

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 10

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

10 JANUARY 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

WHERE WE STAND IN THE HEARTS OF AMERICA

Many of you recently received an email with the subject line **"Change.org Opens Voting for "Top 10 Ideas in America"™**". As I had 'voted for change', I went on their website and checked out how people were voting. I was curious – just what were these "Top Ideas"?

What a revelation! I didn't know how disconnected I was from the general public. I thought that some others of us in VUFT might also be cut off from current reality, so today we will examine the public's concerns. We will explore just what is important to our fellow Americans, and just how important today's serving military and yesterday's veterans are to your neighbors..

I first looked at the list of 88 (count 'em) "Top Ideas" on Monday, 5 January. Because folks were still voting I looked at it a second time the next day (the number of votes had increased by 2.5 times). Two reasons – I didn't trust a single sample, and I couldn't believe my eyes the first time. Between the two samples the first 15 "Top Ideas" did not change, other than a move of one place up or down for a few. Finally I re-checked it Friday morning another doubling of responses.

You are probably dying to know the results!

The most important subject by far in the hearts and minds of Americans is – **WAIT FOR IT!** – marijuana! Of 88 "Top Ideas", numbers (Monday 1, 2, & 12), (Tuesday 1, 3, & 12) (Friday 1, 4, & 12) were "Legalize Marijuana". "End the War on Drugs", and "Decriminalize Marijuana". Of the 140,000 choices that Americans exercised to tell our new Administration and Congress what was most important

in their lives, 19,000 chose grass – 14% of the total votes cast!

In this first 15 there were also some very good "Top Ideas" – "Repeal the Patriot Act" [2 items, one of which fell out of the top 15 by Friday], "Single Payer Health Care" [up to 2 from 5 by Friday], "Marriage Equality Act", "National Strategy for Sustainability" [solid 11 all three days]; but none came close to the American-Progressive-Stoner-for-Change's need for good ol' Mary Jane.

Moving to the second tier we find at number 17 "Vegan School Lunch Options", a subject certainly high on every veteran's wish list.

Of course we mustn't overlook that very important subject that came in at number 18 – "Legalize [unpasteurized] Milk", which seems to be very important to 2800 of our neighbors.

I love animals as much as anyone, but "Stop Animals Torture" at number 22, "Pass The Puppy Uniform Protection Statute To Help Stop Puppy Mills" at number 27, and "Ban Breed Specific Legislation" at number 35 seems to put their welfare ahead of some very important ideas such as "Abolish Nuclear Weapons Globally" at number 26 [Up from 36 on Tuesday – a hopeful sign], and (finally) "Leave Iraq Now!" At number 38.

Many issues are important, and the list (not necessarily this list) of truly significant issues, or genuinely "Top Ideas" is pretty long. But somehow I can't help but despair that stopping the war falls so far down the list, even behind "Introduce Esperanto As The First Foreign Language Subject In Schools" which falls at number 31.

I cannot accept that number 25 [up from 45!], “Victory Gardens 2.0” (this was “Green White House” but I guess no one understood that) should get twice the votes of number 42 “End The Genocide In Darfur”. And I certainly am appalled that number 51 – “A Do Not Mail Registry To Stop Junk Mail” gets almost as many votes as my most important “top idea” – “Take Care Of Disabled Veterans”, that finally appears at 48.

I guess this tells us where we and our brothers and sisters stand in the minds of those Americans who are so devoted to “change”. This is not the “change” I voted for.

If they have their way, much that serves those single-issue advocates will change before the appalling state of veterans benefits delivery gets dealt with.

The only other “Top Ideas” that apply directly to our issues are number 36 – “Close Guantánamo”, and way down at number 67 – “Reverse Boot Camp Before Returning War Veterans”. Given the tenor of the list and its priorities, I can’t help but think that that latter item isn’t a “Support the Troops” issue, rather it is probably a “Keep All Those Crazy Vets Away From My Neighborhood” issue.

To be fair, other important issues also fall distressingly way below the top tiers: 44 – “End Childhood Hunger [only in America]”; 46 – “End Sexual Violence”; 68 – “Improve Global Child Health”; 76 – “End Racial Profiling”; and, 80 – “Save The Children From Preventable Diseases”. Most of those also fall well below these terribly important ideas: 49 – “Complete Adopting The Metric System!” [Up from 52, and yes, the exclamation point is included – must be important enough to need emphasis); and, 61 – “Legalize And Regulate Prostitution”.

Since our organization began four years ago, we have despaired over the lack of response from those who have not served, particularly from those who have made such a public point of “Supporting the Troops”. Now we understand why. For the most part, veterans don’t exist in the public conscience, anymore than the civilians dying in the war exist, or the unconscionable waste of treasure in wars-of-choice exists.

The original list was much longer than 88, but some subjects, such as “A Fully Funded Veterans Administration” didn’t even make the final roll.

Well gang, we are going to keep on going, and we are going to keep on trying to remind our neighbors that certain things stay true, whether they think about them or not.

Here is my list of “10 Top Ideas” – a non-prioritized collective around the three central ideas of “Peace first – war only if we must”, “Veterans are paying a bigger price than you are”, and, “We are all supposed to be in this Republic together”.

1. Never go to war unless we or our true allies are actually threatened and all else has failed.
2. Never contemplate war unless everyone sacrifices – really sacrifices: if it is that important to fight, it is that important that we all fight.
3. Never use military force to execute a political mission, such as “establishing democracy”.
4. Never send too few or poorly trained or inadequately equipped troops into battle unless you are compelled to do so because you can “see the whites of their eyes”.
5. Never use the National Guard for war unless the entire nation is mobilized.
6. If we must fight (see 1 above) define the military mission in clear military terms, and when it is completed, get the hell out.
7. Understand that is humans beings that we send into war, not tin soldiers: deal with the human needs up front, including the needs of soldiers’ families.
8. Consider the benefits owed to soldiers and veterans as “senior debt” – the debt that is paid before all others.
9. Never let a soldier’s claim wait a day – err on the side of the soldier and presume the rightness of the claim: if it turns out to be unfounded, fix it later.
10. Work with our allies and our critics to strengthen security for all so that wars need not happen.

I am sure that many of you would have a different list, but you get the idea.

Sometimes our former Presidents have some real gems for us – starting with our first President:

“It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system, that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a Free Government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even of his personal services to the defense of it.”

George Washington

The keepers of the “Ten Best Ideas” apparently haven’t heard that one. And here are a couple more from our 34th President:

“Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

“I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Let’s hope that somewhere in all of this “change”, someone stops, takes a deep breath, and remembers that the soldier’s and the soldier’s family’s sacrifice never changes, only our attention does. [Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

WEST L.A. VA PROPERTY STILL IN ISSUE

Terence Lyons – Santa Monica Mirror Contributing Writer

On December 28, a group of veterans staged their 41st consecutive Sunday rally to protest non-veteran-related uses of the VA property. While the protesting veterans object to several uses, including leases of land and buildings to schools, an entertainment group, and for rental car and bus storage, the focus of the current protests is an August 2007 Sharing Agreement between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Park Conservancy for the use of 16 acres as a park to “serve the needs of veterans and residents alike.” <More at: <http://www.smmirror.com/MainPages/DisplayArticleDetails.asp?eid=9298>

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/

FIRST CHANCE FOR A 2009 TAX DEDUCTION!

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Our appeal to the Circuit court **has begun** 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)

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

2/11/2208 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

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

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

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

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

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

FOLLOW-UP ON THE LA VETERANS HOME

You have all received our appeal to legislators to stop the land grab at the LA National Veterans Home. We hope that you have written your letters and passed the action along to friends organizations. If we don't defend veterans, who will?

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 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]

LET'S HELP OUR VETERANS WHILE HELPING THE ECONOMY

JANUARY 2, 2009 *WSJ* - Regarding your editorial "[... And Bridges to Everywhere](#)" (Dec. 26): President-elect Barack Obama will soon present his stimulus package. Since Jan. 1, the U.S. government, according to The New York Times of Nov. 26, has allocated "\$7.8 trillion in direct and indirect financial obligations" to the current economic crisis. Nothing has worked to date. Ultimately we will all be saddled with a vast bill and an inflation rate that may reach that suffered by the Weimar Republic.

The economic bailout was originally intended to encourage banks to once again lend to creditworthy applicants. Since there were inadequate conditions imposed on the bailout money given to the banks, they have not done so. Now, bailout money is being handed out to banks and industries simply to prevent bankruptcy, also without adequate conditions. We, the American public, have received very little (I would say nothing) for the largesse of our leaders.

I have two suggestions that will at least give us something more tangible for that ongoing generosity with taxpayers' money. Why don't we authorize the secretary of the Treasury to buy up to 1.5 million automobiles at a price on average of \$30,000 each, which comes to \$45 billion. Also, provide the authorization to buy up to 300,000 houses in foreclosure that were part of the subprime mortgage fiasco, at an average cost of \$300,000, in aggregate less than \$500 billion. Then give a car and a house as a bonus to every veteran of our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I will leave to Hank Paulson and his successor the job of working out the details of distribution, e.g., lottery, fairness, region, etc. The veteran should be required to live in the house, unable to sell for five years, and demonstrate an income that can support his/her maintaining the now mortgage-free home.

The total cost of this package is approximately \$500 billion, depending on the number of veterans, while President-elect Obama's projected stimulus package is a reputed \$800 billion. Most important, our veterans get something tangible for our money, as opposed to the bailouts to date, which are sweetheart giveaways.

Edward I. Koch, *New York* (Mr. Koch is a former mayor of New York.)

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

Waiting for the 111th Congress

US MEDIA WITHDRAWS FROM IRAQ BEFORE THE MILITARY

By John Aloysius Farrell, Thomas Jefferson Street blog December 30, 2008

It is sad, but not particularly surprising, to read that the big U.S. television networks are closing up shop in Iraq.

Revenue is down, and war correspondents are terribly expensive, especially in a place like the Middle East, where they have to protect themselves from kidnapping, IEDs, and suicide bombings. Conditions in Iraq have improved. And there are other wars that need covering—in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Still, it is stunning to think that 140,000 American troops remain at war in Iraq but the networks don't have full-time correspondents there, covering the story.

<More at: www.usnews.com/blogs/john-farrell/2008/12/30/us-media-withdraws-from-iraq-before-the-military.html>

THE US HAS 761 MILITARY BASES ACROSS THE PLANET.

Tom Engelhardt - Tomdispatch.com - Originally Posted on September 8, 2008

Here it is, as simply as I can put it: In the course of any year, there must be relatively few countries on this planet on which U.S. soldiers do not set foot, whether with guns blazing, humanitarian aid in hand, or just for a friendly visit. In startling numbers of countries, our soldiers not only arrive, but stay interminably, if not indefinitely. Sometimes they live on military bases built to the tune of billions of dollars that amount to sizeable American towns (with accompanying amenities), sometimes on stripped down forward operating bases that may not even have showers. When those troops don't stay, often American equipment does -- carefully stored for further use at tiny "cooperative security locations," known informally as "lily pads" (from which U.S. troops, like so many frogs, could assumedly leap quickly into a region in crisis).

At the height of the Roman Empire, the Romans had an estimated 37 major military bases scattered around their dominions. At the height of the British Empire, the British had 36 of them planetwide. Depending on just who you listen to and how you count, we have hundreds of bases. According to Pentagon records, in fact, there are 761 active military "sites" abroad.

<More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/97913>> See table in **"AFTERTHOUGHTS"**

TORTURE TRAIL SEEN STARTING WITH BUSH

Jason Leopold - December 12, 2008

A bipartisan congressional report traces the U.S. abuse of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib to President George W. Bush's Feb. 7, 2002, action memorandum that excluded "war on terror" suspects from Geneva Convention protections. The Senate Armed Services Committee's [report](#) said Bush's memo opened the door to "considering aggressive techniques," which were then developed with the complicity of then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Bush's National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and other senior officials.

Three months ago, Rice admitted that she led high-level discussions beginning in 2002 with other senior Bush administration officials about subjecting suspected al-Qaeda terrorists to the harsh interrogation technique known as waterboarding, according to documents released by Sen. Carl Levin, D-Michigan, committee chairman.

"The abuse of detainees in U.S. custody cannot simply be attributed to the actions of 'a few bad apples' acting on their own," the committee report said. "The fact is that senior officials in the United States government solicited information on how to use aggressive techniques, redefined the law to create the appearance of their legality, and authorized their use against detainees." <More at: <http://www.consortiumnews.com/Print/2008/121208a.html>>

US GIRDS FOR AN AFGHAN SURGE

Associated Press - January 02, 2009

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan - Afghanistan's southern rim, the Taliban's spiritual birthplace and the country's most violent region, has for the last two years been the domain of British, Canadian and Dutch soldiers. That's about to change.

In what amounts to an Afghan version of the surge in Iraq, the U.S. is preparing to pour at least 20,000 extra troops into the south, augmenting 12,500 NATO soldiers who have proved too few to cope with a Taliban insurgency that is fiercer than NATO leaders expected. New construction at Kandahar Air Field foreshadows the upcoming infusion of American power. Runways and housing are being built, along with two new U.S. outposts in Taliban-held regions of Kandahar province.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/us-girds-for-an-afghan-surge.html>>

BRITAIN TO PULL TROOPS FROM IRAQ BY MAY 31

Jim Heintz - AP News - Dec 17, 2008

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said Wednesday his country's troops will leave Iraq by May 31, ending a mission that provided the second-largest military presence in Iraq after the United States. Britain had previously said the 4,000-strong mission would conclude in the early summer, and Brown's statement appeared to accelerate that timetable to end Britain's role in the unpopular war. <More at: http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/news/2008/12/britain_to_pull_troops_from_ir.php>

OBAMA TAPS CLINTON VETS FOR DEFENSE POSTS

Shaun Waterman - UPI Homeland and National Security Editor - Jan. 9, 2009

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 (UPI) -- President-elect Barack Obama named his picks for four top defense positions Wednesday, continuing a pattern of choosing centrist Washington insiders from the Clinton era for his government's top posts.

William Lynn, who served as Pentagon comptroller from 1997 to 2001, was named as Obama's choice to be the top deputy to Defense Secretary Robert Gates; Robert Hale, who was Air Force comptroller under President Bill Clinton, will be nominated to hold that post for the Department of Defense as a whole; Michele Flournoy, who was a principal deputy assistant secretary of defense under Clinton, will be tapped as undersecretary for policy; and Jeh Charles Johnson, a former federal prosecutor who became the Air Force's top lawyer in 1998, will be nominated as Pentagon general counsel.

<More at: http://www.upi.com/Emerging_Threats/2009/01/09/Obama_taps_Clinton_vets_for_defense_posts/UPI-83141231518048/>

AUDIT FINDS NAVY STORING \$7.5B IN UNNEEDED PARTS

Bryan Bender - Globe Staff - December 18, 2008

WASHINGTON - Government auditors identified at least \$7.5 billion worth of unneeded spare parts stored in Navy warehouses yesterday, the latest example of wasteful military spending that is fueling calls for President-elect Barack Obama to take bold action to rein in the Defense Department's bloated budget.

Between 2003 and 2007, the Navy's supply of replacement parts for ships and aircraft far exceeded its needs, the Government Accountability Office found during a new audit. Indeed, in some instances investigators found stocks of equipment that the service is unlikely to use up for decades - such as 13,852 engine blades for its F/A-18 fighter jets estimated to be worth \$3.6 million. In total, the Navy has nearly 2 million more aircraft parts than its own projections deem necessary, while it is storing 10 million ship parts designated as excess, the report found. The cost of storing the equipment alone is \$18 million, the GAO estimated.

<More at: http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2008/12/18/audit_finds_navy_storing_75b_in_unneeded_parts/>

DID YOU EVER WONDER HOW THEY MAKE THEIR RECRUITING GOALS?

RACIAL EXTREMISTS ARE INFILTRATING THE MILITARY FOR THE CHANCE TO 'KILL A BROWN'

David Holthouse - Intelligence Report - December 15, 2008

The racist skinhead logged on with exciting news: He'd just enlisted in the United States Army.

"Sieg Heil, I will do us proud," he wrote. It was a June 3 post to AryanWear Forum 14, a neo-Nazi online forum to which "Sobibor's SS," who identified himself as a skinhead living in Plantersville, Ala., had belonged since early 2004. (Sobibor was a Nazi death camp in Poland during World War II).

About a month after he announced his enlistment, Sobibor's SS bragged in another post to Forum 14 that he'd specifically requested and been assigned to MOS, or Military Occupational Specialty, 98D.

MOS98D soldiers are in high demand right now. That's because they're specially trained in disarming Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), the infamous roadside bombs that are killing and maiming so many U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Presumably, part of learning how to disarm an IED is learning how one is made. <More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/112770/>>

MILITARY CLANS FACE HARDSHIP AS U.S. FIGHTS ON TWO FRONTS

Yochi J. Dreazen - December 13, 2008

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. -- In the weeks before his wedding, Lt. Eric Donahue kept running through a mental checklist of all the things that could go wrong.

His father, Rock, a stocky Army colonel, could get stuck in Baghdad. His fiancée, Claudia Keen, a 24-year-old Army helicopter pilot, could get a last-minute assignment. The groomsmen and bridesmaids, all Army officers, could fail to get time off. Eric, 23, could get called back to his infantry unit.

"There are a lot of moving parts," he said a few days before the late September ceremony, nervously tearing a napkin into neat piles of shredded paper. "You just hope they all somehow fall into place."

Life for military families used to be simpler. Fathers went off to war and left children behind. Children typically didn't go to war until after their parents retired from the armed forces. There were hardly any female troops.

<More at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122912858257803303.html>>

HERE ARE TWO MORE PHONY "SUPPORT THE TROOPS" ORGANIZATIONS, BUT THESE ARE FEDERALLY FUNDED!

VFW WANTS VETERANS CORPORATION SHUT DOWN

PRNewswire-USNewswire - Dec. 12, 2008

WASHINGTON, - The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is calling on Congress to stop appropriating federal funding for the Veterans Business Development Corporation, which is better known as The Veterans Corporation, or TVC.

Congress created TVC in 1999 to provide military veterans with the resources and guidance necessary to start small businesses, but an investigation report released yesterday by the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship revealed that TVC failed to achieve its goals.

According to the [bipartisan report](#) by committee chairman John Kerry (D-Mass.) and ranking member Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), TVC failed to establish and maintain veterans business resource centers, it didn't become self-sufficient as required, and the use of federal funding for executive compensation and questionable expenditures was deemed unacceptable. <More at: [**PENTAGON PRO-TROOP GROUP MISSPENT MILLIONS, REPORT SAYS**](http://www.marketwatch.com/news/story/VFW-Wants-Veterans-Corporation-Shut/story.aspx?guid={038FEFE7-9996-48DA-B24D-0BBBE9689EBD}></p>
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Noah Shachtman - December 12, 2008

A Defense Department project, supposedly designed to support U.S. troops, was used instead to channel millions of dollars to personal friends and allies of its chief. The "America Supports You," or ASY, program was led in a "questionable and unregulated manner," according to a [Department of Defense Inspector General report](#), obtained by Danger Room. At least \$9.2 million was "inappropriately transferred" by the project's managers. Much of that money served only to further promote ASY, instead of assisting servicemembers.

In 2004, the office of then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld set up ASY as a six-month effort to showcase the U.S. public's backing for the troops and their families. "If you're serving overseas, and you watch the mainstream media coverage, sometimes you can't tell if America knows you're there," one official overseeing the program says. America Supports You was seen as a way to counteract that sense. <More at: <http://blog.wired.com/defense/2008/12/asy.html>>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

| Date | Time | Where | What | Who | Notes |
|---|-----------|--|---|---|--------------------------|
| 1/14-15 | | VA Puget Sound Health Care System 1660 S. Columbian Way, Seattle, WA | Hearings | Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans | contact |
| 1/31 | 1300-1600 | Teamster City Auditorium 300 S. Ashland, Chicago, IL | War's Real Impact: Our Voices | Workers' Rights Board | 312-738-6161 |
| 1/21 | 1100-1400 | The Radisson Hotel at LAX 6225 West Century Blvd, Los Angeles | Los Angeles Military/Veteran Career Fair | | |
| 1/22 | 1100-1400 | Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd, San Antonio, | San Antonio Military/Veteran Career Fair | | |
| 1/27 | 1100-1400 | Holiday Inn Rosslyn at Key Bridge 1900 N Fort Myer Dr., Arlington, VA | Washington DC Military/Veteran Career Fair | | |
| 1/29 | 1000-1600 | Morocco Shrine Center 3800 St. John's Bluff Rd. Jacksonville, FL | Southeast Regional Event | | register |
| <p>We are a non-partisan organization. We will advertise all legitimate veterans' events, regardless of purpose.</p> | | | | | |

I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO CUT ANY OF THIS

UNGRATEFUL SALLIE MAE

Kevin Cullen - Globe Columnist / December 18, 2008

Ian McVey could have been anything. He chose to be a Marine. It is not a path that most kids from Weston would take, but Ian Thomas McVey was not most kids. He coasted at Weston High. But when he transferred to The Rivers School, where his father taught Latin, he got serious and blossomed.

One day, he told his father, "I want to join the Marines."

His father said he was proud of him, but had one caveat: go to college first. Ian McVey went off to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in upstate New York, graduating last year with a double major in computer science and computer engineering. He spurned a lucrative career in the private sector to join the Marine Corps.

"I have wanted to be a Marine for as long as I can remember," he wrote in his officer training application. "After September 11, 2001, I knew more than ever that this was what I wanted to do. I wanted to serve my country, and after the attack I knew I wanted to join the Marines' ranks and go into harm's way so others would not have to."

Last summer, Second Lieutenant Ian McVey got his orders. He was to go to Iraq as a platoon commander with the Second Combat Engineer Battalion of the Second Marine Division. On July 19, not long before his unit was to ship out, McVey's motorcycle was blindsided by a car driven by an 84-year-old woman near Camp Lejeune, N.C. He was killed instantly. He was 23 years old.

John McVey went through his son's things. Cluttered bureau drawers. Photographs and memories. He also had to settle Ian's college loans. He wrote to the lenders, asking that the debts be forgiven. Two wrote back, saying they would forgive the loans.

The third, Sallie Mae, the government-created college loan provider that privatized its operations in 2004, refused. John McVey then wrote a very personal letter to Sallie Mae:

"In the process of his education, Ian amassed considerable loans. But Ian was steadfast in his desire to serve our country rather than begin a life in business where his income would have been double or triple his Marine service payment. Giving to our country was Ian's calling, and we admired and supported his choice of service. He was a good and noble son and better friend.

"We are asking that you forgive Ian's loans as his federal loans are being forgiven on the basis of Ian's choice of service to our country as a patriot and so that our family may not have to bear these financial burdens while we deal with the inconsolable grief over the senseless, tragic and untimely loss of our son. While life has not been fair, we pray that you will be."

Sallie Mae responded with a computer-generated letter that, aside from a "Please accept our condolences for your loss" stuck in the middle, was a demand for \$53,144. There was no name on the letter. John McVey's attempts to get a human being to talk to him about this have been met with computer-generated voices.

"What bothers me most is we say our country is at war, but it's only the soldiers, the Marines, and their families who are at war. We're not in this together. Sallie Mae couldn't care less," John McVey said. "I put my heart and soul into that letter. And a computer wrote back."

It is beyond obscene that a government now handing out billions in bailouts to boardroom executives whose idea of risk is using a 9-iron instead of a wedge on an approach shot could spawn a lender like Sallie Mae to soak the family of a young man willing to spill his blood for others.

According to its promotional material, Sallie Mae has been recognized by Business Ethics magazine as one of the 100 Best Corporate Citizens.

That, unlike John McVey, is rich.

Kevin Cullen is a Globe columnist. He can be reached at cullen@....

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YOUNG VETERANS FACE FINANCIAL BATTLES

Commentary By James Key

The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the global financial turmoil, have eclipsed a story I know too well: Veterans returning from the war zones are now battling for their financial lives here at home.

Earlier this year, *The Wall Street Journal* published a summary of a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs study on discharged veterans' employment and wage prospects. The study revealed that young veterans are earning less and having more difficulty finding work than their civilian peers. For example, the percentage of veterans not in the labor force jumped from 10% in 2000 (prewar) to 23% in 2005. Veterans ages 20-24 had an unemployment rate of 12% 50% higher than for all adults in that age category. Even employed vets are barely getting by: Half of those ages 20-24 earned less than \$25,000 a year. And this study was done *before* the latest economic crisis. <More at: <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/12/young-veterans.html>>

COURT: DOD VIOLATED VETERANS HIRING PREFERENCES

By Elise Castelli - Staff writer - Dec 29, 2008

The Defense Department violated the rights of a veteran who was seeking an entry-level, civilian auditing job when it decided to hire two nonveteran candidates instead, a federal court has ruled.

In a Dec. 24 decision, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit found that an Office of Personnel Management authority that allowed Defense to bypass traditional competitive hiring procedures for entry-level positions was invalid because the regulation conflicted with statutory requirements.

Congress required that OPM give permission to DoD to pass over a veteran or other preferred candidate for a job, but in this case Defense made that decision on its own when it passed over veteran Stephen Gingery for a job at the Defense Contract Audit Agency.

Defense used a special authority to hire candidates through the Federal Career Intern Program, which under OPM's regulation allowed the department to decide whether to give preference to the veteran. In exercising this hiring authority, the department denied Gingery, who has a 30 percent or greater disability, his preference rights, Judge Kimberly Moore wrote in the decision.

<More at: http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2008/12/federal_gingery_122908w/>

OBAMA CAN END HOMELESS VETERANS' DISGRACE

Aaron Glantz - New America Media, Commentary - Dec 30, 2008

Editor's note: On any given night, there are 200,000 U.S. veterans sleeping on the streets of America. Many died while waiting for their disability claims to be approved by the government. NAM contributing writer, Aaron Glantz, is the author of "The War Comes Home: Washington's Battle Against America's Veterans" (University of California Press)

SAN FRANCISCO - Roy Lee Brantley shivers in the cold December morning as he waits in line for food outside the Ark of Refuge mission, which sits amid warehouses and artists lofts a stone's throw from the skyscrapers of downtown San Francisco. Brantley's beard is long, white and unkempt. The African-American man's skin wrinkled beyond his 62 years. He lives in squalor in a dingy residential hotel room with the bathroom down the hall. In some ways, his current situation marks an improvement. "I've slept in parks," he says, "and on the sidewalk. Now at least I have a room."

<More at: http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=f0eaa36d9a9afd7953bdc7e791e7707a&from=rss>

BUYER: STIMULUS PACKAGE SHOULD INCLUDE VETERANS

House CVA Press Release - December 29, 2008

Washington, D.C. - Today, U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, urged House leaders and President-elect Obama to include over \$2 billion for initiatives to assist veterans in any new stimulus package considered by Congress.

"We should not say we want to stimulate the economy and fail to include investments in programs that improve the lives of veterans," Buyer said in a letter to President-elect Barack Obama, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and House Minority Leader John Boehner. <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/08/hcva08/hcva122908-1.htm>>

CHANGES COMING TO VETERANS HOSPITALS?

Jennifer Calhoun - Staff writer

A recent brouhaha over closing the emergency room at Salisbury's Veterans Affairs hospital has some critics worried that unwarranted changes could be coming to veterans' health care.

In September, the Salisbury hospital planned to eliminate its emergency, inpatient and surgical services. Under the proposal, veterans needing emergency services would be directed to local hospitals on a fee-for-service basis, while others would be directed to the VA's new outpatient facilities in Charlotte and Winston-Salem. Salisbury would retain its mental health and long-term care services, and the emergency room would be turned into a 12-hour urgent-care center.

The plan is part of a national movement to shift the VA's focus from inpatient to outpatient care, reduce delays in care and cut back on costs, according to James Peake, secretary of Veterans Affairs. <More at: <http://www.fayobserver.com/article?id=314331>>

MILITARY STRUGGLES WITH RESPONSE TO PTSD

Dec. 26, 2008

(CBS) The Pentagon says 1 in 5 service members who come home from Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress. Some find their experiences too much to bear. There were 115 military suicides last year, and 93 through just August of this year. The biggest obstacle to getting those numbers down may be the military culture itself, reports CBS News correspondent Kimberly Dozier. <More at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/12/26/eveningnews/main4687236.shtml>>

DEALING WITH PTSD

Robert Van Boven - Washington Post OP-ED - December 31, 2008

On Friday, December 19th, millions of Americans were exposed on the "Dr. Phil" show to the antithesis of service many of our wounded warriors have received upon their return to civilian life. The honorable Rep. Bob Filner, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, decried that "the American people assume we (the VA) are taking care of our kids ... we are not."

He pointed out that the nearly one million new veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are dealing with a backlog of nearly 800,000 benefit claims. Moreover, Mr. Filner cited unethical conduct at the VA including shredding and deceitful post-dating of many hundreds of benefit claims at several sites. He further pointed out notorious VA communications to conceal suicide rates and encourage alternative diagnoses to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), thereby threatening health care benefits for many thousands of returning soldiers suffering from PTSD. Unfortunately, congressional oversight is hindered, according to Mr. Filner, because it depends upon self-disclosure of wrongdoing by the VA, and "if they want to cover-up, they can cover-up." <More at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/dec/31/dealing-with-ptsd/>>

ANOTHER ARMY GENERAL FIGHTS STIGMA BY ANNOUNCING HE SOUGHT PTSD RECOVERY

Pamela Walck - Savannah Morning News (Georgia) - Dec 21, 2008

Fort Stewart, Georgia - War changes a person. It's a truth Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo knows all too well from his 29 years of service - and counting - in the U.S. Army. And it's a truth he tries to share with each new man and woman arriving at Fort Stewart to serve in the 3rd Infantry Division he guides.

"Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Andrews and I try to speak to each newcomers' group," said the commanding general of the 3rd ID. "We get all ranks - from private to colonel - and in part, we try to impress upon them ... it is a point of moral courage to step forward and say you need help."

... Last month, Gen. Carter Ham, one of the Army's 12 four-star generals, went public with his battle against PTSD after an incident on a base in Iraq in 2005 left him easily startled and struggling to get a good night's sleep. He sought screening for PTSD and got counseling from a chaplain. Ham has been reported to say it helped him "get realigned."

<More at: <http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/ArticleID/11946>>

SO WHY THIS? MAYBE BECAUSE HE IS A SERGEANT AND NOT A GENERAL? SHAME!

PTSD VICTIM BOOTED FOR 'MISCONDUCT'

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Jan 8, 2009

After serving two tours in Iraq — tours filled with killing enemy combatants and watching close friends die — Sgt. Adam Boyle, 27, returned home expecting the Army to take care of him. Instead, service member advocates and Boyle's mother say his chain of command in the 3rd Psychological Operations Battalion at Fort Bragg, N.C., worked to end his military career at the first sign of weakness.

In October, a medical evaluation board physician at Bragg recommended that Boyle go through the military disability retirement process for chronic post-traumatic stress disorder — which is supposed to automatically earn him at least a 50

percent disability retirement rating — as well as for chronic headaches. The doctor also diagnosed Boyle with alcohol abuse and said he was probably missing formations due to the medications doctors put him on to treat his PTSD.

But in December, Lt. Gen. John Mulholland, commanding general of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, signed an order forcing Boyle out on an administrative discharge for a "pattern of misconduct," and ordering that the soldier pay back his re-enlistment bonus. <More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/01/military_ptsd_discharge_010709w/>

VETERANS `KEPT IN THE DARK`

Robert J. O'Dowd - Salem-News.com - Dec-29-2008

The Defense Department does not notify veterans of military Superfund sites of contaminants and the health effects of exposure to them. However, after several deaths from TCE contaminated well water, legislation required the Navy and Marine Corps to contact veterans of Camp Lejeune regarding the TCE contamination of base wells.

<More at: http://www.salem-news.com/articles/december292008/el_toro_ro_12-29-08.php>

VETERANS COULD PAY MORE UNDER HEALTH BUDGET PLAN

Tom Philpott - Tacoma THE NEWS TRIBUNE - January 3rd, 2009

A new report from the Congressional Budget Office shows why some military retirees and veterans could face higher out-of-pocket costs if the Obama administration and Congress take bold moves to reform the U.S. health system and to make federal health programs more efficient.

Among 115 options presented, though not endorsed, in the report, several focus on raising TRICARE out-of-pocket costs for retirees and one for families. Others would tighten access to Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics, or raise VA health fees, for veterans with no service-connected conditions. <More at: <http://www.thenewtribune.com/business/story/583673.htm>>

VETERANS MAY PAY MORE FOR CARE AT [CALIFORNIA]-RUN HOMES

E.J. Schultz - Fresno Bee – Jan. 03, 2009

The price to stay in a state-run veterans home could soon be going up. The proposal is tucked in the plan released this week by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to close the state's growing budget deficit, estimated at about \$40 billion over the next 18 months.

The veterans fee hikes would save the state \$2.8 million a year by removing a cap on the amount veterans contribute toward their care at the homes each month. About 17 percent of the state's roughly 1,600 veterans home residents would be affected, said J.P. Tremblay, a deputy secretary at the state Department of Veterans Affairs. Spouses of veterans also would pay more to stay in the homes, and a new, higher rate would be set for residents who require minimal care.

"The medical costs are getting very high, and the state can't keep picking up that difference," Tremblay said. "This is a very difficult budget year for everybody." <More at: <http://www.sacbee.com/capitolandcalifornia/story/1513339.html>>

G. I. BILL LOST IN PAPERWORK

Dec 11, 2008 09:24 PM

COLORADO SPRINGS - After serving in the military for 8 years, all Jacob Foran wants is the money he earned under the G.I. Bill. Now he's caught up in a nightmare of bad paperwork and bad credit.

"We are getting all these calls [saying] You're late you're payment's late we need the money now," says Foran.

Foran recently graduated from the Leaderquest technical school in Colorado Springs. He was expecting to pay off his student loans with his G-I bill but it never came.

"Now all of a sudden I owe all these over draft fee's, back interest fees and late payment fees. I was supposed to pay \$8,000 now we are up to \$9,400 that we owe." <More at: <http://www.krdo.com/Global/story.asp?S=9509115>>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF JANUARY 6, 2009

This week the Air Force announced an increase, while the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained unchanged. The net collective result is 265 fewer 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 95,831; Navy Reserve, 5,908; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 13,230; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,152; and the Coast Guard

Reserve, 906. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 124,027, 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://preview.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2009/d20090106ngr.pdf>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY 9 JANUARY 2009

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

| OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,123 DAYS) | | OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,652 DAYS) | |
|---|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| KILLED US | 4,223 | KILLED US | 637 |
| WOUNDED US [1/03/09] | 30,934 | OTHER CASUALTIES US [1/03/2009] | 2,627 |
| OTHER US CASUALTIES [1/03/09] | ≥35,470 | KILLED COALITION | 416 |
| DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [1/03/09] | 172 | WOUNDED US [1/03/09] | 7,492 |
| MISSING OR CAPTURED US | 1 | WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007) | 1,602 |
| KILLED UK | 178 | KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY | ≥ 8,619 |
| KILLED OTHER COALITION | 139 | KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004) | ≥ 3,525 |
| WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION | 1,819 | WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004) | 32,034 |
| **KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08] | 1,182 | AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07] | 1.75M/4.8M |
| KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/03/09] | ≥ 48,874 | | |
| KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [1/09/09] | ≥ 98,560- 658,227 | | |
| WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08] | ≥ 400K – 1.374M | | |
| IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07] | 2.1M/2. 5M | COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE | \$586,891,693,436 |

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

MISSION CREEP: MY BASES ARE BIGGER THAN YOUR COUNTRY

Celia Perry August 22, 2008

Mother Jones’ roundup of the Pentagon’s latest basing stats — “plus a few we dug up ourselves.

What a Spread!

Land occupied by US bases: 46,566 square miles*

Land area of North Korea: 46,541 square miles

Lessons From Rome

Roman bases at empire’s peak (AD 117): 37

British bases at empire’s peak (1898): 36

US military sites overseas (2007): 761*

In Germany: 268

In Japan: 124

In South Korea: 87

Number that the Pentagon defines as “medium” or “large” (worth at least \$888 million): 30

Number of foreign countries/territories that host US bases: 39**

Total US sites, foreign and domestic: 5,429

Military Architecture

Total Pentagon “facilities”: 545,714*

Percentage of total on foreign soil: 19

Number on foreign soil: 102,376

Buildings: 52,962

Roads, bridges, weapons ranges, etc.: 39,648

Overseas facilities’ “replacement cost”: \$119 billion

Priorities, Priorities

Estimated worldwide defense spending: \$1.2 trillion

US share of the total: 49 percent

Federal defense spending (FY ‘08): \$587 billion

Federal education spending (FY ‘08): \$62 billion

Federal Social Security spending (FY ‘08): \$5 billion

Bush budget request to train and equip foreign militaries (FY ‘08): \$4.5 billion

Overall US spending for tsunami relief: \$656 million

**Figures don’t include bases in Iraq and Afghanistan; “facilities” include buildings, structures, roads, bridges, ranges, and plants; “sites” may include bases, hospitals, schools, and depots.*

***The Pentagon does not acknowledge all of its bases. (See “America’s Unwelcome Advances.”)*

<http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2008/09/pentagon-base-stats.html>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

SELF-HELP GUIDES

Veterans For America (VFA) have four outstanding guides available for free download on their website. The Veterans Self-help Guide on VA Claims, The Self-help Guide for Veterans of the Gulf War, Self-help Guide on Agent Orange, and the granddaddy of them all, The American Veterans and Servicemembers Survival Guide, a 599-page monster that covers just about everything. Download the Guides for FREE at <http://www.veteransforamerica.org/survival-guide/survival-guide-download/> (and think about joining and donating too).

FOUR WEBSITES THAT SPECIALIZE IN JOBS FOR VETERANS

Hire Vets First A comprehensive career website for hiring veterans of America's military. Whether you're a manager, human resources specialist, or veteran, you'll find the resources you need for matching employment opportunities with veterans. <http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov/>

Vet Central JobCentral National Labor Exchange is a service of Direct Employers Association (DEA), a nonprofit consortium of leading U.S. corporations, in alliance with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA). <http://www.jobcentral.com/vetcentral/>

Hire Heroes USA "Helps link our nation's returning veterans to employment opportunities that match their interests and skills. We are a non-profit program and provide our career placement services at no charge."

<http://www.opv.com/pio/allJobs.jsp?site=hcinfo>

Corporate Gray We link employers with transitioning and former military personnel through our Corporate Gray Series of military-to-civilian career transition books, Corporate Gray Job Fairs, and Corporate Gray Online.

<http://www.corporate-gray.com/>

KNOW WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR BEFORE YOU GO IN

DISABILITY EXAMINATION WORKSHEETS & LINK FOR EACH DISABILITY

"These 56 Disability Examination Worksheets are in use both by the doctors of VHA (Veterans Health Administration) who do the disability examinations and by the rating specialists, hearing officers, and Decision Review Officers of VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) who do the disability evaluations." www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/ben.../index.htm

AND TAKE ALONG SOME SOAP AND WATER AND AN AUTOCLAVE

VA VOLUNTEER CALLS HOSPITAL TOOLS DIRTY

Deanna Lambert - WSMV-TV - Jan. 4, 2009

Sterilization Occurs More Than 30 Miles From Hospital

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - There are fears about some medical equipment used at the York Veterans Administration Hospital in Murfreesboro. There's an investigation under way to determine whether some patients might have been exposed to infection from colonoscopies at the VA Hospital.

A volunteer who said she's seen instruments delivered day after day in the women's and dental clinic for 20 years said they're often dirty, even after supposedly being sterilized more than 30 miles away. <More at:

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28474082/>>

NOTICE

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

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

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