

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 AUGUST 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

HEALTHCARE. WHAT’S THE FUSS?

What’s the fuss? I mean that question quite literally. I don’t understand the fuss.

I hear the fuss – Lord do I hear the fuss! – but not much of it makes much sense.

From the left I hear a fading argument all in wonk-speak that doesn’t really tell me what they are asking for. None of it is apparently very important since every piece of it that meets opposition seems to be ripe for negotiating away.

From the right I hear accusations that are identifiable fantasy, if one just takes the time to read the various legislative proposals. I also hear that they won’t vote for any bill if it includes such-and-so, so the left gives up on such-and-so, and then the right says, “Well, we’re not going to vote for it anyway.”

The left then responds that even though they didn’t oppose all of the amendments that the right insisted on, they will now not vote for any bill that doesn’t include what they just gave away.

If there is a center, I guess it is those who are already covered by employer medical plans who don’t think that they can lose them, even if that is not a realistic expectation. The center also apparently includes everyone on Medicare shouting, “Keep the government’s filthy hands off my Medicare!”

Another group in the center, and the one that inspired this editorial, is the group of veterans, many of whom are unable to get in to the VA system, screaming, “Don’t mess with my veterans’ benefits”, apparently lamenting the loss of benefits that they have generally been unable to collect.

One veteran even said – combining both “no-government” arguments – “Keep your g*d d**n government hands off my veterans’ benefits.”

Don’t worry, brother, they are doing their best to keep their hands totally off your benefits – they want to keep your hands off them too, by the way.

Also by the way, there is no VA “Death Book”. The reported [brochure](#) is in accordance with US law that mandates giving veterans the best possible advice as they make their decisions about wills and living wills. Only someone who is looking for a fight would find anything really wrong with that brochure.

So I repeat, “What’s the fuss.”

Since no one apparently understands what is being proposed, and no one is willing to give an inch on their fantasies, it is all seemingly as Macbeth says of life, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Now if the left had simplified their message so that we all could understand it, part of the fight would go away. No “public option” and no “co-ops”, and no “cost curves”; just something simple like “Medicare for all” would have worked nicely. It would not have stopped the right from opposing it, but it would have avoided the death-by-a-thousand-cuts that the present proposal is going through.

The argument from the right could then eliminate all of those inanities like “death panels” and “bureaucratic rationing” and “killing grandma”, and could have focused on their single, historical argument that “Medicare for all” is “Socialized Medicine”.

So what’s so bad about state-run medicine? Many people in this world with comparable incomes and equal educations, and who are equally devoted to their inefficient democracies as we to ours, seem to love it.

My parents lived for the last 28 years of their lives under the UK’s National Health Service (NHS). While

my Dad did once have to wait five months for an operation on a hiatal hernia, generally they saw their doctors on the day they called or the next day.

They got full treatment including preventive care and all prescriptions, and they probably lived a number of years beyond what they expected because of the excellent quality of their care. My mother had a serious pre-existing condition – yet when they moved to England that was never questioned. As legal residents, but still American citizens, they received many years of excellent care, including three extensive hospitalizations for my mother.

When her time came to die, nurses showed up at the house in the morning and prepared her for the day; her doctor stopped by every afternoon around 4 PM to check on her; two more nurses showed up around 7:30 PM to prepare her for the night. They bathed her, if she wished, changed her bedding, made her comfortable, and made sure that she had her medication to control pain – all in her own home.

The NHS provides these services to everyone for about 1/3 less per citizen than we spend. Infant mortality is lower than in the US (5.0:6.4/ 1,000 live births), and life expectancy is slightly higher (78.7:78.0). At least half of their doctors make as much or more than US doctors. Drug prices don't compare since prescriptions are free. So if you worry about cost, it seems that they might have the answer.

Only medical “extras” such as cosmetic procedures are not covered, but one can even get those under optional private plans. Those plans can also get you into a private hospital, get you a world-renowned specialist (rather than just the very good specialist at your local hospital) and can get you a private room while the NHS patients are in wards and semi-privates.

My folks got the same care as Stephen Hawking (yes he is a Brit) and as any member of Parliament.

What does all of this have to do with veterans?

What if we didn't have to depend on the VA for normal medicine, as so many of our veteran brothers and sisters must? What if those ills were taken care of by a universal system? Then the VA could concentrate on those medical problems that are the direct result of service – not just combat – all service; physical trauma, mental trauma, and service-induced disease.

For those of us on one of the TRICAREs the savings on prescriptions would be slight since we can get our medicines free at a military facility, or 3 1/3 cents a pill for generics and 10 cents a pill for brand

name. But while my four drugs cost me \$24 total every 90 days, the same four drugs in US pharmacies cost my fellow Americans from \$294 at the low end to \$874 at the high end. Somewhere, buried between my cost and theirs is the true cost, if you can find it.

For the normal citizen whose employer covers @70% of his or her premium, based on 2008 data, family care costs \$1,025 a month, and individual plans cost \$365/month. That \$760 the employer pays for family care could go to increase salaries, lower prices, and enhance competitiveness. Yes taxes would go probably go up slightly, but I'll bet it would be a lot less than the comparable commercial premium.

The VA Healthcare work load would drop significantly, and waiting lines for healthcare would dry up. Of course, such a change would have to be accompanied by a complete attitude overhaul, changing the goal from denying as much care as possible to allowing as many in as possible. Service connection would be the key, and the connection would be obvious, although perhaps still difficult in the case of environmentally induced disease. [This wouldn't improve the VA's performance on other benefits, but it might free up some resources to deal with those too.]

Veterans should be fighting for such a system, instead of fighting someone to get “the coverage we all were promised at enlistment”, which no Congressman or bureaucrat seems to understand or care about. We could just go to our ordinary doctor and get taken care of.

Perhaps many veterans want this benefit to remain exclusive because it represents a reward for the very real sacrifice that they made many years before.

One argument they shouldn't be using is that they don't want a bureaucrat between them and their doctor. Guess what? You have one there already. The difference is that the insurance company bureaucrat who is servicing you right now makes his points by denying you service – by maintaining or improving his company's “loss ratio”. Many even get bonuses for keeping you a sick as possible.

At least the government bureaucrat doesn't have his pay tied to your ill health and misery. If you are in Medicare, TRICARE or VA or any combination thereof right now, you have a government bureaucrat on your healthcare case anyway, and in my experience with two of those, it hasn't been bad at all.

Instead of trying to get into the VA system to get all of your medical problems taken care of, the government could take care of paying the veteran's monthly "Medicare for All" premium. To be fair it should be in varied amounts such as say 25% for those who serve one enlistment, 50% for ten years, and 100% for a career through retirement. You would still go into the VA system for service connected trauma or disease, but you would go in without waiting since requests for ordinary healthcare would not be choking up the waiting lines.

The reward for service would still be there, it just would come in a different form. It is the benefit that is important, as are the results for the veteran, not the form that it takes.

I know that many veterans organizations oppose such a plan. USDR, an organization I respect very much, has charged that any attempt to blend these operations would "devalue the service and sacrifice" of veterans.

I respectfully disagree.

We veterans did not fight for ourselves, we fought for our country. Our country includes all of our fellow

citizens and all legal residents. We fought so that they might have the right to life, liberty and happiness. What greater happiness can we offer than a relief from the worries and concerns of personal and family healthcare, and the disasters that can accompany it.

We can fight once again for life and happiness and none of this in any way threatens us as veterans nor our democracy – it doesn't make us a socialist country.

If we were to fight today for universal healthcare, and be satisfied that both our service connected conditions and, through fee-relief, our sacrifice were recognized and accommodated, we would be continuing our fight for our fellow citizens almost at no cost to ourselves.

True patriotism includes service to one's country. We served them before – let's serve them again!

"We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results."

Herman Melville

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims "Public List of Practitioners" are members of the court's bar www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/. Also this site for west coasters <http://www.chapman.edu/law/programs/clinics/amvets.asp>.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24.0,1423297.story>

Case Progress to Date:

7/23/2007 Suit filed w/Federal District Court

9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

12/15/2008 *Swords to Plowshares* and *Vietnam Veterans of America* file amicus briefs

12/22/2008 *Military Spouses for Change and United Spinal Association* file amicus briefs

3/4/2009 Appeal will not be subject to Mediation

4/6/2009 Requested an extension to reply to the DVA response to our brief

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

5/1/09 Appellants' Reply Brief filed

6/11/09 Oral Arguments Scheduled for 12 August 2009

8/12/09 Oral arguments

9/1/09 Reply on mediation

Here is a link to the legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit.

BE A MEMBER If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to [our website](#) and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have. It shouldn't be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures. Please encourage your friends who either are veterans, are related to veterans, or who support veterans' causes to [join VUFT, Inc.](#)

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on [our website](#) "[Donate](#)" page. Every little bit helps. We are a 501(c)(3): your donations are deductible on your federal taxes. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method. If you wish to volunteer your services to the organization, please contact the Chair at bhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org.

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS [SOME EDITED FOR LENGTH]

FREE MENTAL HEALTHCARE IN COLORADO

My name is Donna Descoteaux, LCSW with San Luis Valley Mental Health Center here is Alamosa, CO. I wanted to let your members know about a program we have to provide FREE mental health services to returning veterans and their families. This program is funded by the Civilians for Veterans Fund which is helping to provide services in three regions of Colorado; the San Luis Valley, Gunnison/Montrose region, and in the Southeastern areas covering the Arkansas Valley. The San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center will help soldiers and their families in the San Luis Valley region. Southeast Mental Health Services will serve those in the Arkansas Valley, while the Midwestern Colorado Mental Health Center will help those in need in the Gunnison/Montrose region. Thank You for your time,
Donna Descoteaux, LCSW - San Luis Valley Mental Health Center - 719-672-3143- <http://cbhc.org/>

IN RESPONSE TO:

Can the National Marine Corps Business Network have a small write up in your next newsletter?

The [National Marine Corps Business Network](#) is looking for fellow Marines that have left the Corps and started a career in business. We are a network of business owners, sales reps and executives that benefit from networking amongst Marines. Our two main functions are B2B networking and helping Marines transition into the business world.

For Marines who want to network, you can find new clients, advertise your business and participate in our social events.

For Marines looking for work, we offer mentors, resume building and job searching. We have Marine business owners that only want to hire Marines.

For Marines who enjoy the fellowship of Marines, we currently have 25 chapters that meet regularly across the country. Our goal is to be in every major metropolitan city.

For more information visit www.NMCCBN.com or email info@NMCCBN.com.

Mark Holm - Managing Partner and President - Ph (916) 718-8410 - Fx (916) 983-5021

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

(S.1347) THE CARMELO RODRIGUEZ MILITARY MEDICAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The Carmelo Rodriguez Military Medical Accountability Act introduced by Sen. Charles Schumer (NY) would restore the protections of the civil justice system to the men and women of our armed forces by repealing the Feres Doctrine, a 1950 Supreme Court ruling that prevents service members on active duty from holding the government accountable for non-combat related injuries. You are urged to support legislation to rectify this situation. To do so you can go to [http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=13791596&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=13791596&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]).

BIG PAY BOOST SOUGHT FOR BADLY INJURED VETS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Aug 3, 2009

Severely disabled veterans who need virtually full-time assistance carrying out routine tasks such as bathing, dressing and eating would receive up to \$1,410 more a month under a bipartisan bill introduced July 30 by members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Under the bill, 100 percent disabled veterans qualifying for the highest rate of special compensation because they need aid and attendance would receive up to \$8,642 a month.

The bill, HR 3407, has three other key provisions:

- Some eligibility restrictions on the highest levels of aid and attendance allowances would be relaxed so that veterans suffering from traumatic brain injuries would receive payments now limited to those who have lost limbs.
- Medal of Honor recipients would receive \$2,000 in monthly special compensation, twice the current rate.
- Veterans with severe burns would be eligible for adaptive vehicle grants, something not currently covered for those with burn injuries. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/08/military_severelydisabled_veteranpay_080309w/>

HOUSE PASSES BILL TO IMPROVE HOME ADAPTATION GRANTS FOR DISABLED VETS

July 29, 2009

Washington, D.C. – Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed a measure introduced by House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Steve Buyer, which would increase grants for disabled veterans to make accessibility modifications to their homes.

H.R. 1293, the Disabled Veterans Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Grant Increase Act of 2009, was approved by a vote of 426 to 0. The bill would provide a significant increase in the amount payable to veterans under the Home Improvement and Structural Alteration (HISA) grant program. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva072909-1.htm>

RETREAT – NEWS

THE HEART OF A HERO BEATS ON

Mark Berman - Washington Post Staff Writer - August 8, 2009

'The Worst Thing That Could Happen' Becomes Another's Chance to Live Cpl. Benjamin Kopp gave his life. And then he saved one.

An Army Ranger who had been on his third tour of duty, Kopp was buried Friday at Arlington National Cemetery. Sadly, it's a familiar story: a young man dead before his time, shot by unnamed enemies on the other side of the world.

But this time, there was a renewed life, too. Kopp wanted to be an organ donor. And after he died, his heart was transplanted into a family member's friend who had a rare form of congenital heart disease.

"How can you have a better heart?" said a grateful Judy Meikle, 57, of Winnetka, Ill., who is still recovering from the surgery. "I have the heart of a 21-year-old Army Ranger war hero beating in me."

Kopp's mother, Jill Stephenson of Rosemount, Minn., said that in addition to her son's heart, doctors removed his kidneys, pancreas and liver for transplant. <More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/07/AR2009080703433.html>

DETAINEE INTERROGATIONS TO BE RESTRICTED TO U.S. MILITARY RULES

Viola Gienger and James Rowley - Aug. 24 (Bloomberg)

An Obama administration task force has determined that the CIA will no longer have the lead role in interrogating suspected terrorists and that U.S. military procedures must be followed in the questioning, a government official said.

<More at: www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601110&sid=aYVjuuGI46t8>

ONE OF THE MANY REASONS WHY

CIA REPORT: 'INHUMANE' TACTICS USED ON DETAINEES

Steven R. Hurst and Devlin Barrett - Aug 24, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) - CIA interrogators threatened to kill the children of one detainee at the height of the Bush administration's war on terror and implied that another's mother would be sexually assaulted, newly declassified documents revealed Monday as the government launched a criminal investigation into the spy agency's "unauthorized, improvised, inhumane" practices. <More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20090824/D9A9FLBG1.html>>

1,200 VETERANS WRONGLY TOLD THEY HAVE ALS

Associated Press - August 24, 2009

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) - At least 1,200 Gulf War veterans across the country have been mistakenly notified by the Veterans Administration that they suffer from a fatal neurological disease. ... the VA is blaming a coding error for the mistake.

<More at: www.nbc-2.com/global/story.asp?s=10980522>

AS VETS AWAIT CHECKS, VA WORKERS GET \$24M BONUSES

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS - New York Times - August 21, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Outside the Veterans Affairs Department, severely wounded veterans have faced financial hardship waiting for their first disability payment. Inside, money has been flowing in the form of \$24 million in bonuses.

In scathing reports this week, the VA's inspector general said thousands of technology office employees at the VA received the bonuses over a two-year period, some under questionable circumstances. It also detailed abuses ranging from nepotism to an inappropriate relationship between two VA employees. On the Net:

Reports from VA IG: www.va.gov/oig/51/fy2009rpts/VAOIG-09-01123-196.pdf ; www.va.gov/oig/51/fy2009rpts/VAOIG-09-01123-195.pdf

<More at: www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/08/21/us/politics/AP-US-Veterans-Bonuses.html>

MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM WAS UNETHICAL IN AWARDING CONTRACT

Bob Brewin - 07/28/09

The Military Health System has engaged in unethical contracting with a technology company that is developing one of government's most complex and high-profile computer networks, an electronic health record system that eventually will exchange information with the Veterans Affairs Department, internal e-mails sent within the Army Medical Command and the Military Health System alleged. <More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090728_3448.php>

LOSING BIDDERS PROTEST NEW TRICARE CONTRACTS

Tom Philpott - August 16, 2009

Transition to new managed-care support contractors for six million TRICARE beneficiaries across 30 states has been halted while the Government Accountability Office reviews protests filed by losing bidders.

<More at: www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/article/20090816/NEWS02/908160321/1009>

CONTRACTOR RETURNS MONEY TO PENTAGON

Tony Capaccio - BLOOMBERG NEWS - July 25, 2009

Apptis Inc., a military information technology provider, repaid \$1.3 million of a \$5.4 million Pentagon contract after investigators said the company provided inadequate computer security and a subcontractors system was hacked from an Internet address in China.

Privately held Apptis, based in Chantilly, returned the money in February "for services that were never performed" during a three-year military health-service contract awarded in November 2004, according to the Pentagon inspector generals semi-annual report. <More at: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jul/25/contractor-returns-money-to-pentagon/>

YET ANOTHER "SEAMLESS TRANSITION" PROMISE

VA OUTREACH AIMS AT SEAMLESS TRANSITION

Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service Aug 6, 2009

WASHINGTON (Aug. 5, 2009) -- The days of the Department of Veterans Affairs waiting passively for veterans leaving the military to come seeking benefits and services are over, President Barack Obama told military reporters yesterday. Today's VA is reaching out, while servicemembers are still in uniform, to make sure they know what their benefits are and what services are available to them, he said during a White House roundtable interview.

<More at: www.army.mil/news/2009/08/06/25531-va-outreach-aims-at-seamless-transition/>

VETERANS SEE HOPES FOR HOMES FALL THROUGH

Mary Gail Hare - The Baltimore Sun - August 22, 2009

VA cancels Fort Howard redevelopment contract; deposit refunds sought

Walter Pasciak, 84, was so eager to move to a proposed \$180 million waterfront retirement community for veterans in eastern Baltimore County that he paid \$5,000 to be given "priority consideration" on the waiting list.

"The location is great, and all the facilities would have been there," said Pasciak, a World War II veteran.

Now he doesn't know whether he'll see the money again.

On Thursday, the Department of Veterans Affairs terminated its contract with Federal Development LLC, a Washington-based company that had been selected to redevelop Fort Howard Hospital and other buildings at the one-time Army base on the North Point peninsula. <More at: www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-county/bal-md.co.forthowdaug22.0.4777615.story>

MILLIONS FACE SHRINKING SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS

Stephen Ohlemacher - Associated Press Writer 24 August 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Millions of older people face shrinking Social Security checks next year, the first time in a generation that payments would not rise.

The trustees who oversee Social Security are projecting there won't be a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for the next two years. That hasn't happened since automatic increases were adopted in 1975.

By law, Social Security benefits cannot go down. Nevertheless, monthly payments would drop for millions of people in the Medicare prescription drug program because the premiums, which often are deducted from Social Security payments, are scheduled to go up slightly. <More at: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/08/23/ap/government/main5260179.shtml>

VA WORKS TO PREVENT VETERANS FROM REPEATING CRIMES

P. Solomon Banda (AP) – Aug 5, 2009

DENVER — Bracing for an influx of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Veterans Affairs has launched an ambitious effort to locate veterans who've had minor brushes with the law and offer them treatment to try to prevent repeat crimes. <More at: www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hIqLQw_08nBbLx0CqCP0xIWLNDIwD99SSP302>

SOLDIERS CITE DISCIPLINE BREAKDOWN IN IRAQ

The Associated Press - 2009-07-27

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. Soldiers from an Army unit that had 10 infantrymen accused of murder, attempted murder or manslaughter after returning to civilian life described a breakdown in discipline during their Iraq deployment in which troops killed civilians, a newspaper reported Sunday. <More at: <http://headlines.ocreger.com/common/printer/view.php?db=ocprint&id=35552>>

4 AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN IRAQ CHARGED WITH CRUELTY, MALTREATMENT OF COMRADES, US MILITARY SAYS

Chelsea J. Carter - Associated Press - 08/21/09

BAGHDAD — Four American soldiers in Iraq have been charged with cruelty and maltreatment of soldiers in their platoon, the U.S. military said Friday. The four Multi-National Division-South soldiers are accused of abusing male soldiers with excessive physical fitness, said Lt. Col. Kevin Olson, a military spokesman. <More at: www.washingtonexaminer.com/world/ap/50673757.html>

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL: WHY ARE WE DOLING OUT HARSH JUSTICE TO RETURNING WAR VETS?

Penny Coleman, AlterNet - August 5, 2009

Last March, a member of one of the U.S. military's special operations forces (SOF), home from Iraq for a family emergency, shot and killed a dog that attacked him on his front lawn. He is now facing multiple felony charges and maybe a prison sentence. <More at: www.alternet.org/story/141563/>

THE TRAGEDY OF OUR 'DISAPPEARED' VETERANS

Penny Coleman – AlterNet - August 12, 2009

Wayne McMahon was busted on gun charges six months after he got out of the Marines. He was jumped by a gang of kids in his hometown of Albany, N.Y. , and he went for the assault rifle he kept in the back of his SUV. He's serving "three flat, with two years of post-release" at Groveland Prison in upstate New York. Maybe it's tempting to write McMahon off as just a screwed-up person who made the kinds of mistakes that *should* have landed him in jail, but maybe that's because his injuries don't show on the outside. <More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/140828/>>

PROJECT COMPASSION TO TURN FORECLOSURES INTO HOMES FOR DISABLED VETERANS

Brian Rosenthal - August 13, 2009

At first glance, they seem unlikely partners. RG Smith, a real estate agent from Michigan, is short with graying hair and a tidy beard. Jim Hesel, a home remodeling contractor from California, is tall and slim, with light brown hair and no facial hair. But the two Northern Nevada men share a passion to help American soldiers. They said they think they've found their "destiny" acquiring foreclosed homes, fixing them up and selling them cheaply to disabled veterans.

<More at: www.rqj.com/article/20090813/NEWS/908130341/1321/news/Project-Compassion-to-turn-foreclosures-into-homes-for-disabled-veterans>

ARMY MISSTEPS LEFT TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN OPEN TO DEADLY ATTACK, STUDY REVEALS ~ Hal Bernton and Cheryl Phillips - Seattle Times staff reporters - July 31, 2009

In the days before one of the fiercest battles in America's eight-year war in Afghanistan, Army Capt. Benjamin Pry argued for more surveillance flights to help his beleaguered unit of fewer than 50 soldiers. Since moving into a new outpost on July 8, 2008, they had struggled with shortages of water, fuel, food and heavy machinery to help defend against an enemy attack that they believed would eventually come. Lacking excavating equipment, the troops dug fortifications by scraping the rocky soil with spades and bare hands.

Then on July 12, headquarters commanders diverted drones — remotely operated planes outfitted with cameras to spot enemy movements — to another area. Pry argued so hard to undo that decision that he said he breached professional etiquette. Still, he was unsuccessful. "We had no support from brigade, division or theater level assets at the time," Pry told Army historians. <More at: http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2009572620_wanat31m.html>

GUESS THEY WERE TOO BUSY TO GET TO YOUR CLAIM

THREE PLEAD GUILTY TO FILING FALSE VA DISABILITY CLAIMS RESULTING IN NEARLY \$2 MILLION IN LOSSES

United States Attorney's Office; Western District of Kentucky - August 18, 2009

Parker Also Pleads Guilty to Stealing Over \$47,000 from the Disabled American Veterans Service Organization

LOUISVILLE, KY—Daniel Ryan Parker, age 38, of Santa Rosa, Florida, (formerly of Crestwood, Kentucky), Jeffrey Allan McGill, age 38, of LaGrange, Kentucky, and Michael D. Harper, age 52, of Scottsville, Kentucky, pled guilty on August 17, 2009, to conspiring to defraud the United States and paying and accepting bribes, Acting United States Attorney Candace G. Hill of the Western District of Kentucky announced today.

Parker was the National Service Office Supervisor for the Disabled American Veterans Service Organization (DAV) in Louisville, Kentucky, and one of Parker's responsibilities was to assist veterans in their pursuit of military related disability benefits. McGill was a Veteran Service Representative with the VA regional office in Louisville, Kentucky, and among other things was responsible for reviewing and rating VA disability claims. <More at: <http://louisville.fbi.gov/doipressrel/pressrel09/lo081809.htm>>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
8/27-8/30		Fraser Field Lynn, MA	The Wall that Heals	David J. Solimine Funeral Service, Inc.	
8/28		Duluth, MN	Resource Fair	Kara Cornils	651-292-0145
8/29		Eugene, OR	Resource Fair	David Stone	800-369-4283
9/10-9/13		Chisago Lakes Area High School Lindstrom,, MN	The Wall that Heals	VFW Chisago Lakes Post 7267	
9/10		Indianapolis, IN	Resource Fair	Tina Shelley	317-951-0688
9/11	1000-1600	Houston Marriott West Loop 1750 West Loop South, Houston, TX	9/11 Memorial Hiring Event		Register
9/12		Compton, CA	Stand Down	Ivan Mason	310-348-7600
9/12		Billings, MT	Resource Fair	Lori Hartford	406-256-7957
9/12		Warrenton, OR	Resource Fair	Patrick Preston/Phil Hertel	503-325-4821 x-227

We are a non-partisan organization. We will advertise all legitimate veterans' events, regardless of purpose or affiliation.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

FOR VETERANS, A WEEKEND PASS FROM HOMELESSNESS

Erik Eckholm - San Diego Journal - July 26, 2009

SAN DIEGO — The future mix of homeless veterans was signaled here last weekend at Stand Down, an annual three-day tent city that provides respite and aid to former members of the armed forces whose lives have collapsed. The number of homeless veterans who made their way to a high school's athletic fields for the gathering reached a record high, some 950

compared with last year's record of 830. The job-devouring recession is pushing up the numbers, but organizers said they were also starting to see younger veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, some with traumatic brain injuries or psychological stresses, who had fallen through the safety nets with unusual speed.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/us/26homeless.htm>

PENTAGON RESPONSE TO GUARD CHEMICAL EXPOSURE ANGERS ROCKEFELLER

Andrew Clevenger - Staff writer - Advertiser - August 4, 2009

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- U.S. Sen. Jay Rockefeller is angry with the U.S. Department of Defense because he believes it isn't telling soldiers that exposure to a toxic chemical in Iraq may have devastating effects on their health.

Read more about the Qarmat Ali hearing [here](http://wvgazette.com/News/politics/200908040855). <More at: <http://wvgazette.com/News/politics/200908040855>>

\$117 MILLION FOR GIS' EMOTIONAL TRAINING

Benedict Carey - The New York Times – Aug 18, 2009

Program aims to end culture that views talk of feelings as a weakness

PHILADELPHIA - The Army plans to require that all 1.1 million of its soldiers take intensive training in emotional resiliency, military officials say. The training, the first of its kind in the military, is meant to improve performance in combat and head off the mental health problems, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide, that plague about one-fifth of troops returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Active-duty soldiers, reservists and members of the National Guard will receive the training, which will also be available to their family members and to civilian employees. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32456908/ns/us_news-the_new_york_times/from/ET/>

AMERICAN TROOPS RETURN FROM IRAQ WITH 'CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR'

29 Jul 2009

Amid gloomy reports of high suicide rates in the US military, a new six-month study reveals what other consequences follow American deployments abroad. A fact-based report published by *The Washington Post* in late May estimated that more than 20 percent of the US combat forces deployed to war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan return home psychologically damaged.

The report asserted that American soldiers suffer mostly from major depression and long periods of combat-related stress and show severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The trauma induced on American soldiers serving abroad is also the cause of an "exceptionally high rate of criminal behavior" that is, according to a new report, unleashed upon their return to their home towns. <More at: www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=101902§ionid=3510203>

MORE MILITARY KIDS SEEKING MENTAL HELP

Kimberly Hefling - Associated Press Writer - August 09, 2009

Children of U.S. military troops sought outpatient mental-health care 2 million times last year, double the number at the start of the Iraq war, and there was also an alarming spike in the number of military children actually hospitalized for mental-health reasons. <More at: http://durangoherald.com/sections/Features/Family/2009/08/09/More_military_kids_seeking_mental_help>

LAWSUITS ACCUSE VA OF NEGLIGENCE

Aug. 24, 2009 at 9:40 AM

A Florida man is one of at least 50 people suing the Department of Veteran Affairs with allegations of negligent use of medical equipment, authorities said. Juan Rivera, 55, was diagnosed with HIV after having a routine colonoscopy at the veterans hospital in Miami in May 2008, Ira Leesfield, his lawyer, said.

<More at: www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/08/24/Lawsuits-accuse-VA-of-negligence/UPI-89721251121220/>

MORE PROBLEMS FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS PATIENTS

There are six more cases of prostate cancer patients who were given incorrect doses of radiation at a Philadelphia-area Veterans Affairs hospital, officials said. The bogus cancer treatments are just the latest black eye for the embattled VA, which is already embroiled in a scandal involving the improper reuse of medical equipment in colonoscopies and other procedures, which possibly exposed thousands of patients to hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, and other deadly diseases.

<More at: www.attorneyatlaw.com/2009/08/more-problems-for-veterans-affairs-patients/>

PALO ALTO VA BOTCHES GLAUCOMA TREATMENT

Jessica Bernstein-Wax – 25 July 2009

Seven veterans blind and others with "progressive visual loss" as VA admits improper care. VA says glaucoma patients at Palo Alto facility suffered severe vision loss due to mistreatment

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has confirmed its Palo Alto facility put the chief of optometry on administrative leave and reassigned another optometrist while it investigated the treatment of hundreds of eye patients, some of whom experienced significant vision loss under the department's care. <More at: www.mercurynews.com/ci_12886990>

SPOKANE VA CENTER MISCOUNTED SUICIDES

Spokesman-Review - August 10, 2009

The number of Spokane, Wash.-area veterans who killed themselves in a one-year period is far greater than the Spokane Veteran Affairs Medical Center knew at the time, a VA investigation has found.

The VA's Office of Medical Investigations discovered that from July 2007 through the first week of July 2008, at least 22 veterans in the Spokane VA service area killed themselves, and 15 of them had contact with the medical center.

Spokane VA had previously reported nine suicides and 34 attempted suicides in that time period. All of them had some contact with the medical center. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/spokane-va-center-miscounted-suicides.html>

PTSD RAISES HEART DISEASE RISK IN IRAQ WAR VETS

Aug 4, 2009

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Veterans who come home from Iraq and Afghanistan with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health diagnoses are hit with a double whammy: They also have greater risk factors for heart disease, according to a report in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

<More at: www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSTRE5736SM20090804>

VA SIMPLIFIES COMPENSATION RULES FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs - 08.24.2009

WASHINGTON - The Veterans Affairs Department is taking steps to help veterans seeking compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced, Aug. 24.

"The hidden wounds of war are being addressed vigorously and comprehensively by this administration as we move VA forward in its transformation to the 21st century," Shinseki said.

VA is publishing a proposed regulation today in the Federal Register to make it easier for a veteran to claim service connection for PTSD by reducing the evidence needed if the stressor claimed is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity. <More at: www.dvidshub.net/?script=news/news_show.php&id=37886>

BUT THE PROBLEM REMAINS

VETERANS FORSAKE STUDIES OF STRESS

Bryan Bender, Globe Staff - August 24, 2009

Stigma impedes search for remedies

WASHINGTON - Researchers testing ways to treat the psychological wounds of war among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are encountering a serious roadblock: a shortage of willing study participants.

A strong stigma in the military associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is blamed for the reluctance of combat veterans to take part in a pair of treatment programs being evaluated by staff from the Veterans Administration in Boston at facilities in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire, study directors said.

The VA and the Pentagon hope the studies will lead to a standard intervention when veterans and returning soldiers exhibit signs of post-battle stress, reducing domestic abuse and other violence. In one study, they are measuring the effectiveness of intensive couples counseling; in another, they are schooling veterans in anger management. But since recruiting began at the beginning of the year, only 10 couples have signed up for the first study, far short of the 440 needed, according to officials. Out of 135 male veterans needed for the second study, mean while, only 13 have been accepted so far.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/health/articles/2009/08/24/few_iraq_afghanistan_veterans_willing_to_take_part_in_boston_vas_studies_on_post_traumatic_stress>

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FIX POST 9/11 GI BILL TUITION GLITCH ~ Veterans Will Now Have Standardized Access to Private, Graduate and Out-of State Schools in California Under Yellow Ribbon Program

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced today a joint solution has been reached between the State of California and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) concerning how tuition and fees are determined. The new definition will allow for standardized application under the new Post 9/11 GI Bill and the accompanying Yellow Ribbon program.

"The Post-9/11 GI Bill is an important part of fulfilling our promise to the men and women who have served our country so honorably," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. "This solution will allow all Veterans who want to attend a California school the same benefits as any other Veteran across the nation." <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/vap09/vap080409-1.htm>

COLLEGES IGNORING MILITARY EXPERIENCE

The Associated Press - Aug 20, 2009

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Twelve years of military service left Donald Spradling highly trained in satellite imagery, nuclear engineering and foreign intelligence analysis. None of that made a difference to the University of Missouri. When the fall semester begins next week, the 33-year-old father of five will be taking largely introductory courses with the rest of the school's freshmen.

"I'm going to be studying things I already learned all over again," the Navy veteran said.

Nearly half a million veterans are expected on college campuses this year as part of the new GI Bill. The surge is leading to a call for schools to re-examine their policies of declining to grant college credit for military training and service.

<More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32500220/ns/us_news-education/>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE MONDAY 24 AUGUST 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,350 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,334
WOUNDED US [8/1/09]	31,460
OTHER US CASUALTIES [8/1/09]	≥38,199
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	191
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [8/24/09]	≥ 101,388 – 1,339,771
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,879 DAYS)

KILLED US	798
WOUNDED US [8/1/09]	3,442
OTHER CASUALTIES US [8/1/09]	8,336
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	33
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	538
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION [12/2/07]	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS [7/4/2009]	≥ 7,589
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS [2/24/2009]	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$676,748,293,981
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$225,169,191,547

NOTE: SOME NUMBERS DO NOT CHANGE BETWEEN ISSUES BECAUSE UPDATED FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

* This entry has been changed to "Non-mortal casualties" which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. To see detailed demographic data on the casualties go to <http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>

** Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF AUGUST 18, 2009

This week the Army, Marine Corps and Air Force announced an increase in activated reservists, while the Navy and Coast Guard announced a decrease. The net collective result is 692 more reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 112,758; Navy Reserve, 6,618; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,332; Marine Corps

Reserve, 8,773; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 624. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 143,105, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all NG and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2009/d20090818ngr.pdf

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

THE SECRETARY AND THE VETERANS

Posted by The Oregonian Editorial Board August 18, 2009

Eric Shinseki shines a light on the nation's obligations

Eric Shinseki is the fresh new face of veterans affairs in the United States, and his visit to Portland today helps to highlight the government's positive efforts to serve military veterans with medical care and educational opportunities they deserve.

Yet the challenges he faces as secretary of veterans affairs are so large and persistent that he's bound to disappoint some who have such high hopes for him and for the president who appointed him.

<More at: http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/08/post_21.html

I BELIEVE THE RESPONSE TO THE HIGHLIGHTED PORTION IS, "WELL, DUH!"

VA BEGINS EFFORT TO HELP VETERANS IN JAIL

The Associated Press - Aug 5, 2009

DENVER — The Department of Veterans Affairs has started a nationwide effort to find veterans in jails for minor brushes with the law and offer them medical treatment in hopes of preventing repeat crimes.

The Veterans Justice Outreach Program was launched this year before an Army study released July 15 found a possible link between intense combat and 11 slayings allegedly committed by a handful of Fort Carson soldiers returning from deployment. In El Paso County, next to Fort Carson, the sheriff's department is working on adding military service to information collected during booking.

VA officials say some veterans may be suffering from untreated post traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury and may be self-medicating when they get charged with minor crimes.

http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/08/ap_vetcrimes_vahelp_080509/>

I'M SURE THE VA HAS NO IDEA WHY THEY ARE UNTREATED, DO THEY? MUST BE THE VETERANS' FAULT, DON'T YOU THINK?

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

LOWE'S OFFERING VETERANS 10 PERCENT DISCOUNT

08.22.09

Lowe's Corporation has begun a program giving veterans a 10 percent discount on all purchases.

According to a written statement from the San Jacinto County Veteran's Service Officer, Gerald Duncan, eligible veterans simply have to state they are veteran at check out and ask for "the veteran's 10 percent discount."

The written notice goes on to state that the clerk will ask for identification proving veteran status.

Eligible forms of identification include: a VA medical card, Department of Defense retirement card or a DD-214.

Duncan went on to write that he, "tried this program out on Saturday, August 15, without any problems."

www.hcnonline.com/articles/2009/08/23/cleveland_advocate/news/3509veteran_s_office_ca.txt

VA CREATING 28 NEW VET CENTERS

8/14/2009 - WASHINGTON (AFNS)

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced Aug. 14 that combat veterans will receive readjustment counseling and other assistance in 28 additional communities across the country where the Department of Veterans Affairs will establish vet centers in 2010. <More at: www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123163419>

Communities receiving new VA vet centers include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">-- American Samoa-- Arizona -- Mohave and Yuma Counties-- California -- San Luis Obispo County-- Delaware -- Sussex County-- Florida -- Marion, Lake, Collier, Okaloosa and Bay Counties-- Georgia -- Muscogee and Richmond Counties-- Hawaii -- Western Oahu-- Indiana -- St. Joseph County-- Louisiana -- Rapides Parish-- Michigan -- Grand Traverse County, also serving Wexford County | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-- Missouri -- Boone County-- Montana -- Cascade and Flathead Counties-- Ohio -- Stark County-- Oregon -- Deschutes County-- Pennsylvania -- Lancaster County-- South Carolina -- Horry County-- Texas -- Jefferson and Taylor Counties-- Utah -- Washington County-- Washington -- Walla Walla County, also serving Umatilla County, Oregon-- Wisconsin -- LaCrosse County, also serving Monroe County. |
|--|---|

OVER \$49,000 NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH GI BILL

The Post 9/11 GI Bill officially started paying out Aug 1. Here is what your new benefit can offer:

- Up to 100% Tuition Assistance
- Monthly Housing Stipend up to \$2,700
- Annual Book Stipend up to \$1,000
- One Time Relocation Allowance up to \$500
- Benefit Transferability to Spouse

MILITARY SPOUSE TUITION ASSISTANCE ~ MYCAA PROGRAM

Rod Powers - About.com - Jul 30 2009

Eligible military spouses are now able to receive up to \$6,000 of tuition assistance that can help them pursue education, training, licenses, certificates and degrees leading to employment in in what the military calls "portable career fields. Portable careers are those that are likely to provide job opportunities in most locations where military service members are stationed. These might include but are not limited to: business/management, construction trades, education, financial services, health services, homeland security, hospitality management, human resources, information technology, real estate, etc.

Who is Eligible

Spouses of Active Duty members of the Department of Defense and activated members of the National Guard and Reserve Components are eligible.

What the Program Pays For

Up to \$6,000 (in a lifetime) for expenses such as education and training programs, tuition, licensing and credentialing fees. This includes degree programs (e.g. associates, bachelors, masters, doctoral and post doctoral), continuing education classes (including those offered through professional associations), Bar, CPA and other similar exams, state certifications for teachers, medical professionals and other licensed professionals.

<More at: <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/gibillandta/a/spouseeta.htm>

NOTICE

If at any time you cannot open a link in this newsletter to an article or web page that interests you, please let me know at scook@vuft; I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have been asked what guides my selection of articles. In general, I try to stick with articles that deal exclusively with our target group: serving military, veterans, retirees, and their families. I also favor articles that deal with the effect of Legislative or Executive inaction or bad actions that adversely affect our target group. I try not to pick those articles that have already been beaten to death in the regular press, but rather try to bring the reader articles that he or she might not run across in another medium. While we are non-partisan, I do not believe articles critical of government actions to be partisan as long as they are accurate and fair. Criticism, like dissent, is fair. Finally, I screen hundreds of articles for inclusions and for every article I include, I throw five or six away – good articles, but not as important as the ones selected.

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. [Sandy Cook](#), Editor

If you need to call us, our number is 1.805.530.6417.

The phone is covered by a voice recorder 24 hours a day. We'll get back to you ASAP.