

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 3

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 SEPTEMBER 2008

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

THE FRENCH USUALLY HAVE A WORD FOR IT

Well folks they've established another advisory committee at DVA!

Whenever any organization is failing, it gets reorganized. Somehow, moving all that messy stuff around the chicken coop promises to change it from slimy, grey, stinky stuff into gold and diamonds. The reorganization promises to solve all the problems of the old organization, which incidentally was set up by the same chickens. "We failed before so you can rest assured that we will be successful this time."

When the organization is a governmental department, then prior to reorganization we have to have an advisory committee, sometimes called a "blue ribbon panel" – or as the French would say "*Cordon Bleu*" (coincidentally, on some menus, another chicken product).

We are promised that the members of the committee understand the problem, have vast experience in the issues involved, and just need anywhere from 6 to 18 months to come up with a report. The report, we are also promised, will provide a solution to the problem -- probably through yet another reorganization. Of course, they will need a year or two to convert the report to a plan, another year or so to develop a budget for implementing the plan, and then if Congress provides the money in some future year's budget, a year or two to set up the program.

This new committee is called the "Veterans Administration Benefits Advisory Committee", which apparently was the name of the old committee – but they assure us that this is a new deal. The committee's task is to "help improve VA's compensation system, especially recommending ways to update and improve

the medical evaluation to use for disability compensation."

I thought that the current management of the VA was selected, vetted, and approved for office precisely because they brought that kind of expertise to the task. Apparently the current bosses didn't have the talent they were touted to have, and considering the current state of affairs, don't have a clue how to get out of this mess. Now the bosses need yet another advisory committee to tell them how to do the job the bosses were hired to do in the first place.

So let's look at that committee and see how they measure up to the task.

The chairman, retired Army Lt. Gen. James Terry Scott, has been doing the same job apparently since 2004, but is now hailed as the leader of the new (old?) committee. I guess that means he couldn't get the job done in four years so now he gets to do it over. It is hard to understand how he, a partner in a Texas financial services firm, can provide any of the expertise that task seems to demand. In fact, since he has apparently been unable to solve the benefits problem in four years, it is hard to envision success this time around at all. One is reminded of the old saw, "there isn't time to do it right, but there is time to do it over."

The cast of players includes the former Surgeon General of the Army and commander of the U.S. Army Medical Command -- and we all know what high grades that command has received recently because of the condition of various medical facilities, especially Walter Reed Army Hospital. There are all so several healthcare management "experts" and a few business management "experts". There are a couple of doctors, a judge, a professor, and a few more retired military

officers who, although related in one way or another to the medical profession, seem to all be management gurus rather than disability evaluation professionals.

One member's claim to fame is as a senior advisor for programs in the Ministry of Communications under L. Paul Bremer in the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, and we all know how successful that little enterprise was. Another's résumé emphasizes his experience at the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission which ought to help if part of the solution turns out to be the closing of more VA facilities.

Enough of the members of the committee are currently engaged in commercial business management and operations analysis enterprises to raise the specter of yet another "privatization" solution on the horizon. Perhaps they can outsource the VA's disability compensation education system to Mumbai or Islamabad. At least then there would be somebody at the other end of the line when we call out for help. Disability evaluation tech support anyone?

But, if all you want is another advisory committee to keep you from having to wrestle with the real problems, all the while providing a public show that you are "working as hard as we can to find a solution", then I guess this is what's needed. I, for one, won't be standing on one leg and holding my breath expecting success or even modest improvement.

Meanwhile, the backlog grows -- some report it as high as 800,000 claims, but who knows what the truth is? The individual veterans who need a disability rating now will just have to wait and give the committee, and the VA, and the Congress, and the OMB more time.

You get the sense that they see the real problem as being the impatience of the individual veterans, and our unwillingness to be sympathetic to their oh-so-difficult job. I wonder if they refer to all of us as "whiners" too?

One imagines that the committee might even be considered a cost-saving body, as many of us will conveniently close our claims by dying during the long course of their deliberations -- "Dead? Case closed!". The bosses will probably even be able to show an improvement in claims closure times by averaging in the dead claimants.

The French are right with another of their expressions, aren't they? "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*", or, "The more things change, the more they remain the same."

Although the French may not have a word for everything, in the end the slimy, grey, stinky stuff remains "*fèces de poulet*", doesn't it?

Bon chance! [Ed.]

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/

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

Membership is open, free, and very worthwhile! Get your fellow veterans, and veterans' family members to join VUFT! We are beginning to be heard, and we need you to help us get the message out. If each of us would bring in one new member every month, what an impact we could have!

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: Our advocates are currently working on the appeal to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

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

10/11/2008 Brief to be filed

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 rhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org

DO YOU PASS THIS ON TO ANYONE?
IF YOU DO. PLEASE [LET US KNOW](#) HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU SEND IT TO
[NO NAMES, JUST NUMBERS](#)

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

REQUESTING HELP

Sep 15, 2008

I'm a graduate student at Florida Atlantic University and we are doing a study aimed at helping rehabilitation counselors who work with veterans better address the employment and adjustment needs of veterans who were disabled or injured in OEF and OIF action. [We are trying to find] disabled veterans who might be willing to fill out our on-line survey at:

www.coe.fau.edu/faculty/frain/veteran..htm

In return for completing this survey, we are offering \$20 gift certificates for either Target, Home Depot, Walgreens, or if you prefer, you may donate the gift certificate to Wounded Warriors.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the lead researcher, Dr. Michael Frain, at Florida Atlantic University. His email is mfrain@fau.edu and his phone number is (561) 297-3626.

Thank you for considering this request. - Julia Manfre - juliamanfre@yahoo.com

PTSD APNEA CLINICAL STUDY (PACS)

Principal Investigator: Lisa Kinoshita, PhD

Veterans who have been exposed to physical assault, highly stressful situations or life-threatening events may develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). VA and Stanford researchers are dedicated to better understand PTSD. As a part of this effort we are conducting research studies. The current research program aims to study how sleep disordered breathing, age and genetics may affect memory in older adult veterans with PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD

- Nightmares about the traumatic event
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling tense, on-guard, and easily startled
- Feeling irritable and easily angered, often about everyday things
- Difficulty remembering or concentrating

We are looking for male and female veterans, 55 years old and older to participate. The study consists of a screening visit to determine eligibility and yearly overnight visits. During the overnight visit we will monitor your sleep. There is compensation of up to \$250 for completion of the study.

For more information and a confidential discussion, please call Kader Ucar at (650) 849-0482. See the Recruitment flyer at <http://psychiatry.stanford.edu/alzheimer/files/PACSRecruitmentFlyer.pdf>

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

H.R. 6625: VETERAN VOTING SUPPORT ACT

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to permit facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be designated as voter registration agencies, and for other purposes. *Passed the House*

OMNIBUS VETERANS' BENEFITS BILL PASSES SENATE WITH UNANIMOUS SUPPORT

WASHINGTON, D.C. —U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, thanked his Senate colleagues and urged the House of Representatives to promptly consider S. 3023, the [Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008](#), following the bill's Senate-passage by unanimous consent 9/17/08.

SENATE OKS RECEIPT OF BOTH SURVIVOR BENEFITS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Sep 12, 2008

The Senate voted 94-2 Wednesday to allow survivors of deceased service members and military retirees to receive full military and veterans survivor benefits concurrently with no offsets, a move that addresses one of the top issues raised by associations representing the interests of active, reserve and retired service members and their families.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2008/09/military_survivorbenefits_offset_091108w/>

CHAIRMAN FILNER INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO END DELAYS AND STOP BUDGET SHORTFALLS FOR VETERANS HEALTH CARE FUNDING

September 18, 2008

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) today introduced H.R. 6939, The Veterans Health Care Budget Reform Act, legislation to ensure that VA health care funding is sufficient, timely and predictable. The bipartisan bill was cosponsored in the House by Reps. Walter Jones (R-NC), Michael Michaud (D-ME), Timothy J. Walz (D-MN), and Phil Hare (D-IL). An identical bill was introduced in the Senate today by Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-HI). ... H.R. 6939 would authorize Congress to approve VA medical care appropriations one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year. <More at: <http://veterans.house.gov/news/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=308>>

VETERAN HEALTHCARE BILLS LANGUISH IN CONGRESS

David Goldstein - McClatchy Newspapers - Sep. 22, 2008

WASHINGTON — Despite an abundance of tributes to the heroism and patriotism of wounded veterans, Congress might leave town to campaign before acting on key bills to help them.

Some of the delays are due to politics, which angers veterans advocates.

"It's still surprising to me the extent to which you have to fight when everyone in Congress would say they support the troops and they want to help veterans," said Vanessa Williamson, the policy director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Some bills are caught in the traffic jam of legislation, and it can take time to get all the interested parties — including the Veterans Affairs Department and veterans' groups with different agendas — on board.

More than 70 separate bills are pending just to improve mental-health services alone, Williamson said. Many would make it easier for veterans to get treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and substance abuse.

<More at: www.star-telegram.com/national_news/story/924316.html>

BILL RAISES VA MILEAGE RATE TO 41.5 CENTS

Karen Jowers - Staff writer - Sep 25, 2008

The mileage reimbursement rate would increase to 41.5 cents a mile for veterans traveling to Veterans Affairs Department medical centers under a compromise reached by House and Senate appropriators. The increase from the current rate of 28.5 cents a mile is part of a \$72.9 billion fiscal 2009 military construction and veterans affairs spending bill that lawmakers are hoping to pass this week. The compromise also provides for increasing enrollment of Priority 8 veterans in VA health care.

<More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/09/military_va_mileagereimbursement_092408w/>

SENATE PASSES 3.9% MILITARY PAY HIKE

September 22, 2008

The Senate passed a measure that would permit \$612.5 billion in spending for national defense programs, including \$70 billion for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also includes a 3.9 percent pay increase for military personnel, half a percentage more than President Bush requested. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/September-2008/senate-passes-39-military-pay-hike.html>

S. 1315: VETERANS' BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2007

An act to amend title 38, United States Code, to enhance veterans' insurance and housing benefits, to improve benefits and services for transitioning servicemembers, and for other purposes. Passed both houses.

PENTAGON: AFGHAN STRATEGY NOT WORKING

NBC News and news services - Sept. 10, 2008

WASHINGTON - A top Pentagon official conceded Wednesday that coalition forces are not winning the battle against an increasingly deadly insurgency in Afghanistan, adding that the U.S. would revise its strategy for the region to include militant safe havens in neighboring Pakistan.

"I'm not convinced we are winning in Afghanistan. I am convinced we can," Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in sobering testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee. The testimony came nearly seven years after U.S.-led forces toppled Afghanistan's former Taliban regime following the Sept. 11 attacks. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26642415/>

U.S. GENERAL: I NEED MORE TROOPS TO FIGHT IN AFGHANISTAN

Associated Press - 9/17/08

KABUL, Afghanistan -- The senior U.S. general in Afghanistan said Tuesday he is fighting the war with too few ground troops, and that even the reinforcements President George W. Bush announced last week are insufficient. He said the shortage compels him to use more air power, at the cost of higher civilian casualties.

Gen. David McKiernan, the commander of international forces in Afghanistan, spoke just hours after a new U.S. commander took charge in Iraq. McKiernan told reporters that he realized the only way he would receive the additional ground forces he needs is for Washington to divert them from Iraq. >More at: www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080917/NEWS07/809170338>

US UNABLE TO SPARE AFGHAN TROOPS

BBC – 23 Sep 08

The US does "not have the forces... at this point", Robert Gates told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Last week Gen David McKiernan, the head of the NATO-led force in Afghanistan, said he needed three more brigades on top of planned troop increases. About 6,000 extra troops are set to arrive over the next four months.

"Without changing deployment patterns, without changing length of tours, we do not have the forces to send three additional brigade combat teams to Afghanistan at this point," Mr Gates told the committee. "Those forces will become available probably during the spring and summer of 2009," he said.

The US has some 33,000 troops in Afghanistan, including 13,000 under the command of NATO.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7632096.stm>

UN EXTENDS NATO-LED AFGHAN FORCE

Associated Press - September 23, 2008

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously Sept. 22 to extend the NATO-led force in Afghanistan, but was critical of the growing number of civilian casualties, and urged its troops and U.S.-led forces to make major efforts to minimize civilian deaths. <More at: www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/09/22/news/UN-UN-Afghanistan.php>

BUSH APPROVES SECRET PAKISTAN RAIDS

09/12/2008

President Bush has secretly approved U.S. military raids inside anti-terror ally Pakistan, according to current and former U.S. officials. The high-risk gambit prizes the death or capture of al-Qaida and Taliban extremists over the sensitivities of a shaky U.S.-backed civilian government that does not want to seem like Washington's lapdog.

<More at: www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/11249>

US MARINES COULD HAVE BEEN THE MARRIOTT TARGET

The Cambodia News.Net - 20th September, 2008

US Marines staying at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad may have been the target of Saturday's suicide attack. Police have reported about 30 Marines were staying at the hotel and were scheduled to leave for Afghanistan early Sunday morning. One official said that the American security personnel were in Pakistan for the just-concluded visit by the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen. <More at: www.thecambodianews.net/story/409071>

STATES ACCUSE PENTAGON OF THREATS, RETALIATION ALLEGATIONS ARISE IN BASE CLEANUP HEARING

Lyndsey Layton - Washington Post Staff Writer - September 19, 2008

Environmental officials from several states that have tried to force the Pentagon to clean up polluted military sites say the Defense Department has retaliated by reducing or withholding federal oversight dollars due them. A group representing state environmental officials says California, Colorado, Alabama, Ohio and about a dozen other states have been pressured by the Pentagon to back off the oversight of cleanup at polluted military sites.

"In the worst-case scenarios, the Department of Defense is intimidating a state environmental agency into not pursuing enforcement," said Steve Brown, executive director of the Environmental Council of States.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/18/AR2008091803435.html>

RECORD FUNDING FOR NATIONAL GUARD, SAYS GATES

Associated Press - September 22, 2008

BALTIMORE - Funding for the National Guard has reached a record level amid the largest mobilization of America's citizen soldiers since World War II, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Monday. With the increased spending, nearly 80 percent of Army National Guard equipment will be fully modernized by the end of budget year 2013, he said.

"For the first time ever, the Guard will receive the latest equipment provided to the active force - a change that is long overdue," Gates said in a speech prepared for the National Guard Association of the United States conference in Baltimore.

In the budget year starting next month, the Defense Department helped the Guard's budget reach just over \$30 billion, an increase of \$1.2 billion from FY2008. <More at: www.therochesterdemocrat.com/index.php/test/print/record_funding_for_national_guard_says_gates/>

YET ANOTHER VERSION OF "STOP-LOSS"?

ROTC WASHOUT FIGHTS BOOT CAMP ORDERS

Salt Lake Tribune - September 23, 2008

The Air Force doesn't like quitters. But Christian Madsen may have displayed a little too much tenacity for his commanders at the University of Utah's Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps.

A few months before Madsen expected to get a commission, officials told him he hadn't met academic requirements and dropped him from the program. The 28-year-old Middle Eastern studies major fought back. He gathered letters from supporters, argued that a class he had failed shouldn't be counted against him, demanded a hearing and asked for an order reinstating him.

Instead, ROTC commanders issued a different kind of order -- they shipped him off to boot camp.

>More at: <http://www.military.com/cs/Satellite?c=maArticle&cid=1199420737239&pagename=News%2FnewsLayout>>

ARMY PROSECUTOR QUILTS GITMO WAR COURT CASE

Carol Rosenberg - Miami Herald - Sep. 24, 2008

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVY BASE, Cuba -- An Army prosecutor has resigned from the Guantánamo war court in a crisis of conscience over plans to try a young Afghan accused of throwing a grenade rather than settle the case out of court, according to an affidavit filed with the court Wednesday.

Army Lt. Col. Darrel Vandeveld, a reservist from the Pittsburgh area, becomes the fourth known prosecutor to quit the Pentagon's controversial military commissions, which the Bush administration set up after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

A former chief war crimes prosecutor, Air Force Col. Morris Davis, quit last year, saying he had been pressured to rush trials ahead of the national elections and to sacrifice transparency.

... Now Vandeveld has written a four-page sworn declaration in which he says there is a risk of the case going to trial without the defense obtaining all ``potentially exculpatory evidence."

"In my view," he wrote, ``evidence we have an obligation as prosecutors and officers of the court has not been made available to the defense." <More at: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/guantanamo/v-print/story/700445.html>>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
9/25		Rock Island, IL	Stand Down	Sarah E. Oliver	563-370-1779
9/25-28		Cypress Park Marked Tree, AR	Wall that Heals	Ted Tally Football Scholarship	
9/25	1000- 1600	Radisson Plaza Lord Baltimore Hotel 20 West Baltimore St., Baltimore, MD	Mid-Atlantic Regional Career Event		
9/26		Wichita, KS	Resource Fair	Judith Epperson/David Desmond	316-651-3684
9/26		Greensboro, NC	Resource Fair	Archie Barrow	336-334-5777
9/27		Orlando, FL	Resource Fair	Heather S. Gallagher	321-397-6614
9/27		Clearwater, FL	Resource Fair	Catherine Alexander- Ponder	727-398-6661 x- 4711
9/27		Memphis, TN	Resource Fair	Ovul Ince	901-523-8990 x- 7085
9/29	1100- 1400	Crowne Plaza Anaheim 12021 Harbor Blvd, Garden Grove, CA	Anaheim Military Career Fair		714.867.5555
10/2-5		Oak Forest Soccer Field (158th and Lorell Avenue, Oak Forest, IL	The Wall That Heals	The City of Oak Forest	
10/2		Port Angeles, WA	Resource Fair	John Braasch	
10/3		Cherry Hill, NJ	Resource Fair	James T. Maher	856-424-4086
10/3		Ferndale, CA	Stand Down	Kim Hall	707-826-6191
10/3		Grass Valley, CA	Stand Down	Eve Mangold	530-432-1232
10/4		Libby, MT	Resource Fair	Allen W. Erickson, Sr.	406-756-7304
10/6	1100- 1400	Holiday Inn - BWI International Airport 890 Elkridge Landing Rd, Linthicum, MD	Baltimore Military Career Fair		410-859-8400
10/6	1100- 1400	Holiday Inn - Raleigh-Brownstone 1707 Hillsborough St, Raleigh, Nc	Raleigh Military Career Fair		919-828-0811
10/8	1100- 1400	InfoMart 1950 Stemmons Freeway, Dallas, TX	Dallas Military Career Fair		
10/9	1000- 1600	Morocco Shrine Auditorium 3800 St. John's Bluff Rd, Jacksonville, FL	Southeast Regional Career Event		Register
10/9	1000- 1600	Clarion Hotel San Francisco Airport 401 E. Millbrae Ave., Millbrae, CA	Western Regional Career Event		Register
10/10	1100- 1400	Radisson Hotel Boston 200 Stuart St, Boston, MA	Boston Military Career Fair		617-482-1800
10/14	1100- 1400	Crowne Plaza 4100 Presidential Blvd, Philadelphia, PA	Philadelphia Military Career Fair		215-477-0200
10/14		Dixon, CA	Stand Down	Patrick Stacio	707-344-3743
10/15		Dothan, AL	Resource Fair	Earl C. Jones, Jr.	334-596-1413
10/16		Colorado Springs, CA	Resource Fair	Patricia Frank	719-667-3703
10/16	1100- 1400	Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd, San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Military Career Fair		210.691.8888
10/16-19		3803 Highway 45 N Jackson, Tennessee	The Wall That Heals	Cocks-Danuiels VFW Post 1848	
10/17		Nashville, TN	Stand Down	Bill Burleigh	615-321-3919
10/17		Albuquerque, NM	Resource Fair	Larry J. Campos	505-841-8517
10/17		Augusta, GA	Resource Fair	Kathleen Scott	706-733-0188 x-6392
10/18		Latham, NY	Resource Fair	Donna K. Vaughn	518-626-5167

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

BACKLOG OF VETERANS' BENEFITS APPEALS GROWING BIGGER

Jill Bryce - Gazette Reporter - September 14, 2008

ALBANY — Chauncey Robinson only served six months in the Army, but he's been fighting for 16 years to get his veteran's disability benefits.

Robinson, of Albany, a Bible study teacher who ministers to veterans at Harvest Church, said he's stuck in a bureaucratic maze and says his problems were exacerbated when the Department of Veterans Affairs lost all his medical and personnel records. He's not alone. It's estimated there are 600,000 to 800,000 unresolved claims and appeals with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, according to veterans' advocates. <More at: www.dailygazette.com/news/2008/sep/14/0914_vetbenefits/>

CONTRACTOR TO PROCESS NEW GI BILL'S CLAIMS

Rick Maze - September 29, 2008

A plan by the Veterans Affairs Department to depend on a private contractor — not VA employees — to process claims for the new GI Bill education benefits program has raised questions about whether the agency will be ready by Aug. 1 to provide the full-tuition benefits promised by the program.

... Pressed at the hearing for details about who is competing for the contract, Pedigo would not name names, other than to say the field had been narrowed to four companies.

Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., said the secrecy about the contract is troubling and raises even bigger concerns about whether VA knows what it's doing.

<More at: <http://www.airforcetimes.com/issues/stories/0-AIRPAPER-3727558.php>>

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT FAILING TO EFFECTIVELY MONITOR HEALTH OF RETURNING TROOPS, NEW GAO REPORT SHOWS

9/10/08

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI) commented today on a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, the latest in a number of reports on the Department of Defense's failure to adequately assess the post-deployment health of returning servicemembers. Akaka, Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, stressed the need for the Department of Defense to aggressively address deployment-related health issues.

"The Department of Defense owes it to servicemembers to ensure adequate assessment and reassessment of their health after they return from deployment," said Akaka. "They have committed to defend our freedom, and in return, we have committed to protect their health and wellbeing. Our troops and their families are too important to let any potential mental health issues slip through the cracks."

The report issued September 4, 2008 by the Government Accountability Office, found several problems with DOD oversight of the post-deployment health reassessment (PDHRA). While DOD has developed requirements for administering the PDHRA, the Department is unable to determine whether servicemembers are completing their reassessments. This report follows a June 2007 GAO finding that DOD does not collect or provide Congress with the information necessary for the Congress to evaluate the military's compliance with post-deployment health assessment regulations. GAO noted that while DOD agreed to the recommendations in the June 2007 report, the Department failed to incorporate those recommendations into DOD's oversight practices. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/scva08/scva090908-2.htm>

VA DOCTORS TELL MULLEN THAT VETS NEED MENTAL HEALTH SCREENINGS

Peter Spiegel - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - September 21, 2008

Senior physicians with the veterans health system in Los Angeles told the top U.S. military officer Saturday that the Pentagon needs to overhaul the way it discharges troops because hundreds are leaving the armed forces with undiagnosed combat-related mental health problems.

Several of the physicians, including the system's chief of staff and its top psychiatrist, advocated mandatory mental health screenings for all service members who retire after serving in war zones.

The doctors said that because of the stigma attached to combat stress disorders, few troops acknowledge or seek help for psychological problems while in the military, meaning most remain undiagnosed until they run into family or work problems in the civilian world. Combat stress disorders become more difficult to treat the longer they remain undiagnosed.

"We need to make it a gradual discharge process with milestones, whether it's six months or a year, whatever it takes," said Dr. Robert Rubin, chief of mental health at the Veterans Administration healthcare system for Greater Los Angeles. "The stigma goes away if they have no choice but to go for the exams."

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-mullen21-2008sep21.0.195609.story>

NEW VA REGULATION

An interim final regulation, new 38 CFR 3.318, provides that:

*The development of ALS at any time after discharge or release from active military, naval, or air service is sufficient to establish service connection for that disease.

*The presumption of service connection for ALS does not apply if there is affirmative evidence that ALS was not incurred during or aggravated by such service or affirmative evidence that ALS was caused by the veteran's own willful misconduct.

*The presumption of service connection for ALS does not apply if the veteran did not have active, continuous service of 90 days or more.

*The rating criteria for ALS in VA's Schedule for Rating Disabilities is dependent upon the severity of the disease and its effect on the body systems involved. The minimum rating for ALS is 30 percent.

*The new regulation will apply to all applications for benefits that are received by VA on or after September 23, 2008, or that are pending before VA, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, or the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit this same date.

<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/E8-21998.htm> full record at web site

VA TO INCREASE BENEFITS FOR MILD BRAIN TRAUMA

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY - 9/22/08

WASHINGTON — The government plans to substantially increase disability benefits for veterans with mild traumatic brain injuries, acknowledging for the first time that veterans suffering from this less severe version of the Iraq war's signature wound will struggle to make a living.

... Compensation could reach \$600 a month, the VA said. Currently, veterans with symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, sensitivity to light, ringing in the ears and irritability and insomnia collect \$117.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-09-22-tbibenefits_N.htm>

THE VA BRUSH-OFF

Aaron Glantz - September 17, 2008

The Department of Veterans Affairs routinely delays disability claims by wounded soldiers for months and years, often shunting them into homelessness. But there's a simple way for the government to get disabled veterans the help they deserve. It can trust them.

Twenty-five-year-old Spc. James Eggemeyer injured himself before he even set foot in Iraq, while jumping out of an AC-130 gunship during parachute training at Fort Bragg, N.C.

... Military doctors prescribed several drugs: the painkillers Vicodin and Percocet and the steroid hydrocortisone. Then, in April 2003, they ordered the heavily medicated soldier deployed to Iraq. For the next year, Eggemeyer drove a Humvee, running supply convoys all around the country. His convoys were attacked twice. His worst day occurred early on, when the military truck in front of his Humvee hit a civilian vehicle.

... The longer he stayed in Iraq, the worse his body felt. He also started to take more of the painkillers and the steroids the military had given him. The more he took them, the more he needed to dull the pain.

... Returning to Fort Bragg in April 2004, Eggemeyer was quickly discharged from the military. Already experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, he started fighting with his captain and was given a "general discharge under honorable conditions," which allows him to use the services of the Department of Veterans Affairs but denies him access to

benefits of the GI Bill. Eventually, his PTSD and other injuries led him to become homeless, and he filed a disability claim with the VA. He continued to live literally on the street, sleeping in vehicles, for more than nine months as the VA bureaucracy sorted paper and asked for more, piling delay on delay.

... The VA promotes claims adjudicators based on how many cases they clear, not on whether they make the right decision. "A VA claims official is required to clear 12 claims a day," Roche notes. "If they deny your claim, they can take an 'end product credit.' So as far as statistics go, they have cleared a claim. <More at: www.miller-mccune.com/article/676>

WOUNDED VETERANS DUMPED

The Charleston Gazette - September 13, 2008

Assigned to protect top Bush administration officials in the streets of Baghdad, Sgt. Juan Jimenez was injured twice by exploding roadside bombs, earning him two Purple Hearts.

The first bomb lodged shrapnel permanently in his right arm. The second sprayed metal scraps in his face, knocked him unconscious and damaged his brain. Today, three years after returning home, the 39-year-old veteran suffers seizures, flashbacks, stress-induced nightmares and memory loss.

Jimenez won Veterans Administration benefits for sleep apnea, dyspepsia and post-traumatic stress disorder. But VA officials claim his seizures and brain injuries are unrelated to the exploding bombs, and denied him care.

Jimenez told Joshua Kors, author of "How the VA Abandons Our Vets" in The Nation, that he feels sick and suicidal. The VA attributes this to caffeine.

"They said I was drinking too much Red Bull, That's what was causing my problems," Jimenez said.

<More at: <http://wvgazette.com/Opinion/Editorials/200809120592>>

SMALL COLA HIKE A SURPRISE TO VETERANS

Rick Maze - Staff writer

A 2.8 percent cost-of-living adjustment in veterans' disability and survivor pay approved by the Senate just before the summer congressional recess is drawing complaints and head-scratching from veterans because the amount is far short of the annual inflation rate this year, running at 6.2 percent through July.

The proposed 2.8 percent hike "is a joke," said Dan Cedusky, an Army veteran and veterans' advocate from Champaign, Ill.

With the cost of everything going up, including state and local taxes, a 2.8 percent increase would leave people further behind, said Cedusky, known in veterans' circles as Colonel Dan.

... While the amount of the Social Security increase won't be known until late October, it is expected to be well above 2.8 percent. The Consumer Price Index, a measurement of the cost of goods and services calculated monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is up 6.2 percent with two months to go in the fiscal year.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/money/financial_advice/military_vetcola_082108w/>

FORMER MARINE: DOD VOTING SYSTEM 'BROKEN'

Charlie Coon - Stars and Stripes Mideast edition - September 11, 2008

WASHINGTON — A former Marine who was a voting assistance officer told a Senate committee on Tuesday that he recommends troops living overseas look at online voting alternatives rather than use their military-organized programs.

Bryan O'Leary, a former F-18 pilot who works for a Washington law firm, noted that many servicemembers are on the move or based in remote areas. Those troops, O'Leary said, would be better off using an online registration site —

www.overseasvotefoundation.org — rather than the "broken" system devised by the Department of Defense for its members.

<More at: www.stripes.com/articleprint.asp?section=104&article=57336>

JUST TO SHOW THAT THE VA GOES THE EXTRA MILE

On the back of the DVA pamphlet "*Are You a Veteran in Crisis?*" under the instructions to follow if you believe you fit the bill is the following:

"Call 911 for Emergency Response (Be advised that the VA may not pay for the service)" [my emphasis – Ed.]

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

According to the VA's website at <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/page.cfm?pg=1>, on any given night there are 154,000 veterans who are homeless. Of those, 45% suffer from mental illness, 70% (with much overlap) suffer from alcohol and drug abuse problems, and 56% are African-American or Hispanic.

So this big gift that the VA pats itself on the back for amounts to 0.02% (that's two one-hundredths of one percent) of their annual budget and deals with 0.99% (that's slightly less than one percent) of the problem. [Ed.]

VA ANNOUNCES \$36 MILLION IN GRANTS FOR HOMELESS PROGRAMS

September 23, 2008

WASHINGTON – Homeless veterans in 35 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico will get more assistance, thanks to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grants providing \$36.7 million to community groups to create 1,526 beds for homeless veterans this year.

“These grants provide a helping hand to veterans who have served our nation in uniform,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “Our partnerships with community-based organizations provide safe, temporary housing while these veterans return to productive lives.” <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/vap08/vap092308-3.htm>

IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO QUOTE HERE IN ITS ENTIRETY

GET WITH THE PROGRAM

EDITORIAL: From the Army Times

In January, Congress ordered the Pentagon to drop its disability ratings rules and strictly follow the VA's criteria in assigning ratings to injured and wounded service members.

In March, the Army said it would comply. All the other services were to follow suit. The change in law was among the most significant changes to emerge in the wake of 2007's Walter Reed scandal. Veterans' groups hailed the change, having complained for years that the military had shortchanged wounded combat veterans on their disability ratings and compensation.

But seven months later, the Army still isn't living up to its promise, at least not when it comes to assessing troops suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The VA ratings schedule says PTSD sufferers should receive a minimum 50-percent disability rating from the rating agency and then be reassessed within six months to determine if the initial evaluation should be changed for the longer term.

But a number of soldiers suffering from PTSD have been given disability ratings of just 10 percent, and then separated from service without the required follow-up assessment.

Worse, the Pentagon seems to be gearing up for a broader policy change that would take this approach to PTSD across all the armed services, according to veterans' advocates.

This should hardly come as a surprise - it is just the latest in a string of unconscionable decisions coming from the office of Pentagon personnel chief David Chu.

This is the same executive who sought to cut combat pay for troops in the war zones and once proposed shunting off the Defense Department's obligations for military retirees onto the VA.

Over the past three years, he has advocated doubling and tripling some of the health care fees paid by many military retirees.

And just a few weeks ago, Chu narrowed the definition of "combat related" to reduce the number of disabled troops who might benefit under another provision of the 2008 Defense Authorization Act, which says some disabled troops do not have to return any severance pay they receive from the military before they can draw disability payments from VA.

Chu's definition of combat related is significantly narrower than the one already in use to determine eligibility for a separate program for disabled retirees called Combat Related Special Compensation.

Lawmakers had assumed defense officials would use the definition already in place and were stunned to find a new and narrower interpretation. Indeed, Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., already has drafted an amendment to the pending 2009 defense authorization bill directing the Pentagon to use the more generous definition of combat related for both programs.

A similar retroactive correction is needed to force the Pentagon to live up to its legal responsibilities regarding the assignment of disability ratings for all medical conditions - including PTSD.

A central theme coming out of the Walter Reed hearings was the need to get the Defense Department and VA to share a single government standard in assessing disabilities.

Congress' intent was to make the VA standard apply across the board. The Pentagon needs to comply with that direction.

http://www.armytimes.com/community/opinion/army_editorial_program_092208

DOES THIS EXPLAIN SOME THINGS? MAYBE GITMO IS OJT FOR THE VA?

FORMER GITMO OFFICIAL TO HEAD VETERAN SITE

Sept. 15, 2008

PROVIDENCE, R.I., Sept. 15 (UPI) -- Former Guantanamo Bay detention center director Rick Baccus says he has been chosen to be the administrator of the Rhode Island Veterans Home. <More at: www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/09/15/Former_Gitmo_official_to_head_veteran_site/UPI-37971221497508/>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF SEPTEMBER 16, 2008

This week the Army and Navy announced an increase, while the Air Force and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 87 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 88,109; Navy Reserve, 5,775; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 12,132; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,981; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 738. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 114,735, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2008/d20080916ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2008

NOTE: STATISTICS FOR WOUNDED ARE GETTING SHAKIER - DOD REVISES NUMBERS – DROPS NON-HOSTILE “OTHER”

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,016 DAYS)		OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,545 DAYS)	
KILLED US	4,172	KILLED US	605
WOUNDED US [8/2/08]	30,490	OTHER CASUALTIES US [10/2007]	1,994
OTHER US CASUALTIES [4/5/08]	≥38,634	KILLED COALITION	376
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [3/1/08]	145	WOUNDED US [8/2/08]	2,309
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1	WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
KILLED UK	176	KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED OTHER COALITION	138	KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819	WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [6/30/07]	1,001	AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555		
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 95,664		
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.246M		
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M	COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$557,096,611,090

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

FOR MILITARY, SLOW PROGRESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PUSH

Will Bardenwerper - September 22, 2008

WASHINGTON — Three years ago, the Defense Department set out to increase sharply the number of military personnel who speak strategically important languages. Progress has been slow, and the military has not determined how to reach its goal — or what exactly that goal is. Figures from the department indicate that only 1.2 percent of the military receives a bonus paid to those who can speak languages judged to be of critical importance for the current conflicts in [Afghanistan](#) and [Iraq](#), as well as other areas of strategic concern.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/09/22/washington/22language.html>

POSTAL SERVICE MAKES IT EASIER TO SEND CARE PACKAGES TO SOLDIERS

The US Postal Service has made it easier to get packages to the troops. In fact, if you're sending a package to a servicemember overseas, the Postal Service has even made it cheaper.

Using the Priority Mail Large Flat-Rate Box (12" x 12" x 5.5"), you can ship a package to any US address for \$12.95 (even if they're not service members). If you're sending the package to an APO or FPO address, you'll pay \$10.95 – a \$2 military discount from the Postal Service. The large flat-rate boxes are free. You can get these boxes from your post office, online through [http:// www.usps.com/supplies](http://www.usps.com/supplies), or by calling 1-800-610-8734.

When the special price was introduced earlier this year, Postmaster General John Potter commented, "We're proud that family and friends will be able to use the new, larger-sized box to send much-appreciated packages from home to our dedicated troops overseas."

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

VA FACT SHEET: IMPACT OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS

From our friends at Veterans for Common Sense: their latest "VA Fact Sheet" showing that VA hospitals treated nearly 350,000 OIF/OEF war veteran patients, including nearly 150,000 diagnosed with mental health conditions.

Chart #1, Department of Defense Deployments to War Zones

Deployed to War Zone	Number In Military	Percent in Military	Veterans Now Eligible for VA	Percent Veterans
1,717,925	849,208	49%	868,717	51%

Chart #2, Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

Category	Number of Veterans	Percent
Veteran Patients	347,750	40% of Veterans
Mental Health Patients	147,744	42% of Patients
PTSD Patients	75,850	22% of Patients
Vet Center Patients	302,503	87% of Patients

Chart #3, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

Category	Number of Veterans	Percent
Disability Claims Filed	287,790	32% of Veterans
Claims Pending	41,492	14% of Claims Filed
Approved PTSD Claim	37,460	49% of PTSD Patients

Sources: Department of Veterans Affairs, "Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among US Global War on Terrorism Veterans," Aug. 18, 2008; "VA Benefits Activity: Veterans Deployed to the Global War on Terror, Apr. 16, 2008; "Readjustment Counseling Service, Global War on Terror Veterans Served Each FY," Aug. 22, 2008; and Department of Defense, "Contingency Tracking System," through Mar. 31, 2008.

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 scCook@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