

# SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 6

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

*"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"*

10 NOVEMBER 2008

## FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

### EVERYONE ELSE IS DOING IT, SO WHY DON'T WE?

#### DEAR PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA,

Congratulations on Veterans' Day from 24.5 million military veterans and their families on your recent election.

We know that by now you are receiving tens of thousands of e-mails, letters, white papers, and policy proposals from thousands of organizations claiming that they in part, or perhaps completely are responsible for your election and demanding your attention to their urgent issues. Many will be proposing point-by-point policy and program changes and will be trying to convince you that none of your programs can possibly move forward until you answer their call. Many of them are also convinced, and will try to convince you, that you need to bring them aboard in your transition team and for the future or else you will not be able to realize any of your goals. And besides – you owe them.

There is no question that the economy is in the forefront of your concern. We hope that the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars will remain there also. The environment and global warming call for your attention as do healthcare, education, jobs, trade, foreign relations, nuclear proliferation, and on, and on.

We veterans would like to ask for a moment of your time and we would like to get a place in that line that isn't our usual position somewhere after road repair and agricultural subsidies.

We know that politicians, poobahs, and pundits hate to have their own words echoed back to them. Nonetheless we think that a few reminders of your own words are in order.

During your walk on the broader public scene over the last six years, you have talked repeatedly to various groups about the need for commitment to public

service. At Knox College in June of 2005, at the Pritzker School of Medicine also in 2005, and at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in 2006 you said, "... *there is no community service requirement in the real world; and no one's forcing you to care.*" You went on to say, "... *it's only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you will realize your true potential.*"

There are millions of veterans who made that commitment already. Since 1973 there has not been even the slightest pressure, other than perhaps an economic one, to make that commitment. No one forced most veterans to serve. For the last six years, however, stop-loss has certainly forced long extensions to those commitments, and the National Guard has been forced into service not contemplated by their equally important commitment to the public in their home states. Nonetheless, we cared – we went – we made that commitment – we served.

When you spoke at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery on Memorial Day in 2005 you said, "... *what led these men and women to wear their country's uniform? What is it that leads anyone to put aside their own pursuit of happiness; to subordinate their own sense of survival for something larger – something greater?*" You went on to say, "... *they decided: 'I must serve so that the people I love may live – happily, safely, freely.'*" You called their service, "... *a shining example of what's best in this land.*"

Veterans "hitched their wagon to something larger than themselves", but many of them now find that there is no horse to draw their wagon. In recent years many non-veterans (the other 92% of Americans) have

dismissed that commitment as being just another job, the conditions of which veterans fully understood when they signed up for it, so their pay and their benefits adequately reimburse them for that commitment. Of course, those who say that cannot comprehend the extent of the sacrifice that such a commitment entails.

Military pay has always been unequal to the job. Most people pride themselves on getting 40 hours pay for 40 hours of work. How do you pay someone adequately for the other 128 hours of instant, on-call status? How do you pay someone adequately for the years they spend away from friends and family? How do you pay someone adequately for the years lag behind their contemporaries when they start "the rest of their lives?" At the American Legion conference in 2005 you said, *"In America, we must never forget how lucky we are to have so many men and women who believe – who are willing to put aside their own pursuit of happiness, to subordinate their own sense of survival, for something bigger – something greater."*

As you said in your speech against the Iraq War in October 2002, *"... the sacrifices [are] immeasurable. ... [we should not] allow those who would march off and pay the ultimate sacrifice, who would prove the full measure of devotion with their blood, to make such an awful sacrifice in vain."* You said in your keynote address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, *"When we send our young men and women into harm's way, we have a solemn obligation not to fudge the numbers or shade the truth about why they're going, to care for their families while they're gone, to tend to the soldiers upon their return, and to never ever go to war without enough troops to win the war, secure the peace, and earn the respect of the world."*

At the American Legion Legislative Rally in March, 2005 you said, *"... there will be few issues I'll work harder on than ensuring that the brave men and women who serve our country receive the support they deserve and the benefits they've earned when they come home."* In that same address you said, *"... [the budget] tells all those veterans still waiting for help to keep waiting."* Guess what? They still are.

You went on to give the statistics of that time; that there were 480,000 claims still unprocessed, that veterans were waiting an average of 138 days just to start the process, and that more than 100,000 soldiers may need some kind of mental health treatment when they come home. You further said at that rally, *"... we shouldn't be scraping to find the bare minimum in benefits and healthcare for our veterans."* And you

told the Legion 15 months later, *"it's this sense of obligation – a responsibility to one's fellow American – that we must honor when our veterans return and need our care and support."*

Yet, sir, it seems that we aren't even "scraping to find the bare minimum."

According to the Stars and Stripes three weeks ago it is no longer 480,000 claims that are unprocessed but 850,000. It no longer takes 138 days to start the process, rather (by the DVA's own figures) it takes 196. It is no longer 100,000 soldiers who may need some kind of mental health treatment but 300,000. All of those numbers are growing rapidly.

If their appeals are continually denied, and their parents or friends are wealthy enough to pursue their case to the US Supreme Court, it will take them 9 years, 10 months and 23 days to get a ruling – you will long be the former president when a case gets decided that was submitted at the beginning of your first term.

It is not as if those veterans have other alternatives. State and community programs which are available to all other citizens are, because of budget shortfalls, being denied veterans with the admonition that because they are veterans they must get their help from the crumbling Department of Veterans Affairs.

You said more at the Legion conference. You said, *"... the Department of Veterans Affairs should never be funded as an afterthought."* You then said, *"... the benefits are still too low and the waits are still too long ... it's not enough to simply wave a flag and welcome our veterans with words of praise – we need to get serious about solving these problems and honoring their service."* And then, *"It is not only our patriotic duty to provide this care, it is our moral duty at the most fundamental level – and we must rise to that challenge."* And finally, *"... when we make the decision to send our troops to war, we also make the decision to care for them, to speak for them, and to think of them – always – when they come home."*

When in April of 2005 you introduced the welcome amendment to provide meals and phone service to wounded veterans you said, *"And now, some of them have come home from that war with scars that may change their lives forever – scars that may never heal. And yet they sit there in that hospital, so full of hope and still so proud of their country. These kids are the best of America. They deserve our highest respect, and they deserve our help."*

We do not help them when we coerce them in those same hospitals to sign waivers for benefits,

thereby agreeing, often falsely, that they had some pre-existing condition in exchange for a check. The services leave them behind on the battlefield of life while boasting that, “we never leave anyone behind”.

We do not help them when we shove them off onto a Department of Veterans Affairs that demands that they start the process of proving their injuries all over again because the rules are different and the process is unique. We do not help them when we support the needs of any bureaucratic process over the needs of a more-than-deserving American citizen.

When the "best of America" leave those military hospitals it often happens that they lose that hope, and some begin to question their pride, not so much in their country as in their fellow countrymen. It is hard to maintain hope and hard to retain pride in the system that writes laws that it fails to enforce, and establishes programs that it fails to implement completely, or to fund adequately. Prior performance gives little confidence in the latest announcements of “changes” and “improvements.”

USERRA is a great law, but when returning Guard and Reserve members can't get their jobs back without wrestling with the Departments of Justice and Labor for 30 months, and they need a paycheck this week to feed their families, it is hard to keep up hope – it is hard to be full of pride in the system.

It is hard to keep up hope – it is hard to be full of pride in a benefits system that presumes you have no claim on it, and demands that you prove your right to make such a claim before it even allows you to submit the claim.

It is hard to keep up hope – it is hard to be full of pride in a system that demands that you stand alone, unrepresented before the juggernaut of a full federal department and prove that the battles you fought were the battles that wounded you in body or spirit.

During your campaign you have often spoken about hope. We all know that we can endure much as long as we have hope. We all also know that without hope life can become intolerable. Sadly, we all also know that the recent statistics for military and veteran suicides reflect a profound loss of hope. We all know that, like justice, care delayed is care denied, and with that denial begins the denial of hope.

The Department of Veterans Affairs does not restore hope when it quotes statistics and trends to show how much they have “improved”, especially when some of that “improvement” comes from the fact that veterans claims are closed when they die before they are granted. “Trends” don’t provide care. Opening a handful of clinics doesn’t address the need for many times more. Reducing wait times from six months to five months and three weeks doesn’t help the veteran who needs help desperately today. And shredding the records doesn’t help anybody but the bureaucrats and ought to be answered by prison time.

You have most recently reaffirmed your respect for the ideas of Abraham Lincoln. We need not remind you of his second inaugural in which he said:

*“With malice toward none, with charity for all,  
with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right,  
let us strive on to finish the work we are in,  
to bind up the nation’s wounds,  
to care for him who shall have borne the battle  
and for his widow, and his orphan,  
to do all which may achieve and cherish  
a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all  
nations.”*

We need not remind you that those underlined words are the motto of the DVA.

However, we just may need to remind you to remind them. The DVA and Congress seem to have forgotten. [Ed.]

## REVELLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

### WE NEED YOUR HELP!

**OUR APPEAL TO THE CIRCUIT COURT IS ABOUT TO BEGIN AND WE HAVE TO HAVE EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS ATTEND THE COURT HEARINGS TO OBSERVE, AND PROBABLY TO TESTIFY.**

**THESE TRIPS COST MONEY – TO DATE THE EXPENSES HAVE LARGELY BEEN BORNE BY THE INDIVIDUALS.**

**WE HAVE TO BEGIN PAYING OUR WAY AS AN ORGANIZATION  
PLEASE DONATE WHATEVER YOU CAN BY GOING ON-LINE TO**

**[HTTP://WWW.VUFT.ORG/DONATE.HTML](http://www.vuft.org/donate.html)**

## **BEEN TO THE CALIFORNIA VETERANS HOME AT YOUNTVILLE LATELY??**

Do you or anyone you know reside at the California Veterans' Home at Yountville? The State Auditor has reported that the veterans' home has no plan for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Do you know anyone with a disability (mobility, hearing or vision) who has experienced problems with access at this specific veterans' home? Our friends at Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) want to hear from you. DRA is looking for residents or individuals who know of residents who have experienced problems regarding disability access at the California Veterans Home in Yountville. Please contact Zander Carbajal at [zcarbajal@dralegal.org](mailto:zcarbajal@dralegal.org) or at (510) 665-8644 to speak with someone about this issue. They look forward to your response.

## **NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?**

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program [www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm](http://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/](http://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 9<sup>th</sup> 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/9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals

*11/10/2008 Appeal brief to be filed*

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

### **VUFT RECEIVES AN AWARD**

On October 16, Disability Rights Advocates (DRA), a nationally recognized non-profit that provides legal assistance for the disabled, presented their annual "Eagle" award to Veterans United for Truth, Inc. and our Chair Bob Handy (left), and our partner in the class action lawsuit, Veterans for Common Sense, and their Chair, Paul Sullivan (right). DRA and Morrison and Foerster are the law firms handling our case.



### **OUR CHAIR IS PRAISED FOR HIS ACTIONS**

<http://www.veteranstoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3914>

## **BEEN TO THE CALIFORNIA VETERANS HOME AT YOUNTVILLE LATELY??**

Do you or anyone you know reside at the California Veterans' Home at Yountville? The State Auditor has reported that the veterans' home has no plan for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Do you know anyone with a disability (mobility, hearing or vision) who has experienced problems with access at this specific veterans' home? Our friends at Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) want to hear from you. DRA is looking for residents or individuals who know of residents who have experienced problems regarding disability access at the California Veterans Home in Yountville. Please contact Zander Carbajal at [zcarbajal@dralegal.org](mailto:zcarbajal@dralegal.org) or at (510) 665-8644 to speak with someone about this issue. They look forward to your response.

**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](mailto:rhandy@vuft.org) or the Vice Chair at [scook@vuft.org](mailto:scook@vuft.org). Watch for details at [www.vuft.org](http://www.vuft.org)

**DO YOU PASS THIS NEWSLETTER 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]**

My name is Andrea Byron and I am the Website Administrator for a group known as The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten (or TFTPTF). TFTPTF was formed to raise awareness about the water contamination that occurred on U.S. MCB Camp Lejeune in NC from the 1950s through 1987. I wanted to share this information with you in case you hadn't heard of it yet and wanted to inform your membership. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or visit our website at [www.tftptf.com](http://www.tftptf.com). Thank you for your time and consideration, Andrea Byron

#### **RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS**

##### **CORRECTION**

In the last issue I cited the small number of Veterans' bills that became law. I have been prodded to include three others:

*Public Law 110-168* – To authorize a major medical facility project to modernize inpatient wards at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Atlanta, Georgia (S. 1396)

*Public Law 110-181* – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (H.R. 4986)

Includes provisions from an amendment offered by Representative Steve Buyer (R-Indiana) that would require seamless transition for and a continuum of care of wounded servicemembers.

*Public Law 110-252* – Supplemental Appropriations for 2008 (H.R. 2642)

\* Makes Supplemental appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for: (1) general operating expenses; (2) information technology systems; and (3) construction for major projects.

\* Combat Veterans Debt Elimination Act of 2008 - Prohibits the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from collecting debts owed to the United States by veterans who die as a result of an injury incurred or aggravated while in the line of duty while serving in a theater of combat operations in a war or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after September 11, 2001,

\* Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 - (Title V) Amends federal veterans' benefits provisions to entitle certain veterans to educational benefits: provides soldiers and veterans the option of transferring education benefits to their spouses and children.

#### **STATEMENT OF SENATOR BARACK OBAMA ON THE RECENT GAO INVESTIGATION ON SERVICE MEMBER PSYCHIATRIC CONDITION DISCHARGES**

November 3, 2008

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Barack Obama today released the following statement on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) investigation that found the Department of Defense (DOD) has not adhered to any clear set of standards when discharging troops for psychiatric conditions. Senator Obama requested this investigation following reports that the DOD was labeling service members as having "preexisting" personality disorders instead of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) incurred in combat. This practice allows the DOD to discharge troops instead of treating them.

"This report reveals that the DOD is not doing everything it should be to take care of troops with psychological injuries. I support the two GAO recommendations in the report - the need for consistent personality disorder discharges from all military branches and for strong oversight of compliance. I will continue working toward reforming the over-extended DOD-VA healthcare and disability systems. So far, 1.8 million service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, and we must help those that transition from the military to civilian life. We must also honor our commitment to provide them with the services they need." [http://obama.senate.gov/press/081103-statement\\_of\\_se\\_85/](http://obama.senate.gov/press/081103-statement_of_se_85/)



**IRAQIS SEEK MORE 'WITHDRAWAL' TALKS; U.S. SAYS THEY'RE OVER**

Leila Fadel, Nancy A. Youssef and Warren P. Strobel - McClatchy Newspapers - Nov. 06, 2008

BAGHDAD — The United States delivered Thursday what it said was the final text of the controversial accord on the stationing of U.S. forces in Iraq, but Iraq said more talks are needed before the government can accept it.

"We have gotten back to the Iraqi government with a final text. Through this step, we have concluded the process on the U.S. side," said Susan Ziadeh, the U.S. Embassy spokeswoman in Baghdad. "Iraq will now need to take it forward through their own process."

The accord, which calls for complete withdrawal of U.S. forces by the end of 2011, has been the subject of tense negotiations for the past seven months. <More at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/251/story/55447.html>>

**FINAL TEXT OF IRAQ PACT REVEALS A U.S. [NEGOTIATING DEFEAT]**

Analysis by Gareth Porter - WASHINGTON, Oct 22 (IPS)

The final draft of the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces agreement on the U.S. military presence represents an even more crushing defeat for the policy of the administration than previously thought, the final text reveals. The final draft, dated Oct. 13, not only imposes unambiguous deadlines for withdrawal of U.S. combat troops by 2011 but makes it extremely unlikely that a U.S. non-combat presence will be allowed to remain in Iraq for training and support purposes beyond the 2011 deadline for withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces. Furthermore, Shiite opposition to the pact as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty makes the prospects for passage of even this agreement by the Iraqi parliament doubtful. <More at: <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=44394>>

**GENERAL IN IRAQ: DEAL LETTING U.S. TROOPS STAY MAY BREAK DOWN**

Richard Tomkins and Barbara Slavin - The Washington Times - October 31, 2008

SAMARRA, Iraq; In a blunt assessment, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Army Gen. Raymond Odierno, said Thursday that there is a 20 percent to 30 percent chance that the United States and Iraq won't reach a deal to allow U.S. troops to operate in Iraq past Dec. 31. <More at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/oct/31/general-holds-doubts-on-iraq-deal/>>

**OBAMA DEMANDS IRAQ WAR CHANGES**

Jason Leopold - November 7, 2008

President-elect Barack Obama, in one of the first policy statements of his transition, demanded that the Bush administration either submit the proposed U.S.-Iraq "status-of-forces agreement" to Congress or leave an opening for him to change it next year. Obama's transition office posted [a statement on its Web site](#), declaring that any agreement on the future of U.S. troops in Iraq "should be negotiated in the context of a broader commitment by the U.S. to begin withdrawing its troops and forswearing permanent bases." <More at: <http://www.consortiumnews.com/Print/2008/110708b.html>>

**U.S. THREATENS TO HALT SERVICES TO IRAQ WITHOUT TROOP ACCORD**

Roy Gutman and Leila Fadel - McClatchy Newspapers - October 26, 2008

BAGHDAD \_ The U.S. military has warned Iraq that it will shut down military operations and other vital services throughout the country on Jan. 1 if the Iraqi government doesn't agree to a new agreement on the status of U.S. forces or a renewed United Nations mandate for the American mission in Iraq.

Many Iraqi politicians view the move as akin to political blackmail, a top Iraqi official told McClatchy Sunday.

In addition to halting all military actions, U.S. forces would cease activities that support Iraq's economy, educational sector and other areas \_ "everything" \_ said Tariq al Hashimi, the country's Sunni Muslim vice president.

<More at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/251/story/54795.html>>

**TROOP REDUCTIONS COMING IN IRAQ, MILITARY OFFICIALS SAY**

November 5, 2008

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The U.S. military will reduce the number of troops in Iraq this month as violence has dropped and Iraqi security forces have shown vast improvements, senior military officials said Wednesday. The military said it is sending home two brigades and not replacing one of them this month, dropping the number of brigades in Iraq from 15 to 14. A brigade has about 3,000 troops. There are currently about 152,000 U.S. troops in Iraq.

<More at: [http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/11/05/iraq.main/index.html?section=cnn\\_latest](http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/11/05/iraq.main/index.html?section=cnn_latest)>

## **BRITISH TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ BY APRIL, ALEXANDER SAYS**

Rosa Prince, Political Correspondent - 07 Nov 2008

Speaking during a visit to Basra, Douglas Alexander, the International Development Secretary, said that a "significant draw-down" of troops was on the way. Final negotiations are said to be underway with the Iraqi government, with Gordon Brown expected to make an announcement before Christmas.

<More at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/3400458/Troops-out-of-Iraq-by-April-Alexander-says.html>>

## **U.S. ARMY DELAYS, ALTERS MEDICAL STUDIES UNDER A LITTLE-KNOWN ANTI-TERROR CENSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Bryant Furlow - October 21, 2008

Policy 'stifles scientific discourse,' says an Army epidemiologist

Since 2006 U.S. Army censors have scrutinized hundreds of medical studies, scientific posters, abstracts and Powerpoint presentations authored by doctors and scientists at Walter Reed and other Army medical research centers—part of a little-known prepublication review process called "Actionable Medical Information Review." More than 300 scientific documents have been reviewed by Army censors to date. Fewer than half of them have been cleared for public disclosure in their original form, but officials refuse to describe even in general terms the types of changes required.

... An Army epidemiologist has been threatened with disciplinary action for allegedly violating the policy after sending a letter to *Stars & Stripes* lamenting the Pentagon's inadequate resources for tracking and studying diseases—as Congress requires.

<More at: <http://www.epinews.com/AMI.html>>

## **DOD IG RARELY SIDES WITH WHISTLEBLOWERS**

Richard Lardner - The Associated Press - Oct 31, 2008

WASHINGTON — Military whistleblowers might want to save their breath. The Pentagon inspector general, the internal watchdog for the Defense Department, hardly ever sides with service members who complain that they were punished for reporting wrongdoing, according to a review of cases by the Associated Press.

The inspector general's office rejected claims of retaliation and stood by the military in more than 90 percent of nearly 3,000 cases during the past six years. More than 73 percent were closed after only a preliminary review that relied on available documents and sources — often from the military itself — to determine whether a full inquiry was warranted.

The high rejection rates could suggest scores of complaints aren't valid. But critics, including a senator [Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa], wonder whether many valid cases are dismissed before being carefully examined because of attitudes in the inspector general's office. Indeed, a confidential government survey obtained by the Associated Press described a demoralized and ambivalent work force in the inspector general's office "at a high level of risk."

<More at: [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/10/ap\\_whistleblower\\_103108/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/10/ap_whistleblower_103108/)>

## **INVESTIGATION REVEALS HUNDREDS OF UNSUPPORTED CLAIMS REGARDING WAR MEDALS**

John Crewdson - Chicago Tribune - Oct. 25, 2008

WASHINGTON — Scores of Americans, from clergymen to lawyers to CEOs, are claiming medals of valor they never earned.

A Chicago Tribune investigation has found that the fabrication of heroic war records is far more extensive than one might think. Take the online edition of *Who's Who*, long the nation's premier biographical reference. Of the 333 people whose profiles state they earned one of the nation's most esteemed military medals, fully a third cannot be supported by military records.

Even in death, these stories live on. A look at 273 obituaries published in the past decade alone found that in more than four of five cases, official records didn't support decorations for bravery attributed to the deceased.

The Tribune also found bogus decorations, including at least two Medals of Honor, engraved on headstones in military cemeteries across the country. <More at: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/headline/nation/6078108.html>>

**DOES SOMEONE HAVE A BRIDGE FOR SALE?**  
**NEW ARMY RECRUITING TACTIC: OBAMA WILL**  
**"GET US OUT OF IRAQ"**

Brandon Friedman - Nov 07, 2008

Well that didn't take long. Polls across America had been closed for less than 24 hours and Army Career Counselors were already exploiting Barack Obama's victory in an effort to recruit former soldiers back into units. This email was forwarded to me by an Iraq veteran and former Army captain who received it on Wednesday:

From: [REDACTED] AGR USAR ARRTD <[REDACTED]@usar.army.mil>  
 Date: Wed, Nov 5, 2008 at 4:46 PM  
 Subject: New Commander In Chief (UNCLASSIFIED)  
 To: [REDACTED]

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
 Caveats: NONE

24 Month Mobilization Deferment. A President Elect who says he'll get us out of Iraq. What are you waiting for? Stop taking your chances in the IRR and be safe from deployment for 2 years. By that time our new President will have gotten us out of these other countries.

SFC [REDACTED]  
 Army Reserve Career Counselor  
 Region [REDACTED] Area [REDACTED] Operations Sergeant  
 AR RTD, R [REDACTED] Area [REDACTED]  
 OFFICE: [REDACTED]  
 CELL: [REDACTED]  
 TOLL FREE: 1 866 [REDACTED] X [REDACTED]  
 FAX: [REDACTED]  
 EMAIL: [REDACTED]@usar.army.mil

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
 Caveats: NONE

<More at: <http://www.vetvoice.com/showDiary.do?sessionId=CF3872F0CAED821BD897D5DB4385F0D1?diaryId=2148>>

**TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS**

**DOL LAUNCHES MONTH-LONG VETERANS JOB FAIR 'BLITZ'**

The Department of Labor (DOL) announced on Oct. 29 the launch of a month-long blitz of more than 120 veterans job fairs to be held in 31 states as part of its "Hire Vets First" initiative. The effort begins on Oct. 24, and concludes at an event on Nov. 25 in Knoxville, Tenn. The job fairs aim to help newly separated veterans in their transition to civilian life. "The qualities America's servicemembers are known for—discipline, strong work ethic, leadership and technical skills—are highly valued by employers," said DOL Secretary Elaine Chao. A list of job fair locations by state—and more information about the campaign—are available at [www.hirevetsfirst.gov](http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov). For more information on all of the veterans employment programs, go to: [www.dol.gov/vets](http://www.dol.gov/vets). List of Job Fairs by State: [http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov/pdf/vets\\_day\\_job\\_fairs.pdf](http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov/pdf/vets_day_job_fairs.pdf)

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
11/10-11		Crystal Lake IL	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Amy Johnson</a>	815-455-5190
11/11	1300	Nationwide – Release orange balloons in memory of those taken by Agent Orange	Veterans Day Agent Orange Balloon Release	Everyone	Get some Orange Balloons
11/12	1100-1400	Holiday Inn Conference Center 130 Clairemont Ave, Atlanta, GA	Atlanta Military Career Fair		<a href="#">Register</a>
11/13-16		Bowman Field Clemson, SC	Wall That Heals	Pendleton American Legion Post 113	
11/15		Fort Myers FL	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Catherine Alexander-Ponder</a>	727-398-6661 x-4711
11/17	1100-1400	Holiday Inn Select Houston-Greenway Plaza Area 2712 Southwest Freeway, Houston, TX	Houston Military Career Fair		(713)523-8448 <a href="#">Register</a>
11/18		Mankato MN	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Kara Cornils</a>	651-292-0145
11/18		Dallas TX	Resource Fair	Tammy Wood	214-467-1864
11/20	100-1600	Hilton Phoenix Airport Hotel 2435 S 47th St, Phoenix, AZ	Southwest Regional Career Event		<a href="#">Register</a>
11/20		DeeJay's Event Center 704 Beacon Lake Dr, Raleigh, NC	Southeast Regional Career Event		<a href="#">Register</a>
11/20		Mobile AL	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Dan A. Williams</a>	251-450-3345
11/221		Pensacola FL	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Isreal Jones</a>	228-523-4688
11/22		Crystal River FL	Resource Fair	<a href="#">John Young</a>	352-628-4357
11/24		Union Dale NY	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Patrick Yongstrom</a>	516-227-8731

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



## **TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES**

### **EXTENDED WAR TOURS LIKELY TO CONTINUE**

Tom Vanden Brook - USA TODAY – 28 October, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Army's use of involuntary extensions of combat duty will likely continue through 2009 despite pledges earlier this year by top military officials to reduce reliance on the policy known as stop loss.

In September, 12,204 soldiers were affected by stop loss, a policy that forces them to remain in the Army after their service commitment has expired. The same number likely will be affected each month through 2009, Army Lt. Col. Mike Moose said last week. <More at: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-10-26-stoploss\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-10-26-stoploss_N.htm)>

### **GENERAL BUCKS SILENCE ON MENTAL HEALTH**

Associated Press - November 08, 2008

WASHINGTON - It takes a brave soldier to do what Army Maj. Gen. David Blackledge did in Iraq. It takes as much bravery to do what he did when he got home.

Blackledge got psychiatric counseling to deal with wartime trauma, and now he is defying the military's culture of silence on the subject of mental health problems and treatment.

"It's part of our profession ... nobody wants to admit that they've got a weakness in this area," Blackledge said of mental health problems among troops returning from America's two wars.

"I have dealt with it. I'm dealing with it now," said Blackledge, who came home with post-traumatic stress. "We need to be able to talk about it." <More at: <http://www.physorg.com/news145362796.html>>

### **ROA WANTS ANSWERS ON DENIED RESERVE CLAIMS**

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Oct 24, 2008

The head of the Reserve Officers Association said he hopes a study ordered by Congress will explain the big discrepancies in veterans' disability benefits awarded to active and reserve forces.

Retired Marine Lt. Gen. Dennis McCarthy, ROA's executive director, said Wednesday that there may be good reasons why National Guard and reserve members are more likely to have their veterans' claims denied and to receive lower disability ratings — but those reasons are not immediately clear, and the Department of Veterans Affairs does not have a good explanation.

"We really need to keep on them until this study is done," McCarthy said, noting that veterans must have confidence that the disability system is fair.

... The study will take more than a year to complete. <More at: [www.armytimes.com/news/2008/10/military\\_reservegroup\\_benefitsdisparity\\_102308w/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/10/military_reservegroup_benefitsdisparity_102308w/)>

### **TOO MANY SOLDIERS IN NEW CARE CENTERS**

Lolita C. Baldo - Fort Campbell, Ky. (AP) - Nov 2, 08

In a rush to correct reports of substandard care for wounded soldiers, the Army flung open the doors of new specialized treatment centers so wide that up to half the soldiers currently enrolled do not have injuries serious enough to justify being there, The Associated Press has learned.

Army leaders are putting in place stricter screening procedures to stem the flood of patients overwhelming the units - a move that eventually will target some for closure.

According to interviews and data provided to the AP, the number of patients admitted to the 36 Warrior Transition Units and nine other community-based units jumped from about 5,000 in June 2007, when they began, to a peak of nearly 12,500 in June 2008. <More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20081102/D9470CQ80.html>>

### **PHYSICAL DISABILITY BOARD OF REVIEW**

Service members who have been medically separated since September 11, 2001 will have the opportunity to have their disability ratings reviewed to ensure fairness and accuracy.

The new Physical Disability Board of Review (PDBR) will examine each applicant's medical separation, compare DoD and VA ratings, and make a recommendation to the respective Service Secretary (or designee). A disability rating cannot be lowered and any change to the rating is effective on the date of final decision by the Service Secretary.

To be eligible for PDBR review, a service member must have been medically separated between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2009 with a combined disability rating of 20 percent or less, and not found eligible for retirement.

There are significant differences between this new PDBR review and a Board for Correction of Military (or Naval) Record (BCMR/BCNR) review. These differences are outlined in the table at the end of this issue in "Add-on – Stuff of Interest" and will also be on the application. <More at: <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/604044p.pdf>>

Refer to the FAQ document at <http://www.health.mil/Content/docs/PDBR%20Question%20and%20Answers.pdf> for more information

The DoD Instruction on the PDBR process is available here: <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/604044p.pdf>

## **NEW YORK AND ARIZONA ARE STEPPING UP TO A HUGE PROBLEM**

### **NEW YORK JUDGE URGES SPECIAL COURTS FOR VETERANS**

Steven Walters - Journal Sentinel - Oct. 27, 2008

Madison - Mental health, law enforcement and political leaders and veterans called Monday for the creation of specialized Wisconsin courts for military veterans, citing a growing number who return from service in Iraq and Afghanistan with emotional and other critical needs.

"It's extremely important," said Judge Robert T. Russell Jr., who in January began presiding over Veterans Treatment Court in Buffalo, N.Y. He spoke at a Wisconsin Veterans Intervention Program sponsored by the state Public Defender's Office.

Russell said his court has a "nothing but veterans" approach.

That means former service members accused of nonviolent crimes are supported by mental health and Veterans Administration professionals, have volunteer mentors who served in the military assigned to work with them, and regularly return to court to have their progress monitored. <More at: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/33419404.html>>

### **EFFORTS UNDER WAY TO CREATE VETERANS COURT IN THE VALLEY**

Jim Cross/KTAR - November 3rd, 2008

Many United States soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq have been unable to leave the battlefield behind them, and now an effort's underway in the Valley to help soldiers get through the court system. Several groups are working to create a Veterans Court in Maricopa County. It would handle criminal cases involving all soldiers, but primarily it's designed to address the unique needs of combat veterans with post traumatic stress disorder and brain injuries suffered on the battlefield.

"They haven't gone off of being on full alert," said Bill Richardson, a former Mesa police officer and Marine veteran who is behind the idea.

Retired Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Kenneth Fields is spearheading the effort.

<More at: <http://ktar.com/?nid=6&sid=984315>>

### **VA ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM PILOT**

Washington - Nov 07, 2008 - PRNewswire-USNewswire

Wounded service members leaving the military will have easier, quicker access to their veterans benefits due to the expansion of a pilot program that will offer streamlined disability evaluations that will reach 19 military installations, representing all military departments.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today the expansion of the Disability Evaluation System (DES) pilot which started in the National Capitol Region in coordination with the Department of Defense (DoD). The pilot is a test of a new process that eliminates duplicative, time-consuming and often confusing elements of the two current disability processes of the departments. <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/08/vap08/vap110708-1.htm>>

### **500 FILES PULLED FROM SHREDDER**

John W. Allman - October 25, 2008

TAMPA - A review this week of 57 regional offices of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has turned up nearly 500 benefit claim records that were set to be destroyed, agency officials said Friday.

The VA is now recommending that veterans - those who have not been contacted for six months or more about their claims for benefits - call their regional benefits office "to make sure the claim has been received, and everything is there," said Alison Aikele, the VA's press secretary in Washington, D.C.

The documents that were found in bins of paper waiting to be put through a paper shredder included veteran applications and change requests for benefits, which are needed to properly process an individual's claim.

The department is keeping in place an agency-wide ban on shredding while investigators from the VA's Office of Inspector General complete an audit of the St. Petersburg regional office. Staff there found eight documents in a shred bin last week that should not have been put there.

Investigators also have been asked to review allegations at two other regional offices that staff intentionally tried to destroy documents.

More than half of the 498 veterans' documents found in shred bins came from regional offices in St. Louis, Cleveland and Columbia, S.C. Both Columbia and St. Louis have placed one employee each on administrative leave pending the probe.

"There is a suspicion ... that those documents may have been mishandled intentionally," Aikele said.

<More at: <http://www2.tbo.com/content/2008/oct/25/250111/na-500-files-pulled-from-shredder/>>

## **AND WE ALL KNOW HOW WELL INTERNALLY DEVELOPED DOD SOFTWARE SYSTEMS WORK, DON'T WE?**

### **VA HIRES NAVY TO BUILD CLAIMS PROCESSING SYSTEM**

10/29/08

The Veterans Affairs Department has asked the Navy to develop a computer system to process the complex claims for educational benefits that veterans will file under the new GI bill President Bush signed into law in June.

In an Oct. 17 letter sent to the House and Senate VA committees, and obtained by Nextgov, VA Secretary James Peake wrote that the agency has hired the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) in Charleston, S.C., to build a system to process educational benefits for veteran as outlined in the 2008 GI bill. <More at: [http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng\\_20081029\\_2928.php](http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20081029_2928.php)>

### **VA DOCUMENTS: COMPUTERIZED FILES SUBJECT TO TAMPERING**

Larry Scott

A denied VA claim is just a click away. Altering files and changing dates all too common.

They have names like COVERS, VACOLS and MAP-D. They are just a few of the computer software programs used by the Veterans' Benefits Administration (VBA) of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to process a veteran's claim.

And, they are all subject to tampering.

Recent revelations of documents vital to veterans' claims showing up in shredder bins at VBA's Regional Offices (VAROs) and further revelations that thousands of pieces of unopened mail were found have captured the interest of veterans and their veterans' service organizations (VSOs).

Full background here... <http://www.vawatchdog.org/VAshredderscandal.htm>

But, nothing has been said about computer tampering as the VBA moves toward electronic processing of claims.

Now, we find that it's just as easy for a claim to be delayed or denied by the simple click of a computer mouse as it is to achieve the same result by dumping a document in a shredder bin. <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/08/nf08/nf08/nf103108-3.htm>>

### **ARMY PROBES RECENT SUICIDES**

Lindsay Wise - Houston Chronicle - Nov. 6, 2008

General will look into allegations of cover-up, low morale in Houston unit

The Army has appointed a brigadier general to investigate allegations that commanders of a Houston-based recruiting battalion tried to cover up a toxic leadership climate and low morale after a recent string of suicides, according to a letter obtained Thursday by the Chronicle. <More at: <http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/front/6099800.html>>

## **APPARENTLY PAST STOP-LOSSES WERE LESS IMPORTANT TO NATIONAL SECURITY THAN FUTURE STOP-LOSSES WILL BE**

### **STOP PAYMENT**

Brian Mockenhaupt - October 27, 2008

This summer, Congress surprised me with an unexpected but welcome gift. A House subcommittee on defense appropriations had approved \$500 for each month that a service member was retained under [stop-loss](#), the policy by which military personnel can be involuntarily retained on active duty. Since September 11, 2001, 180,000 troops have served beyond the end of their enlistment contracts. The Navy, Marines, and Air Force curtailed stop-loss in 2003, but the Army—which accounts for 130,000

of those affected—still uses the policy. I served an extra 14 months under stoploss, including a year in Iraq, my second tour there. The House valued that life interruption at \$7000.

Now, though, my wallet feels a bit lighter. In late-round finagling over the \$612-billion defense bill, senators amended the stop-loss provision, removing the clause that made payments retroactive. <More at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200810u/stop-loss>>

## **ENHANCED VA MORTGAGE OPTIONS NOW AVAILABLE FOR VETERANS**

October 24, 2008

### **Of Potential Benefit to Those in Financial Distress**

WASHINGTON -- Veterans with conventional home loans now have new options for refinancing to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) guaranteed home loan. These new options are available as a result of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008, which the President signed into law on October 10, 2008.

"These changes will allow VA to assist a substantial number of veterans with subprime mortgages refinance into a safer, more affordable, VA guaranteed loan," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Veterans in financial distress due to high rate subprime mortgages are potentially the greatest beneficiaries."

<More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/08/vap08/vap102408-1.htm>>

## **TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS**

### **NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF NOVEMBER 4, 2008**

This week the Army announced an increase, while the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 245 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 95,832; Navy Reserve, 6,041; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 10,563; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,116; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 758. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 120,310, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov2008/d20081104ngr.pdf>.

### **OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2008**

#### **NOTE: STATISTICS FOR WOUNDED ARE GETTING SHAKIER - DOD REVISES NUMBERS – DROPS NON-HOSTILE "OTHER"**

<b>OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,062 DAYS)</b>		<b>OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,591 DAYS)</b>	
KILLED US	4,193	KILLED US	626
WOUNDED US [11/01/0810]	30,774	OTHER CASUALTIES US [10/2007]	1,994
OTHER US CASUALTIES [11/01/08]	≥34,618	KILLED COALITION	381
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [11/01/08]	160	WOUNDED US [11/01/08]	7,293
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1	WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,602
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 [11/01/08]	≥ 97,062- 638,579		
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.246M		
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2. 5M	COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$569,760,774,624

*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**

**HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO COMMENT ~ CLICK ON "64208" FOR FULL TEXT**

**SUBJECT: PTSD INTERIM FINAL RULE - 10/28/2008**

[Federal Register: October 29, 2008 (Volume 73, Number 210)] [Rules and Regulations] [Page [64208](#)-64210]

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS 38 CFR Part 3 RIN 2900-AN04

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

AGENCY: Department of Veterans Affairs.

ACTION: Interim final rule. SUMMARY: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is amending its adjudication regulations regarding service connection for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by eliminating the requirement of evidence corroborating occurrence of the claimed in-service stressor in claims in which PTSD is diagnosed in service. This amendment is necessary to facilitate the proof of service connection in such claims. By this amendment, we intend to reduce claim-processing time for such claims.

DATES: Effective Date: This interim final rule is effective October 29, 2008. Comments must be received by VA on or before November 28, 2008.

ADDRESSES: Written comments may be submitted through [www.Regulations.gov](http://www.Regulations.gov); by mail or hand-delivery to the Director, Regulations Management (02REG), Office of the General Counsel, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Ave., NW., Room 1068, Washington, DC 20420; or by fax to (202) 273-9026. Comments should indicate that they are submitted in response to "RIN 2900-AN04--Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." fiction," Pike said.

<More at: <http://cryptome.info/0001/va102908.htm>>

**ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST**

<b>COMPARISON - BCMR VERSUS PDBR REVIEW OF RATING CHARACTERISTIC</b>	<b>Board of Correction of Military Records [Old]</b>	<b>Physical Disability Board of Review [New]</b>
Panel Composition	3 civilians in grade of GS-15 and above	3 military officers in grade of 05/06 (or civilian equivalents); Board president 06 or civilian equivalent only
Review Authority	May apply for review of military record, within three years of error/injustice, (may be waived in the interest of justice)	Medical separation 20% or less where member did not retire finalized between 11 September 2001 and 31 December 2009
Review Process	Application submitted, medical, personnel or legal advisories prepared and served on applicant with chance to comment before panel review and vote	Application submitted, then case summarized by PDBR medical member (or other experts) for presentation to PDBR before vote. Applicant can submit records from non DOD sources
Panel Outcome	Recommendation or Decision	Recommendation only
Decision Authority	Director, Review Boards Agencies (Army, Air Force, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (M&RA) or Assistant General Counsel (M&RA) (Navy)	same
Burden of Proof	Member has the burden of proof to establish error or injustice. There is a presumption of regularity	Member need not allege anything, review accomplished upon request
Effective Date of Correction and Benefits Computation	Benefits retroactive to date of separation	Benefits forward only as of date of final decision
Standards	Will correct errors in records and/or remove an injustice	Rating reviewed for fairness and accuracy
Impact of Subsequent VA Rating	Within discretion of the Board	Will compare VA rating with particular attention to one given within 12 months of separation



## 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](mailto: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