy commanders now lies in the hands of President Donald Trump. The non-judicial punishment is exactly what it sounds like: Sailors at the rank of E-3 and below, attached to or embarked on a vessel, can be confined for up to three days and fed nothing but bread and water under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. “It’s an effective punishment, because it sucks,” said Zack Spilman, a military law expert and Marine Corps Reserve judge advocate who defends servicemembers in courts-martial and appeals.

Eliminating bread and water is one of several changes to the military justice system recommended by a group of legal experts brought together by the Pentagon in 2013. The changes were approved as part of last year's defense bill but require Trump to issue implementing regulations by Dec. 23, 2017 and the new regs must take effect by Jan. 1, 2019. What happens to those reforms should the president fail to act remains a gray area, according to defense officials. The Pentagon has posted the Manual for Courts-Martial revisions and a draft presidential executive order for public review and comment. They comprise the most significant changes to military law in roughly 30 years. The White House did not respond to a Navy Times request for comment on whether Trump intends to sign off on the changes.

Other than eliminating the bread-and-water provision, the reforms awaiting presidential perusal include changes to guilty pleas, sentences and plea agreements, among others, said Air Force Maj. Ben Sakrison, a Pentagon spokesman. The reforms also seek to modernize criminal offenses by enacting several computer-related crimes and establishing a panel to recommend military justice system improvements. But nothing on that list carries the outlandish legacy, or carb load, of eliminating confinement on bread and water. Sailors say it's a punitive measure that some of today's commanders still turn to, but Navy officials said they do not track how often bread and water is meted out across the fleet.

Commanders can impose bread and water only when the sailor is medically cleared, according to the Navy's Corrections Manual, and such sailors will not be removed from their cell for work or any exercise during the punishment. "The amount of bread and water shall not be restricted and will be served three times daily at the normal time of meals," the manual states. The experts who drafted the legal changes did not note in their recommendations report exactly why bread and water should be phased out. But they wrote that they had "confidence in the ability of commanders in a modern era to administer effective discipline through the utilization of a wide range of punishments otherwise available under Article 15 and other non-punitive measures."

Spilman, the military defense attorney, tracked the military justice reforms for years and said he also saw no formal reason given by the group for eliminating bread and water. "I've never experienced it, and I've never had a client who experienced it, but it has long been regarded as an effective punishment because of how miserable it is," he said. "And it's historic." The group probably recommended its elimination because of its decidedly un-modern nature, Spilman said. "You could be nostalgic to keep the old ways, but they're getting rid of it," he said. Retired Navy Admiral and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stavridis said "it's about time" the military did away with the punishment. "In my time as a CO, I never used bread and water," he said in an email. "Even two decades ago, it seemed a really anachronistic, dumb sort of sanction."

When bread and water entered the command disciplinary toolkit remains unclear, but retired Cmdr. David Winkler of the Naval Historical Foundation said it likely was enacted in the mid-19th century. Back then, the sea service was phasing out flogging as a punishment and might have wanted a replacement, he said. Winkler recalled checking on a sailor confined on bread and water at the Philadelphia Navy Yard when he was assigned to the ammunition ship *Suribachi* in the 1980s. He showed up just as the guards prepared the sailor's chow. "It was raisin bread," Winkler recalled. "The Marine guards were there with tweezers, pulling out the raisins before they served it to the poor prisoner."

Winkler said bread and water was a popular punishment aboard America's first aircraft carrier, the *Langley*, commissioned in the early 1920s. "Going through the logs of the USS *Langley* back in the 20s, they had a brig and the captain meted the punishment out all the time," he said. Winkler recalled reading about how the brig was below the galley, and how friends of the confined sailors would pass food down through the portholes. "They were in amazement that those sailors were gaining weight while on bread and water," he said. Like many Navy men and women, Winkler loves the sea service's traditions. Still, he conceded, "it is kind of time" to do away with the punishment. "The other services don't have such a thing," he said. "For the sake of conformity throughout the military establishment, it's probably time to go." [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | July 13, 2017 ++]



WWII Vets 105 ► Cole-Richard 01

Lt. Col. Dick Cole served as co-pilot of the lead B-52 bomber, which was piloted by Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, who planned and led the raid. In May, Cole suffered a broken shoulder and elbow. Trump wanted to reach out to him before the Fourth of July. “President Donald J. Trump spoke by phone on July 2 with Lt. Col. Dick Cole, the last surviving member of the famed Doolittle Raiders,” a statement released by the White House said. “The President offered his best wishes and support to this 101-year-old veteran who was recently injured. The President congratulated Lt. Col. Cole on his courage, thanked him for his service, and wished him a full recovery in advance of his upcoming 102nd birthday.”



In an interview Cole gave last year, he spoke about the raid and why it had been planned. “One was to let the Japanese people know their leaders were not being truthful by saying Japan couldn’t be bombed by air,” he explained. “The other was to give the Allies, and particularly the United States, a morale shot in the arm.” “The damage we did wasn’t much,” he continued. “But the raid caused the Japanese to bring back forces from down around Australia and India and concentrate their power in the Central Pacific. They also transferred two carriers to Alaska, and that evened the odds with the U.S. Navy at Midway. Japanese naval forces were at a disadvantage from then on. It was a turning point in the war.”

Everyone who flew in the Doolittle Raid had volunteered for the mission, despite knowing that there would not be enough fuel for the aircrafts to return to friendly territory. Every member of the raid was given the opportunity to

drop out, without suffering any repercussions, but no one took it. It was the first combat mission for all of them. Cole and the other Raiders ended up bailing out over China and Cole said that it was because of the Chinese that they all survived. “We couldn’t have done it without their help,” Cole said. “They did everything they could to keep the Japanese from capturing our crews. But according to historians, the Japanese killed over 250,000 people.”

While Cole received the Distinguished Flying Cross, he has never considered himself to be a hero. “No, we were just doing our job, part of the big picture, and happy that what we did was helpful,” he said. “We couldn’t have done it without the Navy. They risked two of their carriers and quite an armada.” The White House statement concluded with another message to the military, saying, “President Trump appreciates the service and sacrifice of all veterans as we celebrate Independence Day.” [Source: Right Wing News | Cassy Fiano | July 2017 ++]

Maryland Vet Cemetery Update 03 ► Loudon Park National Cemetery

An iron fence surrounds the rows of headstones of Loudon Park National Cemetery in Maryland and formal cast-iron gates stand as centurions at the entrance. The two-story folk Victorian lodge, built in the 1890s, is a stalwart reminder of the cemetery’s past, a past that is as much a part of Baltimore’s history as it is America’s history.



Loudon Park National Cemetery, now a VA national cemetery and historical site, was originally a military cemetery established in 1862 during the Civil War. Most of its first interments came from nearby Baltimore hospitals and prisons, such as Fort McHenry. Baltimore played a modest but tangentially connected part in America’s Civil War. Despite being located less than 100 miles from the nation’s capital, no major Civil War battles occurred in Baltimore. However, as a major port city and home of the B&O railroad, it was a key transportation center during the war.

Loudon Park National Cemetery is a place that tells the story of our country’s past, and it’s a story that continues to this day. A report from the inspector of national cemeteries in 1871 cited 1,789 total interments; among them 139 “rebel soldiers, prisoners of war” who died at Fort McHenry. While today this cemetery is closed for interments, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) protects, preserves and maintains the site, along with hundreds of other VA national cemeteries across the nation, as a part of our sacred trust. “The mission of the National Cemetery Administration is to provide final resting places for families and to commemorate the service and sacrifice of our Veterans,” said Ron Walters, the National Cemetery Administration’s acting under secretary.

For many who work at NCA, this mission is one that goes beyond just a sense of duty and responsibility. Shawn Graham, a public affairs specialist, explains the care of Veterans, even ones interred hundreds of years ago, is part of

a personal mission for him. “We take care of Veterans from the beginning of their enlistment until we inter them into the earth,” he said. “These people gave a part of their lives. Whether they did two or 30 years, they gave a part of their lives in service to their country. It’s a noble mission. That means a lot to me.” Recently, service members from the [Defense Information School](#) at Fort Meade, Maryland visited Loudon Park National Cemetery to tell the story of what they learned and why the [sacred trust of NCA](#) is such a historical, and deeply American, mission. Refer to <https://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/loudonpark.asp> for more on Loudon Park National Cemetery [Source: VAntage Point | July 5, 2017 ++]

China Submarine Program ► Abacuses Used in Design of 1st Nuclear Sub

Now 93, Huang Xuhua, chief designer of the Long March-1, said he still owns one of the suanpan [abacuses] that were used by his team almost 60 years ago, Chutian Metropolis Daily reported on 10 JUL “Lots of critical data used in the development of the nuclear submarine jumped out from this suanpan,” he was quoted as saying. Often referred to as the “Father of China’s nuclear subs”, Huang worked for China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation, which had several abacus calculation teams divided into specialist sections, he said. Scientists “attacked the beads [on their abacuses] until every section reached the same result”, he said, adding that the constant clattering was enough to make entire buildings “rattle from dawn until dusk”.



Huang Xuhua, chief designer of the Long March-1

The Chinese abacus dates back to about 200BC. Traditional designs featured a bamboo frame with beads that could be pushed up or down. Even today, skilled users can perform mathematical calculations on them as quickly as they can on a calculator. Zhang Jinlan, one of the experts currently working on nuclear submarines at China Shipbuilding Industry Corp, said that for designers working today, trying to build a vessel using an abacus would be a “mission impossible”, the report said. “This is not simple addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, but involves algorithms and models with sophisticated mathematical language, such as trigonometric functions and logarithms,” he was quoted as saying.

Huang, however, said that by doing the calculations by hand he and his fellow scientists were able to overcome many challenging technical issues. Such was their success that they came up with five original designs in a period of just three months, the report said. The first Long March-1 was completed in 1970 and went into military service four years later. It was retired last year and is now on exhibition at a naval museum in Qingdao, eastern China’s Shandong province. [Source: South China Morning Post | Binglin Chen | July 10, 2017 ++]

USS Laffey (DD-724) ► Kamikaze Attack 1945

This is incredible actual footage during the 80-minute attack on the USS Laffey! About the best naval footage ever shot by a Navy cameraman. The gun turret under attack! It's Amazing! The U.S.S. Laffey, "the ship that would not die", was hit by 6 Kamikazes and 4 bombs, but remained afloat after an 80-minute battle that included 22 Kamikaze attacks. Click on the following link then click on the photo of the five inch gun turret to activate the video. <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4zpk7hvrgbcd7gd/D-qPNsG9ym?preview=Laffey+Enhanced+vo+3.wmv>. [Source: Laffey Enhanced vo 3.wmv | Robert Clark (Patriots Point) | June 27, 2017 ++]

Abandoned Military Bases [03] ► 109th Iman Fortified



Operating during the World War II era, this fort took heavy damage between the fighting of Soviets vs the Japanese during the war. After the war ended it was abandoned and has been sitting empty and forgotten about for over 60 years.

Insanely Daring Air Raids ► No. 2 | The Sinking Of the Tirpitz

Air raids were one of the military strategies that were used to attack enemies using fighter planes which would drop bombs and blow buildings apart. This task was perhaps the most dangerous and terrifying mission during the times of war. However, many brave aviators risked their lives and conducted daring raids against insane odds. Following covers one often of the most daring raids to ever been conducted in history, the story behind the raids and the crews who flew the military planes.

Tirpitz was the largest battleship the Nazi Germany had built right before World War II. Sister ship to the more famous Bismarck, mighty 42,900 ton Tirpitz carried a main armament of eight 15 inch guns, and posed a grave threat to Allied shipping, the British in particular. Over the year, the presence of the Tirpitz was a great concern to the Allied Forces. The British Royal Air Force and Royal Navy made several attempts to sink the Tirpitz but were unsuccessful. In January 1942, Tirpitz left Germany for Norway, where she would lead fearsome attacks on Allied convoys hauling supply cargoes to Allied forces in Russia. This became another concern to the Allies as they were

forced to flee to the northern waters to guard against her. At this time, the attempts made by the British Royal Air Force and Royal Navy to sink her failed.



However, with a newly developed bomb called the ‘Tallboy,’ Bomber Command hatched a plan to use the bombs to sink the Tirpitz. The enormous bomb, weighing 5,400 kilograms (12,000 lb) was so big, and no other plane could carry it. The British, therefore, decided to use the Lancaster bomber, which was usually used for high-altitude night bombings to fly the mission. With the help of Norwegian undercover agents who were used for intelligence gathering, the British Special Operations (SOE) had daily reports on Tirpitz’s movements. Finally, on November 12, 1944, the Royal Air Force carried out a successful attack using the Tallboy bomb and sank the Tirpitz. The attack was made by 29 Lancasters of Nos 9 and 617 Squadrons. With the sinking of the Tirpitz, Hitler lost the last influential ship of his surface battle fleet, and this marked the end of Germany’s naval war in northern waters.

Future of War ► Battle of Mosul's Impact

The bloody battle to wrest Mosul from ISIS was the world’s largest military operation on nearly 15 years. The attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Mosul's Impact On the Future of War**" tells how Western-backed Iraqi soldiers helped break the Islamic State’s grip on a city of more than 1 million people — and what we can learn from it. Refer to If the U.S. military has learned anything about Iraqi insurgencies over the past 15 years, it’s that violence will likely return to Mosul, as it has on occasion in Baghdad—which the group never seized. And there are still other regions that Baghdad must wrest from ISIS. On top of that is the ISIS presence in Syria, where an entirely separate large-scale operation has been progressing for months. The target: the group’s *de facto* headquarters in Raqqa. Beyond that, ISIS also maintains strongholds south of Raqqa in the Euphrates River city of Deir Ez-Zour, and some 200 kilometers west, around the ancient city of Palmyra. Which is all to say: the battle for Mosul may soon be over, but the war against ISIS — already a generational conflict — is far from finished. [Source: Defense One | Ben Watson | 6 July 2017 ++]

Civil War Soldier Heroism ► United States Colored Troops

Several year ago, Dan Pyle was sitting on the sidewalk for the wreath-laying ceremony that Civil War buffs host annually at the gravesite of a Confederate soldier killed in Corbit's Charge, a skirmish that took place in Westminster on June 29, 1863. That Pyle was recovering from foot surgery at the time put him closer to the ground than normal, and a ray of sunlight happened to illuminate four faint letters on a worn gravestone nearby: USCT. "Holy cow," Pyle remembers thinking. Just 10 or 15 feet behind the headstone of a Confederate soldier was one for a member of the United States Colored Troops, the approximately 180,000 black soldiers who fought in the Union Army.



President of the Pipe Creek Round Table Steven Carney, left, and member Dan Pyle visit the grave of Cpl. Samuel Butler, a black Union soldier, at the Ascension Episcopal Church cemetery in Westminster.

Since then, USCT Corporal Samuel Butler has had a growing part in the annual weekend devoted to remembering Westminster's role in the Civil War. On 24 JUN, organizers placed a new Civil War veteran's marker on Butler's gravesite at the Church of the Ascension, where Confederate Lt. John William Murray is also buried. "The Confederate has his marker. We wanted to make sure [Butler] has his, too," said Steven Carney, chairman of the committee that organized the Corbit's Charge commemoration weekend. "Our organization has taken it on itself to honor both of them. We take care of both their graves."

A century and a half after the war, the USCT is emerging more fully from the shadows of history. According to the Library of Congress and the National Archives, black soldiers comprised 10 percent of the Union Army. But to the extent they're known today, it's mostly from the 1989 movie "Glory," which focused on a unit from Massachusetts. But recognition of their contributions is growing as descendants and history aficionados research specific soldiers or units. The curiosity of one family descended from a black Civil War soldier in St. Mary's County, for example, led to a memorial and statue to the USCT being erected in Lexington Park in 2012.

Blacks volunteered and organized for service from the start of the war in 1861. But it was only after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863, that they were officially "received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service." By the war's end, according to the National Archives, 16 black soldiers had earned the Medal of Honor. The discovery of Butler's grave at the church cemetery has led the Westminster group, the Pipe Creek Civil War Round Table, to "revamp" their annual event to include him. "When you get down to it, all veterans of that era are American soldiers. They're still our veterans," said Carney, 28. "We preserve Civil War history on both sides. You can't have one story told and not the other."

Corbit's Charge, also known as the Battle of Westminster, was a brief and lopsided clash. Fewer than 100 members of the 1st Delaware cavalry arrived on June 28, 1863, from Baltimore to guard the rail and road junction in

Westminster, according to the town's website. Meanwhile, Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart was advancing northward through Maryland with about 6,000 cavalry soldiers. He arrived in Westminster the following day. Union Capt. Charles Corbit led a cavalry charge against the confederates. Stuart's troops quickly overwhelmed the smaller Union force. Two Union troops were killed, and more than half the survivors were captured. Two Confederate officers also died. But the skirmish led Stuart to spend the night in the area, delaying his arrival at what would turn out to be the pivotal clash of the war: the Battle of Gettysburg. Stuart didn't reach the Pennsylvania town until July 2, after the fighting was already underway. Some believe that was a factor in the Confederacy's defeat there, from which it never recovered.

While the recently discovered Butler did not fight in Corbit's Charge, the Westminster Civil War group has tried to find out more about him. His gravestone identifies him as a member of Company C, 32nd regiment of the USCT. Pyle obtained his service records from the National Archives, which say he was a 37-year-old, 5-foot 9-inch man with a "Mulatto" complexion who was born in Frederick County and had worked as a laborer. He enlisted in Philadelphia on Feb. 21, 1864, in and was promoted to corporal two months later. After the war ended in May 1865, his unit was mustered out on 22 AUG. The final document notes he was due a "bounty" of \$300. It is unknown how Butler ended up buried at the Church of the Ascension. Pyle said Butler could have been from the area, giving him a reason to return after the war. Although his military records show he was born in Frederick County, part of the county became what is now Carroll County in 1837.

Pyle, 51, said he has always been interested in military history and now wants to focus some of his research on the USCT. A retired Army sergeant who now works as a real property manager for the Maryland National Guard, he hopes to write a book on USCT veterans who were born in Maryland. Butler's gravestone says he died at age 45 in 1868, although his military records indicate he should have been 41 in that year. But Pyle said there sometimes can be discrepancies in ages and the spelling of names in records from that era. And indeed, organizers of the weekend event initially thought a different Samuel Butler was buried in the church graveyard. After discovering Butler's grave, they reached out to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. The head of the Baltimore chapter, Tim McCoy, retrieved records of another Samuel Butler. McCoy realized just recently that he had the wrong one when he saw the Westminster gravestone identified Butler as a member of the 32nd regiment of the USCT.

McCoy's Samuel Butler was part of Company K of the 23rd regiment. He has a fascinating story of his own: Born in Fairfax, Va., he enlisted on May 13, 1864, as a "substitute for Marcus Vining of Cummington" in Massachusetts. (The Enrollment Act of 1863 allowed a draftee to pay another man to serve in his place.) Like others who have become interested in researching Civil War history, McCoy, 50, has a personal link: He has five pro-Union ancestors from Eastern Tennessee who fought for the North. His job with the Washington-based World Cocoa Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to sustainability in the industry would not seem to have anything to do with the Civil War. But his travels abroad allow him to seek out veterans gravesites in unlikely places. He has visited burial sites of Civil War veterans as far afield as Auckland, New Zealand. McCoy said he is happy to honor any USCT soldier. "These soldiers weren't even considered citizens in many parts of the country," he said. "And they defied the odds to defend the U.S. and help ensure the 'new birth of freedom' referred to by President Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address." [Source: The Baltimore Sun | Jean Marbella | June 24, 2017 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 JUL

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 July”**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | Jun 2017 ++]

Medal Of Honor Story ► Sal Guinta | Afghanistan



Go to <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/ouGhMzo-KZA/mqdefault.jpg> to listen to MOH awardee Sal Guinta recount the actions in Afghanistan that resulted in him being awarded the medal. [Source: The American Legion May 2017 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Flukey~Eugene B | WWII



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

Eugene Bennett Fluckey

Rank and organization: Commander, U.S. Navy, Commanding U.S.S. Barb

Place and date: Along coast of China, 19 December 1944 to 15 FEB 1945

Entered service: U.S. Naval Academy 13 JUN 1931 thru 6 JUN 1935

Born: October 5, 1913, Washington, D.C.

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as commanding officer of the U.S.S. Barb during her 11th war patrol along the east coast of China from 19 December 1944 to 15 February 1945. After sinking a large enemy ammunition ship and damaging additional tonnage during a running 2-hour night battle on 8 January, Comdr. Fluckey, in an exceptional feat of brilliant deduction and bold tracking on 25 January, located a concentration of more than 30 enemy ships in the lower reaches of Nankuan Chiang (Mamkwan Harbor). Fully aware that a safe retirement would necessitate an hour's run at full speed through the uncharted, mined, and rock-obstructed waters, he bravely ordered, "Battle station--torpedoes!" In a daring penetration of the

heavy enemy screen, and riding in 5 fathoms of water, he launched the Barb's last forward torpedoes at 3,000-yard range. Quickly bringing the ship's stern tubes to bear, he turned loose 4 more torpedoes into the enemy, obtaining 8 direct hits on 6 of the main targets to explode a large ammunition ship and cause inestimable damage by the resultant flying shells and other pyrotechnics. Clearing the treacherous area at high speed, he brought the Barb through to safety and 4 days later sank a large Japanese freighter to complete a record of heroic combat achievement, reflecting the highest credit upon Comdr. Fluckey, his gallant officers and men, and the U.S. Naval Service.



Fluckey was born in Washington, D.C. on October 5, 1913. He graduated from Western High School in Washington at age 15. He was too young to go to college, so his father sent him to the Mercersburg Academy in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. He also was a member of the Boy Scouts, achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. He prepared for the Naval Academy at Columbian Preparatory School, Washington. He entered the United States Naval Academy on June 13, 1931, and graduated and was commissioned an Ensign on June 6, 1935.

Fluckey's initial assignments with the Navy were aboard the battleship USS Nevada (BB-36), and in May 1936 he was transferred to the destroyer USS McCormick (DD-223). In June 1938, he reported for instruction at the Submarine School, New London, Connecticut and upon completion in December, he served on the submarine USS S-42 (SS-153), and in June 1941, he was assigned to the submarine USS Bonita (SS-165).[2]

During WWII he completed five war patrols on the Bonita and after he was detached from the submarine in June 1942, he returned to Annapolis for graduate instruction in naval engineering. In December 1943, he attended the Prospective Commanding Officer's School at the Submarine Base New London until January 1944, then reported to Commander Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet. After one war patrol as the prospective commanding officer of the submarine USS Barb (SS-220), he became the submarine's seventh commander in January 1944 to August 1945. Fluckey established himself as one of the greatest submarine skippers, credited with the most tonnage sunk by a U.S. Naval skipper during World War II: 17 ships including a carrier, cruiser, and frigate.

In one of the stranger incidents in the war, Fluckey sent a landing party ashore to set demolition charges on a coastal railway line, destroying a 16-car train. This was the sole landing by U.S. military forces on the Japanese home islands during World War II. Fluckey ordered that this landing party be composed of crewmen from every division on his submarine. "He chose an eight-man team with no married men to blow up the train," Captain Max Duncan said, who served as Torpedo Officer on the Barb during this time. "He also wanted former Boy Scouts because he thought they could find their way back. They were paddling back to the ship when the train blew up." The selected crewmen were Paul Saunders, William Hatfield, Francis Sever, Lawrence Newland, Edward Klingsmith, James Richard, John Markuson, and William Walker. Hatfield wired the explosive charge, using a microswitch under the rails to trigger the explosion.

Fluckey was awarded four Navy Crosses for extraordinary heroism during the eighth, ninth, tenth, and twelfth war patrols of Barb. During his famous eleventh patrol, he continued to revolutionize submarine warfare, inventing the night convoy attack from astern by joining the flank escort line. He attacked two convoys at anchor 26 miles inside the 20 fathom curve on the China coast, totaling more than 30 ships. With two frigates pursuing, Barb set a then-world speed record for a submarine of 23.5 knots using 150% overload. For his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, Fluckey received the Medal of Honor. Barb received the Presidential Unit Citation for the eighth through eleventh patrols and the Navy Unit Commendation for the twelfth patrol.

In August 1945, Fluckey was ordered to Groton, Connecticut in September, to fit out the USS Dogfish (SS-350) and to be that submarine's Commanding Officer, upon her completion. After the Dogfish's launching, however, he was transferred in November to the Office of the Secretary of the Navy to work directly for James V. Forrestal on plans for the unification of the Armed Forces. From there he went to the War Plans Division. In November 1945, he was selected by Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the incoming Chief of Naval Operations, as his personal aide. On June 9, 1947, he returned to submarines, assuming command of USS Halfbeak (SS-352) until May 1948, the second submarine to be converted to a GUPPY-type high-speed attack submarine with a snorkel. In May 1948, he was ordered to the staff of the commander of the Submarine Force U.S. Atlantic Fleet to set up the Submarine Naval Reserve Force, until July 1950.

In August 1950, he became the flag secretary to Admiral James Fife, Jr.. From August 1950 until July 1953, he served as the U.S. Naval Attache and Naval Attache for Air to Portugal. The Portuguese government, for his distinguished service, decorated him with the Medalha de Mérito Militar, noting that this was the first time this decoration was awarded to a naval attache of any other nation. He was the commander of Submarine Division Fifty-Two of Submarine Squadron Five from August 1953 to June 1954. In June 1954, he took command of the submarine tender USS Sperry (AS-12) until July 1955. Fluckey commanded Submarine Flotilla Seven (now Submarine Group 7) from October 14, 1955, to January 14, 1956. He then returned to the Naval Academy to become the chairman of the Electrical Engineering Department.

His selection for the rank of rear admiral was approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in July 1960, and in October, he reported as Commander, Amphibious Group 4. In November 1961, he became the president of the Naval Board of Inspection and Survey, Washington, D.C.. He was ComSubPac (Commander Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet), from June 1964 to June 1966. In July 1966, he became the Director of Naval Intelligence. Two years later, he became Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Portugal. Fluckey retired from active duty as a Rear Admiral in 1972.

After he retired from the Navy in 1972, his wife, Marjorie, died in 1979, after 42 years of marriage. He later ran an orphanage with his second wife, Margaret, in Portugal for a number of years. He has one daughter, Barbara. His book, *Thunder Below!* published in 1992, depicts the exploits of his beloved Barb. "Though the tally shows more shells, bombs, and depth charges fired at Barb, no one received the Purple Heart and Barb came back alive, eager, and ready to fight again." [4] The book won the Samuel Eliot Morison prize for Best Naval Literature in 1993. Fluckey died at age 93, from complications of Alzheimer's disease, at Anne Arundel Medical Center in Annapolis, Maryland, on June 28, 2007. He is buried at the United States Naval Academy cemetery.

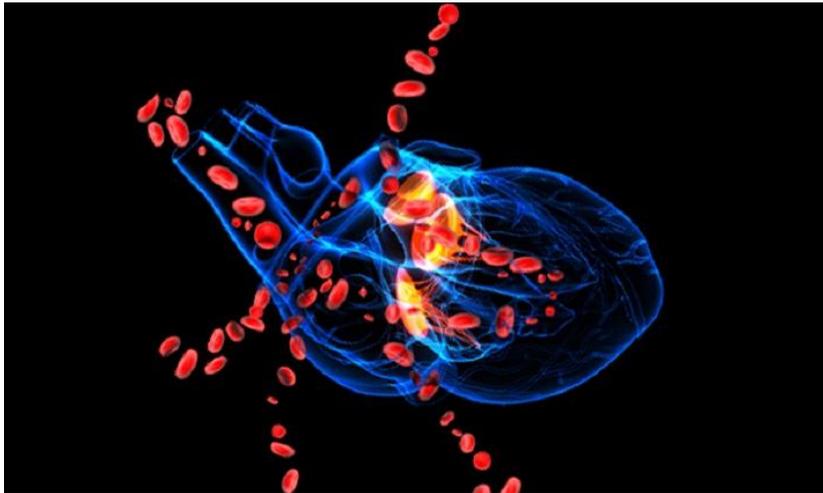
[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | July 2017 ++]

*** Health Care ***



Heart Disease Update 03 ► Men's

The number one threat to men's health in the United States is cardiovascular disease, or heart disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 321,000 men died from heart disease in 2013, or one in every four male deaths. Making just a few lifestyle changes can significantly lower the risk of heart disease. Common risk factors of heart disease are smoking, drugs, alcohol, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, physical inactivity, obesity and being overweight, an unhealthy diet and stress. "There are modifiable factors you can change and unmodifiable factors you can't change," said Navy Lt. Ruth Cortes, physician assistant. "Modifiable factors are things you can change like your smoking or dietary habits. Unmodifiable factors are things like age, your gender, your race and family history."



A blue 3D drawing of a human heart with large red blood cells flowing out. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 321,000 men died from heart disease in 2013, or one in every four male deaths.

To lower their risk of getting a cardiovascular disease, men can maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, not use tobacco products, limit alcohol consumption and have yearly physical examinations to identify any changes in their health. "Common risk factors [I see] include tobacco use which includes cigarettes, dip, vaping and cigars; high blood pressure or high cholesterol," said Navy Lt. Stephanie Horigan, critical care nurse. "Over half of the patients in hospitals for cardiovascular disease generally have high blood pressure or cholesterol or they use tobacco or a combination of the three."

While both the civilian and military sectors have their share of risk factors, there are many factors the military has that the civilian sector does not. "We are exposed to an environment of higher stress," said Cortes. "We have easier accessibility to fast food and poor food either on base or off base because they are always close by, peer pressure to start drinking and smoking which can affect cardiovascular risk, and the environmental factors that can't be changed such as deployments and workload."

Only half of all patients who suffer from heart attacks show symptoms prior to the attack. Symptoms of sudden cardiac events, or heart attacks, include feeling dizzy, racing heartbeat and jaw or arm pain. "There is no definitive

way to know if you have cardiovascular disease unless you see a medical professional but you can know if you have a higher risk," said Horigan. "If you're overweight, you're a smoker and your mother and father have heart disease, there is a good chance your risk of heart disease is much higher."

According to the 2014 Defense Manpower Data Center's Active Duty Military Personnel Master File, 83.5 percent of all service members are male. "Men rarely ever go see a doctor because men are supposed to be tough," said Cortes. "There are many studies on it. They're humiliated or called out if they want to go see a doctor even if it's a legitimate issue. They put it off and put it off until they pass out on the field and someone has to bring them in for dehydration. I think it's harder for men in the military because of the way they think they're going to get treated." Although it is typical of men to avoid seeing a doctor, it is best for them and their family if they didn't wait until a condition is severe or irreversible to treat. The earlier a cardiovascular disease is identified, the better the chances of survival. [Source: Health.mil | Bryan Mai | June 19, 2017 ++]

Flu Shots Update 10 ► Dissolving Microneedle Patch Alternative

A National Institutes of Health-funded study led by a team at the Georgia Institute of Technology and Emory University has shown that an influenza vaccine can produce robust immune responses and be administered safely with an experimental patch of dissolving microneedles. The method is an alternative to needle-and-syringe immunization; with further development, it could eliminate the discomfort of an injection as well as the inconvenience and expense of visiting a flu clinic. "This bandage-strip sized patch of painless and dissolvable needles can transform how we get vaccinated," said Roderic I. Pettigrew, Ph.D., M.D., director of the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB), which funded the study. "A particularly attractive feature is that this vaccination patch could be delivered in the mail and self-administered. In addition, this technology holds promise for delivering other vaccines in the future."

The study was published online 27 JUN, in *The Lancet*. The vaccine patch consists of 100 solid, water-soluble needles that are just long enough to penetrate the skin. "The skin is an immune surveillance organ," Prausnitz said. "It's our interface with the outside world, so it's very well equipped to detect a pathogen and mount an immune response against it." Adhesive helps the patch grip the skin during the administration of the vaccine, which is encapsulated in the needles and is released as the needle tips dissolve, within minutes. The patch is peeled away and discarded like a used bandage strip.

The researchers enrolled 100 adult participants, dividing them into four random groups: vaccination with microneedle patch given by a health care provider; vaccination with microneedle patch self-administered by the study participant; vaccination with intramuscular injection given by a health care provider; and placebo microneedle patch given by a health care provider. The researchers used an inactivated influenza vaccine formulated for the 2014-15 flu season to inoculate participants other than those in the placebo group. The researchers found that vaccination with the microneedle patches was safe, with no serious related adverse events reported. Some participants developed local skin reactions to the patches, described as faint redness and mild itching that lasted two to three days.

The results also showed that antibody responses generated by the vaccine, as measured through analysis of blood samples, were similar in the groups vaccinated using patches and those receiving intramuscular injection, and these immune responses were still present after six months. More than 70 percent of patch recipients reported they would prefer patch vaccination over injection or intranasal vaccination for future vaccinations. No significant difference was seen between the doses of vaccine delivered by the health care workers and the volunteers who self-administered the patches, showing that participants were able to correctly self-administer the patch. After vaccination, imaging of the used patches found that the microneedles had dissolved in the skin, suggesting that the used patches could be safely discarded as non-sharps waste. The vaccines remained potent in the patches without

refrigeration for at least one year.

The prospective vaccine technology could offer economic and manufacturing advantages. The manufacturing cost for the patch is expected to be competitive with prefilled syringe costs. The patch, however, can dramatically reduce the cost of vaccination, since self-administration can eliminate the need to have health workers oversee the process. It can be easily packaged for transportation, requires no refrigeration, and is stable. To see and hear ore on the patch refer to <https://www.youtube.com/embed/AhSAQTVLkvQ?autoplay=1>. The team plans to conduct further clinical trials to pursue the technology’s ultimate availability to patients. They also are working to develop microneedle patches for use with other vaccines, including measles, rubella and polio. [Source: National Institute of Health News Release | June 27, 2017 +]

Sleep Apnea Update 06 ► Don't Let It Steal Your Sweet Dreams

Most people who have sleep apnea don’t realize it. That’s because this disorder only occurs during sleep. Sleep apnea is when you have pauses in breathing while you’re asleep. These pauses can last from seconds to minutes. You may have difficulty breathing a few times or dozens of times an hour. These breathing pauses can be dangerous if they cause the oxygen level in your body to drop or disturb your sleep. When oxygen drops, your brain does whatever it can to get you to resume breathing. And then you may snore, gasp, snort loudly, or make a choking sound. A family member or bed partner might be the first to notice these disruptions in your sleep.



Sleep apnea is a common disorder. Anyone can develop it. “Sleep apnea can occur in both genders, in all races and ethnicities, and in people of all sizes and shapes,” says Dr. Michael Twery, a sleep expert at NIH. The most common type of sleep apnea is called obstructive sleep apnea. Any air that squeezes past a blocked airway can cause loud snoring. When you’re awake, the muscles in your throat help keep your airway stiff and open. In adults, the throat muscles and tongue can relax during sleep, or fat tissue in the neck can narrow your airway to cause an obstruction. In children, the airway may become blocked if their tonsils are so large they obstruct the airway opening. The other type of sleep apnea is central sleep apnea. In central sleep apnea, the brain doesn’t send the correct signals to your breathing muscles, so you stop breathing for brief periods.

So how can you tell whether you may have this disorder? One of the most common symptoms is excessive daytime sleepiness. “Anyone who feels so tired on a regular basis that this is a drag on their daytime function—that even if they allow enough time to get enough sleep on a regular basis and they still feel this way—then they need to discuss it with their doctor,” Twery says. Another common symptom is loud, frequent snoring. But not everyone who snores has sleep apnea. Other symptoms of sleep apnea may include feeling irritable or depressed, or having mood swings. You may have memory problems or trouble concentrating. Or, you may wake up with a headache or a dry mouth.

Your doctor can diagnose sleep apnea based on your symptoms, a physical exam, and a sleep study. For a sleep study, your doctor may send you to a sleep lab or provide a portable sleep monitor. Sleep studies record things like heart rate and oxygen level while you sleep. A sleep study can show whether apnea is mild or severe. “The largest proportion of the population with sleep apnea has mild sleep apnea,” Twery explains. “Mild may or may not be associated with any daytime symptoms.” People who are so sleepy that they’re at risk of a drowsy driving accident

are probably in the moderate to severe range. Doctors may prescribe breathing devices that pump air or mouthpieces that adjust the lower jaw or hold the tongue. Other treatments are available and may be considered with advice from a physician familiar with your health.

If you feel extremely sleepy during the daytime or your bed partner says that you stop breathing when you're asleep, go talk with your doctor. Everyone deserves a good night's sleep. Some self-care tips for breathing better while you're sleeping are:

- **Avoid alcohol before bedtime and don't take medicines that make you sleepy.** They make it harder for your throat to stay open when you're asleep.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Extra fat in the walls of your throat can make it narrower.
- **Sleep on your side instead of your back.** This helps keep your throat open.
- **Ask your physician about medicines.** Some medications can help open your nasal passages.

[Source: NIH Health in News | July 2017 ++]

Biosensors ► What's Your Body Trying to Tell You

Your body alerts you to many aspects of your health. Your stomach growling tells you when to eat. A powerful yawn lets you know you're tired. Your body gives off many other valuable signals, but requires technology to detect them. Scientists are looking for new ways to track and use your body's signals to improve your health and manage disease. Physical activity trackers and step counters are now helping people develop and maintain healthy habits. These devices have also opened doors for people to participate in health research. Now, researchers are designing more advanced devices called biosensors that measure biological, chemical, and physical signs of health. "The variety of biosensors used by researchers, clinicians, and people from every walk of life is growing," says Dr. Šeila Selimović, a biosensors expert at NIH.

"Some speed up test results so treatments can be started promptly. Others provide the benefits of continuous monitoring of health conditions. Biosensors function in fascinating ways. They use chemical attraction, electrical currents, light-detection systems, and compact wireless-sensing technologies." Some common types of sensors are:

- **The mercury thermometer.** It is one of the earliest biosensor technologies used in medicine. In modern thermometers, mercury has been replaced by safer temperature-sensitive probes. But the goal is still the same: to detect changes in your body temperature.
- **Home pregnancy test.** It uses color-changing strips to detect pregnancy hormones in urine. Pregnancy tests are still done in doctor's offices. But the home test has become a reliable alternative since it was first introduced more than 40 years ago.
- **Rapid strep test.** If you have a sore throat, your doctor may want to use one to test for bacteria called streptococci. The rapid strep test can provide results from a swab of the back of your throat in a few minutes—with 95% accuracy. Your doctor may still send a throat swab to a lab to confirm a positive test result. But they can use the rapid test results to start treatment immediately.

In parts of the world where public health care isn't readily available, researchers hope to introduce rapid tests for people living in remote regions to test for infections like influenza, HIV, and hepatitis C. New biosensor technologies can now be combined with smart phone cameras and wireless signaling. These advances make health tests more portable and affordable than lab-based equipment. Biosensors can also be used to continuously monitor a health condition. Blood-oxygen monitors are now found throughout hospitals and in patients' homes. These devices detect changes in the level of oxygen in the bloodstream. A rapid drop in oxygen can cause brain injury and requires quick medical attention. Blood oxygen monitors are ideal for people with lung and heart conditions, those

undergoing anesthesia, or those being treated in intensive, neonatal, or emergency care. Other biosensors can be used to continuously monitor your blood sugar levels (for managing diabetes), blood pressure, or heart rate.

Flexible sensors are making even more types of monitoring possible. A team of engineers, led by Dr. Patrick Mercier and Dr. Joseph Wang at the University of California San Diego, is developing a flexible sensor that measures blood alcohol levels. It looks like a temporary tattoo. The sensor releases a sweat-promoting chemical into the skin and detects alcohol in the sweat. The sensor then sends the information wirelessly to a laptop or mobile device. Similar devices are being developed by other groups to monitor cystic fibrosis and other diseases and conditions. At the University of Minnesota, a group of researchers led by Dr. Michael McAlpine has developed inks for 3-D printing sensors that are flexible, stretchable, and sensitive. These sensors can be used to detect human movements, such as flexing a finger. They can be printed directly onto skin and used to detect body signals, like a pulse. They can also detect chemicals in the environment and be used to warn of hazards.

NIH also supports research to use sensors to gather data about environmental and other factors involved in childhood asthma. These sensor systems monitor what children are exposed to and their body's reactions. For example, Dr. Zhenyu Li, a biomedical engineer at George Washington University, is developing a sensor that can be worn on a child's wrist to detect formaldehyde, an air pollutant that can trigger asthma. "Researchers don't have tools at the moment that can monitor environmental triggers, physiological responses, and behavior without interrupting normal activities," Li says. There are many different asthma triggers, he explains. He expects to have a wearable sensor prototype that he and his clinical partners can begin testing with patients. He's also working on a device that can be placed in a child's home to detect multiple air pollutants, like those found in tobacco smoke and some manufactured wood products, such as flooring and furniture.

Biosensors can be placed inside your body as well. Dr. Natalie Wisniewski, a biomedical engineer at a medical device company in San Francisco called Profusa, is developing miniature sensors that can be injected under the skin. These sensors automatically track chemicals in your body without drawing blood. They continuously scan multiple factors at once. Normally, you need to stay in a hospital to have your body chemistry continuously monitored. With this technology, information about the chemicals in your body could be accessed around the clock, from anywhere. Once placed under the skin, such biosensors can last for months to years. They can monitor various body functions through chemical changes. All this information can be collected on a cell phone app and shared with your physician, a caretaker, or anyone else you choose. "Health sensors have the potential to dramatically improve the way we practice medicine and shift the focus away from reactive treatments to preventive maintenance," Wisniewski explains.

Biosensors are quickly becoming part of our normal health care routines. New sensor technologies are opening avenues to better health. Researchers are working to develop the biosensors of tomorrow. These could provide access to better health in ways we can't yet imagine. [Source: NIH Health in News | July 2017 ++]

Prostate Cancer Update 16 ► Overdiagnosed and Overtreated

Prostate cancer may be thought of as a disease that primarily impacts older men, but all men – regardless of age – should be aware of their risk. It is the second most common cancer among males in the United States, behind only skin cancer. But there is good news: It's highly treatable if detected early. "Many men die with prostate cancer and not from it," said Army Lt. Col. Dustin Boyer, Office of the Surgeon General Consultant for Radiation Oncology at Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii. Roughly one in six males will be diagnosed with it in his lifetime. The National Cancer Institute estimates more than 161,000 men in the United States will be diagnosed with the disease this year alone. Nearly all of them – more than 98 percent – will be alive five years after diagnosis.

“We’ve seen some pretty exciting advances over the past year, from a better understanding of the genetics of prostate cancer to improved imaging modalities and targeted drugs,” said Boyer. A recent study of a personalized genetic test has proven to predict the risk of prostate cancer returning after prostate gland removal or radiotherapy, he said. The test identifies abnormal genetic DNA of the prostate cancer and its oxygen content. “The studies suggest that this information can predict with almost 80 percent accuracy, and in about three days, the prostate cancer patients who are at greatest risk of recurrence,” said Boyer. “This is a good thing because identifying patients who will [most likely] die from other causes will allow us to follow these patients and avoid the side effects of treatment. It will also identify patients who are likely to die from the disease [if untreated] and thus should be treated more aggressively.”

Although the chance of developing prostate cancer increases with age, younger men can still be at risk. Men who are 40 or older, have a male relative with a history of prostate cancer, or are African-American have a higher risk of developing the cancer. In the past, men age 50 or older were encouraged to have a prostate-specific antigen blood test – also known as a PSA test – every year to screen for prostate cancer. In 2012, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended against PSA screening, citing that the slow-growing disease is often overdiagnosed and overtreated. The task force concluded that the side effects of treatment, as well as the psychological and emotional distress of diagnosis, can do more harm than good. Side effects can include urinary, bowel, or erectile dysfunction, fatigue, pain, vomiting, and nausea, among others.

Since prostate cancer advances slowly, not all cases require treatment. Patients can discuss alternative options with their physician, such as monitoring the cancer – known as active surveillance. The American Urology Association recommends males age 55 to 69 get screened every two years, and recommends discussing PSA testing with a doctor. “If you have any concerns about your risk for prostate cancer, it’s best to talk to your primary care provider about the risks and benefits of PSA screening,” said Boyer. Early stages of the disease do not show symptoms. Signs of more advanced prostate cancer are trouble urinating, blood in urine, and discomfort in the pelvic area.

There is no definitive way to prevent prostate cancer, but there are things men can do that might lower their risk, said Boyer. These include eating a nutritious diet, being physically active, and maintaining a healthy weight. A diet that includes at least two-and-a-half cups of a wide variety of vegetables and fruits each day can’t hurt, he added. “It’s important to spread awareness about prostate cancer,” said Boyer. “It may not impact your life right now, but knowing what to look out for and what questions to ask can help later on in life.” [Source: Health.mil | June 29, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 404 ► Prostrate Cancer | Child Obesity | Vitamin D

Prostrate Cancer Research -- Prostrate cancer affects all men, regardless of age. It is the second most common cancer among males in the United States, behind only skin cancer. But there is good news: It’s highly treatable if detected early. The National Cancer Institute estimates more than 161,000 men in the United States will be diagnosed with the disease this year alone. Nearly all of them, more than 98 percent, will be alive five years after diagnosis. There’s been many advances over the past year, from a better understanding of the genetics of prostate cancer to improved imaging modalities and targeted drugs. A recent study of a personalized genetic test has proven to predict the risk of prostate cancer returning after prostate gland removal or radiotherapy. The test identifies abnormal genetic DNA of the prostate cancer. Although the chance of developing prostate cancer increases with age, younger men can still be at risk. Men who are 40 or older, have a male relative with a history of prostate cancer, or are and its oxygen content. African-American have a higher risk of developing the cancer.

Since prostate cancer advances slowly, not all cases require treatment. Patients should discuss their options with their doctors. The American Urology Association recommends males age 55 to 69 get screened every two years, and recommends discussing PSA testing with a doctor. TRICARE covers exams and screenings for prostate cancer. There is no definitive way to prevent prostate cancer, but there are things men can do that might lower their risk. These include eating a nutritious diet, being physically active, and maintaining a healthy weight. A diet that includes at least two-and-a-half cups of a wide variety of vegetables and fruits each day can't hurt either!

For TRICARE, I'm Jenny Sokol.

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Avoidable Childhood Obesity -- With most children on summer vacation, parents may want to take this opportunity to make sure their children are getting plenty of exercise and fresh air. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention obesity among children and adolescents between the ages of two and nineteen is about seventeen percent. Nearly twenty percent of twelve to nineteen year olds are obese. By adding just one hour of moderate physical activity daily can help a child avoid the health problems associated with childhood obesity. Spending more time outside is good for children beyond the weight loss and weight management benefit. Physical activity helps children deal better with stress. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that play protects children's emotional development; but less free time and a hurried lifestyle can be a source of stress, anxiety, and may contribute to depression for many children. This summer, be sure your children spend time playing outside. Consider playing with them to reap your own health benefits! Visit health.mil/olw for more healthy living ideas.

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Vitamin D -- This is an essential nutrient your body produces when your skin is exposed to sunlight. But did you know there are ways to get it from foods too? It helps your body absorb calcium and maintains the calcium and phosphate your bones need to form and grow. It also contributes to cell growth, immunity, and nerve and muscle function, and it can help reduce inflammation. In addition, it plays key roles in reducing your risk of many adverse health conditions, including depression, cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis and others. Fair-skinned people can get enough Vitamin D from as little as 15 minutes in the sun; the darker your skin, the longer it will take. People often don't get enough exposure. A little time outside on a sunny day with your arms and legs uncovered can provide nearly all the vitamin D most people need, but that can be challenging when you're working inside all day, or in winter.

Unlike other nutrients, vitamin D occurs naturally in very few foods, so it can be difficult to get enough through your diet. That's why some foods are "fortified" with vitamin D, meaning they have vitamin D added. Nearly one-fourth of people living in the U.S. have low vitamin D levels, which can lead to osteoporosis, autoimmune diseases, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, and more. For more information about vitamin D, visit www.ods.od.nih.gov.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | June 30, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 405 ► Updating DEERS | Oral Health | Heart Disease

Updating DEERS -- The Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS, is a database that manages your eligibility status. DEERS is used for all active duty, National Guard and Reserve, and retired service members worldwide and their family members. The information you provide in DEERS confirms your eligibility and your family members' eligibility for TRICARE coverage and programs. It also determines your assigned TRICARE region. It's important to keep your information current, especially during life changes, such as moving, getting

married or divorced, and having children. Only sponsors, or a sponsor-appointed individual with valid power of attorney, can add family members in DEERS. When there's a change in information, each family member's DEERS record must be updated separately.

It's important for sponsors to register new spouses and children in DEERS to ensure their TRICARE coverage. The sponsor needs to provide a copy of the marriage or birth certificate and/or adoption papers to the nearest uniformed services ID card office, or to a DEERS representative in remote locations. To find your nearest office, visit dmdc.osd.mil/rsl. Sponsors must also update DEERS if they divorce. Certain former spouses who haven't remarried may be eligible for continued coverage. Check with the sponsor's service personnel office to verify eligibility and find out what documentation is necessary to continue TRICARE coverage. For more information, visit www.TRICARE.mil/DEERS.

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Oral Health -- When people think of good oral health, they typically think of brushing, flossing and visiting the dentist. These actions are certainly critical to strong oral health. What people tend to overlook, however, is the impact of the foods and beverages they eat and drink every day. Sugary sweets, like candy, are major contributors to tooth decay and cavities. Eating a wide variety of nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains will help keep your teeth and body healthy. High-fiber foods like fruits and vegetables take longer to chew, which stimulates saliva. This increased production is beneficial because saliva neutralizes the acids that damage teeth. High-fiber foods also have a high-water content, an added benefit for both your teeth and body.

When it comes to beverages, many juices are loaded with added sugar. Be sure to read labels and look for 100 percent fruit juice or beverages with little or no sugar added. Water acts as a rinsing agent for teeth, which is even better if the water is fluorinated, acting to strengthen enamel. Try to gradually phase out the sugary sodas and juices from your diet and increase your water intake. View your oral health holistically and make small changes that will make a big difference. To learn more about dental health, visit www.uccitdp.com and click on "Health and Wellness."

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Avoiding Heart Disease -- You wake up one morning and feel pressure in your chest and then a sharp pain. Are you having a heart attack? You call 911 just to be safe. How did this happen, or what could you have done to prevent it? Regular heart, cholesterol and blood pressure screenings can help you stay healthy. TRICARE covers heart disease screenings that include cholesterol and blood pressure checks.

The heart pumps blood to the body to provide necessary oxygen and nourishment to keep us alive and healthy. When the heart can't pump blood as well as it should or there's reduced blood flow to the heart, it can lead to heart disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. A majority of the risk factors are those that we can control, modify or treat, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. If you don't know if your blood pressure or cholesterol levels are in the healthy range, make sure to talk to your doctor to find out. High blood pressure often has no signs or symptoms until someone experiences a stroke or heart attack. The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to get it checked regularly. TRICARE recommends adults have their blood pressure checked at least once every two years. You'll also get a blood pressure screening each time you visit your doctor.

People with high cholesterol have about twice the risk of heart disease as people with lower levels. Like high blood pressure, you may not be aware that your cholesterol level is too high until something is wrong because you experience no symptoms. That's why it's important to schedule regular visits with your doctor to get your cholesterol levels checked. TRICARE covers cholesterol testing as recommended by National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure or cholesterol, your doctor will work with you to come up with the best way to treat your condition. For more information about your heart-related benefits, visit www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices.

The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | July 07, 2017 ++]

*** Finances ***



LinkedIn Scam ► Bogus Connection Requests

Just as job hunters use LinkedIn to connect with former colleagues and potential employers, scammers use the networking service to find targets. If you have a LinkedIn account, watch out for suspicious "recruiters" and job offers.

How the Scam Works:

- You get a LinkedIn message asking you to apply for a job. It comes from someone who appears to be a recruiter. You check out their LinkedIn profile, and it looks real. You may even have several connections in common!
- From here, the scam works in a couple of different ways. Sometimes, the message contains a link that appears to point to an online job application. You are supposed to upload your resume and provide personal information, anything from your address to Social Security/Social Insurance number. Other times, you respond to the message and are "hired" for the job. Then, you are asked to pay upfront for training and/or others expenses.
- No matter the details of the scam, the job never materializes. The scammer takes the money or information and disappears. Victims who share person details are at risk for identity theft.

How to Spot a LinkedIn Scam: Here are some tips for dealing with job scams on LinkedIn.

- Set your LinkedIn privacy settings. You can limit which LinkedIn users can send you messages or connection requests. Go here to make adjustments.
- Don't accept every request you get. Check out the user's profile for completeness and correct grammar. Just because you have several connections in common, does not mean they are real. Scammers frequently create a large network to look more legitimate.
- Ask to talk on the phone. If a recruiter contacts you through email, ask to speak by phone. Scammers will try to dodge this with excuses, such as being out the country.
- Check out BBB Tips: Many job scams use similar techniques, see www.bbb.org/employmentscam for more advice.
- Read more about scams on LinkedIn's blog at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-scams-how-spot-fake-connection-requests-bukhari>

To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips (www.bbb.org/scamtips). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (www.bbb.org/scamtracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | June 30, 2017 ++]

Wi-Fi Scam ► Beware Free Connection Offer

If you are travelling this summer and taking advantage of free Wi-Fi hotspots, double check before connecting your laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Scammers use fake Wi-Fi hotspots to steal personal information and/or gain access to your device.

How the Scam Works:

- You are at a coffee shop, airport, hotel lobby, or other public place, and you want to connect to the Wi-Fi. You search for connections and find one nearby. It may be labeled something generic like "Free Public Wi-Fi." This may look harmless, but don't connect. It is really a scam!
- Some fake Wi-Fi hotspots claim to be charging a small fee to use the connection. After a user connects, they are prompted to enter credit card information. Of course, this info is shared with the scammer.
- In another version, a hacker inserts him or herself between your computer and the Wi-Fi connection. Everything you do online – such as make a purchase or log into an account – is now transmitted through the scammer's computer. This means they can now access any passwords, credit card information, and other data you've entered online.

Protect Yourself From a Wi-Fi Scam: Here are some suggestions to safely use public Wi-Fi connections:

- Be sure you are using the correct Wi-Fi connection: If you are in a place that offers free Wi-Fi, verify the name of the connection before joining. Scammers often set up fake hotspots next to real ones.
- Be careful how you use public Wi-Fi: When using a hotspot to log into an account or make a purchase, be sure the site is fully encrypted (Use "https").
- Consider using a VPN: If you regularly access public Wi-Fi, use a virtual private network (VPN). VPNs encrypt traffic between your computer and the Internet, even on unsecured networks.
- Always use antivirus software and a firewall. Protect your computer (and some cell phones) by using anti-virus software and a firewall from a reputable company.
- Use good password sense: Protect yourself from hacking by using strong passwords and creating a different password for each account.

For More Information check out <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0014-tips-using-public-wi-fi-networks> tips from the Federal Trade Commission on using public Wi-Fi networks. To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips (bbb.org/scamtips). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (bbb.org/scamtracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | July 07, 2017 ++]

Debt Collection Update 12 ► Harassment | How to Deal with It

Your phone rings late at night. The caller tells you he has a warrant for your daughter's arrest over an unpaid debt he's trying to collect. Heart-stopping words? Or maybe a text lights up your cellphone: "YOUR PAYMENT DECLINED WITH [YOUR CREDIT CARD NUMBER] ... CALL 888-555-1234 IMMEDIATELY." Does that look like a fraud alert from your credit card company? Both messages are just sneaky, illegal scare tactics that unsavory debt collectors may use in their odious attempts to squeeze cash from you — even if you don't owe anyone any money. You can fight back. You might even get a lawyer to fight for you for free.

Debt collection businesses must abide by federal laws designed to protect consumers. Federal courts have banned dozens of firms from participating in the debt collection business due to abuse allegations. Here's what to watch for and how to stop harassment by debt collectors.

Know your rights -- A federal law called the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act details practices that are off-limits for debt collectors. They include:

- Lying about the amount you owe.
- Using foul language.
- Making threats of violence or harm.
- Calling repeatedly to annoy you.
- Calling you at work (if you've told them orally or in writing that your employer doesn't allow you to get such calls in the workplace).
- Publishing a list of individuals with outstanding debts.
- Falsely claiming to be a lawyer or someone who works for a government agency as a means of harassing, threatening or deceiving you.
- Falsely claiming you have committed a crime or will be arrested.

Additionally, debt collectors must send you what's known as a "validation notice" in writing within five days of first contacting you. It must include:

- The amount of money you owe.
- The name of the creditor to whom you owe the money.
- How you should proceed if you don't think you owe the money.

What you do upon receipt of this notice affects what debt collectors can do going forward. The Federal Trade Commission explains: "If you send the debt collector a letter stating that you don't owe any or all of the money, or asking for verification of the debt, that collector must stop contacting you. You have to send that letter within 30 days after you receive the validation notice. But a collector can begin contacting you again if it sends you written verification of the debt ..." If a debt collector takes any of the above illegal actions or fails to do what is required of them, tell them you know your rights and will file a complaint.

The FTC advises that you report abuse to the commission as well as the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and your state attorney general's office. You can contact and file complaints with federal agencies online. To find out how to contact your state attorney general, visit the National Association of Attorneys General's website <http://www.naag.org/naag/attorneys-general/whos-my-ag.php>.

How to stop debt collection harassment -- Attorney Craig Kimmel of Kimmel & Silverman tells Money Talks News that if you are contacted by a debt collector, you should tell them you want everything in writing. Do not give them any personal information over the phone. To keep collectors at bay, you can also tell them you don't want to be contacted by phone and then hang up. Additionally, write a letter, or have a lawyer write a letter for you, saying that you don't want to be contacted. Documentation is key to fighting abuse, especially if you decide you want a lawyer to help you fight abuse. So if you send a letter, for example, keep a copy for yourself and get a return receipt to prove the collector got the letter. If the company is abusive on the phone, log the time of every call, the person you spoke to, and what he or she said.

If you sue a debt collector within one year of their violation and you win the case, you could be awarded damages or reimbursed for attorney fees, the FTC says. Additionally, the collector could be ordered to pay you up to \$1,000. Some consumer attorneys also represent abuse victims for free. "We know we can get paid if we can go after the debt collector successfully," Kimmel says. Lawyers need good documentation, though. Another option if a collector crosses the line is to consult the debt collector harassment page of MoneyTalksNews' Solutions Center <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/solutions/collector-harassment>. Money Talks News has partnered with Debt.com to match you with a reputable expert who can help you. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | y Jim Gold | July 5, 2017 ++]

State Retirement Income Tax Update 01 ► North Carolina Senate Action

Senators want to give a state income tax break to more North Carolina military veterans on retirement pay or benefits received by surviving family members. The state Senate voted 5 JUL to expand how many income tax filers can deduct military pensions or survivorship benefits. A court settlement during the 1990s already gives that break to retirees who served in the military for at least five years prior to August 1989. Supporters of expanding the deduction say it will make North Carolina more attractive to service members. Such advantages also could favor military installations in eastern North Carolina during the next round of base closings. The House would still have to approve the tax break, which legislative staff estimate could cost state coffers up to \$32 million annually within five years. [Source: Associated Press | June 29, 2017 ++]

Medicare Coverage Rates ► 2017

You may remember some years ago, Medicare had to fix the payment system used to pay doctors. A permanent fix was passed in 2015. The permanent fix established new income tiers for Part B premiums to pay for the doctor payment fix. The new income tiers start in 2018. Below you can compare the current income tiers against the 2018 income tiers. You will see how the higher income tiers have smaller amounts thereby making more people pay higher premiums in the future. The 2018 Part B premiums are not known at this time.

| Tax Filing Status | 2017 | 2017 Part B Premiums | 2018 |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Single | Less than \$85,001 | \$134mo | Less than \$85,001 |
| Married | Less than \$170,001 | | Less than \$170,001 |
| Single | \$85,001 - \$107,000 | \$187.50 | \$85,001 - \$107,000 |
| Married | \$170,001 - \$214,000 | | \$170,001 - \$214,000 |
| Single | \$107,001 - \$160,000 | \$267.90 | \$107,001 - \$133,500 |
| Married | \$214,001 - \$320,000 | | \$214,001 - \$267,000 |
| Single | \$160,001 - \$214,000 | \$348.30 | \$133,501 - \$160,000 |
| Married | \$320,001 - \$428,000 | | \$267,001 - \$320,000 |
| Single | More than \$241,000 | \$428.60 | More than \$160,000 |
| Married | More than \$428,000 | | More than \$320,000 |

[Source: MOAA | June 28, 2017 ++]

Gig Economy ► A Means for Seniors to Available Funds

The share of Americans working past age 64 has been rising for a few decades now. It recently stood at 19 percent — the highest it’s been since 1962. Working in your golden years might sound like a miserable prospect, but it doesn’t have to mean traditional or full-time employment. For example, many baby boomers are becoming their

own bosses by working as freelancers in the so-called gig economy, reports Steve Vernon, a research scholar at the Stanford Center on Longevity and author of “Money for Life.” In a CBS MoneyWatch article, Vernon writes of such work:

“This is indeed a great employment strategy for millions of aging baby boomers approaching their retirement years. ... Earning just enough money to cover your living expenses while letting your financial resources grow can significantly increase your retirement income when you eventually leave the workforce for good.”
What is the gig economy?

“Gig economy” is a relatively new term for an old concept. It refers to employment that entails doing multiple short-term jobs for several clients rather than working one job for a single employer. It’s generally synonymous with self-employment and freelance work. For example, Vernon writes of a retired couple finding work through the website www.Rover.com, which matches up people who want to provide services like dog-walking and pet-sitting with people in need of such services. Not only have the couple postponed dipping into their retirement funds, but they also get to set their own work hours and spend time together while working. Other advantages of the gig economy for people nearing retirement include that it:

- Provides an alternative for older workers who have difficulty finding a traditional job, over such things as age bias.
- Involves few upfront or ongoing costs.
- Provides social interaction.

Downsides include that:

- Income can be unpredictable.
- Workers are generally responsible for paying their own taxes.
- Benefits like health insurance are generally not available.

Rover is among a growing number of websites that enable people to find freelance work. Joining these sites is generally free and as simple as signing up for an account, although potential workers are often screened before they can start soliciting work. Signing up for a Rover account, for example, entails simply providing your name, email address and ZIP code. Rover also conducts background checks. If pet-sitting isn’t your ideal idea of retirement work, other options in the gig economy — just to name a few — include:

- House-sitting (examples of websites that enable this type of work include [Rover](#) and [Thumbtack](#))
- Renting out a room to travelers ([Airbnb](#), [HomeStay](#) and [VRBO](#))
- Renting out your car ([Turo](#))
- Tutoring ([Wyzant](#))

For more options, check out the “[Make](#)” section of MoneyTalksNews website. For tips to get you started in the gig economy, check out “[11 Keys to a Successful Freelance Career](#)..” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | July 3, 2017 ++]

Credit Reports Update 08 ► Changes Will Help Some Consumers

Without even having to lift a finger, some consumers will see their credit scores increase starting in July. These score increases stem from changes in the types of public records that are collected by the three nationwide credit reporting agencies, or CRAs — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. These changes will in turn impact some consumers because the data collected by CRAs go into consumers’ credit reports. And credit scores are based on credit reports. The changes are part of an initiative by the three nationwide CRAs “to enhance the accuracy of credit

report information,” among other aims, according to information released by the Consumer Data Industry Association at the end of June. Basically, some standards for data collection by the CRAs have been raised.

How credit reports are changing

Starting in July, the three nationwide CRAs will exclude all civil judgments and about half of tax liens from credit reports. Civil judgments are court-ordered debts stemming from civil lawsuits. Tax liens are placed by government agencies on the properties of people with unpaid taxes. Prior to July, civil judgments and tax liens could appear in credit reports and thus impact credit scores, as we reported in the spring. These types of public records generally impact credit scores negatively, so some consumers stand to see their scores improve.

How credit scores are impacted

The changes in the types of public records collected by the nationwide credit reporting agencies will be applied to the CRAs’ databases in July. Consumers will see any resulting changes to credit reports and scores “soon after,” according to the industry association. Many consumers’ scores are unlikely to be affected, however. For example, the changes would not affect consumers who did not have any civil judgments or tax liens on their credit reports to begin with. VantageScore Solutions LLC, the company behind VantageScore credit scores, expects that “slightly over 8 percent” of consumers with a credit score will be affected. On average, the company expects those consumers’ scores to increase by 10 points. Fair Isaac Corp., the company behind FICO credit scores, expects FICO credit scores will see a “moderate” impact overall. If you’re unsure whether you are affected by these changes, there’s only one way to find out: Check your credit reports and scores.

Checking your credit

Each of the three nationwide credit reporting agencies has its own credit report on you. Federal law requires these CRAs to give you a free copy of your report once a year. One place you can obtain them is at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action>. Free credit reports do not include credit scores, though. CRAs will charge you if you ask them for your scores — but don’t ask them. Instead, try one of the several ways to get your credit scores for free. Just check out:

- <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/8-ways-get-your-fico-score-for-free> | “8 Ways to Get Your FICO Score for Free“
- <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/19-card-companies-offer-free-credit-score-info> | “These 19 Card Companies Offer Free Credit Score Info“

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsheer | June 30, 2017++]

Tax Burden for Rhode Island Retired Vets ► As of JUL 2017

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn’t necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. 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 retire in Rhode Island.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 7% (food, some clothing, precious metal bullion, some burial-related items, prescription and non-prescription drugs are exempt). The tax on clothing applies to each sale of clothing and footwear with a sales price of more than \$250. Tax on meals and beverages is 8%. [Click here](#) to see taxes on other items.

Gasoline Tax: 54.2 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 58.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$3.75/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 3.75%, High – 5.99%.

Income Brackets: Three. (Single) Lowest – \$60,850, Highest – \$138,300

Personal Exemptions: Federal exemptions multiplied by \$3,900.

Standard Deduction: Federal amount or if age 65 or older, \$8,300 (single), \$16,600 (married filing jointly).

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Railroad Retirement benefits are exempt. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed. Social Security is taxed to the extent it is federally taxed.

Retired Military Pay: Follows federal tax rules.

Military Disability Retired Pay: Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation: VA benefits are not taxable because they generally are for disabilities and are not subject to federal or state taxes.

Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP: Generally subject to state taxes for those states with income tax. Check with state department of revenue office.

Property Taxes

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 \$300. Call 401-222-2280 for details.

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 persona property) in another state. The fraction is Rhode Island assets over total estate assets.

The Rhode Island estate tax is designed to absorb the federal estate tax credit for state death taxes. However, the state has decoupled from current federal estate tax laws and adopts the version of the Internal Revenue Code in effect on January 1, 2001. The estate tax exemption is \$892,650. Estates of decedents who are declared missing in action by the armed forces of the United States are not subject to the state's estate tax.

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For further information, visit the Rhode Island Division of Taxation site <http://www.tax.state.ri.us> or call 401-222-1111. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> JUL 2017 ++]

*** General Interest ***

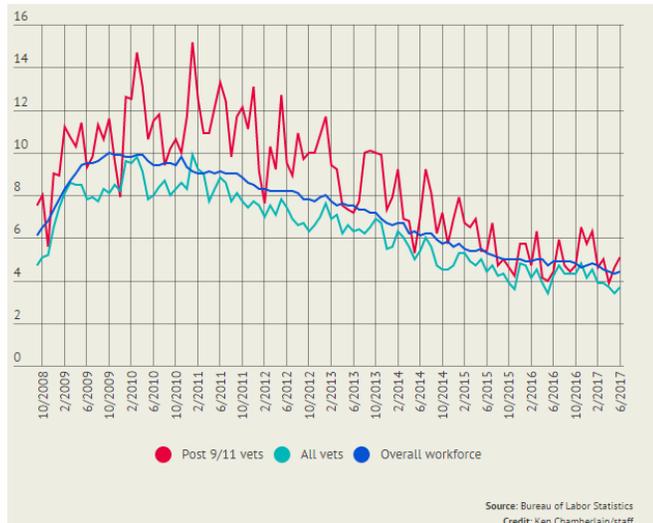


Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 15 JUL 2017

- **2018 Budget Request.** The Trump administration has officially requested that a second littoral combat ship be added to the fiscal 2018 budget request, after officials said they wanted to add the ship the day the White House sent a budget to Congress that requested only one.



- **Household Tips.** Check out the video at <https://www.facebook.com/kimberly.yusunas#> and learn how to deal with furniture scratches, restring a noodle, clean a scorched pan, find lost small items, get gum off of clothes, and do a chemical free microwave clean-up.
- **Sexual Assault.** Las Vegas police arrested a man 25 JUN after receiving reports of a sexual assault on the side of a central valley road. Police found a dead woman at the scene and arrested Joseph G. Martinez, 57, on one count of unlawful sexual penetration of a dead body. The dead woman appeared to be homeless and had no identification on her, according to the arrest report.
- **Folds of Honor.** In partnership with Folds of Honor, Budweiser proudly honors those who have served with a special delivery. #ThisBudsForYou at <https://youtu.be/yzMSzLkOkJA>. From May 22nd through May 29th, Budweiser donated one cent per America can or bottle sold to Folds of Honor up to a maximum of \$1 million.
- **God Bless the USA.** Go to <https://youtu.be/daqwGRdRIsk> to listen to a moving rendition of this song by the Texas Tenors.
- **Vietnam War.** Find out in this 25 minute preview video at <http://www.pbs.org/video/3001104790> about the creation of the upcoming series coming to PBS September 17, 2017.
- **VA Firings.** The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 7 JUL that more than 500 officials have been fired for misconduct since President Trump took office earlier this year, according to data posted online at https://www.va.gov/accountability/Adverse_Actions_Report.pdf.
- **BRAC.** The House on 13 JUN voted down a defense policy bill provision that would have taken out language preventing a new round of base closures, going against White House wishes. Lawmakers voted 175-248 to reject the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) amendment, offered by Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA).
- **Homeless Vets.** A 5-million program to assist homeless veterans has helped only 268 get off the streets over 18 months, according to a recent Los Angeles County civil grand jury report — in part because a \$1.2-million contract to provide interim shelter has been delayed for nearly a year.
- **Vet Jobs.** The jobless rate for post-9/11 veterans was up in June to 5.1%, compared with 4.6% in May, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. This marks the highest unemployment rate for that category of veterans since January.



China Overseas Bases ► First in Djibouti Being Manned

China on 11 JUL dispatched members of its People's Liberation Army to the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti to man the rising Asian giant's first overseas military base, a key part of a wide-ranging expansion of the role of China's armed forces. The defense ministry said on its website that a ceremony was held at a naval pier in the southern Chinese port of Zhanjiang presided over by navy commander Vice Adm. Shen Jinlong. It said the personnel would travel by navy ship but gave no details on numbers or units. Photos on the website showed naval officers and marines in battle dress lining the rails of the support ships Jingangshan and Donghaidao.



In this Tuesday, July 11, 2017, photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, ships carrying Chinese military personnel departs a port in Zhanjiang, south China's Guangdong Province.

China says the logistics center will support anti-piracy, U.N. peacekeeping and humanitarian relief missions in Africa and western Asia. It says it will also facilitate military cooperation and joint exercises as the PLA navy and other services seek to expand their global reach in step with China's growing economic and political footprint. Djibouti is already home to the center of American operations in Africa, Camp Lemonnier, while France, Britain, Japan and other nations also maintain a military presence in the small but strategically located nation.

Multinational anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden that China joined in 2008 have also given its navy ready access to the Mediterranean, and, in 2011, it took the unprecedented step of sending one of its most sophisticated

warships together with military transport aircraft to help in the evacuation of about 35,000 Chinese citizens from Libya. In 2015, China detached three navy ships from the anti-piracy patrols to rescue Chinese citizens and other foreign nationals from fighting in Yemen. The same year, it took part in its first Mediterranean joint naval exercises with Russia. [Source: The Associated Press | July 11, 2017 ++]

Battle of Mosul ► **Victory Declaration | Iraqi Forces Brace for Future**

Outside the general's office, Raith al-Shababi, an Iraqi Special Forces fighter, flips through Facebook on his phone. "This is my brother," he said, showing a reporter a picture of a young man in a white dress shirt, posing with a serious, thoughtful face. "Daesh," al-Shababi explained, holding his finger up to his head like a gun. "Boom, boom." Islamic State militants killed his brother at the age of 21. Waiting for the generals to escort them on a victory tour of Mosul's Old City, al-Shababi says Mosul has not been completely captured, but the end is near. But the losses endured over eight months of fighting, three years of IS rule in Mosul and more than a decade of constant extremist attacks, he observes, make the coming milestone more sad than celebratory. "We've won, but look around you," said Col. Saaed Badeer Katam, of the Special Forces Najaf Battalion. "Everything is destroyed."

Even the al-Nuri Mosque, the victory tour's destination, is in ruins, with its iconic minaret chopped down and prayer space destroyed. Abu-Bakar al-Baghdadi declared himself "Caliph" of IS in 2014 in this mosque. Three years later IS destroyed it, apparently just to lessen Iraq's triumph in Mosul. The al-Nuri Mosque is also one of Mosul's most ancient and beloved treasures, making its loss heartbreaking for many Iraqis. Living in the battle zone, Col. Katam says he isn't bothered that the declared victory precede the end of the fighting. As he speaks, airstrikes pound IS targets, and militants lob mortars and snap off sniper fire. Soldiers battle house to house, and families continue to flee the fighting.



The al-Nuri Mosque, the symbolic heart of IS was bombed by militants in June, and is now in the hands of Iraqi forces, prompting the declaration of victory in Mosul.

Katam explodes IEDs that litter the re-captured streets of Old Mosul, hidden in debris and even in children's toys. Buildings in the area are crushed and abandoned, and militants' corpses rot in the streets. Under the piles of rubble are the remains of families killed when houses collapsed in airstrikes, sometimes burying them alive. "I lost 25 of my friends in the fight for Mosul," said Kaiser, 28, an Iraqi Special Forces fighter. When asked if he is happy

about the victory, he replies, “I’m just tired. I want to go home.” For Iraqi fighters, going home will be a break, but not the end of the war. Militants continue hiding out in Iraqi-controlled territory, poised to strike again.

IS still holds large parts of Iraq, including parts of Anbar province, Hawija and the strategic city of Tal Afar, according to Col. Katam. “Operations will continue until IS is finished,” he noted. Afar has been surrounded by Popular Mobilization Units, or Hashd Shaaby fighters, since last year, though an advance to retake the city itself has not yet begun. And the terrain around Tal Afar is so rough that it is impossible to completely secure, added Katam. Militants fleeing other areas will finally retreat to the city if they can. “The last place we fight will be Tal Afar,” he said. “And there, they will fight to the death.”

“ Sleeper cells” in Iraqi-controlled Mosul already are conducting attacks. Last week three suicide bombers targeted eastern Mosul, killing and maiming people in a market. Early this week, 40 to 50 militants believed to be hiding out in an abandoned industrial zone overran two neighborhoods of western Mosul in an apparent attempt to distract Iraqi forces from their battle in Old Mosul. “They thought Iraqi forces would leave Old Mosul so some other militants could escape,” said Sergeant Mahmoud Mohammad of the Iraqi Army’s 9th division. “But they failed.” Special Forces and Iraqi Army soldiers killed all of the battling militants, he said, showing us bloodstains on the floor of one house. The blood is still sticky, and two bullet shells are on the floor. Mohammad thinks it was an IS double execution.

Returning neighbors say there was pandemonium when IS showed up in an area controlled by Iraq since mid-April. Families were separated as everyone ran when they saw the bushy beards and traditional clothes. They don’t know if anyone was killed. Soldiers and civilians agree, however, that more sleeper cells are hiding out all over Mosul and that attacks are far from over. “Of course we are always afraid,” said Mohammad, a 31-year-old father of seven who lives in Tenek, one of the areas briefly overrun by IS early this week. “But where else are we going to go?”

With the fight for Mosul in its final stage 3 JUL, Islamic State militants sent female suicide bombers hidden among fleeing civilians, while Iraqi forces and the U.S.-led coalition unleashed punishing airstrikes and artillery fire that set dozens of buildings ablaze. Monday’s two suicide bombings against Iraqi soldiers followed three other such attacks by women — some of them teenagers — in the previous two days, said Sgt. Ali Abdullah Hussein. The tempo of airstrikes was so great Monday that coalition aircraft couldn’t keep up with the requests for air support from Iraqi ground forces. Instead, they sought approval for artillery strikes. While shops have reopened and civilian traffic fills streets in retaken neighborhoods, thick black smoke continued to rise just a few kilometers away from IS-held territory on the bank of the Tigris River that divides Iraq’s second-largest city. The area controlled by the militants is less than half a square mile. [Source: VOA | Heather Murdock | July 1, 2017 ++]

Aging Update 01 ► End of Life Decisions

It can be overwhelming to be asked to make healthcare decisions for someone who is dying and is no longer able to make his or her own decisions. It is even more difficult if you do not have written or verbal guidance (see Prepare Advance Directives and Other Documents at <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/end-life-helping-comfort-and-care/planning-end-life-care-decisions#advance-directives>). How do you decide what type of care is right for someone? Even when you have written documents, some decisions still might not be clear since the documents may not address every situation you could face. Two approaches might be useful. One is to put yourself in the place of the person who is dying and try to choose as he or she would. This is called substituted judgment. Some experts believe that decisions should be based on substituted judgment whenever possible.

The simplest, but not always the easiest, way to prepare is to talk about end-of-life care before an illness. Discussing your thoughts, values, and desires about end-of-life care before you become sick will help people who

are close to you to know what care you want. You could discuss how you feel about using life-prolonging measures (for example, CPR or a ventilator) or where you would like to be cared for (for example, home or nursing home). Doctors should be told about these wishes as well. For some people, it makes sense to bring this up at a small family gathering. Some may find that telling their family they have made a will (or updated an existing one) provides an opportunity to bring up this subject with other family members. As hard as it might be to talk about your end-of-life wishes, knowing your preferences ahead of time can make decision-making easier for your family. You may also have some comfort knowing that your family can choose what you want.

On the other hand, if your parents (or another close relative or friend) are aging and you are unsure about what they want, you might introduce the subject. You can try to explain that having this conversation will help you care for them and do what they want. You might start by talking about what you think their values are, instead of talking about specific treatments. Try saying something like, “When Uncle Isaiah had a stroke, I thought you seemed upset that his kids wanted to put him on a respirator.” Or, “I’ve always wondered why Grandpa didn’t die at home. Do you know?” Encourage your parents to share the type of care they would choose to have at the end of life, rather than what they don’t want. There is no right or wrong plan, only what they would like. If they are reluctant to have this conversation, don’t force it, but try to bring it up again at a later time.

If you are faced with making healthcare decisions for someone who is dying and no longer able to make his or her own decisions, ask the medical staff these 7 questions:

- What is the care plan? What are the benefits and risks?
- How often should we reassess the care plan?
- If we try using the ventilator to help with breathing and decide to stop, how will that be done?
- If my family member is dying, why does he or she have to be connected to all those tubes and machines? Why do we need more tests?
- What is the best way for our family to work with the care staff?
- How will I make sure to get daily updates on my family member’s condition?

[Source: National Institute on Aging | June 26, 2017 ++]

Grocery Stores ► Things You Should Not Buy There

Do you love your neighborhood grocery store? Buy everything you need there? If so, your local grocery store probably loves you too. It loves that you’re willing to spend so much on items you could get for a whole lot less money elsewhere. Keep supporting your local store, but skip the following 20 things. These are the goods you should never buy at the grocery store when you have cheaper options available.

1. **Greeting cards** -- Anyone who’s bought a grocery store greeting card has felt the sticker shock. \$4.95 for a piece of cardstock with a pretty design? You can do better. Go to the dollar store and pick up some equally nice options for a buck. Buy in bulk on Amazon, and spend even less. Or if you’re the crafty type, simply make your own.
2. **Batteries** -- Batteries are an essential part of life, particularly if you’re a parent on Christmas morning. However, there’s no reason to overpay. Head to the warehouse store of your choice — Costco, Sam’s Club or BJ’s Wholesale Club — where you can stock up on bulk packages that bring your per-battery cost down. Not a member? Amazon also has good prices on bulk batteries.
3. **Magazines** -- A single issue of a magazine at the grocery store will set you back \$3 or \$4. For many publications, you can subscribe for the entire year for less than \$20. There are also plenty of ways to get discounted access to your favorite titles. Or go to your library where, you guessed it, the magazines are FREE to read!

4. **Diapers** -- Who knew it cost so much to cover your little one's bottom? Well, experienced parents know, but it's often a surprise to new moms and dads. Using cloth diapers you can wash and reuse is always an option, but for many people, disposables are the only way to go. Buying those from a grocery store is easy, but you'll pay a lot less per diaper by going through the Amazon Subscribe and Save service. It gives Prime members 20 percent off diaper subscriptions. Plus, if you schedule deliveries right, you should never have to worry about finding yourself amid a middle of the night blowout diaper-less.
5. **Alcohol** -- Beer and wine are money-makers for grocery stores, but you can minimize the markup by shopping at a warehouse club instead. Thanks to many state laws, even people who aren't members can walk into these stores to buy booze.
6. **Toothbrushes** -- Are you really buying toothbrushes at the grocery store? Don't you go to the dentist? If you do, you'll find they have drawers full of them for the taking. Yes, most people go to the dentist once every six months, and you should change your toothbrush every three months. However, we bet if you ask really nicely, your dentist will give you two to last until your next visit.
7. **Special occasion cakes** -- Getting a birthday cake at the grocery store is convenient, but it isn't all that cheap, especially if you need to feed a crowd. Instead, we're going to send you back to your warehouse club where you can get a giant decorated sheet cake for the same price many grocery stores charge for their small ones.
8. **Pet food** -- The grocery store isn't the worst place to buy pet food, but you can do better. The subscription service through Chewy.com works a lot like Amazon's Subscribe and Save. You can set up automated shipments and get a discount in return. Stores like Petco, Pet Supplies Plus and PetSmart also offer competitive prices, coupons and loyalty programs that can result in free food. Don't forget to also visit your local feed store to look for deals.
9. **Bottled water** -- Unless you happen to live in a city where the water is unfit to drink, there is no reason to buy bottled water ... period. The water from your tap will hydrate you just fine. Invest in a couple of reusable bottles and fill them for cheap at home. Water tastes icky? Buy a filtering pitcher, and keep it in the fridge for a cold fresh drink when you want it and to refill those reusable bottles. If you absolutely must have individual bottles from a store, buy them at your warehouse club.
10. **Frozen pancakes** -- Why frozen pancakes are a thing is a mystery. Making pancakes at home is super easy. A basic recipe takes about five minutes to whip up and slightly longer to cook. We know you can do it. Cook up a big batch on the weekend and freeze the extras to eat throughout the week. Your cost will be pennies per pancake.
11. **Basic baking mixes** -- Let's take it one step further and say you should banish buying all basic baking mixes from the grocery store. If you're baking with Bisquick, you really aren't saving any time if you think about how long it takes to mix together flour, sugar, salt and baking powder. All you're doing is paying more. Same can be said for basic cookie, cake and brownie mixes. Really. These things aren't that hard to make from scratch. By skipping the mixes, you'll save money and possibly be a little healthier too.
12. **Kitchenware** -- Speaking of baking, the grocery store knows you might need some equipment to cook up all the delicious food you're buying. That's why most have a selection of pots, pans and even small kitchen appliances for purchase. Resist the urge. You can probably find better prices and quality at stores like TJ Maxx, Marshalls and HomeGoods. For rock-bottom prices on your kitchenware, wait until the Black Friday sales when department stores sell theirs for a song.
13. **Spices** -- Herbs and spices can be another item leading to sticker shock in the grocery store. That tiny little bottle costs how much?! If you have a bulk food store that sells spices, you can save a bundle. Not only could the per-ounce cost be less than the grocery store, you only have to buy as much as you need. No reason to get a whole jar when you only want a teaspoon for a recipe. Note: you can also get cheap spices at the dollar store, but the quality may be questionable.
14. **Party supplies** -- Like greeting cards, party supplies are sold at the grocery store for a premium. Don't make the mistake of getting your candles, tablecloths and colorful napkins there. Swing by the dollar store and buy them on the cheap instead.

15. **Coffee** -- It's the elixir of life for many people, which is probably why it costs so much at the grocery store. To get cheaper coffee, you have a couple of options. Your warehouse store (noticing a theme here?) is a good place to stock up on bulk packages of whole-bean, ground and K-cup coffee. If you have a Keurig machine, you can also register it at Keurig.com, where they send out the occasional good deal. Perhaps most surprisingly, you can find low sale prices on coffee at office supply stores like Staples. These shops also have online coupons and loyalty programs to help you save even more.

16. **Toilet paper** -- There may be no more essential product to family harmony than toilet paper. It is also shocking how much tissue paper rolled around a tube can cost in the grocery store. Head to your warehouse club or office supply store for discounted bulk purchases. Amazon's Subscribe and Save is also your friend here.

17. **Light bulbs** -- Now that incandescent lightbulbs are no more, it can cost a lot of money to light up your house. Walk past that display in the grocery store if you want to save some cash. You could go to Costco, Sam's Club or BJ's for lower prices, but the best prices per bulb we found were on Amazon.

18. **Individually wrapped snack items** -- You know you should buy the jumbo box of goldfish crackers and put them in baggies for school lunches, but that's way too much work. OK, fine. Just don't buy those individually wrapped snacks at the grocery store. You can get a big box of them at a much cheaper price per serving if you go to a warehouse club. If brand doesn't matter, see what your local dollar store has in stock.

19. **Gift cards** -- Forgot to buy a gift? No problem! Grocery stores have set up convenient displays of all sorts of gift cards by the checkout lanes. Now, for many of these, you might only pay face value. So you're probably wondering why we're saying that you're overpaying. That's because you can go to Costco and get \$100 worth of gift cards to many restaurants for only \$80. If your warehouse store doesn't have the gift card you want, check out one of the many gift card reseller sites and see if you can't get a deal there before shelling out full price at the grocery store.

20. **Bread** -- If you have a bakery outlet store nearby, you should never buy bread at the grocery store. They practically give the bread away at the outlet, and it usually freezes quite well. Even if your outlet store isn't around the corner, it may be worthwhile to take a trip. These discount shops are often filled with all sorts of bread and snack products. Stock up your freezer and then eat your carbs for cheap all month long.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | June 20, 2017 ++]

Driving Tickets ► Car Insurance Impact

The blue lights flash, the siren sounds, and then you're pulled over by the side of the road as the police officer writes you a ticket. How embarrassing. And potentially expensive! First, there's the cost of the actual ticket, of course — and that initial expense varies widely, depending on the state and the driving violation. But did you realize that getting a ticket will also increase the cost of your insurance? Over time, that can really add up. From reckless driving to not wearing your seat belt, a recent study shows just how much that traffic ticket will raise your insurance rates. Check it out and then read on for what you can do about it.

Tickets and your insurance rates -- A study by Insurance.com (<http://www.insurance.com/auto-insurance/traffic-ticket-calculator.aspx>) analyzed 490,000 insurance quotes to figure out how different violations affect your car insurance rates. Here are average increases for 15 common violations:

- Reckless driving — 22 percent increase
- DUI (first offense) — 19 percent
- Driving without a license — 18 percent
- Careless driving — 16 percent
- Failure to stop — 15 percent

- Driving 30 mph or more over the speed limit— 15 percent
- Improper turn — 14 percent
- Improper pass – 14 percent
- Following too closely — 13 percent
- Driving 15 to 29 mph over the speed limit — 12 percent
- Driving 1 to 14 mph over the speed limit — 11 percent
- Failure to yield — 9 percent
- Driving without insurance — 6 percent
- Seat belt infractions — 3 percent
- Texting while driving — 14 percent. Note that 45 states and Washington, D.C., have outlawed texting for all drivers, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association. (<http://www.insurance.com/auto-insurance/auto-insurance-basics/texting-tickets.html>).

It could be even worse; those are just averages. Your actual rate will depend on a variety of factors, including your age, sex, where you live, your marital status and how long you've been with your carrier. Insurance.com has an online calculator at <http://www.insurance.com/auto-insurance/saving-money/tickets.aspx> which allows you to input your age, location and years with your insurance company to get a more accurate picture of the likely cost of a particular infraction.

How to prevent a rate hike -- Before you get a ticket check out <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/how-to-fight-a-traffic-ticket> on how to fight one. Traffic violations show up on your state driving record, which is accessed periodically by your insurance company. There are a few things you can do to keep a ticket from appearing on your driving record or to minimize the impact on your insurance rate.

1. Go to court. If you go to court, you may end up getting the ticket reduced to a lesser offense or having the case dismissed entirely. There are several reasons why a judge might dismiss your case. Among them:

- The officer who issued the ticket didn't appear in court.
- The ticket contains inaccurate information.
- You can prove you did not commit the offense.

2. Hire a lawyer. A lawyer could help your case. You'll have to pay, but probably not much. A lawyer interviewed by MoneyTalksNews charges \$80 to handle a basic traffic case.

3. Attend traffic school. Some states allow you to keep a violation off your record by attending traffic school. You can attend traffic school in person (many have night and weekend classes) or online and you'll have to pass a test, but it shouldn't be difficult if you pay attention. The fee to attend the school is usually small.

If you end up paying the fine, here are some steps to take going forward:

- **Avoid getting pulled over again:** This seems obvious, but remember that more violations will further increase your insurance rates. Keep your car maintained — no broken or malfunctioning lights — wear your seat belt, drive safely and defensively, and renew your registration on time.
- **Be patient:** Some insurance companies will reduce your rate after a year with no violations. Many moving violations will no longer affect your rate after three years.
- **Comparison shop for new insurance:** Insurance companies treat violations differently, so another company may offer you a better rate. But don't lie about past infractions. The company will be reviewing your driving record, even if you've moved to another state.

A bump in your insurance rates is always upsetting, but you can lessen the impact by following the preceding suggested steps and not repeating the offense. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | June 28, 2017 ++]

Toilets ► One Way to Deal with Stench

The airplane bathroom is an engineering feat we tend to take for granted. Think about it: Nonstop transcontinental travel would be exceedingly uncomfortable — if not impossible — without that toilet. Of course, the unearthly relief provided by airplane bathrooms makes them heavily trafficked. The stall locks are among the most germ-ridden parts of an airplane, after all. And then there’s the repulsiveness that sometimes lurks inside the bathroom — that stench left behind by another passenger. If you’ve never experienced that odious odor, you can thank flight crews. Flight attendants have a handy hack to neutralize nasty odors. It’s one you can use at home, too: harnessing the aroma of coffee.

The Sun reports: “If a traveler has let loose a particularly pungent stink, the flight attendant will brew a strong pot of coffee to bring with them while clean(ing) the loo.” On some airlines, flight attendants simply pour a strong cup of black coffee down the toilet. There is science behind this hack. For example, a 2012 study out of the City College of New York found that caffeinated coffee can wipe out hydrogen sulfide gas — the chemical responsible for the stink of raw sewage. The caffeine in coffee contains nitrogen, which the researchers said was key to coffee’s odor-neutralizing ability.

So the next time someone leaves a stench behind in your own bathroom, brew some coffee instead of spending money on store-bought air fresheners. If you don’t drink coffee, a bag of coffee will do, too. Several years ago, the Los Angeles Times reported that some flight attendants neutralize nasty odors by hanging a bag of coffee on a coat hanger in the bathroom. On one flight, the crew even gave bags of coffee to some travelers who were plagued by the “horrendous” body odor of a particular passenger seated nearby. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsler | July 6, 2017 ++]

GTMO Detainees ► Omar Khadr | Awarded \$8M in Lawsuit

A former Guantanamo Bay prisoner who pleaded guilty to killing a U.S. soldier in Afghanistan received a multimillion-dollar payment from Canada, a government official said 6 JUL.. The official told the Associated Press that Omar Khadr had been given the money. A separate government official also familiar with the deal, which is expected to be announced Friday, said Khadr was given about \$8 million. Canada and Khadr’s lawyers negotiated the terms last month, based on a 2010 court ruling that Canadian officials violated his rights at Guantanamo. The Canadian Supreme Court ruled that Canadian intelligence obtained evidence from Khadr under “oppressive circumstances,” such as sleep deprivation, during interrogations at the detention center in 2003, and then shared that evidence with U.S. officials.



Khadr was 15 when he was captured by U.S. troops following a firefight at a suspected Al Qaeda compound in Afghanistan that resulted in the death of U.S. Special Forces medic, U.S. Army Sgt. First Class Christopher Speer. Khadr, who was suspected of throwing the grenade that killed Speer, was taken to Guantanamo and ultimately charged with war crimes by a military commission. The Canadian-born Khadr pleaded guilty in 2010 to charges that included murder and was sentenced to eight years plus the time he had already spent in custody. He returned to Canada two years later to serve the remainder of his sentence and was released in May 2015 pending an appeal of his guilty plea, which he said was made under duress. His lawyers filed a \$20 million wrongful imprisonment lawsuit against the Canadian government, arguing the government violated international law by not protecting its own citizen and conspired with the U.S. in its abuse of Khadr.

The widow of Speer and another American soldier blinded by the grenade in Afghanistan filed a wrongful death and injury lawsuit against Khadr in 2014 fearing Khadr might get his hands on money from his \$20 million wrongful imprisonment lawsuit. A U.S. judge granted \$134.2 million in damages in 2015, but the plaintiffs acknowledged then that there was little chance they would collect any of the money from Khadr because he lives in Canada. Khadr's lawyers have long said he was pushed into war by his father, Ahmed Said Khadr, whose family stayed with Usama bin Laden briefly when Omar Khadr was a boy. Khadr's Egyptian-born father was killed in 2003 when a Pakistani military helicopter shelled the house where he was staying with senior Al Qaeda operatives.

After his 2015 release from prison in Alberta, Omar Khadr apologized to the families of the victims. He said he rejects violent jihad and wants a fresh start to finish his education and work in health care. He currently resides in an apartment in Edmonton, Alberta. [Source: Fox News World | July 07, 2017 ++]

Coca Cola Update 02 ► 23 more ways It Can Be Used

Its hard to imagine a world without the drink Coca Cola. But as it turns out, Coke is useful for myriad tasks. And the fact that that you can get it almost anywhere means it can help you with all sorts of problems in all sorts of places. As noted in the "Coca Cola Update 01" article in th last Bulletin which covered 24 of the 47 alternate uses for Coke. Following are the remaining 23 uses:

25. **Loosen stuck bolts** -- It's daunting to face removing a rusty bolt, especially when you get a flat tire and the bolts in question are keeping you from changing it. Grab some Coke and apply it to the bolt to loosen the rust, suggests [WiseBread](#).

26. **Create "vintage" paper** -- Want letters, maps or other papers to look really old? Soak the paper in Coke, wipe off the excess and dry in the oven for about five minutes, suggests [BusinessInsider](#).

27. **Make floors sticky** -- Are you worried the kids will slip when they're putting on a dance performance? Try the old theater tip of mopping the stage floors with Coke to make sure they are sticky, suggests [WiseBread](#).

28. **Clean a pool** -- Did you open your pool for the season and find it's rusty? Pour 2 liters of Coke into the water and let it work on dissolving away the rust, recommends several sites including [Shareable TV](#). You'll see the difference once the pool has cleared out the soda.

29. **Create greener lawns** -- Want a golf-course worthy lawn? Mix a can of Coke with a can of beer, a ½ cup of household ammonia, 1 cup of mouthwash and a ½ cup of dishwashing soap. Pour the solution into a 10-gallon sprayer container for your hose. Coat the lawn with the mixture a few times a week, recommends [TipHero](#).

30. **Give hair body and bounce** -- English actress Suki Waterhouse told [Seventeen magazine](#) she credits a Coke rinse for her bouncy, full hair. You may have heard that Coca-Cola curls your hair. What actually happens is that

Coke brings out the natural curl in your hair, reports [Hairfinder](#). Wet your hair, put Coke on it for about five minutes and then wash.

31. **Inflate a balloon** -- Entertain kids (and plenty of adults) by pouring salt into a balloon and attaching it to a bottle of Coke. The balloon will inflate, according to several sites including [Little Things](#).

32. **Shine a bumper** -- Dip aluminum foil in Coke and use it to shine up a chrome bumper, recommends [Business Insider](#).

33. **Clean grout and caulking** -- Did you ever spill some Coca-Cola on the floor and marvel at how it cleaned the grout? It works magic on caulking too, reports [Clean My Space](#).

34. **Deepen your suntan** -- Lying in the sun to get a tan can be dangerous for your skin, but you'll find plenty of people doing it. Spraying your skin with Coke causes deeper tanning, according to various sites including [Leaf.TV](#).

35. **Remove stains from vitreous china** -- The acids in Coke clean stains from vitreous china, which has an enamel coating, according to a number of sources, including [Business Insider](#).

36. **Clean a greasy motor** -- Automotive technicians have used Coke for years to clean greasy motors, reports [Wisebread](#).

37. **Dissolve a tooth** -- There's some debate on whether soaking a tooth in Coke will dissolve it. [WiseBread](#) reports that it will, but it will take quite a bit of time. If nothing else, it's a good science fair project idea!

38. **Fertilize azaleas** -- Pour Coke on azaleas or gardenias when you water to increase the acidity and boost their blooms. The sugar in Coke feeds microorganisms in the soil, increasing the organic matter, reports [Instructables](#).

39. **Clean eyeglasses** -- You can use Coke to clean windows and eyeglasses, too. Pour Coke on your glasses, then rinse clean with water and wipe, recommends [Instructables](#).

40. **Works as a multipurpose floor cleaner** -- Some people swear by pouring a can of Coke into a bucket of water to clean their household floors, reports [Emlii](#). Our caveat — be sure to rinse thoroughly after so the floor doesn't stay sticky or attract ants.

41. **Flavor pork dishes** -- Add a can of Coke to the slow cooker when making pork dishes, recommends [Taste of Home](#).

42. **Makes a great chicken wing sauce** -- One of the popular recipes that call for Coke (there are many — check the [company website](#)) is a chicken wing sauce. Combine 1 cup of brown sugar, 1 can of Coke, 2 medium onions, 2 Cloves of garlic and 2 Tablespoons of soy sauce. Use the mixture to coat 2 ½ pounds of wings or ribs, recommends [Coca-Cola](#).

43. **Descale a pot or kettle** -- Descale a tea or coffee pot by filling it with Coke and letting it sit overnight, recommends [Business Insider](#). Scrub the outside with Coke, too, to make it look like new.

44. **Baste a ham** -- When you bake a ham, enhance its flavor by basting it with Coke every 30 minutes, recommends [Food Network](#).

45. **Remove bugs from a windshield** -- Use Coke on your car windshield to remove street grime, bugs and more, recommends [Business Insider](#). Of course, protect the paint from the Coke and even wash the car immediately after cleaning the windshield.

46. **Unclog a garbage disposal** -- When your garbage disposal runs slows or clogs, pour a can of Coke down it followed by boiling water, recommends [Business Insider](#). That should unclog it.

47. **For fun, add a few Mentos** -- Watch it explode! You've probably seen the eruption caused when Mentos candies are dropped into a bottle of Diet Coke (if not, try it or turn to [YouTube](#)). [NewScientist](#) explains how it works.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | June 14, 2017 ++]

PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 12 ► Cost Impact on Troops

Daring defections by two malnourished North Korean soldiers across the Demilitarized Zone have highlighted a crack in the regime's armor. More than 30,000 escapees from the North now live in South Korea. But cases involving front-line soldiers are "different from simple defections," as one defector put it. Defections by soldiers pose a grave threat: Not only do they lower morale, they also suggest the regime is not as invincible as it seems. One soldier crossed the DMZ on 13 JUN, and another followed on 23 JUN. Both are around the age of 20 and were found to be undernourished, according to South Korean media reports. The last time a North Korean soldier defected to the South was in September 2016.

The soldiers decided to flee because they had heard they would be given U.S. dollars in South Korea, they said. Defecting through China is doable these days -- if you have the funds. "You can safely flee from the North if you pay 40,000 yuan to 50,000 yuan (\$5,880 to \$7,350) to a broker who bribes Chinese and North Korean border guards," a defector said. There are even quite a few "repeat defectors," who shuttle between North Korea and China or South Korea, where they earn foreign currency. Some upstream portions of the Tumen River, which separates China and North Korea, are less than 10 meters wide, allowing North Koreans to walk across the ice in the winter. Many sneak into China under the cover of darkness, find food, and return home later the same night, according to an ethnic Korean living on the Chinese side of the river.

It is a different story for North Korean soldiers staring down their South Korean counterparts across the DMZ. The North Korean regime has buried a huge number of land mines in the DMZ in recent years. This is allegedly more about discouraging its soldiers from attempting to flee than warding off a South Korean intrusion. In addition, the North reportedly runs a thorough brainwashing program to try to prevent front-line forces from longing for the South.

There was a time when North Korean soldiers were considered the ideal marriage partners, partly because they were entitled to ample rations. But the country's rationing system has become unworkable. Senior officials of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea and the Korean People's Army, who live in Pyongyang, are still guaranteed sufficient rations in return for their absolute loyalty to the Kim Jong Un regime. In Potemkin village fashion, Pyongyang now features rows of high-rise condominiums, a growing number of fine restaurants and more than 3 million smartphones in use. Elsewhere, citizens have been virtually cut off from the rations, forcing them to rely on illegal black markets, called jangmadang, to survive.

These markets started out as places to exchange farm produce and everyday goods for rice and other staples. They have grown to include a wider array of products brought in from China, according to defectors and other sources familiar with life in North Korea. More than 400 are scattered across the country. The markets are always crowded because shoppers "can buy anything as long as they have money," a defector said. Working around the regime's strict controls on citizens, shrewd merchants have bribed officials and established distribution systems covering almost the entire country. Merchants who control the supply and prices of key merchandise are now emerging as a new wealthy class. The government was loath to allow this makeshift "market economy" to grow. But attempts to control the jangmadang were met with strong public resistance, so it now gives tacit approval.

Like most citizens, military personnel are scraping by -- besides high-ranking officers, that is. The armed forces collect rice from farmers and do some growing of their own, but a large portion of the output goes to the top brass.

Small rations are still available for the rank and file, but most young soldiers are said to be in a state of malnutrition. In some ways, soldiers have even fewer options for easing their hunger. Unlike factory workers and farmers who can do side jobs, soldiers are already mobilized for farming and construction work. Under the circumstances, there has been a steep increase in cases of soldiers banding together for robberies and looting. North Korean soldiers assigned to the DMZ also hear criticism of the regime blaring from South Korean loudspeakers. This may also tempt some to brave the land mines and defect.

All of this lays bare the contradictions at the heart of Kim's North Korea. While the leader is pushing an economic rehabilitation drive, it is clear that only the privileged class -- the critical class for preserving the regime -- will benefit. Meanwhile, North Korea is pouring precious funds into its nuclear and missile programs, even as hunger drives its own soldiers to risk their lives to find better ones in the South. [Source: Nikkie Asian Review | Masanori Yamakuchi | July 2, 2017 ++]

PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 13 ► 1st Successful ICBM Test

North Korea on 4 JUL said it had successfully tested its first -intercontinental ballistic missile, catching military experts- -off-guard and ratcheting up -pressure on its Asian neighbors to take a harder line against the hermit nation. China, Pyongyang's main ally, issued a joint statement with Russia that calls for a halt to missile tests in exchange for the US and South Korea suspending their large-scale military exercises.



This photo distributed by the North Korean government shows what it said was the launch of the Hwasong-14 missile.

The missile was launched at 9.40am and flew about 933km, reaching an altitude of 2,802km, before falling into the sea inside Japan's exclusive economic zone after a 39 minute flight, the North's official media reported. The launch was tracked by the US and Japan, which said the -missile reached an altitude that "greatly exceeded" 2,500km. It appeared to be the most successful missile test yet by North Korea, flying higher than the 560km recorded by Seoul in the previous test carried out in May. Pyongyang said the success of the ICBM – which it calls the **Hwasong-14** – marked the "final step" in creating a "confident and powerful nuclear state that can strike anywhere on Earth".

Andrei Chang, founder of military affairs magazine Kanwa Asian Defence, said he was surprised by Pyongyang's progress in its missile program. "Now there is only one question remaining – whether the missile will be equipped with a nuclear warhead one day. North Korea's missile experts are very smart, and it's possible based on the existing progress and capability," Chang said. Based on the missile's similarity to China's own ICBMs with a range of more than 6,000km, he estimated it could strike Alaska, but the lower 48 states as well as Hawaii would be out of range. China's foreign ministry said it opposed the test and called for restraint by Pyongyang, as well as calm from all sides. "China urges the DPRK to refrain from acts that violate UN Security Council resolutions so as to create necessary conditions for resuming dialogue and negotiation," ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said, using the North Korea's official name.

One Chinese foreign affairs expert said North Korean leader Kim Jong-un might have intended the test as a reminder to China and the US of Pyongyang's presence ahead of Xi and Trump's meeting in Hamburg. Kim might also be trying to sow tension between Beijing and Washington over how to contain the North's weapons program, according to Sun Xingjie, a professor at Jilin University. Disagreement between the two sides could see the US move closer to Japan and South Korea, which in turn would push China towards North Korea, he said. Trump has grown increasingly impatient over the deadlock in resolving the nuclear crisis, and blamed China. He discussed the issue with Xi by phone on 3 JUL, but both sides failed to announce any progress beyond reiterating their commitment to a denuclearized Korean peninsula.

Trump took to Twitter after the launch, writing: "Hard to believe that South Korea and Japan will put up with this much longer. Perhaps China will put a heavy move on North Korea and end this nonsense once and for all!" North Korea Alexander Gabuev, a senior associate and chair of the Russia in Asia-Pacific program at the Carnegie Moscow Centre, said he expected Sino-Russian ties to continue to grow, but there were limits. "It increasingly appears the Trump administration will be tough on many issues which constitute China's core interests, and the US will be unable to improve relations with Russia ... However, there are limits – Beijing and Moscow don't want to enter a military alliance relationship." [Source: South China Morning Post | Laura Zhou & Minnie Chan | July 5, 2017 ++]

Garage Door Billboards ► Making Yours Stand Out (05)



Have You Heard? ► Old Man, Boy & Donkey | Dr. Young vs Dr. Geezer

An old man, a boy & a donkey were going to town.
The boy rode on the donkey & the old man walked.

As they went along they passed some people who remarked "What a shame the old man is walking and the boy is riding."

The man and boy thought maybe the critics were right, so they changed positions.

Later they passed some people who remarked, "What a shame.... he makes that little boy walk." So they then decided they'd both walk!

Soon they passed some more people who remarked, "They're really stupid to walk when they have a decent donkey to ride."

So, they both rode the donkey. Now they passed some people who shamed them by saying "How awful to put such a load on a poor donkey."

The boy and man figured they were probably right, so they decide to carry the donkey.

As they crossed the bridge, they lost their grip on the animal and he fell into the river and drowned.

The moral of the story?

If you try to please everyone, you might as well...
Kiss your ass goodbye!

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Dr. Young vs Dr. Geezer

An old geezer, who had been a retired farmer for a long time, became very bored and decided to open a medical clinic. He put a sign up outside that said: "Dr. Geezer's Clinic" - "Get your treatment for \$500 -- If not cured, get back \$1,000 -- Guaranteed." Doctor "Young," who was positive that this old geezer didn't know beans about medicine, thought this would be a great opportunity to get \$1,000. So he went to Dr. Geezer's clinic. This is what transpired...

Dr. Young: "Dr. Geezer, I have lost all taste in my mouth." Can you please help me?

Dr. Geezer: "Nurse, please bring medicine from box 22 and put 3 drops in Dr. Young's mouth."

Dr. Young: Aaagh!! -- "This is gasoline!"

Dr. Geezer: "Congratulations! You've got your taste back. That will be \$500."

Dr. Young gets annoyed and goes back after a couple of days figuring to recover his money.

Dr Young: "I have lost my memory and I cannot remember anything."

Dr. Geezer: "Nurse, please bring medicine from box 22 and put 3 drops in the patient's mouth."

Doctor Young: "Oh no you don't, -- that's gasoline!"

Dr. Geezer: "Congratulations! You've got your memory back. That will be \$500."

Dr. Young (after having lost \$1000) leaves angrily and comes back after several more days.

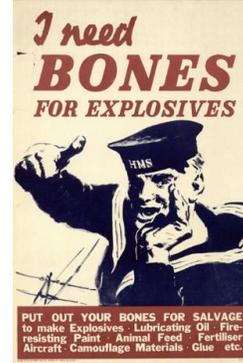
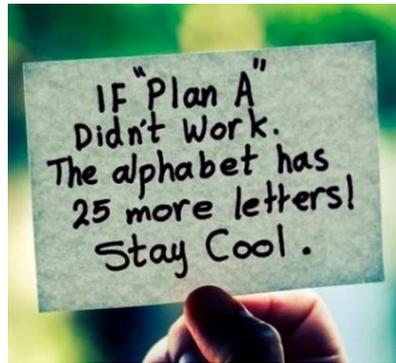
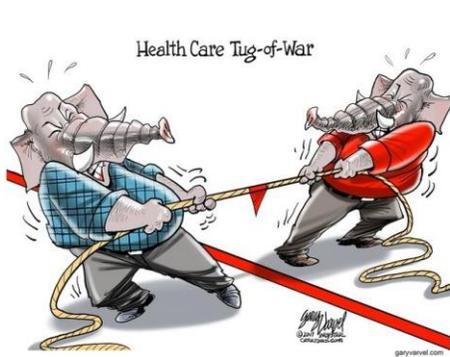
Dr. Young: "My eyesight has become weak --- I can hardly see !!!!

Dr. Geezer: "Well, I don't have any medicine for that so... Here's your \$1000 back."

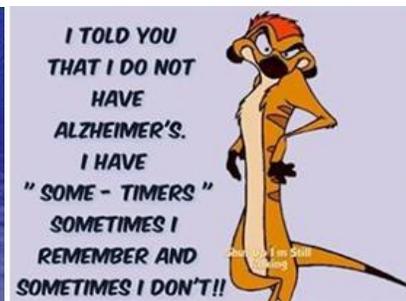
Dr. Young: "But this is only \$500..."

Dr. Geezer: "Congratulations! You got your vision back! That will be \$500."

Moral of story -- Just because you're "Young" doesn't mean that you can outsmart an old "Geezer"



They tell you that booze is cheap in there but they do not tell you the consequences! This python that devoured a passed out drunk. It took 8 men to load this python on to the truck. It swallowed a man after it found him drunk and sleeping next to the N2 road in Mkhuze, KZN, South Africa. Had it not been spotted, the python would have remained on the same spot for up to 8 months while it digested every piece of the man's body, including skull and every bone in his body.



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Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,182 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others have or are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.
2. Anyone who wants to remove or change their email addree from the Bulletin mailing list **SHOULD NOT USE** the automatic "UNSUBSCRIBE" or "Change of Address" tabs at the bottom of this message as they are no longer fully functional. Send a message to raoemo@sbcglobal.net with the word "DELETE" or "COA" in the subject line.
3. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.
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