



# The California Zephyr

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## CSC PRESIDENT MESSAGE

Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council's 13th biennial convention is fast approaching. The convention will take place at the Holiday Inn Fresno Downtown from June 28, 2012 to July 1, 2012. With the membership numbers we had at the end of February, CSC is allotted 94 delegates for this year's convention. I hope the CSC chapters will be able to send all their delegates to the convention to take part in the business at hand. We do have a good time, plus you will get to meet VVA and AVVA members from all over the state. So please come join us, we would love to see you there. We hope to accomplish a lot for the betterment of the CSC and our chapters.

For those who have not heard the good news yet, the lawsuit that the ACLU filed (VVA is a plaintiff) challenging VA policies that deny permanent housing to disabled veterans on the West Los Angeles VA campus will now go forward after the federal court in Los Angeles denied, for the most part, the defendants' (VA) motion to dismiss the case.

On Friday, March 16, 2012, U.S. District Court Judge James Otero issued a 41-page decision in *Valentini v. Shinseki* denying the motion to dismiss that had been filed last October by defendants Eric Shinseki, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Donna Beiter, Director of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (GLAHS) as to three of the six claims presented in the complaint. The class action suit was filed in June 2011 by disabled homeless veterans and the Vietnam Veterans of America, charging that "the West LA VA has eliminated permanent housing for disabled veterans, many of whom now literally sleep outside its walls, and it now leases portions of the property to private companies."

According to Mark Rosenbaum, ACLU lawyer, "Judge Otero's ruling denying the VA's motion to dismiss, marks the first time in the nation's history that a federal court has held the VA responsible for assuring that severely mentally disabled veterans have access to housing and services that they can access the psychiatric and medical services they require to heal the wounds of war. In addition, Judge Otero held that Congress has made "crystal clear that [its] intention was to ensure that the DVA's land [the campus at Wilshire and San Vicente] was used primarily to benefit veterans."

So we have had a small victory here. Now it is time to move on to the trial. The ACLU wants the trial to start in June 2012. We will have to wait and see what the judge says.

In the mean time Elayne and I, and our daughter, travel to the West LA VA every Sunday that we have available so that we can participate in the ongoing rally. The Sunday rally has been taking place from 1:00 PM to 4: PM for 210 straight Sundays. That works out to 4 straight years of Sunday's that the rallies have occurred. VVA member Bob Rosebrock has been at every one of these Sunday rallies. A giant thank you to Bob for what he is doing for the homeless veterans.

March 27, we attended the VVA/ CSC Legislative Day at the Capitol. We had approximately 60 VVA and AVVA members in attendance. We also had two Vietnam Veterans, members of AM VETS, who had heard about the event and joined us. The two were so impressed with what VVA was doing with our Legislative Day they both decided to join VVA. In the near future there will be two new members joining Chapter 500.

Legislator of the Year awards were presented to Senator Ted Lieu (Torrance) and Assemblywoman Betsy Butler (Marina Del Rey). Secretary Peter Gravett, California Department of Veterans Affairs, came by to let us know what is going on at the CDVA. He also introduced some members of his team.

Earlier in the year Assemblywoman Linda Halderman (Fresno) introduced a bill to restore the 26 million dollars to open the two new CA Veteran homes, one in Redding and the other in Fresno. The Appropriations Committee was scheduled to hear testimony on this bill on March 27, 2012. Pete Conaty asked that all in attendance, during our morning session, sit in on this hearing. Everyone filled the seats in the hearing room with our presence definitely recognized as support for Assemblywoman Halderman. We did make a difference as several members of the committee said they would find the money to open the two homes. We will continue to keep up to date on this bill.

We gathered at the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial where we participated in the Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Ceremony. A moving tribute to our Veterans was presented. (see pages 9 - 11)

The day was very informational, with good speakers. I hope that next year's Day at the Capitol will have even more attendees.

Thank you to everyone for your participation.

## ELECTION COMMITTEE REPORT

Ken Holybee, Chair

The election committee has been receiving letters of intent to run for office, in the California State Council election of 2012, at the convention in June. At the time I am writing this we still have almost three weeks until the deadline for letters of intent. After April 13, 2012 we will no longer be accepting letters of intent and anyone wishing to run must run from the floor. To run from the floor a member must come to the election office at the convention to get a petition to run before any campaigning can begin. All candidates must conduct themselves in a civil manner at all times. All candidates must check in with the Election Committee at the convention.

We strive to maintain a fair and honorable election process that maintains the integrity of our organization and gives everyone the opportunity to run for an office. We

have received, at this time, seven letters of intent. The Biographies of the candidates can be seen on the VVA, CSC web site on a page set up for the candidates for office. This page will only be up until the convention and election process is complete.

The elections will be held on Saturday June 30, 2012 at a time and place to be announced at the convention. All state council positions are open for election, under the rules set in place by the state council bylaws and the rules of the convention.

At this time the candidates that have filed papers to run and have met the requirements are as follows: President Steve Mackey; 1st Vice President John Crooker; 2nd Vice President Dick Southern; Secretary Tom Hohmann; Treasurer Barry Schloffel; At Large Ken Porizek; North District open; Central District Richard Segovia; Southern District open.

The information is available on the CSC web site for anyone who wishes to read their Biographies, or see any updates of any the candidate intents that arrive to me before the deadline date.

Remember if you wish to run off the floor you must have a copy of your DD 214 and your membership must be paid. You will be responsible for any information that you wish the members to have. We will not be able to assist in printing or copying of material. If you need a computer, feel free to bring your own.

## CA ASSOCIATES

### ATTENTION: AVVA AT LARGE MEMBERS

Thank you to all of our associate members that continue to make CA AVVA the number one state (still) leading in membership. As of February 2012, CA AVVA has 730 members which include 75 At Large members.

In the fall all of 2011, the AVVA National Membership Committee began a membership campaign. We are proud to say that 2 CA AVVA Affiliated Chapters took first place in their respective categories. Guadalupe CA AVVA - Ch. 982 placed first place in their category, now with 162 AVVA members. San Jose CA VVA - Ch. 201 placed first place in their category, now with 62 members

On behalf of National AVVA, each was awarded \$200.00 for their AVVA Affiliate Chapter use.

Congratulations and thank you both!

What makes CA Associates so special? This could be answered in so many ways. We have a very dedicated group that work hard for our veterans, their families and love their communities. We also have a great VVA CA State Council to work beside. I have said this many times and will continue to. I have worked with 3 CSC Presidents and they all have been gracious and do recognize what a vital part that AVVA serves in the organization.

CA AVVA's Secondary PTSD Committee continues to grow and go forward in a very positive manner. Thank you to Nina Schloffel for conducting a well presented tier. Not only do the women attend, we also have a lot of the guys that stop by. We do not attempt to counsel but simply talk, share our thoughts and our blessings.

If you are a CA AVVA At Large member, thank you and I would like to tell you that your voice does count. Many times members are listed in the At Large membership due to the fact that when the application was filled out, an affiliated VVA chapter number was not added. Others like to belong to an organization but prefer not to be directly involved. Either way, we do appreciate your membership.

CA AVVA would like to have an At Large Representative. The only way our At Large members hear news of CA AVVA is the newsletter. This is certainly not a complete representation of what we do. If you would like more information about the duties of an At Large Representative, please contact me.(information below) It is not time consuming and the At Large Representative would be the voice of the CA AVVA At Large membership through email or USPS, at no cost to you.

At Large Representatives may also cast a vote at the State level, representing their members.

If you are interested in learning more, please email or call: Elayne Mackey: mmm4evr1@aol.com or (951) 681-9531.

We do send an electronic newsletter approximately every 3 months. If you would like your email address added to the mailing list, we would be happy to do that. Not only do we send AVVA news but also the latest news regarding veterans issues.

Thank you everyone, for standing by your commitment to our nation's best - our veterans.

Welcome Home.

Elayne Mackey, AVVA CA President

## HONORING CALIFORNIA'S OLDEST LIVING FEMALE VETERAN

On Tuesday, March 20, 2012, CalVet, CalGuard and USDVA hosted a reception at the California Museum for 102 year old Mrs. Bea Cohen. She was presented an Assembly Resolution by the Honorable Betsy Butler, California State Assembly.

WWII veteran Bea Cohen has spent more than 70 years giving back to the US and supporting the American military. She collected black widow spiders and sent them to





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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of VVA, the State Council or its members.

Who Are The Vietnam Veterans Of America?  
Founded in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA is organized as a not-for-profit corporation and is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

VVA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE  
"Never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another."

PURPOSE  
The purpose of Vietnam Veterans of America's national organization, the state councils, and chapters is:

To help foster, encourage, and promote the improvement of the condition of the Vietnam veteran.

To promote physical and cultural improvement, growth and development, self-respect, self-confidence, and usefulness of Vietnam-era veterans and others.

To eliminate discrimination suffered by Vietnam veterans and to develop channels of communications which will assist Vietnam veterans to maximize self-realization and enrichment of their lives and enhance life-fulfillment.

To study, on a non-partisan basis, proposed legislation, rules, or regulations introduced in any federal, state, or local legislative or administrative body which may affect the social, economic, educational, or physical welfare of the Vietnam-era veteran or others; and to develop public-policy proposals designed to improve the quality of life of the Vietnam-era veteran and others especially in the areas of employment, education, training, and health.

To conduct and publish research, on a non-partisan basis, pertaining to the relationship between Vietnam-era veterans and the American society, the Vietnam War experience, the role of the United States in securing peaceful co-existence for the world community, and other matters which affect the social, economic, educational, or physical welfare of the Vietnam-era veteran or others.

To assist disabled and needy war veterans including, but not limited to, Vietnam veterans and their dependents, and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans.

FUNDING  
Vietnam Veterans of America relies totally on private contributions for its revenue. VVA does not receive any funding from federal, state, or local governments.



USC so that their strong webs could be used as crosshairs in the sites of submarine periscopes during WWII. She was a real life Rosie the Riveter at Douglas Aircraft Company in LA. She joined the Army and had duty stations in the US as well as overseas. She witnessed history in the making in Stone, England as she saw American planes on their way to invade Normandy during WWII.

As Private First Class Abrams assigned in Elveden, England, Ms. Cohen worked in the communications department with top-secret mimeographed documents.

After the war, she married Ray Cohen, a former prisoner of war who was imprisoned in Corregidor Island,

Philippines for more than 3 years. Together , they became involved with the Ex-POW group that still meets today at Veterans Home of California-West L.A.

She has been instrumental to many philanthropic organizations, including the Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary Post 667, where she became the group's child welfare chairperson. She is involved with the United Cerebral Palsy-spastic Children's Foundation for over 35 years. She makes various blankets and wheelchair and walker bags for veterans at the local VA hospital. She has also volunteered at the LA Air Force Base for Family Services, and also for the City of Hope.

Mrs. Cohen became legally blind 1990. In 2003, Mr. Cohen passed away. However, she still maintains camaraderie with ex-soldiers and attends the Blinded Veterans Association of Southern California. When asked what she would like to accomplish in 2012, she answered, "...





to collect clean white socks for homeless Veterans, and to meet First Lady Michelle Obama. She says, “Our men and women Veterans are America’s real heroes.”



**WOMEN'S MILITARY HISTORY WEEK CELEBRATION - TWIN TOWERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, ALAMEDA**

This celebration for women veterans was a joint endeavor by several veteran service groups.

Carolann Wunderlin, founding commander American Legion Post 881 Moffett Field did the introductions. We had an all woman honor guard from Travis Air Force Base.

Ms. Barbara Ward, former Deputy Secretary for Women and Minority Affairs for CA, gave the keynote address. She talked about how Service is always a part of our lives. Only we can determine when our “service” ends. We stand on the shoulders of our previous women veterans. Education is extremely important. We need to know what our benefits are after we leave the military. Empowerment gives you the freedom to take charge of your own life. Our voices are needed to help the younger women veterans that follow behind us. Our voices translate into a political voice that is needed to help create all the deserved benefits that may not even be there yet.

Capt. Rebecca Murga, Public Affairs Officer with the USA for 63rd Regional support command at Moffett Field, CA, showed a 10 minute movie about her tours through Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar. She was attached to a Special Operation Command supporting US Navy Seal teams and US Army Special Forces in Afghanistan. Cpt. Murga is also working on two documentaries about women's issues/stories in the military. She is interested in videotaping women veterans stories. During her three tours in-country, she was extremely touched by the plight of the Afghan women's ability to learn to survive. 1:4 Afghan children die before they are five years old. Punishment of children includes burning them in boiling water by their fathers. Mothers have no say. 43% of Afghan men and 13% of women are literate.

Our soldiers do an average of six deployments overseas and the strains of this are obvious. They too are learning to survive.

“Only the dead have seen the end of war” Plato.

**“War was easy; coming home was hell”.**

She stated 1:8 are coming home with PTSD. Many others are getting lost and having trouble fitting back into society.

“I’ve been through all stages of Dante’s Hell... so assume that all the rest is heaven...but I hope I will be able to appreciate it.” Anonymous.

The third woman veteran to be honored was Patricia Ryan, CDR, American Legion Post 117, San Leandro. She was not able to be there, but her accomplishments have been many. She joined the WAVES in January 1953 and separated from service in 1955. She as served with Alameda and Contra Costa Navy Leagues for 12 years. She served on committees that would help with the commissioning of two ships, the USS Grace Hopper(1997) and the USS McCambell(2006). She represented Military Women on the Alameda County Veterans Commission.

**Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Women Veteran Committee Chair**

# LEGISLATIVE DAY

Henry Iasiello, PTSD Committee, Chair

On March 28, 2012 I attended the 'Legislative Day' at the State Capitol. It was well-organized and I had a chance to speak with several California Legislators about the mental health issues facing both our active duty servicemembers and veterans. Most notably I brought to their attention the negligence of the DOD in both screening and attending to soldier's mental health, the DVA's failure to properly accept, help develop and process claims, and provide timely and appropriate mental health services. We also discussed the issue of fee-basis therapy with private providers.

I did mention that our VVA CA State Council's Veteran Service Officers program had been very successful at bringing federal dollars into California.

I also attended the 'Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day' ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. While I found the overall ceremony moving I had some objection to the Chaplain's lengthy 'prayer' and numerous references to 'our lord' insensitive to our many veterans who are not Christian and/or not religious. I would recommend in the future that Chaplains be advised to avoid such references and keep their presentations more generic ... a moment of silence for those who wish to pray is probably the most appropriate.

I also found the 'Master of Ceremonies' comment from the podium that he had been "ragged on" inappropriate and offensive to our women veterans and, our women

supporters in the audience. I afterwards complained to the 'Master of Ceremonies' who took it good-naturedly (as only a television personality can ...) and Pete Conaty (and his staff person Dana Nichols) who organized the event. They both 'blew it off' as inconsequential and common language at the Capitol. This I find very troubling ... respect is a common theme among veterans and this comment was very disrespectful. We have enough problems with sexism, sexual trauma and respect for women veterans in the military ... we don't need it in the veteran community.

# AGENT ORANGE

## BLUE WATER NAVY VETS

<http://www.bluewaternavy.org/>

The National Archives in College Park is undertaking a wonderful project. They are scanning the Deck Logs from ships of the Vietnam War and making them available at no charge on their Web site. They have many already scanned, starting with the aircraft carriers, but the project is ongoing and the Monthly Deck Log sheets are being added pretty quickly. They have not (yet) scanned all the ships that served in Vietnam. So if you are unable to find your ship, it is one that will probably be showing up in the future. This conversion to digital is a long and tedious process, so have patience. And it is being done as a Public Service specifically for you Blue Water Navy personnel. Here are the instructions for accessing the site and doing a search for your ship:

Access the site at <http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/>

That will take you to the Archival Research Catalog

Click on the box for DIGITAL COPIES

**That will open up a window for Digital Copies Search.**

Enter the name of your ship into the search box

The ship name can be entered with or without the prefix "USS" – it seems to bring up the same records

If you enter the words DECK LOGS you will get the entirety of all Deck Logs so far entered. In either case, the name of the ship and the dates of Deck Log coverage will appear in PDF format.

You can review the Deck Logs on-line, or you can save them to your own hard drive. National Archives Contact information is available at <http://www.archives.gov/contact/>

We appreciate the time and effort the personnel at the National Archives have put into this project for The Blue Water Navy.

On March 9, 2012, additional information of interest was provided by Michael Heffernan FCC USNR retired, from his contact with the National Archives on the Deck Log project. This may indicate that Deck Logs for ship's not shown [specifically Destroyers] may need to be 'by request.'

"The destroyers were not part of our original scanning plan, however we have almost completed scanning the logs on our original list. We will be continuing to scan (at least for the present), and will add this ship to our list. It will be at least a month before it would be made available online."

## VVA TO VA:MAKE AGENT ORANGE AIRCRAFT CREWS ELIGIBLE FOR CARE AND DISABILITY COMPENSATION

(Washington , D.C.) "Vietnam Veterans of America holds true that crews who flew the C-123K aircraft contaminated with Agent Orange should be acknowledged by your department to have been exposed to this herbicide, and that those crew members who are afflicted with any of the maladies the VA considers presumptive to service connection ought to be eligible for health care and, when warranted, disability compensation," wrote John Rowan,





National President of VVA, to General Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Citing the strong language from Dr. Thomas Sinks, Deputy Director of the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, in acknowledging the contamination and the crews' exposure, Rowan noted, "This directly challenges the VA's contention that, although the aircraft 'may' have been contaminated by dioxin, there was little likelihood of any harmful exposure."

Acknowledging that, far too often, the VA has taken an adversarial stance concerning invisible wounds of war suffered by too many of our veterans, rather than acting as an advocate on behalf of these men and women, Rowan stated, "It is time for the VA to acknowledge what the U.S. Air Force has already certified, that there is enough evidence these aircraft were, in fact, heavily contaminated, and that those crew members afflicted with illnesses the VA recognizes as service-connected presumptive ought to be eligible for health care as well as disability compensation."

"We bring this to your attention," stated Rowan in his letter to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, "because we hope your good offices might ask for a reevaluation of your department's stance in this matter."

#### VA PUBLISHES THE RETROACTIVE BENEFIT RULES FOR AGENT ORANGE CLAIMS REQUIRED BY THE NEHMER COURT ORDER

Since 1991, the VA has been required to follow special retroactive benefit rules whenever it grants a disability compensation claim or a claim for death benefits under the VA's Agent Orange rules. These rules are very favorable to Vietnam veterans and survivors of Vietnam veterans and they are contained in an Order issued by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in the Nehmer class action brought by lawyers from the National Veterans Legal Services Program.

The VA finally recognized that the retroactive benefit rules are complex and that VA regional offices and the Board of Veterans' Appeals need more guidance on how to apply the rules. As a result, on August 25, 2003, the VA published detailed regulations that VA regional offices and the BVA must follow in deciding the effective date of benefits awarded under the VA's Agent Orange rules. (The effective date of an award controls the amount of retroactive benefits to which a Vietnam veteran or a survivor of a Vietnam veteran is entitled when the VA grants an Agent Orange claim).

The new regulations also explain that if the person to whom the retroactive benefits is owed (that is, the Vietnam veteran or the survivor of a Vietnam veteran who claimed death benefits) dies before the VA is ready to make the payment, the VA does not get to keep the money; instead, the VA must make the payment to the surviving spouse, surviving children, or surviving parent of the deceased individual, or, if no such surviving family member exists, to the individual's estate.

What follows are:

The new regulation – which is 38 C.F.R. § 3.816; and The VA's detailed explanation of the meaning of these rules, which the VA published on January 28, 2003, when it first proposed the new regulation.

#### **THE NEW VA REGULATION — 38 C.F.R. § 3.816**

§ 3.816—Awards under the Nehmer Court Orders for disability or death caused by a condition presumptively associated with herbicide exposure.

(a) Purpose. This section states effective-date rules required by orders of a United States district court in the class-action case of Nehmer v. United States Department of Veterans Affairs, No. CV-86-6160 TEH (N.D. Cal.).

(b) Definitions. For purposes of this section-

(1) Nehmer class member means:

(i) A Vietnam veteran who has a covered herbicide disease; or

(ii) A surviving spouse, child, or parent of a deceased Vietnam veteran who died from a covered herbicide disease.

(2) Covered herbicide disease means a disease for which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has established a presumption of service connection before October 1, 2002 pursuant to the Agent Orange Act of 1991, Public Law 102-4, other than chloracne. Those diseases are:

(i) Type 2 Diabetes (Also known as type II diabetes mellitus or adult-onset diabetes).

(ii) Hodgkin's disease.

(iii) Multiple myeloma.

(iv) Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

(v) Acute and Subacute peripheral neuropathy.

(vi) Porphyria cutanea tarda.

See for rest of report.... [www.veteranprograms.com](http://www.veteranprograms.com)

## PTSD

### ARMY'S IDEA TO TAKE 'D' OUT OF PTSD IS STUDIED

By Lindsay Wise, Houston Chronicle

The president of the American Psychiatric Association says he is "very open" to a request from the Army to come up with an alternative name for post-traumatic stress disorder so that troops returning from combat will feel less stigmatized and more encouraged to seek treatment.

Dr. John Oldham, who serves as senior vice president and chief of staff at the Houston-based Menninger Clinic, said he is looking into the possibility of updating the association's diagnostic manual with a new subcategory for PTSD. The subcategory could be "combat post-traumatic stress injury," or a similar term, he said.

"It would link it clearly to the impact and the injury of the combat situation and the deployment experience, rather than what people somewhat inaccurately but often assume, which is that you got it because you weren't strong enough," Oldham said.

The potential change was prompted by a request from Gen. Peter Chiarelli, the Army's vice chief of staff, who wrote to Oldham last year, suggesting APA drop the word "disorder" from PTSD.

"Calling it a disorder contributes to the stigma and makes it so some folks - not all, but some folks - don't get the help they need," Chiarelli said.

The general doesn't like to use the word disorder. "It's not a dirty word, but I think it's misused here," he said. "I don't think that the post-traumatic stress that soldiers experience is a disorder. It's not something that happens just to weak people or people that are somehow inclined to be affected by horrible things that they see or are required to do. I think it causes an actual injury to the brain and how the brain works."

Early discussions

After receiving Chiarelli's letter, Oldham wrote back to say he appreciated his concern, but dropping the word disorder might not be the best way to go. He said he was eager to work with Chiarelli to see what APA could do.

The general invited Oldham to the Pentagon to discuss the situation. They met for about an hour and a half on Dec. 9. Oldham agreed to bring the general's suggestion to the APA work group tasked with reviewing PTSD for the next version of the association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the classification book used by psychiatrists in America. APA is finalizing the fifth edition of the manual, due in May 2013.

Oldham cautioned the discussion is very preliminary but speculated that a new subcategory like "combat post-traumatic stress injury" might work.

Although Chiarelli still would prefer to lose "disorder" entirely, he said a new subcategory would be a start. "I'm frustrated with how long this is taking to be honest," he said.

The general pointed out that PTSD has had many names over the years, from shell shock to battle fatigue. "It's been called all kinds of different things and somehow we decided to go with PTSD and I think that's just wrong," he said.

Chiarelli's campaign to change the name of PTSD is part of the Army's effort to reduce alarming suicide rates among soldiers. Statistics released last month identified 260 potential suicides in 2011. Of that total, 154 were active-duty soldiers, 73 were National Guard troops and 33 were reservists.

Silence over stigma

Stigma is a major problem. A study published in the Archives of General Psychiatry in October found that soldiers were two to four times more willing to report PTSD, depression, and suicidal thoughts if they were allowed to answer a survey anonymously, rather than put their names on a routine post-deployment screening form.

Of the soldiers who screened positive for PTSD or depression, 20 percent said they weren't comfortable answering honestly on the routine form. The study concluded that the Army's screening process misses most soldiers with significant mental health problems.

Dr. Harry Croft, a psychiatrist in San Antonio, said the findings jibe with what he hears from veterans he treats for PTSD.

"Even though the rules, as I understand them, say you don't get kicked out if you get diagnosed with PTSD, depression or any other issues, a lot of veterans say, 'I knew damn well if I answered the questions right my chance to get promoted was gone,'" Croft said.

Croft has mixed feelings about changing the name of PTSD. He understands the concern about stigmatizing troops but thinks whether the condition is called PTSD or something else will have little effect on the suicide rate.

"Rather than concentrate on what we call it, we need

to concentrate more on how to help warriors coming back from the combat zone, because I don't think the name we give it will have much of an impact on the 18 suicides a day and all the other problems that we see," Croft said. "That's putting a Band-Aid on a much bigger wound."

Chiarelli says his main concern is getting soldiers into treatment, so if calling post-traumatic stress a disorder keeps them from seeking help, then the wording needs to change, the sooner the better.

"You can have the very, very best treatments in the world, but if you can't get people take advantage of them, they don't do any good," he said.

### VETERANS ADMINISTRATION FURTHER INJURES PTSD VETERANS

<http://www.newswithviews.com/Clausen/barry106.htm>

Madigan memo on PTSD costs sparked Army review

By Hal Bernton Seattle Times staff reporter

<http://jrsalzman.com/2012/02/24/army-reinstates-ptsd-diagnoses-from-madigan-army-medical-center/>

A memo about a psychiatrist's remarks about costs of treating post-traumatic stress disorder has helped spark what the Army Regional Medical Command calls a "top-to-bottom" review of a Madigan Army Medical Center forensic psychiatric team charged with screening soldiers under consideration for medical retirement.

Last week, The Times reported that the leader of the forensic psychiatric team, Dr. William Keppler, and another Army doctor had been suspended from clinical duties while the Army investigation unfolds.

The Army Medical Command's investigation is being monitored by Sen. Patty Murray, who chairs the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. She said that doctors should not be taking financial considerations into account as they make a mental-health diagnosis.

"This is the opposite of everything that we are working for," Murray said of the statements detailed in the memorandum. "It is very disheartening to see this in writing."

Army doctor at Madigan suspended over PTSD comments

Two physicians on a Madigan Army Medical Center psychiatric team have been removed from clinical duties, as the Army opens an investigation into whether PTSD screenings for soldiers were mishandled.

A Madigan Army Medical Center psychiatrist who screens soldiers for PTSD has been removed from clinical duties while investigators look into controversial remarks he made about patients and the financial costs of disability benefits, according to U.S. Sen. Patty Murray.

<http://offthebase.wordpress.com/2012/02/04/ptsd-comments-of-army-doctor-investigated/>

<http://blog.thenewstribune.com/politics/2011/11/29/u-s-sen-patty-murray-plans-hearing-on-long-wait-times-for-veterans-seeking-mental-health-care/>

### FROM THE DESK OF BARRY R. CLAUSEN

Investigative Journalist, Author & Researcher

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Calls have been made to some of our local politicians and asked them to attend. I also have about 100 letters of complaint regarding what the VA is doing to our local Veterans mental health. I have been trusted with the letters and believe me; the affected Veterans have opened their hearts with their inner thoughts about what is happening to them mentally.

A talk with the U.S. Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee Chair, Senator Patty Murray's staff about the letters proved to be very interesting. During the first week of April, I will be at her Seattle office to meet with her staff. At that time I will present a copy of those letters to her staff and request an investigation like the one at Madigan into what is transpiring here in Redding with the PTSD issue.

Henry Iasiello, Vietnam Veterans of America, CA State Counsel Northern CA District PTSD Committee Chair referenced VA Practitioner Dr. Greg Nelson in a June 30, 2006 letter to then Redding Clinic Director Linda Nelson. Iasiello states, " ... I would like to reiterate that in my conversation with Dr. Greg Nelson about the reviews and cutbacks at the Redding Clinic he assured me that money was not the issue. His concern was that extended fee-basis [out of clinic care], especially as regards PTSD, did not serve the Veteran. That in fact, he believes, many also are just 'scamming' the system. It was, I admit, a little disheartening to hear him characterize the Clinic as practicing 'frontier medicine' and PTSD as an 'overused' diagnosis..."



According to one Veteran’s Advocate, “I’ve had several discussions with Dr. Nelson, Tehama Team, regarding this issue. His position is that it is purely financial—that it costs less to have the Veterans seen under the VA out-patient clinic umbrella than it costs to care for that Veteran under fee-basis care.”

In 2006 when I interviewed Dr. Nelson he told me, “If veterans want to see an outside practitioner they can pay for it themselves.” And when the VA decided to cut Veteran’s services many Veterans wrote letters to the VA condemning Dr. Nelson for his statements to them when he told them, “there is no such thing as PTSD.”

**PROTECT VETERANS’ HEALTHCARE FIRST**

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, issued the following statement on President Obama’s Veterans Job Corps initiative:

“I look forward to learning more about the President’s initiatives. Veterans deserve nothing less than to have the opportunity to gain meaningful employment and to be first in line for any existing jobs program.

“My immediate concern, however, is the potential for cuts to veterans’ healthcare this coming year through sequestration. Due to a conflict in the law, the Department of Veterans Affairs may be subject to a 2% cut in medical care—a cut that would significantly impact the care provided to America’s veterans. Despite repeated requests made to the President and Secretary of Veterans Affairs over the past six months, I have not received any assurance—and more important, nor have our veterans—that these cuts will not take place.

“Today, I will, therefore, introduce the Protect VA Healthcare Act of 2012 to remove any ambiguity from the law and ensure existing funding for veterans is in no way adversely affected in the years ahead. We must protect our veterans’ healthcare first.

“We must also always look to plot the course ahead that serves the best interest of our veterans in the long-term. It starts with getting our economy going again. Short-term spending and temporary programs have failed and are not the solution. I am hopeful that the Administration will work with Congress to get our businesses hiring again in order to give America’s veterans the chance to lead the successful and productive lives they deserve when they return home.”

**HOUSE BUDGET MAKES ZERO MENTION OF VETERANS**

Eleven billion in cuts.

Recent gains in veterans health care and benefits are under attack. The federal budget is a statement of priorities. In the Rep. Ryan version of the 2013 budget subsequently embraced by Gov. Mitt Romney, the word veteran never appears. The budget proposal runs to 98 pages. Zero mention of veterans. Two protracted conflicts, high veteran unemployment and a multitude of coming home issues and not one mention of veterans in this budget proposal. It clearly states that veterans are NOT a priority. This budget proposal is worse than an empty thanks for your service, an empty thanks would require being mentioned. Veterans did not even make the list of priorities but were ignored entirely. Veterans are essentially being told thanks for nothing, you are on your own. This is absolutely unacceptable. Especially coming from an aspiring commander-in-chief. Continue reading... <http://veteransforcommonsense.org/2012/03/22/vcs-gop-budget-ignores-veterans>

Although the budget forgets to mention veterans, they remembered to cut 11 billion in programs that are meant to benefit veterans. At Veterans For Common Sense we pledge to remain vigilant protecting our military and veterans rights and benefits. They earned them. We make sure veterans are not forgotten. This year we have already made more than 60 visits to Capitol Hill offices to advocate for veterans. Only 1% have borne the burden of a decade of conflicts and we only ask for a square deal after wards. We are proud to be entering into our second decade fighting for America

and her veterans and smart national security positions. To continue to fight we need your support, please donate to VCS today by visiting this link [https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=\\_s-xclick&hosted\\_button\\_id=ACA7FLW5YAPKY](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=ACA7FLW5YAPKY)

In Other News

Recently VCS staff recently had over 25 office visits with Congressional staff, to discuss among other things reform of the for-profit education industry. Bad actors in the for-profit education industry have been targeting veterans and service members for their education benefits. Veterans and service members are being misled with manipulative and aggressive recruiting tactics, into believing that they are purchasing a quality educational experience. In reality too many of these schools have insufficient accreditation and academic standards. This is wasting tax payers money and opportunities that our veterans and military have earned, with their blood, sweat and tears. This is outrageous.. Please let your elected officials in Washington know you support these reforms. At the end of the day when our veterans choose to pursue an education they must have the confidence that they are making the right choice. The future prosperity of our country depends heavily on preserving economic opportunities for our veterans. Economic opportunities available to GI's after World War II created the middle class as we know it. We must protect these opportunities now. These reforms bring standards and accountability, while reducing the incentive to see veterans and military as nothing more than a revenue stream. Below are links to two letters of support we have issued

Patrick Bellon, MPA, Veterans for Common Sense

**RETURN TO VIETNAM**

By Richard Halloran

With both nations casting a wary eye toward China, the US has quietly expanded low-key military relations with Vietnam. The long, bitter war the US fought in Vietnam from 1954 to 1973 was never mentioned as a group of American troops spent 20 days on a humanitarian deployment. More than 40 service members worked alongside host-nation soldiers and civilian contractors last August, renovating three medical clinics and building a library in an orphanage. What made this unusual is that the Americans were working in Vietnam.

Four airmen participating in the US Pacific Command deployment—SMSgt. John Buendia, SSgt. Gil Miguel, SrA. Brynn Stephany, and SrA. Darren Clemen—all agreed they did not see any anti-American antagonism during the mission. The trip itself would have been impossible even two decades ago, when diplomatic relations did not exist between the nations.

In conversations at JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, the airmen said the Vietnamese were friendly, worked hard, and managed to overcome the language barrier. "We used lots of hand motions," Stephany said. She added that the Vietnamese were a bit surprised to see an American

woman working as a laborer. The airmen were posted in Ha Tinh province, some 200 miles south of Hanoi along the coastal neck of what was once North Vietnam. A poor province today, during the war it was a supply location, along an infiltration route for troops slipping into South Vietnam. The US bombed it, but Ha Tinh was not the site of fierce ground battles. Clemen, whose father was a helicopter crewman in the war and whose mother is Vietnamese, said the Vietnamese were puzzled because he could speak their language—though in his mother’s southern dialect rather than the northern dialect of Ha Tinh. When he explained, he chuckled, "they didn’t believe me." The work was rewarding. "We were touching people and touching lives," Miguel said of the clinic he worked at. Despite the good vibe overall, there were still some distinct difficulties. Buendia said his troops were "frustrated" by what they saw as a lack of quality control. What took Americans a half-day to complete was left unfinished by the Vietnamese at day’s end. Clemen had one "eerie" experience, when the proprietor of a souvenir shop tried to sell him a necklace made up of American dog tags. "I don’t think he knew what they were, but I didn’t want it," he recounted. Remarkable Turnaround The sight of American airmen and Navy Seabees working side by side with Vietnamese soldiers and workers some 40 years after the war in Vietnam can only be termed as remarkable. Over nearly 20 years, hostilities between the US and North Vietnam took the lives of 58,000 Americans, an estimated 224,000 South Vietnamese soldiers, and about 1.1 million Viet Cong and North Vietnamese fighters. This doesn’t count several million civilian Vietnamese and the toll on forces of allies on both sides. The wartime generations in both the US and Vietnam have retired from military service, however, lessening the personal reminders of the war.

The airmen’s humanitarian mission was far from the only military engagement the US has had with Vietnam. Exchanges, visits, and cooperative efforts have quietly but steadily ramped up over the past decade. Just this year, the carrier USS George Washington received Vietnamese senior civilian officials and military members.

The cargo-ammunition ship USNS Richard E. Byrd docked at Cam Ranh Bay, the port and base built by the US during the war. The ship was the first of the US to respond to a Vietnamese decision to repair ships of all nations at Cam Rahn Bay, and Byrd remained there for a week while Vietnamese crews cleaned the hull underwater, polished the ship’s propeller, fixed shipboard piping, and overhauled the salt water cooling system. From both the US and Vietnamese points of view, the prime motive for their reconciliation can be summed up in one word: China. The Vietnamese have long memories and make little effort to hide mixed feelings about their northern neighbor. China occupied much of Vietnam for a thousand years until 1010 A.D. For the next 850 years, the Vietnamese fought off repeated Chinese incursions until Vietnam, and the rest of Indochina, fell under French colonial rule. French rule of Vietnam ended when Ho Chi Minh’s army prevailed

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Airmen and Navy Seabees make progress on renovating a medical clinic in Ha Tinh province, Vietnam. The US service members worked alongside Vietnamese soldiers and civilians during the humanitarian mission.



Then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (c) participates in a ceremony with Vietnamese Minister of Defense Gen. Phung Quang Thach. Gates said, "Here and," and others would be wise to put differences aside to build an international partnership.

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From both the US and Vietnamese points of view, the prime motive for their reconciliation can be summed up in one word: China.

The Vietnamese have long memories and make little effort to hide mixed feelings about their northern neighbor. China occupied much of Vietnam for a thousand years until 1010 A.D. For the next 850 years, the Vietnamese fought off repeated Chinese incursions until Vietnam, and the rest of Indochina, fell under French colonial rule. French rule of Vietnam ended when Ho Chi Minh’s army prevailed at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

Vietnam’s most recent battle with China was in 1979, when Chinese forces sought to teach Vietnam a lesson for getting involved in Cambodia by launching a short-lived punitive invasion. Instead, the Chinese were humiliated by the Vietnamese—who by then held what was perhaps the most experienced army in the world.

China seeks to limit the US military presence in East Asia and may seek eventually to push American forces back across the Pacific. China has begun openly flexing its strategic power in Asia and sees the US as the main obstacle to establishing a modern version of the ancient Middle Kingdoms.

In response, the US has been cultivating allies and friends, including Vietnam, to counter the Chinese drive.

"US relations with Vietnam are growing," said Gen. Gary L. North, commander of Pacific Air Forces, who visited the nation last year. Relations are obviously not as robust as they are with some other nations, "but they are promising," he said.

A focal point of common interest is the South China Sea. China has claimed most of the sea as sovereign territory, while the US, Vietnam, and Southeast Asian nations along the sea’s shores have asserted it as an international waterway—a position that American officials say is





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#### Testing Waters

Although that trade, US investments in Vietnam totaled \$13.2 billion by the end of last year, making the US the seventh largest foreign investor in Vietnam, according to Vietnamese government figures.

Former Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen was the first SECDEF to visit Vietnam after the war, going to Hanoi in 2000. Vietnamese Defense Minister Pham Van Tra visited Washington in 2005.

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld flew to Hanoi in 2006 and his successor Robert M. Gates seemed to set a new tone in a speech at the Vietnam National University in October 2010.

"Wars end," Gates said. "Nations are enough to put just bitterness and fear back behind them can find in each other future friends and partners. There is no doubt that the war left an indelible imprint on both our peoples. But by addressing its legacies together, our two nations have been able to demonstrate how you can build upon the past without being bound to repeat it."

Adm. Robert F. Willard, commander of Pacific Command, was more specific when he spoke with reporters in Singapore, saying the Vietnamese set the pace of reconciliation.

"The military-to-military relationship with the Vietnamese [has] lagged the



Top: Flight crew member (left) and flight instructor (right) work with a flight instructor during a mission training exercise to medical crisis in the Pacific theater. Above: Maj. Gen. (left) performs dental work on a Vietnamese patient in Hanoi (left) provides aid to the humanitarian assistance operation Pacific Relief.

rest of [the government's] engagement with Vietnam, but was always positive," he said in a Defense News interview. "Incrementally, they were testing waters and improving and taking for serious some of our engagement in the region, and in recent years, [that has] begun to turn upward." He added that PACOM is looking for Vietnam to assume a bit more of a "leadership role" in the region, provided the right opportunities, in efforts such as peacekeeping or maritime security.

PACAF is engaged in forging military relations on the ground in Vietnam, North said in an interview. "The point of these exchanges, which are very much welcomed by Vietnam, is to build trust and confidence. Vietnam, like other countries

in the region, is "understandably concerned with figuring out the behavior of large neighbors, including China," North said. Due to Vietnam's long coastline on the South China Sea, the nation's security needed about maritime security.

Even with strengthening ties, limits still exist. So far, no plans have been made for combined training in combat operations. "We're not ready to do anything kinetic," said a staff officer.

The Vietnamese are eager to learn how the US projects power, especially in logistic support for those operations, but the US has been reluctant to move too fast. Further, the laws governing the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) were issued in 2000 to restrict the US to transfer "sensitive defense articles"

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supported by international law. Keeping the South China Sea open to shipping traffic is vital to the economies of Asia, including that of China, because more traffic passes through those waters each year than through the Suez and Panama Canals combined.

#### But Out

For the US Navy, the sea-lane is a crucial passage through which warships transit between the Pacific and Indian Oceans—precluding the time-consuming and costly need to sail far south around Australia.

The focus on both the South China Sea and Vietnam seems likely to sharpen as the Air Force and Navy push ahead with the AirSea Battle concept. Among the doctrine's salient features is the need to acquire access to as many bases as possible over a wide expanse. This strategy will complicate the offensive operational plans of the Chinese (and other adversaries, senior military officials almost always add) by forcing them to target multiple bases to pursue an anti-access, area-denial strategy.

The Chinese government in Beijing is aware of the new US-Vietnam military relations and has expressed its displeasure.

For countries outside the region, we hope they will respect and support countries in the region to solve this dispute through bilateral channels," a spokeswoman for Beijing's foreign ministry said. The statement reveals China feels other nations should butt out of the South China Sea and let China and other Southeast Asian nations resolve differences themselves. In this specific case, the spokeswoman referred to a dispute over India's plans to drill for oil under the South China Sea—but similar words were

earlier directed at the US. "It is wise for those trying to feel out China's bottom line to wake up to the reality that China will never yield an inch in its sovereignty and territorial integrity to any power or pressure," she added.

For months, Beijing has claimed "indisputable sovereignty" over large reaches of the South China Sea. Chinese officials have asserted that US warships have no right to sail into China's exclusive economic zone while the US and most other nations contend warships can sail in all waters outside of a nation's 12-mile limit on territorial waters.

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Due to Vietnam's long coastline on the South China Sea, the nation is acutely worried about maritime security.

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#### Two Decades of Warming Relations

For years after the fall of Saigon in 1975, relations between Hanoi and Washington were nonexistent. But in 1995, President George H. W. Bush, president Hanoi with a "roadmap" for a phased normalization of ties. In 1995, the Vietnam of Foreign Vets announced it would agree to support US domestic relations with Vietnam. That opening a domestic political barrier in 1995, Vietnamese and others against US domestic relations. President Bill Clinton visited Vietnam in 2000 and a trade agreement followed the next year. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who had fought as an Army officer in Vietnam in 1969, attended an international forum in Hanoi in 2001.

The first US Navy ship to make a port call after the war, the guided missile frigate *Wainwright* (DDG-61), docked in the Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in 2004. Adm. Thomas S. Fargo, then PACOM commander, visited Hanoi and Da Nang in 2004.

The following year, Prime Minister Phan Van Tra made the first visit to the US by a Vietnamese leader since the war, and the destroyer *Gary* made a port call to mark the 10th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

In 2006, President George W. Bush took part in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Hanoi.

The following year, President Nguyen Minh Triet made the first visit to Washington by a Vietnamese head of state since the war. The same year, the amphibious ship *Patrol*, rechristened into a hospital ship, docked at Da Nang for a medical mission.

In 2008, the hospital ship *USS Mercy* (T-ES-9) docked at Da Nang for a medical mission, and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung met with George W. Bush in the White House. Later, Sen. James H. Webb (D-Va.), the chairman of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, visited Hanoi and Da Nang in 2008.

2009 proved to be a busy year in the new Pacific warming relations. Gen. Carlisle H. Chandler, then PACAF boss, became the first USAF "four-star" to travel to Vietnam since diplomatic relations resumed. That activity earned John C. Stennis, a retired Vietnamese military and civilian officer, a call to the ship at sea.

The command ship *USS Blue Ridge* and the guided missile destroyer *Laurel* commanded by Capt. Hong Ba Lu, a Vietnamese-American, made port calls. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) met with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, and the chairman of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, visited Hanoi and Da Nang in 2009.

A Vietnamese military delegation made the first visit to PACAF headquarters to discuss search and rescue missions. In Pacific April, 56 Air National Guard residents flew into Quang Tri province to treat about 5,000 patients.

In 2010, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited the US for the first time since 1975. In Pacific April 2010, PACAF received 15,000 patients and received two medical clinics in Tan Thien and Thang Thien. The hospital ship *Mercy* returned to Vietnam during Pacific Partnership 2010 to treat 10,000 patients and perform 112 surgical procedures. Engagement renewed a crisis and action for disabled children.

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Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld flew to Hanoi in 2006 and his successor Robert M. Gates seemed to set a new tone in a speech at the Vietnam National University in October 2010. "Wars end," Gates said.

"Nations wise enough to put past bitterness and heartbreak behind them can find in each other future friends and partners. There is no doubt that the war left an indelible imprint on both our peoples. But by addressing its legacies together, our two nations have been able to demonstrate how you can build upon the past without being bound to repeat it."

Adm. Robert F. Willard, commander of Pacific Command, was more specific when he spoke with reporters in Singapore, saying the Vietnamese set the pace of reconciliation.

"The military-to-military relationship with the Vietnamese [has] lagged the rest of [the government's] engagement with Vietnam, but was always positive," he said in a Defense News interview. "Incrementally, they were testing waters and improving and asking for new forms of engagement between us, and in recent years, [that has] begun to turn upward."

He added that PACOM is looking for Vietnam to assume a bit more of a "leadership role" in the region, provided the right opportunities, in efforts such as peacekeeping or maritime security. PACAF is engaged in forging military relations on the ground in Vietnam, North said in an interview.

"The point of these exchanges, which are very much welcomed by Vietnam, is to build trust and confidence." Vietnam, like other countries in the region, is "understandably concerned with figuring out the behavior of large neighbors, including China," North said.

Due to Vietnam's long coastline on the South China Sea, the nation is acutely worried about maritime security.

Even with strengthening ties, limits still exist. So far, no plans have been made for combined training in combat operations. "We're not ready to do anything kinetic," said a staff officer.

The Vietnamese are eager to learn how the US projects power, especially in logistic support for those operations, but the US has been reluctant to move too fast. Further, the laws governing the International Traffic

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in Arms Regulations (ITAR) were eased in 2006 to permit the US to transfer "nonlethal defense articles" to Vietnam but not to export lethal items, crowd control equipment, or high-tech night vision devices. Current efforts have centered on humanitarian and trust-building measures, so little consideration has been given to lifting the restrictions on combat-related equipment. The US, with Vietnamese help, continues to search for the remains of Americans who died there. "We have had C-17s on the ramp at Tan Son Nhut," said North, referring to the wartime air base, "for a reparation ceremony in keeping with our standards of a dignified return of our fallen heroes." Even with reconciliation, the war has not been forgotten.

Richard Halloran, formerly a New York Times foreign correspondent in Asia and military correspondent in Washington, D.C., is a freelance writer based in Honolulu. His most recent article for Air Force Magazine, "Japan at a Crossroads," appeared in the April 2011 issue.

## SHINSEKI VOWS TO SUPPORT MILITARY MEMBERS, VETS

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30, 2012 - Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki offered assurances that VA will make good on its promises to veterans and those currently serving in uniform, despite growth in demand for its services and benefits and federal belt-tightening initiatives.

Shinseki sat with American Forces Press Service during the 26th annual National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic this week in Snowmass Village, Colo., to discuss VA's \$140.3 billion budget request for fiscal 2013 and what it means for those who serve or have served in uniform.

With a 4.5 percent increase in discretionary funding over fiscal 2012 funding levels, Shinseki said it sends a clear message to the nation's 22 million living veterans. "The nation honors and appreciates their service," he said. "It has not forgotten and will not forget."

The funding increases will go primarily toward medical care, disability pay and pensions, jobs and educational and training programs. They also will help build momentum in three priority areas Shinseki has identified: increasing access to care, benefits and services; eliminating the disability claims backlog; and ending veterans' homelessness.

Shinseki said the budget request -- up from \$99.9 billion when he arrived at VA in 2009 -- was an easy sell to President Barack Obama, who he said has been a staunch advocate of veterans.

"He gets it, both that sense of obligation, and a responsibility to ensure that these men and women we have sent off to do the nation's business have an opportunity to get back to some kind of normalcy in their lives, and that VA is responsible for carrying that load," Shinseki said of the President's support for veterans.

The VA's workload is anticipated to grow, Shinseki said, with an estimated 1 million service members expected to leave the military during the next five years. And based on the experience of 1.4 million veterans of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan who have left the military as of September, he said the newest veterans will be twice as likely as those from previous generations to take advantage of VA services and benefits.

Shinseki noted that 67 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have come to VA for services or benefits ranging from health care to insurance, home mortgages and Post-9/11 G.I. Bill education. That's a far-higher percentage than for previous generations, he said, noting that roughly 8.8 million, or about one-third of all 22 million living U.S. veterans, are enrolled with the VA.

"So looking down the road, that percentage is going to be pretty significant," he said.

In some respects, VA has become a victim of its own successes and what Shinseki called a "very aggressive"





### The West Los Angeles Veterans Home is Currently Accepting Applications for Residency in the Assisted Living Level of Care



The Veterans Home of California—West Los Angeles is a 396-bed, long-term care facility located adjacent to the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System in West Los Angeles.

**Although two levels of care are offered, immediate space is primarily available in the Assisted Living Unit.**

The Veterans Home provides California veterans with a living environment that protects their dignity and contributes to their feeling of self-reliance and self-worth.

The Veterans Home of California—West Los Angeles offers two levels of care that provide continuity in the lives of residents in a homelike atmosphere of dignity and respect.

**Assisted Living:** Residents at this level of care require minimal assistance and supervision with some activities of daily living. Services may include care by licensed nurses.

**Skilled Nursing Care:** Residents at this level of care are provided 24-hour services of licensed nurses and certified nursing assistants. Skilled nursing residents have greater access to rehabilitation therapies, nursing care, pharmacy management, structured activities and clinical dietary services. A memory care program within this level of care provides a supervised environment for veterans with symptoms of confusion, memory loss, difficulty making decisions, solving problems or participating in conversations. These levels of care will be available in 2012.

**Amenities include:**

- Room and board – three meals plus snacks
- Medical care and medications
- Optical care, dental care and podiatry services
- Transportation services to all medical appointments and off-campus activities
- Additional services include a beauty/barber shop, multi-purpose room and limited banking services
- Opportunities for worship for all denominations through the Chaplaincy Program
- A modern fitness room and exercise classes
- Library and cable television
- Restorative Therapy Center
- Housekeeping and laundry services
- Caring and compassionate staff, and
- Variety of community outings and an enhanced activity program

The Veterans Home of California—West Los Angeles enjoys the strong support from the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, the local community as well as camaraderie from the neighboring Los Angeles Air Force Base and many local Veterans organizations. Veterans Homes of California are also located in Chula Vista, Lancaster, Ventura, Barstow and Yountville.

**For admission information, contact:**  
Veterans Home of California—West Los Angeles  
11500 Nimetz Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90049  
(424) 832-8101  
(424) 832-8103  
Toll Free: (877) 806-1332  
[www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov)





### The Barstow Veterans Home is Currently Accepting Applications for Residency in the Independent Living (Domiciliary), and Intermediate Nursing Levels of Care

The Veterans Home of California—Barstow is a 400-bed, long-term care facility located on 22 acres with a panoramic view of the Mojave River Valley. The high desert atmosphere offers a climate that is healthful, quiet and safe with very low air pollution. The Veterans Home provides California veterans with a living environment that protects their dignity and contributes to their feeling of self-reliance and self-worth. It offers three levels of care that provide continuity in the lives of residents in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

1. **Domiciliary Care (Independent living)** for veterans who are self-sufficient and do not require assistance with activities of daily living. Non-nursing staff provides minimal supervision. Residents at this level of care have access to other levels of care and medical services.
2. **Intermediate Nursing Care** for veterans requiring some nursing assistance to perform activities of daily living. Licensed nursing staff assist veterans with medications and treatments.
3. **Skilled Nursing Care** for veterans who require a higher level of nursing care and require assistance with many activities of daily living.

**Although this Veterans Home offers three levels of care, space is primarily available in the Independent Living (Domiciliary), and Intermediate Nursing levels of care.**

**Amenities include:**

- Room and board – three meals plus snacks
- Medical care and medications
- Optical care, dental care and podiatry services
- Transportation services to all medical appointments and off-campus activities
- Additional professional services include a beauty/barber shop, multi-purpose room and limited banking services
- Opportunities for worship for all denominations through the Chaplaincy Program
- A modern fitness center and exercise classes
- Library, cable television, and wireless internet
- Housekeeping and laundry services
- Caring and compassionate staff, and
- Variety of community outings and an enhanced activity program

The Veterans Home of California—Barstow enjoys the strong support from the local community as well as camaraderie from the neighboring Marine Corps Logistics Base and the National Training Center at Fort Irwin.

Veterans Homes of California are also located in Chula Vista, Lancaster, Ventura, West Los Angeles, and Yountville. Veterans Homes are currently under construction in Fresno and Redding. Veterans considering assisted living are encouraged to apply to any of the Veterans Homes of California. Spouses are also eligible to apply with the veteran.

**For admission information, contact:**  
Veterans Home of California—Barstow  
100 E. Veterans Parkway  
Barstow, CA 92311  
(800) 746-0606, ext. 1





### The Yountville Veterans Home has immediate availability for Applicants to Domiciliary and the Residential Care Facility for the Elderly (Assisted Living)

The Veterans Home of California – Yountville is a 1021 bed facility located in the heart of the beautiful Napa Valley in Yountville, California. It is the largest Veterans Home in the United States.

**Although four levels of care are offered, immediate space is available in the Domiciliary Care Units and Residential Care Facility for the Elderly.**

If admitted the Yountville Home, provides four levels of care to residents; providing continuity in care to the lives of residents in a homelike atmosphere of dignity and respect.

**Domiciliary Care:** Residents at this level of care do not require assistance and supervision in their daily living and receive room, board, and outpatient medical care.

**Residential Care Facility for the Elderly:** Receive everything found in Domiciliary Care plus residents at this level of care require minimal assistance and supervision with some activities of daily living.

**2 levels of Skilled Nursing (ICF and SNF):** Residents at this level of care are provided 24-hour services of licensed nurses and certified nursing assistants.

**Amenities include:**

- Room and Board – three meals and snacks
- Medical care and medications
- Optical care, dental care and podiatry services
- Limited banking services
- Beauty/Barber shop
- Opportunities for worship for all denominations
- State of the art fitness center
- Bowling Alley
- Coffee Shop
- Community Center
- Base Exchange Store
- Library
- Swimming pool and therapy pool
- 9-hole golf course
- 1200 seat Theater, Symphony, Plays and Concerts
- Picnic Grounds
- Baseball Stadium
- Creative Arts Center
- Music Program
- Napa Valley Museum
- Cable Television

The Veterans Home of California—Yountville enjoys the strong support from the Napa/Solano Healthcare System. The local community as well as camaraderie from the neighboring Travis Air Force Base and many local Veterans organizations. Veterans Home of California are also located in Chula Vista, Lancaster, Ventura, Barstow and West Los Angeles.

**For more information, please contact:**  
Veterans Home of California—Yountville  
Admissions Office  
280 California Drive  
Yountville, CA 94599  
(800) 464-8187  
(707) 944-4401

outreach effort to encourage veterans to take advantage of VA programs. "In the last three years, we have pushed very hard to get the message out," he said. It's been a two-prong effort, he added, to educate new veterans, and to "reach out to those who may have tried us and been disappointed in the past to say, 'This is a new VA. Give us another try.'"

The message has clearly resonated, with about 800,000 new veterans enrolling with VA over the past three years and beginning to take advantage of its services.

"As a result, we have been able to present what I think is a good argument for why VA's budget needed to be reinforced, Shinseki said.

The VA budget request includes \$52.7 billion for medical care, up 4.1 percent. VA officials estimate that 6.3 million veterans will use its health care services, including about 610,000 veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The request includes \$6.2 billion for mental-health, up 5.3 percent from current levels. VA will use the additional funding to conduct more outreach and screenings, better address post-traumatic stress disorder and enhance programs that reduce the stigma of seeking mental-health care, officials said.

The budget also will fund expanded gender-specific care for women veterans and medical research focusing on traumatic brain injury, suicide prevention, PTSD and other needs, officials reported.

New funding in the 2013 budget request, officials said, will help veterans prepare for and secure jobs, building on a national program that includes tax credits for employers, corporate hiring pledges, job fairs and other initiatives.

The budget request will cover Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits for an estimated 606,000 service members, veterans and family members during fiscal 2013, officials said. A separate funding increase of \$9 million would expand the "VetSuccess on Campus" program from 28 college campuses to 80 to provide outreach and supportive services for about 80,000 veterans transitioning from the military to college.

Meanwhile, VA's vocational rehabilitation and employment program will expand services to wounded, ill and injured service members to ease their transition to civilian life, officials said. Program participants are expected to increase from 108,000 in fiscal 2011 to 130,000 next fiscal year.

The budget request proposes \$1 billion over five years for a Veterans Job Corp. This effort, projected to put 20,000 veterans to work, would leverage military-acquired skills for jobs protecting and rebuilding U.S. public lands.

Shinseki said VA and the Defense Department are collaborating better than ever before to ensure a smoother transition from the military to VA-assisted ranks.

A task force that blends both departments' expertise is exploring ways to improve transition assistance programs and weave health care, employment, education and entrepreneurship offerings into them. The idea, Shinseki explained, is to put transitioning service members "on a vector to that next phase of their lives, as opposed to the uniform coming off and then having them ask the question, 'What am I going to do now?'"

The goal, he said, is to gear transition assistance programs toward providing veterans "a clear set of choices," that both departments can help support.

Shinseki noted other areas where the close DOD-VA partnership already is helping service members and their families and veterans. VA is the insurer for everyone in the military carrying Servicemembers Group Life Insurance. VA administers Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for service members and their families as well as veterans. VA hospitals already provide specialized care to many active-duty patients.

"So the connection is there," Shinseki said. "And I want all service members and their families to understand that we are there

for them, and that is our only mission."

## SHINSEKI: VA ON TRACK TO BREAK CLAIMS BACKLOG

By Donna Miles

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2012 - Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki says VA is on track toward meeting one of the top priorities he set on arrival at the department three years ago: breaking the back of the disability claims backlog.

VA spent the last two years creating an automated tool to make claims determinations faster and more accurate, he said.

"Our intent is to have no claim over 125 days," Shinseki told American Forces Press Service. "And every claims decision that we put out the door [will be] at a 98-percent quality mark."

Toward that end, VA has been testing the new Veterans Benefit Management System in Providence, R.I., and Salt Lake City. Shinseki told Congress last month he believes this technology is helping VA "approach the tipping point in ending the backlog in disability claims."

He stopped by the Salt Lake City office last week to assess progress there as the department prepares to take the system nationwide beginning this fall. The rollout will begin at 16 regional offices in September, with all 56 VA regional offices to receive it by the end of fiscal 2013, Shinseki said.

This advance is expected to go a long way in helping VA reduce the time veterans must wait for disability claims decisions, the secretary said.

"We know we can do it manually," Shinseki said. "But we plan to layer this automation tool on top of that, and have the people who did the manual work now armed with an automation tool. I think we will be able to improve our productivity in ways that we will be able to take that backlog down quickly."

Shinseki noted the monumental challenge VA has been up against. During 2009, VA produced 900,000 claims decisions, but also received 1 million new claims. The next year, VA increased its claims decisions to 1 million, but received 1.2 million new claims.

"Last year, we produced another 1 million claims decisions and got 1.3 million claims in," Shinseki said. "So the backlog isn't static. The backlog is a bigger number than we would like, but it is not the same number as three years ago."

Once the automated system is in place, Shinseki said, he believes the 125-day, 98-percent accuracy goals he set are achievable. "There is a lot on the line here," he said. "And that is why this rollout in September is an important one."

His confidence, he said, comes from the successes he's seen automation bring to VA's processing of Post-9/11 GI Bill claims.

Shinseki recalled arriving at VA in 2009 just as the new program was being launched and having to implement it on the fly, with no automation tools. Within about nine months, he said, VA was able to prepare the manual process of getting about 173,000 people into schools by the fall 2009 term.

"It was pretty rocky," he acknowledged.

But today, with the process now automated, VA is able to process more than 600,000 Post-9/11 GI Bill claims faster, and with fewer mistakes, the secretary said. That experience demonstrated the importance of keeping manual processing going as automation is being rolled in, then gradually moving all the processes toward automation, he added.

"The lessons we got out of that were tremendously important," he said. "It educated our efforts with the automation tool for the [disability] claims process, and we are doing the same things, step-by-step, that we learned how to do through with the [Post-9/11 GI Bill]."

The new system is just one initiative VA has taken to break the claims backlog.

Another effort focuses on fundamentally changing the relationship between veterans and VA, making VA an advocate in putting together a strong claims package. VA began giving veterans a checklist of what's needed to file a claim, and also did its own digging to produce whatever documentation veterans couldn't find. This effort reduces the time needed to put a claims package together.

Another pilot program focuses on making claims processing more efficient by simplifying the process and improving communication among the entities that process a claim to reduce procedural delays, the secretary said.

Shinseki said he wanted to focus on getting the bugs out of the claims process before increasing automation.

"We didn't want to automate bad processes and just get lousy decisions faster," he told a Paralyzed Veterans of



## Legislative Report

By: Pete Conaty, VVA-CSC Legislative Advocate

On March 28 the California State Council held their third annual legislative day at the State Capitol in Sacramento. We also took the opportunity, while we were at the Capitol, to attend a ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Capitol Park in honor of Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day (WHVVD), which occurs on March 30. WHVVD is recognized by proclamation of the Governor on March 30 of each year. Vietnam veteran and State Assemblyman Paul Cook (R-Yucaipa) carried the legislation to annually recognize WHVVD.

We had a great turnout for this event with more than 50 council members attending. In addition to hearing from legislative and CA Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA) speakers and taking part in the WHVVD ceremony, attendees also visited their local legislators and urged support for veterans legislation.

During the morning, Secretary Peter Gravett of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA) spoke to the group. He outlined the major goals and issues of the CDVA and thanked the VVA for their good works helping veterans. Secretary Gravett also introduced Deputy Secretary Lindsey Wathen for Women Veterans Affairs. Deputy Secretary Wathen outlined the Department's proposals to increase outreach and awareness of the unique challenges faced by women veterans.



L to R: Pete Conaty, Council Legislative Advocate; Steve Mackey, Council President; Peter Gravett, Secretary CDVA; Assemblywoman Betsy Butler; Ken Holybee, Council Legislative Chair

The Council awarded its 2011 Legislator of the Year awards to Senator Ted Lieu (D-Torrance) and Assemblywoman Betsy Butler (D-Marina Del Rey) for their exemplary efforts to help California's veterans and their families. Both Lieu and Butler have recently carried high profile veterans legislation which was vetoed by the Governor last year. Undeterred, they both re-introduced their legislation this year and have vowed to get these important measures (Lieu-SB 661, military funeral protests and Butler-AB 2611-veterans courts; see below) through the legislative process once more. With some modifications to address the Governor's concerns and

with the strong backing of the veterans community, both Lieu and Butler are confident of success this year.



L to R: Conaty, Mackey, Senator Ted Lieu, Holybee



L to R: Conaty, Mackey, Butler, Holybee

**SB 661-LIEU.** CREATES CONSTITUTIONALLY-SANCTIONED PLACE AND MANNER LIMITS ON PROTESTS OF FUNERALS. THIS

LAW WILL PROTECT GRIEVING FAMILIES FROM DISRUPTIVE PROTESTS, WHILE CAREFULLY BALANCING THE CONSTITUTIONALLY-PROTECTED RIGHT OF FREE EXPRESSION. SB 661 ESTABLISHES A MISDEMEANOR CRIME FOR ANYONE TO PROTEST WITHIN 500 FEET OF A FUNERAL BEGINNING ONE HOUR PRIOR TO THE FUNERAL AND ENDING ONE HOUR AFTER THE CONCLUSION. THIS BILL IS BASED UPON THE U.S. SUPREME COURT'S DECISION AND SEEKS TO ESTABLISH A TIME, PLACE AND MANNER RESTRICTION IN CALIFORNIA LAW. VVA-CSC IS A CO-SPONSOR OF THIS BILL.

**AB 2611-BUTLER.** THIS BILL WOULD AUTHORIZE THE CREATION OF VETERANS' TREATMENT COURTS (VTC) BY CALIFORNIA SUPERIOR COURTS. THIS IS DONE TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM OF JUSTICE INVOLVED VETERANS, PROVIDING THAT THEY HAVE SERVICE-RELATED MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND THEY ALLEGE THAT THE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR RESULTED FROM THESE PROBLEMS. VTCs HELP JUSTICE INVOLVED VETERANS TURN THEIR LIVES AROUND BY IDENTIFYING THEM, ASSESSING THEIR NEEDS, AND CONNECTING THEM WITH NEEDED SERVICES AND MANAGING THEIR CARE. SOME CALIFORNIA COURTS HAVE TAKEN DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN THE CREATION OF THESE VETERAN TREATMENT COURTS (VTCs). THEREFORE THE LEGISLATURE FEELS IT IS NECESSARY TO CREATE GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS IN HOW THESE COURTS SHALL BE ESTABLISHED AND CONDUCTED SO THAT THERE IS UNIFORMITY IN HOW VETERANS ARE TREATED BY THESE COURTS. THE CREATION OF VTCs IS VOLUNTARY.

A portion of the morning program is also devoted to hearing from key legislators who drop in to address the group. Thirteen Assembly and Senate members, besides Lieu and Butler, stopped by to introduce themselves to the Council and to speak about veterans related legislation they are carrying:

### Senators

- Doug LaMalfa (R-Richvale)
- Michael Rubio (D-Bakersfield)
- Darrell Steinberg, (D-Sacramento)
- President Pro-Tem of the Senate

- Katcho Achadjian (R-San Luis Obispo)
- Paul Cook (R-Yucca Valley)
- Felipe Fuentes (D-Sylmar)
- Beth Gaines (R-Granite Bay)
- Jeff Gorell (R-Camarillo). Deployed to



PHOTOS BY FRED ROMERO





Afghanistan, represented by Chief of Staff  
Mark Timmerman

- Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield)
- Linda Halderman (R-Fresno)

- Steve Knight (R-Palmdale)
- Jim Nielsen (R-Gerber)
- Henry Perea (D-Fresno)



Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (in front of flag) and VVA Chapter 500 members



Assemblywoman Shannon Grove greets VVA attendees.

At noon we took a break from the legislative portion of the Capitol Day to go to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial for a short ceremony for Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day and the reading of the Governor's proclamation. The Master of Ceremonies was Stan Atkinson who was instrumental in raising funds for the construction of the memorial along with B.T. Collins. Those who spoke were CDVA Secretary Peter Gravett, CSC President Steve Mackey, and Assemblyman Paul Cook. This was an emotional and heartfelt ceremony as befitting those brothers and sisters left behind. Barry and Nina Schloffel, on behalf of the State Council, laid the wreath before the memorial. Special thanks to Chapter 500 (Sacramento) and Executive Director Mary Lou McNeill for organizing the ceremony.



After the ceremony it was back to the capital for lunch and meetings with legislators. Attendees also distributed folders to all 120 legislative offices containing:

- VVA-CSC's background (kudos to Elayne Mackey for putting together this comprehensive 6 page document).
- An appeal to the Legislature to fully fund the Fresno and Redding Veterans Homes.
- A list of key veterans legislation sponsored and supported by the Council.

I would like to thank all who attended that day's events and for the unique perspective they bring to our advocacy efforts. Also, when veterans from across the state meet with their legislators and help to show our strength, it brings home the importance of veterans issues to our elected officials.

I would like to hear from some of the participants to get guidance on how we can improve in next year's event. Hopefully we can work it out so more members from the southern part of the state can attend. A lot of the members of the Legislature's Veterans Affairs committees are from the LA and San Diego areas of the state. It would be very beneficial to have some of the leaders of our Southern California chapters attend next year's event so that they may communicate our message to the crucial LA and San Diego delegations.

## WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY:

An Editorial by Assemblyman Paul Cook

March 30th is Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day in California, making this the third consecutive year that it has been observed in our state. As a Vietnam veteran and the author of the legislation that created Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day, I'm humbled by the number of events that will take place throughout the state in recognition of this special day. Organizers will hold ceremonies in Tulare, Whittier, Redding, Pomona, and Riverside, among many other locales. This is an important day, not only for these wonderful events, but to remind us that veterans deserve our support today and in the future.

High unemployment plagues our veteran population, particularly veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. While the bad economy has factored into this statistic, government policies haven't done much to improve the situation. The reduction of state funding has jeopardized healthcare for our aging veteran population. While veterans struggle to make ends meet, our veterans homes have empty beds due to budget cuts, leaving some homeless out of desperation. As other social services continue to expand, veterans services are under the gun at both the state and federal levels.

Many veterans are leaving the service only to learn that their military training isn't recognized by government licensing agencies. One glaring example of this concerns combat medics whose military medical training doesn't apply to meeting licensing requirements for registered nurses. Combat medics are highly trained and have proven their worth on the battlefield. However, due to state regulations, these medical professionals are required to undergo needless and expensive retraining, even though they are already capable of performing the job.

Access to higher education is another problem for veterans in California. While the Post 9/11 GI Bill provides educational benefits that far exceed previous versions of the program, veterans are experiencing difficulties registering for classes at our public universities. The federal government provides veterans with funding to attend college, but our public colleges can't give them a seat in the classroom.

As Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee, I've developed a package of bills with several of my colleagues to address these and other problems our veterans encounter on a daily basis. AB 1932 will improve the transition of military healthcare professionals to the civilian sector by streamlining state licensing requirements. AB 1832 would give veterans priority class registration at all public universities for 15 years after leaving service. Words are useless without action, both on the battlefield and in the halls of government. Let's commit to taking action to improve the lives of veterans. Let's give all of our veterans, from the Vietnam War era and from other eras, a true welcome home.





America gathering. "So we broke the complex, convoluted claims process down into its component pieces to improve each part before putting them back together."

## VA EXPANDS MEDICAL FORMS PROGRAM IN HOPES OF FASTER CLAIMS PROCESSING

By Greg Engle, Veterans Affairs Examiner

Any veteran who has ever applied for disability benefits knows what a long and arduous process it can be. In response the Veterans Administration has released new forms designed to speed the process of Veterans' disability compensation and pension claims.

The 68 new forms, known as disability benefits questionnaires or DBQ's, are used to guide physicians' reports of medical findings. This helps to ensure the VA has exactly the medical information needed to make a prompt decision.

"VA employees will be able to more quickly process disability claims, since disability benefits questionnaires capture important medical information needed to accurately evaluate Veterans' claims," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Disability benefits questionnaires are just one of many changes VA is implementing to address the backlog of claims."

The VA currently provides veterans with free medical examinations that are used to gather the necessary medical evidence to support a disability claim. However, veterans can give a DBQ to their private physician to fill out; it's the same form used by the VA. The costs of the examination by a private physician are the responsibility of the veteran.

"By ensuring relevant medical information can be found on one form, we will cut processing time while improving quality," said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

DBQ's can be found at <http://benefits.va.gov/disabilityexams>.

Veterans may file a claim online through the eBenefits web portal at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>. The Department of Defense and VA jointly developed the eBenefits portal as a single secure point of access for online benefit information and tools to perform multiple self-service functions such as checking the status of their claim.

Servicemembers may enroll in eBenefits using their Common Access Card at any time during their military service, or before they leave during their Transition Assistance Program briefings. Veterans may also enroll in eBenefits and obtain a Premium account in-person or online depending on their status.

Adding even more paperwork to the already long disability claims process may seem counterproductive at first glance. However, if in the end it gives us veterans more opportunities to file claims and take the initiative of having our private physicians get involved in the process without waiting on the VA, the process may actually seem shorter. That's the hope.

Greg Engle is a published award winning sportswriter who spent 23 years combined active and active reserve military service, much of that in and around the Special Operations community. He served in support of Operation Just Cause, Desert Shield/Storm and ended his military career in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Greg can be contacted at [gregory.engle\(AT\)us.army.mil](mailto:gregory.engle(AT)us.army.mil)

## AMVETS URGES AFFIRMATIVE-ACTION STATUS FOR VETS

By Rick Maze - Staff writer

A major veterans group wants federal affirmative action laws expanded to include veterans among the classes of Americans that are specifically protected from employment discrimination.

Under their plan, laws barring discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, disability or sexual orientation would be altered to include veterans among the protected classes.

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act already makes it illegal for an employer to refuse to hire someone solely because he is a veteran. But AMVETS, a 187,000-member organization based in Lanham, Md., believes this isn't enough.

"There is discrimination against veterans in the workplace," said Stewart Hickey, executive director of AMVETS.

Adding veterans to affirmative-action laws would improve protections against both overt and subconscious

hiring discrimination, Hickey said.

In some cases, employers fear hiring veterans out of concern they might be recalled to active duty or because of worries that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans may have post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries, Hickey said.

At a minimum, putting veterans into a protected status is likely to result in employers giving extra attention to their hiring, Hickey said.

"If current laws and programs were effective, that would be great. But they aren't," Hickey said. "If there is any group in the U.S. who deserve special attention in employment, it is veterans."

AMVETS has been pushing the idea in talks with lawmakers and with other veterans groups. So far, no member of Congress has agreed to sponsor legislation to change the law, but Hickey is far from alone in talking about employment discrimination.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee chairwoman, said at a Feb. 29 hearing that she hears from veterans "who still find themselves confronted by obstacles to employment and who are even afraid to write the word 'veteran' on a job application because of the stigma they believe employers attach to it."

Diane Zumatto, AMVETS legislative director, said she believes veterans have been hit "disproportionately hard" by the tight job market.

In 2011, the unemployment rate for Iraq- and Afghanistan-era veterans averaged 12.1 percent.

But the rate appears to be falling. The Labor Department reported March 9 that the jobless rate for people separated from the military since 2001 fell in February to 7.6 percent, below the 8.3 percent national unemployment rate.

Affirmative-action laws got their start in the 1960s with civil rights legislation but have expanded over the years to include laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits an employer from refusing to hire someone because he is disabled. This protection applies to veterans with service-connected disabilities.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has issued guidance requiring employers to make reasonable accommodations for disabled veterans, with a new definition of disabilities that includes post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries as the types of disabilities covered by the law.

The law makes it illegal to discriminate in hiring, including asking about a disability, and requires employers to take steps to make it possible for someone with a disability to hold a job as long as it does not cause the business an "undue hardship."

## VIETNAM WALL TURNS 30 AS OFFICIALS PLAN EDUCATION CENTER

By Terri Moon Cronk American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 26, 2012 – Commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial groundbreaking here today, officials of the memorial's fund announced the development of an education center to inform younger generations about the war's history.

Retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffrey, a Vietnam veteran and chairman of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund advisory board, said the center also will showcase a "Wall of Faces" of the lives lost during the war, just as the wall bears their names.

"The wall is not just for the [millions] of us who served, but also for the 300,000 or more who were wounded, the 58,000 who were killed, and all the pain that brought along with it [for] dads, mothers, brothers, friends," McCaffrey

said. "It's an extraordinary achievement."

And the crux of the education center, he said, will be to connect service members' stories, families and experiences to the wall.

"It will also connect the other veterans from our other wars from the Revolutionary War all the way up to the unbelievable heroism and sacrifice of our service members who are still fighting in Afghanistan," he said.

"The Wall" is one of the most visited memorials in the nation's capital, added retired Army Brig. Gen. George Price, who also was an early supporter of the memorial and served in Vietnam.

Price said the American public owes knowledge of the Vietnam War to today's children.

"We owe this center to our youngsters to bridge the gap between then and now," he said. "We need to make sure they understand that mistakes were made, good things were achieved, and most importantly, they must understand the sacrifices of service to the most important country in the world, the United States of America."

To preserve the legacy of the fallen, the center will offer exhibits such as:

- "Telling Their Stories," to showcase military service taken from excerpts of letters and memories;
- "The Wall of Faces," digital images of the more than 58,000 service members who are memorialized on the wall;
- "The Legacy of Service," comprising images of service members who served in all the nation's wars through Iraq and Afghanistan; and
- "The Artifacts Collection," which is expected to exhibit more than 120,000 personal items left at the wall by families and visitors.

The center also will provide other educational resources for information on the fallen, officials said.

The education center's groundbreaking is expected to take place sometime this year, amid other celebrations to take place all year along the National Mall to commemorate the memorial's 30 years, Memorial Fund officials said.

## APRIL IS PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA AWARENESS MONTH

By Paralyzed Veterans of America

WASHINGTON, March 29, 2012 -- Paralyzed Veterans' National President will Travel Around the Country to Raise Awareness for Veterans with Disabilities

Paralyzed Veterans of America is marking the 66th anniversary of its founding this April by encouraging all Americans to take a stand and commit to helping veterans as part of their life's mission.

With the theme Building a Nation Fit for Heroes and events across the country, Paralyzed Veterans Awareness Month highlights the unique challenges facing veterans with spinal cord injury/dysfunction. It spotlights the work of Paralyzed Veterans to empower seriously wounded heroes and their families with everything they need to thrive.

"Take a minute during April to think about the challenges facing paralyzed veterans every day and then please do something good for veterans in your community," said U. S. Army veteran Bill Lawson, national president of Paralyzed Veterans. "Everyone can do something to change lives and build independent futures for those who have worn the uniform — from a school kid saying thanks to a paralyzed veteran who has just come home from Afghanistan to an employer hiring more veterans with disabilities."

Lawson will be traveling around the country throughout the month of April to raise awareness for Mission: ABLE — Paralyzed Veterans' campaign to help veterans with disabilities fully live the lives they deserve and to get them what they need most: care, benefits and jobs. The campaign aims to enlist all Americans — citizens, communities and companies — in this effort to give paralyzed veterans and their families the opportunity to live full and productive lives.

Paralyzed Veterans and its 34 chapters across the nation:

- Fight for quality VA health care and veterans benefits.
- Promote and provide wheelchair sports and recreational activities.
- Lead the charge to make America more accessible.
- Empower paralyzed veterans with the tools they need to secure good careers, at a time when the unemployment rate for veterans with severe disabilities is 85 percent.
- Invest in research to find new treatments and a cure for paralysis.





• Provide their services to all veterans and their families free of charge.

For more information about Paralyzed Veterans Awareness Month, please visit [www.pvaawareness.org](http://www.pvaawareness.org)

## VETS ANGRY OVER PENTAGON

### HEALTH CARE PROPOSAL

By Barrie Barber and Rick McCrabb, Staff Writers

The Pentagon's proposal to charge higher fees on retirees enrolled in Tricare, the military's health insurance program, has angered some veterans.

But the Pentagon contends those who retired from the ranks must share more of the cost as expenses escalate under the weight of budget cuts.

Military health system costs have spiraled from \$19 billion in 2001 to more than \$50 billion in 2011, according to federal figures.

In the next fiscal year, the military has outlined a \$1.8 billion cut as part of a projected \$48.7 billion health care budget covering 9.6 million people. The cuts would total \$12.9 billion over five years.

To offset the loss, retirees would pay higher enrollment fees based on how much they earn through their military pensions. Retirees and active-duty family members would pay more for pharmacy co-payments, too.

"Budget pressure is the reason these changes are proposed," said Austin Camacho, chief of the benefit information and outreach branch at Tricare headquarters in Falls Church, Va.

The increases have sparked criticism among some Capitol Hill lawmakers and a backlash from at least one veterans' group.

An Obama administration official testified this week in a Senate hearing the higher fees are necessary to avoid cuts elsewhere. Dr. Jonathan Woodson, assistant secretary for defense affairs, has said if lawmakers reject the hikes, 30,000 to 50,000 service members might have to be cut from the force, according to published reports.

On Thursday, Bill May, 68, of Middletown, was released from Atrium Medical Center after having successful back surgery. He hopes the next pain isn't felt in his wallet. When he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1961, he was told he'd have affordable health care for life if he stayed for a 20-year-career or longer.

He called the proposed price hike "just not right."

May, who served 20 years in the military, has "no idea" if his benefit rates will increase or at what percentage. Right now, he said, he has no out-of-pocket medical expenses.

Bill Harvey, 65, commander of the American Legion Post 138 in Hamilton, served in the U.S. Navy, but retired as an electrician. He's ineligible for the military health insurance program.

He called Pentagon's proposal "a little unjust" because those in the military where guaranteed health insurance.

"That don't seem right to me," he said of the changes.

Lisa Lewber, 46, fears the Tricare changes could mean an additional cost of as much as \$2,000 a year for her and her husband, Joseph, a retired Navy petty officer who served in uniform for 21 years. The couple has a teenage son.

"I don't understand why they are trying to balance the budget on the backs of retirees," said Lewber, an Air Force veteran. "I just think there's other places they can look to trim expenses."

Veterans who stayed for a full career endured repeated deployments and other sacrifices to earn the benefit, she said.

That's a point the Military Officers Association of America officials have pressed in arguing against the higher fees to members of Congress who have the final say.

The Alexandria, Va.-based organization has concerns the higher fees are disproportional and retirees expenses would grow exponentially.

"Our premise is military people have paid up front by their service and sacrifice for the premiums," said Kathy Beasley, deputy director of government relations and a retired Navy captain. "We look at our health care fees and our health care benefits as something that has been earned."

"We have always stood for the fact that health care benefits have already been rendered with service and sacrifice," she said.

Under the proposal, retirees enrolled in Tricare Prime pay either \$460 or \$520 a year to enroll in a family insurance program. Depending on income, those costs could rise to between \$893 to \$2,048 by 2017. Tricare Prime is a managed-care program, similar to a civilian health maintenance organization, that treats most beneficiaries at military facilities, Camacho said.

In 1996, military retirees enrolled in Tricare Prime paid 27 percent of their total health care costs. That fell to 11 percent this year, according to Tricare. Meanwhile, the enrollment fee stayed the same for 15 years, the organization said.

Those who participate in Tricare Standard and Extra, a fee-for-service plan for working-age retirees under age 65, pay no enrollment fees. But enrollees could see a charge of \$130 for individuals and \$250 for families by 2017. Deductibles would increase, also.

Tricare-for-Life is a supplemental health insurance program for veterans who must enroll in Medicare Part B, or outpatient coverage, at age 65. They would see enrollment fees rise from no charge today to \$158 to \$475 a year by 2017, based on income.

Herbert Davis, executive director of the Montgomery County Veterans Service Commission, is a retired Army sergeant first class who spent 20 years in uniform.

Davis, 57, who is single and enrolled in Tricare, said the benefits outweigh the costs retirees would have to pay to an outside insurance company.

"I think even if there is an increase in the cost of Tricare, it is significantly cheaper than the standard or normal charge for health insurance," he said.

Ohio congressional lawmakers have mixed views.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the military must balance costs as it navigates through budget austerity.

"There's no question the Pentagon has to address health care costs," he said. "I have some concerns about the way they are doing it, but I realize there has to be some ways to keep health care costs" in check to avoid impacting key parts of the military budget.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, said the nation should keep the promises it made to military retirees and not pass on higher fees.

"These are typically not wealthy people," he said. "They are already squeezed on gasoline prices and everything else. I think the Department of Defense is wrong on this."

"Some private companies have broken their promises on pensions and health care and that's wrong, but government should never do that," the senator said.

"As our military is challenged with budget constraints, any proposed changes to Tricare must be justified with costs kept low for our military and their families," U.S. Rep. Steve Austria R-Beavercreek, said in a statement. "As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I intend to work with the Department of Defense to ensure that Tricare costs are kept affordable and ensure that our men and women serving in the military have the medical resources needed and medical benefits are protected."

## HOW CAN WE KEEP THE 'WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING' AT BAY?

Lt. Colonel James G. Zumwalt, USMC (ret)

The early morning sky was clear. The bright moon directly overhead made it difficult for the U.S. Army Special Forces unit to stay within the shadows cast by houses along the street of the quiet Iraqi town.

Advancing toward what U.S. intelligence had identified as an al-Qaida safe house, the soldiers carefully scanned rooftops and windows for enemy lookouts. Silently approaching the house in question, each man took up his assigned position. With the house surrounded, four soldiers scaled the walls to take up positions on the roof.

As safe houses are commonly protected by booby traps, the first two men to enter -- one through the front door and one through the back -- were U.S. Navy bomb technicians trained to spot such devices and disarm them.

Upon entering, the senior technician saw nothing yet felt a certain uneasiness come over him. It was a feeling only acquired by those who have survived danger on Iraq's battlefield numerous times -- enabling them to sense its presence.

Wearing a radio headset, the technician sounded a codeword that didn't need repeating. All members of the unit immediately pulled clear of the house -- those on the roof jumping off; those inside diving through windows. Only seconds later, as the unit reassembled at a safe distance, did it become clear why the alarm was sounded: The house collapsed in a tremendous explosion.

Had the senior Navy technician not relied on "gut instinct" that day in 2010, several parents would have lost sons.

The relevance of this story will be shared in a moment. But let us first turn to Afghanistan.

The timing couldn't have been worse for the United

States. With a need to negotiate its relationship with the Afghan government on a number of issues, the United States has to do so from a position of weakness, now burdened by Afghan ire raised in the aftermath of the Koran burning incident and the massacre of 16 locals, allegedly by a U.S. soldier.

The situation, however, isn't too dissimilar to what the U.S. experienced in Iraq -- facing the ire of an Iraqi government also eager to see U.S. forces leave. An agreement allowing U.S. military trainers to remain after U.S. combat troops were withdrawn couldn't be reached -- primarily because Baghdad didn't want to grant immunity from prosecution for any future suspected criminal act -- effectively ending the U.S. military presence there.

Among other things, Afghanistan objects to the U.S. policy of nighttime raids on Afghan homes and its positioning of military units in villages. Kabul wants the raids to stop and for U.S. units stationed in villages to be withdrawn to centralized bases. The United States says the nighttime raids are necessary to apprehend Taliban commanders while the village deployments help stabilize the countryside.

(Conducting these raids at night -- most of which act on U.S. intelligence concerning known militants -- actually limits civilian casualties as the element of surprise reduces likelihood of a long, drawn-out firefight.)

Kabul says its own forces can perform the security and stabilization role U.S. forces have played and that night raids should at least be approved in advance -- even when conducted in partnership with Afghan units -- by obtaining a judicial warrant. It is the advance notice demand that should worry the Americans most.

There have been numerous incidents in Afghanistan over the years involving a "wolf in sheep's clothing" by which a perceived friend, in actuality, is the foe.

Kabul has proven incompetent at weeding this danger from among its own troops.

Most recently, after the burning of the Korans, just such a wolf-in-sheep's-clothing incident occurred when two U.S. military officers were shot dead from behind while at their desks in what was a very secure Afghan ministry office.

An absence of trust for our Afghan allies has long been a factor in the U.S. relationship with them -- even before the Koran burning incident and massacre contributed to their distrust toward the Americans.

This brings us back to the story about the Iraqi safe house. The Special Forces unit had been set up. As information about the scheduled U.S. operation was shared with Iraqi allies, an Iraqi wolf-in-sheep's clothing reported it to al-Qaida. Militants rigged the house with explosives in anticipation of luring the Special Forces unit in.

Had it not been for a seasoned veteran's ability to sense danger, dozens of U.S. soldiers would have died.

Distrust was the reason for not giving advance notice to another ally -- Pakistan -- when a U.S. Navy SEALs team zeroed in on Osama bin Laden's hideout. The decision was made that it was better to kill the terrorist mastermind than err on the side of risking his being tipped off and escaping by giving Pakistan prior notice.

Similarly, it is better to ensure that the life of one American soldier isn't put at risk by erring on the side of informing the Afghan government in advance when conducting night raids.

Saving American lives is just as important, if not more so, than extinguishing the life of a well-known terrorist. As such, the same safeguards should be employed.

American lives in Afghanistan shouldn't be put at risk to satisfy Afghan sensitivities, especially when the Afghan government is incapable of purging itself of the wolf in sheep's clothing lurking within its own forces.

FamilySecurityMatters.org Contributing Editor James. G. Zumwalt, is a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer who heads Admiral Zumwalt and Consultants, Inc. He is author of "Bare Feet, Iron Will -- Stories from the Other Side of Vietnam's Battlefields" and "Living the Juche Lie -- North Korea's Kim Dynasty."







*Above and Left:  
Some additional  
photos of CSC Capit-  
ol Day and at the  
CA Vietnam Memo-  
rial by Steve Mackey*

## INVITATION TO GOURD DANCE CEREMONY

Camp Pendleton - June 15, 2012

Greetings, this is to invite you to attend our 2nd annual Gourd Dance Ceremony, scheduled for June 15, 2012, from 2:00pm through 8:00pm, on Camp Pendleton. The Gourd Dance ceremony is intended to thank and honor our current serving Native American Marines/Veterans and to also stimulate a sense of heighten awareness of American Indian Veterans and the contributions they have made to our country.

This year, we are honored with many local and out of state guests, and we look forward in meeting and networking with each of you. It is also our hope to be honored with the arrival of some of our Navajo Code Talkers. I do not have confirmation with this yet, but it is our hope that some of them can be present for our ceremony.

Enclosed is the flyer which identifies details of the ceremony. The location will take place on the 11th area Parade Deck, behind VISN headquarters/Vandergrift Blvd. The second attachment includes a map of the location and how to get there from the main gate of Camp Pendleton.

Below link that that describes the Gourd Dance and what it means to our people and how it relates to our Veterans and our current service members [http://www.zotigh.com/kiowa\\_began\\_gourd\\_dance.htm](http://www.zotigh.com/kiowa_began_gourd_dance.htm).

Thank you in advance for your willingness to join us in this day of celebration and recognition.

If you get lost inside Camp Pendleton our cell phone numbers are Pershing Yeahquo (405) 274-2426 or Elizabeth Cordova (562-338-5347).

Thanks again to each of you; we look forward in seeing you all there!

Have a blessed day everyone, and a BIG thank you for your support.

Elizabeth Cordova  
562-826-8000 X2872

## BAKERSFIELD FORMING CHAPTER

Long Beach VVA Vhapter 756 long time member, Mark Smith, who lives in Oildale (Bakersfield,CA) is in the process of starting a chapter in Bakersfield, Kern, County.

Mark is asking any At-Large VVA members who live in the Bakersfield area to call him if they would want to help start this new chapter.

Please only call between the hours of 4:PM -8:PM week days and all day weekends. If you know of any Vietnam Vets pass his phone on to them. They need not be In-Country Vets to join.

Marks Phone is: 661-805-5956

email : msmith@trihydro.com



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VVA CA State Council contact info inside - page 2

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To:

In this issue:

- CSC Capitol & WHVVD event info
- Legislative Information
- Veteran Benefit Information
- CSC Committee Reports

And more...

VVA & CSC Meeting Dates & Events

CSC Meeting - April 27-28, 2012 - Fresno, CA  
CSC State Convention - June 29-30, 2012 - Fresno, CA  
National Leadership Conference - August 7, 2012, Irving, TX  
CSC Full Council Meeting - August 24-26, 2012, Fresno, CA  
CSC Full Council Meeting - October 26-28, 2012, Fresno, CA