



The California Zephyr

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An Organization Chartered By The U.S. Congress



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is that time of year again. We are getting ready for the CSC convention, which will take place June 23-25th. We will be holding the convention at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Fresno.

By now all chapters should know how many delegates they are allotted for the convention. It would be great if every chapter could send all their delegates to the convention. If we did this we would have almost a 100 delegates in attendance. This would be outstanding. So let's get busy and send all your delegates. We not only take care of a lot of business but you get to meet other veterans from throughout the state. It is a great time so please join us.

All the information for registering for the convention can be found on the CSC web page and in this issue of the Zephyr.

We are in the planning stages for an Agent Orange Town Hall meeting in Southern California. Southern District Director Mike Kennedy along with Chapter 756 members Max Stewart and Conrad Gomez are working on the meeting which will take place on August 25th, 2016 at the Gold Star Manor in Long Beach. They are trying to get all the southern district chapters in the area involved in the town hall meeting. We have to remember that these Agent Orange Town Hall are for the discussion of the effects of Agent Orange on our children, grandchildren and so on. So let us get the word out now and if you are in the area please plan on attending.

With Memorial Day coming up I receive numerous invitations to attend ceremonies around the state. The first invitation I received this year was from Chapter 1065, the Incarcerated Veterans Chapter at Soledad. So Elayne and I will be attending the Memorial Day Ceremony at Soledad. The VVA Chapter members there along with the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America at Soledad plan and put on a wonderful ceremony. We have been to two of their ceremonies, missing last year because we were in Washington DC, and they were both outstanding. They have a marvelous Color Guard who do an outstanding job at presenting the colors, the chapter provides lunch to all those in attendance and they are very proud of their chapter. The only problem is we can't take any cameras into the institution so we can't take any pictures. The have some of the employees in attendance that take pictures so this year I will try to get them to send me the pictures they take so we can get some of them into the next issue of the Zephyr.

If anyone else would like to attend the Memorial Day Ceremony at Soledad please let me know so we can get you in touch with the institution so you can get clearance to enter the prison. You won't be disappointed.

God Bless
Steve

WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY FOUNDER HOSTS LAST EVENT IN WHITTIER

By Brian Day, Brian.Day@sgvn.com
San Gabriel Valley Tribune



Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day founder Jose Ramos poses for a picture Sunday at Sierra Vista High School. Photo by Shilah Montiel

Fifteen years after launching a campaign to heal some of the nation's historic wounds and honor Vietnam veterans for their service, Jose Ramos hosted his last Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day event in his hometown of Whittier, where it all began.

Veterans, their families and grateful Americans joined together at Sierra Vista High School to observe the day, which has been officially recognized by the state of California since 2011.

The grassroots campaign began as the dream of one veteran, and has since spread to every corner of the country.

It was designed to show Vietnam veterans the honorable "welcome home" they did not receive four decades ago.

"They weren't ready when they sent us away, and they damn sure weren't ready when we came home," he said.

At Ramos' request, Whittier became the first city in the U.S. to recognize Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day in 2002

He and a small team made a cross-country bike ride in 2003, and rapidly built sup-

port for the idea.

The day received statewide recognition in late-2009, when then California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill establishing the designation.

All 50 states, as well as Puerto Rico, have since followed suit, Ramos said.

But Ramos is ready to focus his attention on a new project to honor veterans.



Pastor Joe Enriquez, of Point Man International Ministries, leads the color guard in the opening ceremony of Jose Ramos' Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Sunday at Sierra Vista High School. Photo by Shilah Montiel

"This is my last event," he said.

He was hopeful that local veterans organizations would continue to team with the city of Whittier to carry on future Welcome Home Vietnam Days without his guidance.

At this year's event, live bands provided a concert while representatives of groups ranging from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to local AMVETS and VFW posts hosted a resource fair to connect veterans with available services.

U.S. Rep. Grace Napolitano, D-El Monte, made a surprise visit.

Rather than give an address from the stage, she spent her visit walking through the event and speaking with veterans one-on-one.

Despite the remarkable success Ramos' campaign has achieved, "I don't feel like I reached the goal," he said.

While the U.S. Congress has passed resolutions in support of recognizing Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day, it has not received a formal, federal designation, Ramos said.

A proclamation by President Barack Obama in 2012 designated March 29 Vietnam Veterans Day. But the designation did not include the words, "welcome home," which Ramos explained is the main point of his efforts.

"We didn't get a (national) Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day, but we raised awareness about a welcome home," Ramos said.

Ramos' wife, Sylvia Ramos, said she admired the accomplishments her husband has made through his tireless efforts.

"He has a passion for the veterans. It's all about the veterans. I don't know where that passion comes from," she said.

"I'm extremely proud of him," she said.

And although Ramos is planning to step away from organizing Whittier's WHVVD event, he's got another idea to pursue.

Ramos said he hopes "The Living Veterans' Memorial," which now exists only as an idea in Ramos' mind and some sketches in a note pad, will someday stand in Los Angeles County as a permanent tribute to all living veterans.

His concept involved a community park, joined with retail spaces to be rented to veterans and a memorial in which veterans are invited to express themselves through art.

The Living Memorial would serve as a home for veterans, both before they deploy and upon returning from service.

After returning from Vietnam himself, Ramos said he spent three days in a bar, simply because it was familiar to him, before contacting his family.

"I wish to God I would have had some place like (The Living Memorial) when I came home," he said.

GOVERNOR BROWN ISSUES PROCLAMATION DECLARING WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. issued a proclamation declaring March 30, 2016, as "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day" in the State of California.

Nearly three and a half million Americans served in the United States military during the Vietnam War and related conflicts in Southeast Asia between 1959 and 1975. More than 58,000 U. S. service members died during the Vietnam War, including more than 5,800 Californians. Many suffered physical injuries. Others suffered invisible wounds of war, including post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions. Decades later, Vietnam veterans are being diagnosed with diseases and disorders associated with their exposure to Agent Orange and other toxic herbicides.

Unfortunately, too many of these veterans have not received the help and care they need to live healthy and productive lives in peacetime. In addition to those with medical conditions that are direct results of their service, there are many who suffer from unemployment, poverty, homelessness and substance abuse.

Treatment of our veterans reflects profoundly on our character as a state and a na-

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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.



tion. The state is committed to improving current services and implementing new programs for those who served and their families.

Our Vietnam War veterans earned our everlasting gratitude. I urge all Californians to join us in welcoming home our veterans and assisting them in every way possible.

NOW THEREFORE I, EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor of the State of California, do hereby proclaim March 30, 2016, as “Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day.”

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of California to be affixed this 28th day of March 2016.

VA COMMEMORATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it conducted hundreds of events in VA facilities across the nation on Mar. 29 to recognize, honor and thank U. S. Vietnam Veterans and their families for their service and sacrifices as part of the national Vietnam War Commemoration.

VA Secretary Robert McDonald hosted a wreath-

laying ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – “The Wall” – to initiate VA’s contribution to the Commemoration. He was joined by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter. “We are proud to partner with the Department of Defense in this endeavor. Secretary Carter’s Vietnam War Commemoration staff has greatly assisted us in planning this humble tribute to our

Vietnam Veterans and their families.”

VA, along with more than 9,000 organizations across the country, has joined with the Department of Defense as a Commemorative Partner to help Americans honor our nation’s Vietnam Veterans.

Authorized by Congress, established under the Secretary of Defense, and launched by the President in May 2012, the Vietnam War Commemoration recognizes all men and women who served on active duty in the U. S. Armed Forces from November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975. Nine million Americans, approximately 7 million living today, served during that period, and the Commemoration makes no distinction between Veterans who served in-country, in-theater, or were stationed elsewhere during those 20 years. All answered the call of duty.

“This Commemoration has special significance for those of us at VA because of our honored mission to serve those who have “borne the battle,” said McDonald. “It’s also an opportunity to remember our VA colleagues who served in this generation of Veterans, to extend our heartfelt appreciation to them and to their families who shared the burden of their loved one’s service.”

More than 329 VA medical centers, regional benefit offices and national cemeteries will host events, many in partnership with local Veteran service organizations and volunteers.

By presidential proclamation issued on May 25, 2012, the Commemoration extends from its inaugural event on Memorial Day 2012 through Veterans Day 2025.

Commemorative Partners – local, state and national organizations, businesses, corporations and governmental agencies – have committed to publicly thank and honor Vietnam Veterans and their families on behalf of the nation and have pledged to host a minimum of two events annually.

To learn more about the Vietnam War Commemoration, go to: www.vietnamwar50th.com

CAVBF
CALIFORNIA VETERANS BENEFIT FUND

I have been asked to submit an update on what the California Veterans Benefit Fund (CAVBF) does. In the last year, as in most years, the majority of our funds go to the VVA/CSC to assist in their service officer program, government affairs program, mailing the Zephyr and other



Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.
California State Council
15th Biennial State Convention - Cal Con 15
June 24-25, 2016 - Fresno, CA.

Subject to Adjustments
Draft #4

Convention Action Dates 2016

April 15	Any final review comments or proposed revisions from committees submitted to Constitution Amendments Chair and Resolutions Chair before distribution.
April 25	Mailing of Proposed Constitution Amendments and Resolutions to Chapters.
April 25	Candidate information mailed to chapters.
April 29 – May 1	CSC Meeting Radisson Hotel Fresno Conference Center
April 30	Proposed Constitution Amendments and Resolutions submitted to Committees for review.
May 14	Deadline for Images of Bravery and Awards Program Nominations submitted to Committees.
May 24	Last day for Early Chapter Delegate Certification and Registration. Registration must be received with payment of registration fees.
May 24	Associate Luncheon Reservation Form received with payment.
May 24	Convention Awards Banquet Reservation Form received with payment.
June 3	Hotel Room Reservations received by hotel with payment guarantee.
June 3	Vendor Registration Deadline
June 21	Convention planning committee arrives at hotel to begin preparation for the convention.
June 22	Convention Committee continues preparation.
June 23 - Thursday	3 p.m. Delegate Registration opens. 4 p.m. Welcome Reception. 4 p.m. Golf Putting Contest
June 24 - 25	Convention.
June 24 - Friday	9 a.m. Convention opens
June 25 - Saturday	9 a.m. Convention resumes
June 25	11 a.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Delegates must be registered at Convention.Any Delegates not checked in at Convention Registration by 11 a.m. will not be seated on the Convention floor or allowed to vote.
June 25	7 p.m. CSC Reception and Awards Banquet.
June 26 - Sunday	10 a.m. CSC BOD meeting.
July 23	August Zephyr deadline

contributions. A large part of our resources come from tele-marketing but we do other types of fundraising. We host events and sponsor events and programs, like the women veteran’s conference, CSC legislative day, the CSC convention, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the LGBT conference. We do a lot of these things to get out name into the community and open ourselves to people that have money to give to worthwhile causes. We are working on being able to make funds available to put on town hall meetings supporting the Toxic Exposure Research and ill-

ness of veteran’s children.

We work year round learning how to approach people for funds. We accept funds for any cause and will put funds to specific line items if asked. We have even worked with groups that need a pass thru for fundraising. We are not a total fundraiser for VVA/CSC but we do make the Vietnam Veterans a priority in donations.

The last few years have been real hard to all non profits in fundraising. We cannot put ads on TV using big name people to get us donations. Those types of ads hurt



Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.
California State Council
15th Biennial State Convention - Cal Con 15
June 24 - 25, 2016 - Fresno, CA.
CSC Awards Program

The 15th Biennial State Convention will be held *June 24 thru June 25, 2016* at the Radisson Hotel Fresno Conference Center, Fresno, CA. During the Saturday evening banquet, the CSC will present the Awards Program, recognizing outstanding Chapters, VVA Members and other recipients for their dedication and contributions to VVA and/or the Veterans Community.

The California State Council presents Recognition Awards for the following:

- Outstanding Chapter of the Year
- Outstanding VVA Member of the Year
- Outstanding Chapter Newsletter/E-Newsletter
- Outstanding Veteran Community Supporter of the Year
- Presidents Award

Nominations of recipients for these awards may be submitted by individual VVA members or chapters. It is suggested that individual members making nominations should consider getting the support of their chapter (if affiliated). Chapter sponsored nominations should be signed by the Chapter President, unless it would reveal a surprise nomination.

Nomination Forms and supporting documents should be sent to the Committee Chair at the below address: **Submission deadline is May 14, 2016**

You may submit via USPS or email: nebuskfan@aol.com

Steve Mackey Awards Program
7407 Candlelight Drive
Riverside, CA 92509

(Home) 951) 681-9531
(Cell) 951) 231-7268
nebuskfan@aol.com



Images of Bravery Award

Images of Bravery ~ is the recognition of a Veterans personal, quiet acts of courage in the pursuit of their own peace after serving their country during a war.

It is not about heroic deeds on the battlefield, for those ~ the military has the appropriate awards.

The California State Council seeks to profile a small group of in country Veterans who have overcome personal sacrifice and adversity to lead lives contributing to their families, communities, and their fellow Veterans while providing a positive image of the Vietnam Veteran.



To make a nomination: (one per chapter)
Submit a written narrative describing a Vietnam Veteran who has shown involvement in Veteran and/or community affairs since their wartime service.

Provide a list of activities that demonstrates that the nominee has enhanced the image of the Vietnam Veteran.

The following information must be included in the nomination:

- Branch of Service
- Dates of Service
- Military Decorations
- Occupation
- Family Status
- Home Address
- Phone Number

Also, provide a chapter contact person and phone number should the selection committee require additional information. The Chapter President and one other board member should sign the nomination.

Please have the nominations postmarked: *May 14, 2014*

Information is available at (209-728-2138) or Leanin.Al391@yahoo.com

The State Council regrets that it cannot pay travel and hotel costs for the recipients of the award.

Nominations should be mailed to:
Al Sickle
Images of Bravery Award Committee
PO Box 1424
Murphys, Ca. 95247
Email : Leanin.Al391@yahoo.com

the local groups more than anyone else but the money going out of state hurts all of us. When asked about whom to donate to I always tell people to look local first. As a non-profit board President it is probably not the proper way to respond but if they cannot find a local group to donate to I would hope they remember us. As a 501 (c) (3) sometimes we can receive funds that you cannot. If you come across this issue let us know and we may be able to assist you in getting the funds.

Ken Holybee
California Veterans Benefit Fund (CAVBF)
10311 Woodside Dr
Forestville, CA 95436-9806
www.cavbf.org

CA VIETNAM MEMORIAL

NAMES OF THREE FALLEN SERVICE MEMBERS TO BE ADDED TO CALIFORNIA VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

The names of three California Veterans who died as a result of their service in the Vietnam War will be added to the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Capitol Park during a ceremony Sunday, May 29, 2016, the day before Memorial Day.

"The men we honor today did not die in the theater of war. Instead, they each carried the burden of their battlefield experience back home, sometimes suffering for decades, before their military service took them. The sacrifice of our fallen service members is deserving of recognition," said Dr. Vito Imbasciani, Secretary, California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet).

The California Vietnam Veterans Memorial Honor Committee, created by AB 287 in 2013, is tasked with adding names of men and women killed during the Vietnam War. The Committee is also tasked with including the names of California Veterans who later died as a result of illness or injuries, including physical or mental injuries documented by the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or licensed medical professionals, that can reasonably be assumed to have resulted from military service in the Vietnam War. Under the provisions of the law, written by Assemblymember Jim Frazier, Jr., the Committee must compile a list of names to be added to the memorial by November 1st of each year.

On October 19, 2015, the committee voted to add the following individuals to the Memorial:

- Private First Class Richard Carmine Borrelli of Sierra Madre, who served in the U. S. Army and died as a result of his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam.
- Ensign Jan Byron Jones of Ione, who served in the U. S. Navy and took his own life in 1973 as direct result of the severe post-traumatic stress disorder he experienced due to his service in Vietnam.
- Captain Brien Thomas (B. T.) Collins of Sacramento, who served in the U. S. Army and died as a result of his service in Vietnam, where he also lost an arm and a leg in combat. He was a life-long advocate for Veterans and served in the California State Legislature.

The memorial bearing the three additional engraved names will be unveiled at a ceremony in Sacramento's Capitol Park during "The Reading of the Names," a day-long annual event during which volunteers will read aloud all 5,659 names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The event is hosted by Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 500 in Sacramento.

The Committee members are CalVet Secretary Dr. Imbasciani; representatives from the California State Commanders Veterans Council: Jerry Guevara, Jim Anderson, and Frederick Romero; representatives from the California State Council of Vietnam Veterans of America: Al Sickle, and Lou Nuñez.

For more information about the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial Honor Committee, or to nominate a deceased Vietnam Veteran for addition to the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial, please visit <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/Pages/Vietnam-Veterans-Memorial-Honor-Committee.aspx>.

CHAPTER 201

Chapter 201 is aggressively beginning 2016 with high hopes for successes that will carry on the rebuilding goals begun in April last year.

Through the efforts of President Dave Sanders and Vice President Bob Kadlec, the Chapter has conducted a series of fund raising efforts that has resulted in a significant improvement of the Chapter's financial condition obtaining an almost four-fold increase in budgetary income which will greatly improve its capability to aid and

support veterans and the local veteran community. Dave has been aided by the efforts of new Chapter Treasurer Dennis Foggie who filled the unexpired term of past Treasurer Barbara Johnston who has moved out of State and resigned her position.

With an improved fiscal posture, the Chapter was able to provide significant donations to the Sunnyvale Moose Lodge Veterans Affairs Program and the Veterans Alliance of Santa Clara County, a 501(c) (3) corporation that promotes and supports activities and patriotic events for veterans, active military, reserve, and National Guard personnel, and their families, by providing financial assistance to Santa Clara County Veteran organizations. Additionally, the Chapter was able to provide scholarships for four Vietnamese children under a Vietnam Children's school program sponsored by VVA Chapter 165 in Bellingham, Washington.

During January, the Chapter presented Certificates of Appreciation to Randy Richmond (Chapter-201 Chaplain) and Cang Kim Dong (AVVA-201 Vice President) for their outstanding performance during the 2015 Holiday "Visitation" at the Palo Alto and Menlo Park VA Hospitals.

A contract was signed for the development maintenance of a new Chapter website (www.vva201.org) which went online for the first time at 3:00pm on February 15, 2016. As the website evolves, and updates are implemented, minutes of meetings will be posted to keep the membership apprised of Chapter business along with a photo gallery of Chapter activities. In addition to an annual calendar of events, links to important websites of interest to veterans will be included on the website.

During February, Chapter members Maj. Gen. Robert Ostenberg (USA, Ret) and Sergeant at Arms Michael Frangadakis, held an annual visitation to the Polytrauma Units at the Palo Alto VA Hospital. For their performance in support of our "wounded warrior" veterans, President David Sanders presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Michael Frangadakis in appreciation for his commitment during the visit to the Palo Alto VA Hospital (See enclosed photo).

A certificate will also be presented to Maj. Gen. Ostenberg at our next meeting. Chapter 201 Certificates of Appreciation were also presented to Past Chapter President Robert Johnston, for his 27-years of service to the VVA, past Chapter Treasurer Barbara Johnston for her years of service to the Chapter in her capacity as both Secretary and Treasurer and the Sunnyvale Moose Lodge 2049 for their continuing support to veterans.

As the Chapter enters the Spring of 2016, plans are underway for participation in the United Veterans Council of Santa Clara County Memorial Day Ceremony at the Veterans Section at Oak Hill Memorial Park. Additionally, Chapter 201 is the host organization for the annual Vietnam Veterans Memorial Day Service that is held at the Oak Hill Field of Honor.

A future project that the Chapter plans to support is as a sponsor, or host, for a monthly dinner for veterans at the Palo Alto VA Hospital Polytrauma Unit. The Chapter would finance the purchase of food and provide volunteer members to serve the patients. How often the Chapter will be able to accomplish this will be determined after the annual election meeting to be held on April 18, 2016.

CHAPTER 982

We are off and running for the new year. Our past President, Reed Brewer, has put together our



Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.
California State Council
15th Biennial State Convention
June 24 – 25, 2016

California State Council Elections Campaign Guidelines and Election Packets for Candidates

The Election Committee wishes to make this campaign process as relatively painless as possible. However, there are several guidelines that must be established to maintain fairness and equal opportunity for each candidate. Therefore, it is important that each candidate follow the guidelines as described within this packet.

We wish you a positive experience with your campaign.

**All forms must be postmarked to the Election Committee by:
Tuesday March 1, 2016 (Mail early, please)**

These standards are in compliance with the VVA, CSC By-Laws, Article IX, Sect. 2, Para. 1 Rev.2006

STANDARDS OF EQUITY FOR CAMPAIGN PRACTICES:

I. Each candidate *MUST* complete a Candidate Declaration Form (enclosed)

II. Candidates must provide the Elections Committee with:

- A **READABLE** copy of their DD-214,
- A Completed and signed SF-180 (request for military records form).

Those candidates that either:

- Are holding an elected position on the current CA. State Council Board (or)
- Have held an elected position on a previous CSC Board (or)
- Are a VVA Life Member (Paid in Full with DD- 214 on file at VVA National, **do not** have to submit these two (2) forms.
- If you are not in one of the above categories:
 - You **must** submit a copy of your DD 214.

III. Each candidate must provide the Election Committee with:

- A typed Candidate Biography.
- Please send a copy of the biography to: Alan Cook alancook53@aol.com

IV. The Election Committee will send a packet containing one copy of each:

- A Candidate's Biography to:
 - Each Chapter office, California State Council Board Members, and the State website.

V. The Election Committee will provide a: Campaign area for the distribution of and posting of campaign materials. We are not responsible for the distribution of campaign materials.

The candidate must turn in all completed, required paperwork to the:

- Election Committee, **NLT 5 p.m., Tuesday March 1, 2016** in order for the committee to certify them as a qualified candidate and list their name on the ballot.
- Anyone who "runs from the floor" **shall not** campaign (distribute campaign materials, participate in candidate forums, etc.) prior to having his/ her petition verified and candidacy certified by the election committee.

A VVA member may petition for candidacy at the State Convention by:

- Obtaining and filing the Candidate Declaration Form with the Election Committee, along with the other required documents (items #2 and 3) listed above.
- The candidate doing so must collect the signatures of at least 25% of the registered and checked-in delegates at the convention, at the time of their initial declaration.

BALLOTING AND VOTING PROCEDURES:

- The method of printing and securing for the ballots will be determined by the Election Committee and will be disclosed to the designated vote tabulation organization. Candidates and delegates will be advised as to the proper procedures at the convention.

THE ELECTION PROCESS WILL TAKE PLACE ON:

Saturday, June 25, 2016 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

- The election results will be announced at the convention banquet.
- Each candidate will be allowed to: have one poll watcher and one representative in the vote tabulation room. The vote tabulation representative will be required to stay until all the votes are counted and verified.

Each candidate will have the right to challenge a ballot.

- This must be done in writing by **9:00 a.m. Sunday, June 26, 2016**
- The absence of any such formal challenge constitutes a final waiver of rights to later contest the election process.
- If a position "run-off" is necessary, the details will be announced at the convention.

All State Council positions are open for election:

- President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer
- Three (3) District Directors and one (1) At Large Director
 - Chapter Delegates from each of the Districts (Northern, Central, and Southern) shall vote for: **their own District Director.**

All delegates should vote for:

- President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer
- **Their** District Director and one (1) At Large Director.

ALL CANDIDATE FORMS & MATERIALS MUST BE SENT TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS

E-mail: acook53@aol.com

VVA CSC Cal Con 15
Election Committee
5872 Alderbrook CT
Castro Valley, Ca. 94552



CalCon 15
June 24-26, 2016
Convention Committee Chairs

Convention Planning

Dick Southern southern@lodelink.com

Credentials

Dean Gotham deang1968@gmail.com

Rules

Barry Schloffel bshowful@att.net

Constitution

Mike Kennedy mike3sps@verizon.net

Resolutions

Richard Segovia rsego11b@yahoo.com

Elections

Alan Cook alancook53@aol.com

Awards

Steve Mackey nebuskfan@aol.com

Dean Gotham deang1968@gmail.com

Mike Kennedy mike3sps@verizon.net

Al Sickle leanin.al391@yahoo.com

Golf Putting Contest

Steve Mackey nebuskfan@aol.com

Vendor Coordinator

Steve Mackey nebuskfan@aol.com

Comptroller

Carol Southern c.southern.cs@gmail.com

monthly bowling night and it has been a great success. We have moved bowling night to Mondays to be able to get more lanes. Last bowling night we had some 25 folks and we had such great fun. We presented one of our members with the Turkey Award, given to the one with different,



peculiar, or amazing bowling skills. The trophy will be passed on to the next lucky person at our next game. Reed Brewer was our high bowler for the night with 155.

Some of our members helped out with providing security for an annual wrestling match held at Santa Maria High School. Thank you John Archuleta, Deek Sogovia, Reed & Treasa Brewer.

At our March Chapter meeting I invited 3 young men who are graduating from high school this year and entering the service. These men are all joining the Marine Corps.



This turned out to be so rewarding to our members and for these young men. They were welcomed and thanked and talked to, given advice by our seasoned Vets. There is already talk about adopting them into our Chapter. We welcome Jonah Massey, Zack Hepper, and Noah Steffler.

We are proud to support you.

Also at our March meeting we took a group photo to show our support for the March 30, 2016 rally to be held at the West LA - VA land battle. Keep up the fight.



April 2 we are having our first Veterans Dinner & Dance. We will also celebrate Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day that evening. We moved the date a little this year and got away from the usual BBQ that we have done for so many years. This is a fully catered event with music, a bar, raffle prizes, 50/50 drawing, AVVA bake sale, and a short program. This year our Vets don't have to work. It will be a nice change and good fun.

Support Our Troops and May God Bless
Jerry Kaufman, President

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

DoD GIVES FINAL GO AHEAD FOR WOMEN TO INTEGRATE INTO ALL MILITARY SERVICES JOBS.

Secretary Ash Carter's statement was released this month after thorough review. He formally approved the final implementation plans prepared by the military services and U. S. Special Operations Command to integrate women into all combat roles. This must be managed the right way to ensure combat effectiveness. Deputy Defense Secretary Bob Work and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Paul J. Selva co-chaired an implementation group tasked with a detailed review of the plans.

There are seven "guiding principles" for integration of services: transparent standards, population size, physical demands and physiological differences, conduct and

culture, talent management, operating abroad, and assessment and adjustment.

During the years of review, it was found that some standards continued just because "that's the way we have always done it." For example, the 35 pound weight carried by marchers in their rucksacks during the Army's Expert Infantry Badge qualification was based on a WWII era airborne study. It was the minimum weight required to keep the jumper's rucksack from being tangled in the static line.. nothing to do with what was needed by the paratrooper once they landed.

Equal Opportunity, Merit-Based Advancement

The department's performance standards are also now informed by current real world operational requirements and experiences gained in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Integration provides equal opportunity for men and women who can perform the tasks required; it does not guarantee women will be promoted at any specific number or at any set rate, as adherence to a merit-based system must continue to be paramount," the secretary wrote.

VETERANS INCARCERATED

ADVOCATES SAY IMPRISONED VETERANS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO VA

by Bryant Jordan

Members of the Incarcerated Vietnam Veterans of America (IVVA), Chapter 1065, at the Correctional Training Facility (CTF) salute before folding the U.S. flag. (Photo: Inside CDCR)



Two veterans' service organizations are backing Senate legislation requiring prison officials to give the Veterans Affairs Department reasonable access to a prisoner who has served in the military.

John Rowan, president of the Vietnam Veterans Association, on Tuesday informed Sens. Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Dick Durbin, a Democrat from New York and fellow panel member, of the organization's support for the bill, while Paralyzed Veterans of America notified the lawmakers of its support.

"Because of its long history with veterans and criminal justice issues, [Vietnam Veterans of America] has always believed that VA access to incarcerated veterans is especially needed by those transitioning from incarceration to life beyond prison walls, Rowan wrote in the letter, a copy of which was provided to Military.com.

Carl Blake, associate executive director for Government Relations for PVA, said the group offers its full support to the bill.

"A veteran utilizing resources such as mental health care, substance abuse treatment and education benefits significantly increases the likelihood of successful re-entry into society, he told the Senators in a letter.

The Senate legislation, which passed out of the committee with bipartisan support, is aimed primarily at rolling back some of the onerous mandatory sentences that in recent years have been determined to be too harsh or unfair.

Under so-called "three strikes laws that states began adopting in the 1990s judges were required to sentence individuals convicted a third time of certain crimes to set penalties. Though initially intended to target perpetrators of serious and violent crimes, the laws eventually resulted in the incarceration of non-violent, petty criminals for sentences up to and including life.

A Veterans of Foreign Wars spokesman said the organization is still studying at the bill. The provision related to veterans' access to VA takes up about a single page in the 81-page bill.

The VA did not respond to Military.com's request for comment.

Dr. Tom Berger, executive director of the VVA's Veterans' Health Council, said the Senate bill will make it possible for imprisoned veterans to learn about and apply for VA healthcare and benefits, including employment,

housing and other services, before they're released. This will make it easier for them to reintegrate, he said.

But, he said, "the devil will be in the details of just how the VA responds to the bill, if it's passed.

"Because we do not want the [VA representative] ... just showing up two months before the guys get out with a bunch of brochures, Berger said. "We want to make sure there is a connection regarding employment, housing and most important, health care, including mental health.

"Some of these folks have been behind walls for a long time, and they're going to have a great deal of difficulty transitioning, so we want to make sure their mental and physical health is taken care of, he added.

"VVA has a long history of working with incarcerated veterans, Berger said. "I think we're the only congressionally chartered veterans' service organization that has chapters inside the walls at a number of institutions around the country.

VVA's history with imprisoned veterans goes back to the earliest days of the organization. In testimony before Congress leading up to being granted a federal charter -- about seven years after it began organizing -- the group said meeting the special needs of women, minority and incarcerated veterans is part of its mission.

The PVA, in its letter to Grassley and Durbin, said the legislation would also benefit the Bureau of Prisons.

"As BoP strives with limited resources to implement re-entry programs throughout its infrastructure, VA efforts in this arena will be a welcome addition to the system and would prevent veterans from falling through the cracks, Blake wrote. "Most importantly, this provision gives transitioning veterans a better chance at walking out with their head held high again.

-- Bryant Jordan can be reached at bryant.jordan@military.com. Follow him on Twitter at @bryantjordan.

END OF VA?

CARE COMMISSION SHOCKER: THE PUSH TO END VA HEALTHCARE

Seven of 15 outside health advisors appointed to recommend ways to improve veterans' health services over the next two decades have proposed shutting down all VA medical centers and outpatient services, and having its nine million enrollees get their medical care in the private sector.

The 34-page "straw man" document released by the congressionally-created Commission on Care, calls for an immediate halt to construction of new VA hospitals and clinics, and launch of a "BRAC-like process" to begin closing existing facilities. Shuttering the largest medical system in the country would leave the VA to be "primarily a payor" for the care veterans would receive from civilian community doctors and health facilities.

To entice these physicians and facilities to accept more veterans as patients, the straw man document proposes that VA reimbursement rates be set five or 10 percent higher than Medicare pays.

A slim majority of commissioners have not endorsed dismantling the Veterans Health Administration with its 288,000 employees and \$63 billion budget. In fact its chairperson, Nancy M. Schlichting, chief executive officer of Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, warned colleagues in an open letter against recommending a "payor-only" role for VA in their final June report.

"It is conceivable that VHA could become only a payor in the future," Schlichting wrote, "but if we recommend it now the report recommendations...will likely be dismissed. A recommendation of that kind would not only provoke a strong backlash from stakeholders but further demoralize VHA staff and exacerbate recruitment and retention challenges."

Backlash from veteran service organizations was swift. The American Legion noted that many commissioners are medical industry executives who stand to gain

financially if VA care is privatized. Paralyzed Veterans of America said placing vets with special needs into private sector care "is a death sentence" because community providers are minimally experienced to provide complex care over the lifetime of severely injured veterans.

Dr. David J. Shulkin, VA under secretary of health, also criticized the straw man recommendations, but he is grateful they surfaced so early.

"This would be a terrible mistake, a terrible direction for veterans and for the country, to essentially systematically implement recommendations that would lead to the end of the VA health care system," Shulkin said in a phone interview Tuesday.

The controversial ideas popped, however, two months before a final report is due to the President and Congress. That's time enough, he said, to educate commissioners on "transformative steps" VA already has taken to preserve the system and better integrate VA care with community care.

Schlichting, appointed by President Obama, said in an interview Wednesday that given differences of opinion since commissioners began work last fall, she asked Commissioner David Blom, a health care executive from Ohio appointed by then-House Speaker John Boehner, to prepare the straw man document.

By definition, she said, "it's to be evaluated, criticized and considered as part of our discussion as we are...driving toward a consensus final report."

The final report will be "veteran centric" and, if Schlichting prevails, will support "the most integrated model

possible to ensure veterans have appropriate choice access to highest quality services."

The straw man says the VA health system is so broken there's "no efficient path to repair it." It's a theme often heard from Republican lawmakers, particularly in the House, in hearing after hearing the past two years. Five commissioners who support ending VA care are Republican appointees including all three named by Boehner before he resigned last year. One of his appointees, Darin Selnick, advises Concerned Veterans for America, a lobby group funded by the billionaire Koch brothers that seeks to cut budgets and responsibilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Though the straw man correctly identifies "serious systemic issues" across VA health care, Shulkin said, the system can be repaired. He said he was disappointed the straw man ignores reforms VA has launched the past year including its call for legislation to improve access to community care.

"We are bringing these new perspectives and industry-wide best practices to the VA and really creating that type of bold transformation that the straw man calls for," Shulkin said. He hopes the commission embraces VA's vision of a system "that takes what's best within VA, what's best within the private sector, and creates an integrated approach for health care."

Shulkin became VA's top health executive nine months ago, after 30 years as a physician and medical center manager in the private sector.



- Three Shots: \$5.00
- Mulligan: \$2.00
- All tickets must be purchased prior to contest



Tee Signs \$20.00 each

15" Tee signs

- Chapter Name & Number
- Whatever you would like written

Please register for Tee-sign with your Convention Registration.

1st prize: Most holes in one.

2nd prize: Runner up to 1st prize.

3rd prize: Closest to the hole
Without making a hole in one.



Consolation prize: 'The Pro' that spends the most \$\$\$ without any score.

Don't let the name fool you! Great prizes!





ALL VETERANS DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

MARCH 30, 2016 • SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

AB 1556: Mathis

TITLE: Property Taxation: Exemptions: Disabled Veterans

SUMMARY: Exempts the full value of the principal place of residence of a veterans spouse. Defines the term blind in both eyes. Specifies that a totally disabled veteran includes a veteran so severely disabled as to be unable to move without an assisted device.

POSITION: Support

AB 1560: Mathis

TITLE: Veterans: substance abuse programs

SUMMARY: Authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to refer a veteran to drug and alcohol treatment programs for veterans that are administered by the United State Department of Veterans Affairs. Authorizes the department to, by regulation, create a form for the purpose of making these referrals.

POSITION: Support

AB 1596: Mathis

TITLE: Veteran Service Organizations

SUMMARY: Appropriates \$1 million from the General Fund each fiscal year to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of grants to veterans service organizations. Requires a veteran service organization to have a presence in this state and be registered with both the Secretary of State and Attorney General.

POSITION: Support (some veterans groups are also sponsors of this bill)

AB 1706: Chávez

TITLE: Stolen Valor

SUMMARY: Requires specified elected officers to forfeit office upon the conviction of a crime pursuant to the federal Stolen Valor Act of 2013 or the Stolen Valor Act that involves a fraudulent claim, made with the intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit that the person is a veteran or a member of the Armed Forces of the United States, as prescribed in those acts. Imposes a misdemeanor for such actions.

POSITION: Support (some veterans groups are also sponsors of this bill)

AB 2512: Grove

TITLE: Task Force on Women Veterans Health

SUMMARY: Creates the Task Force on Women Veterans Health Care to study the health care needs of women veterans in the State

POSITION: Support (some veterans groups are also sponsors of this bill)

SB 112: Roth

TITLE: State Veterans' Bill of Rights

SUMMARY: Establishes the State Veterans' Bill of Rights. Proclaims the rights of veterans in the State, including, that veterans have the right to be treated with dignity, understanding, and respect, and have the right to housing, education, job training, and physical and mental health services.

POSITION: Support

SB 384: Levva

TITLE: Veteran Housing: Multifamily: Underserved Veterans

SUMMARY: SB 384 would require that a percentage of state bond funds allocated annually for purposes of the Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention (VHHP) Act of 2014 be reserved for housing underserved veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to annually determine the percentage of reserved funds in consultation with appropriate local agencies, beginning July 1, 2017.

POSITION: Support

SB 980: Nielsen

TITLE: Cal Vet Veteran Homes Code Update

SUMMARY: Provides that the administrator is the senior executive appointed to oversee the operations of a veterans home. Specifies which veterans homes are administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to adopt uniform statewide policies and procedures, for the operations of those veterans homes. Requires a quality of care assessment team. Requires a electronic medical records system for such homes. Relates to the setting of related fees.

POSITION: Support (some veterans groups are also sponsors of this bill)

SB 1012: Nguyen

TITLE: U.S. Flags; purchase

SUMMARY: Requires any Flag of the United State or the Flag of the State purchased by the state or any local government agency be made in the United State from articles, materials, or supplies that were grown, produced, and manufactured in the United States.

STATUS: Senate Committee on Governmental Organization

POSITION: Support

SB 1080: Morrell

TITLE: Memorials

SUMMARY: Makes it a crime to receive a grave marker or other structure designed to commemorate the grave of a veteran, peace officer, firefighter, or other first responder that the person knows, or reasonably should know, is stolen.

STATUS: Senate Committee on Public Safety

POSITION: Support

THE LANGUAGE, STATUS, ANALYSES, AND VOTES ON ALL CALIFORNIA LEGISLATION CAN BE ACCESSED AT:

[HTTPS://LEGINFO.LEGISLATURE.CA.GOV/](https://leginfo.ca.gov/)

For more information, contact Veterans Advocate:

Pete Conaty & Associates
Governmental Advocacy
1107 9th Street, Suite 620

"If it was simply better for veterans to get their care in the private sector," and have VA pay for it, "I would be all for that," Shulkin said. But veterans would lose two essential components of VA-provided care.

One are the aspects of care that don't exist in the private sector — expertise in prosthetic and orthotics, post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and loss of hearing or sight, and polytrauma centers that treat the most devastating injuries of war or training mishaps.

"Most Americans understand that the people we send off to war have different needs than the general population," Shulkin said.

But the second component now at risk, he said, "I'm not sure people do understand, because I know I didn't until I came into the VA system and began to practice the type of care VA delivers." That is VA's "comprehensive and holistic approach" to delivering care. It focuses not only on patients' physical pain but social, psychological, emotional, even economic wellbeing, Shulkin said. For example, VA mental health care is integrated with primary care, something not seen in the private sector.

"If we were simply to turn our veterans out onto the street with a voucher, they'd find that the type of care they're getting is not anywhere near the level of care they're able to get within the VA system," he said.

"I absolutely agree with that," said Schlichting who heard Shulkin address commissioners last week. "I also believe that some of the models within the VA system should be emulated by the private sector, particularly mental health and the integrated primary care/mental health model, which is superior to anything I've seen in most of the private sector."

"In the end, when the commission has all the information, we're hoping this turns out to be a much more balanced report," Shulkin said.

Send comments to Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, VA, 20120, email milupdate@aol.com or twitter: Tom Philpott @Military_Update.

BELTWAY PLOT TO DISMANTLE VA HEALTHCARE

by Suzanne Gordon

The San Francisco VA Healthcare System (SF-VAHCS) now produces world-class research, and its hospital and clinics provide high quality care to thousands of veterans. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System has specialized services for veterans who have had brain or spinal cord injuries. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities in Sacramento, Los Angeles and throughout California provide high quality care to thousands of veterans.

Unfortunately, inside the Beltway, a group of conservative ideologues and hospital executives want to dismantle the California – indeed the entire – VHA healthcare system and turn veterans' healthcare over to the private sector. Don't think for a moment that this is just a crazy scheme concocted by a Koch brothers cabal meeting at some remote, invitation- only retreat for billionaires (the kind New Yorker writer Jane Mayer describes in her book Dark Money). Instead, this is what seven of the 15- member Commission on Care on the VHA is pushing in Washington openly and aggressively. The Congressionally mandated commission has been asked to propose strategies to deliver better health care to veterans over the next 20 years.

Last week, as I have previously reported in The American Prospect, some commission members found out that seven of its members produced a proposal — one they actually call "The Strawman Proposal" — arguing for the total elimination of the VHA. If the commission, as a whole, endorses this plan in their final report, which is expected in June, and our Republican led Congress adopts it, the VHA would no longer deliver direct healthcare services to veterans. They would become patients of a fragmented and expensive private sector system with the government footing the bill, as it does under Medicare, and jointly with the states under Medicaid.

According to the Strawman faction, the VHA is "broken" beyond repair and fixing it requires a "bold, transformational approach." This right-wing Republican line on Capitol Hill and in the mainstream media has been shaped by the Koch Brothers funded pseudo-veterans service organization, Concerned Veterans for America. (CVA) (For more on CVA and Koch Brothers role in this debate see Alicia Mundy's great article "The VA Isn't Broken, Yet," in the Washington Monthly).

Two members of the Strawman group are Darin Selnick, who works for CVA and Stewart Hickey (who led Amvets, the veterans service organization (VSO), which parted company with three other large VSO's because it supported CVA proposals to privatize the VHA). Their allies in the group include three high level hospital execu-

tives who stand to benefit financially from VHA privatization: Delos Toby” Cosgrove CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, David Blom, president of hospitals in the Ohio Health System, and Marshall Webster Senior Vice President at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Other signers are retired Rear Admiral Joyce Johnson, an Obama appointee on the Commission, who directed the U.S. Coast Guard’s health and safety systems. Johnson reportedly supported the use of the insurance plan Tricare to replace the provision of direct healthcare services at the Coast Guard. When Google failed to ill illuminate her position, and I emailed her to clarify it, she replied that, “Since I am currently serving on the VA Commission on Care, it’s not appropriate for me to be interviewed at this time.”

Finally there is retired Marine Corps General Martin Steele, who has argued that caring for mentally ill veterans within the VHA presents an obstacle to their reintegration into society.

The proposal they have crafted is an exercise in incoherence, denial, and magical thinking. The group believes that private sector hospitals would be willing and able to recreate VHA Centers of Excellence and other programs like the San Francisco VAHCS’s Center of Excellence in Epilepsy or Primary Care Education or Palo Alto’s polytrauma, blind or spinal cord injury rehabilitation programs. It also believes the private sector could fulfill the VHA’s research and teaching missions. As one San Francisco VAHCS researcher told me, “Can you see my eyes rolling?”

By providing private sector providers with financial incentives, they argue that hospitals, physicians, and other health care providers will produce the kind of integrated services that, even the authors acknowledge, are largely non-existent in the private sector. In spite of all evidence to the contrary, they assert that the private sector can also be encouraged to provide veterans with the mental healthcare, housing, homeless, and programs the VHA currently provides to low income, indigent, and mentally ill veterans. They thus blithely recommend dismantling what is, arguably, the only functioning mental health system in the country – the VHA’s.

An Independent Assessment of the VHA’s record on care delivery, mandated by the Choice Act, documents that the VHA outperforms the private sector on many measures, is equivalent on some, and marginally worse on only a few. In spite of variability in the VHA system, the Independent Assessment repeatedly reports that the private sector healthcare system provides care with even more variability than the VHA. Just last week, the Association of VA Psychologist Leaders posted yet another review of the scientific studies on VHA care which document similar outcomes.

In their document, the Strawmen justify their position on total privatization by pointing to the fact that the VHA is having trouble hiring new recruits to fill many staff vacancies because of the “stigma” attached to working at the VHA. They also argue that the current VHA workforce suffers from “poor morale” and a “culture of fear.” Of course, VHA management practices could be significantly improved. But if there is now a “stigma” attached to working at the VHA, a “culture of fear” within it, or demoralization among its current employees, that is, in great part, due to the bashing conservatives have unleashed in the media and Congress.

The way to remedy this problem is not to abolish the VHA but to set the record straight on its accomplishments and provide solutions to its real problems. This is just what one veterans service organization, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is trying to do now in a new social media campaign. The campaign consists of short videos debunking various proposals to partially or fully privatize the VHA and then recommending real solutions that would improve VHA care.

Fortunately for the DAV and other veterans groups – The American Legion, and Paralyzed Veterans of America – that have already spoken out against the Strawman proposal, the Commission on Care has some members who are actually data-driven. These include Michael Blecker, Executive Director of the San Francisco’s own Swords to Plowshares, David Gorman, a former executive director of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and Phillip Longman, senior editor of The Washington Monthly, and author of Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care Is Better than Your’s.

They are receptive to proposals put forth by VHA Undersecretary of Health David Shulkin when he recently testified before the commission. He proposes allowing veterans to use private sector providers when needed, while strengthening the VHA’s ability to deliver direct care as well as manage and coordinate any care veterans receive from private sector providers.

In his book as well as in his role on the commission, Phillip Longman has urged Congress to extend VHA care to all veterans (not just those with service connected disabilities and/or low incomes). He suggests that veteran’s spouses and their families should also be able to access VHA care and recommends establishing pilot projects that would allow non-veterans to purchase care in the system. One group that could be included first are the over 200,000 non-veteran VHA employees who care for veterans but can’t access the high quality care they provide. Just as most employees at Kaiser are covered by their own employer, VHA staff should be able to access the care VHA delivers if they so choose.

In the name of delivering what it calls “veteran centric” care, the commission’s pro-privatization faction want to squander the 70 -year investment that U.S. taxpayers have made in the largest and only fully integrated healthcare system in America. While private sector hospitals and other providers talk about being patient-centered, few really are. In spite of its many problems and the numerous obstacles it faces, the VHA has tried to create a truly veteran/patient centered system. Throughout California, many of us non-veterans who help pay for veterans’ care already know that having private health insurance is not the same thing as having access to reliable, affordable, high quality, integrated care.

Healthcare journalist Suzanne Gordon has authored 18 books, many on the problems of patient safety in the private sector healthcare system. She is writing a new book on VHA healthcare and has spent the past year and a half visiting VHA facilities around the country.

To leave feedback, go to feedback@beyondchron.org

VETERAN ON DRIVER LICENSE UPDATE

A big veterans thank you to Assemblymember Jim Frazier for his leadership, tenacity and drive to help veterans. Because of his AB 935, there are at least 1458 veterans who have filed claims through their CVSO to receive federal benefits that they had earned through their military service who were unaware that they were qualified for federal benefits.

AB 935 passed in 2014 and was implemented on Veterans Day 2015. During the period November 12, 2015 through January 31, 2016 (only 53 DMV working days), the county veterans service offices have issued 14,184 eligibility forms for veterans to take to the Department of Motor Vehicles in order to receive a new drivers licenses with "veteran" on their drivers license.

Of those 14,184 veteran visitors to their local county veterans service office, 1458 California veterans have filed claims with the federal Veterans Administration (VA) for federal benefits through their local county veterans service office.

The average veterans claim in California is \$18,000 annually. Using the average amount per claim, these 1458 new veterans, claims will bring in an additional \$26,244,000 in new federal dollars which will go directly to the veteran.

The number of veterans who will have the designation on their driver,s license is estimated to be 30,000 per year. California is home to approximately 1.8 million veterans with more Iraq and Afghanistan veterans returning every month.

VETERAN CHOICE

VA Announces Community Care Call Center to Help Veterans with Choice Program Billing Issues

Veterans can now work directly with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to resolve debt collection issues resulting from inappropriate or delayed Choice Program billing. In step with MyVA’s efforts to modernize VA’s customer-focused, Veteran-centered services capabilities, a Community Care Call Center has been set up for Veterans experiencing adverse credit reporting or debt collection resulting from inappropriately billed Choice Program claims. Veterans experiencing these problems can call 1-877-881-7618 for assistance.

“As a result of the Veterans Choice Program, community providers have seen thousands of Veterans. We continue to work to make the program more Veteran-friendly,” said Dr. David Shulkin, Under Secretary for Health. “There should be no bureaucratic burden that stands in the way of Veterans getting care.”

The new call center will work to resolve instances of improper Veteran billing and assist community care medical providers with delayed payments. VA staff are also trained and ready to work with the medical providers to

expunge adverse credit reporting on Veterans resulting from delayed payments to providers.VA is urging Veterans to continue working with their VA primary care team to obtain necessary health care services regardless of adverse credit reporting or debt collection activity.

VA acknowledges that delayed payments and inappropriately billed claims are unacceptable and have caused stress for Veterans and providers alike. The new call center is the first step in addressing these issues. VA presented The Plan to Consolidate Community Care in October of 2015 that outlines additional solutions to streamline processes and improve timely provider payment.

For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact. Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program can call 1-866-606-8198 to find out more about the program, confirm their eligibility and schedule an appointment.

COLA POSSIBLE?

LAWMAKERS PUSH TO LINK VETERANS' COLA WITH SOCIAL SECURITY

By Leo Shane III, Military Times

Veterans always get the same annual cost-of-living increase as Social Security recipients. But there’s no guarantee that will continue.

That’s why lawmakers are again pushing for new legislation that would permanently tie together the two rate increases, and thus avoiding a potential payout hiccup if congressional politics stalls what is normally routine business.

Earlier this month, House lawmakers adopted the so-called “American Heroes COLA Act,” which would provide an automatic cost-of-living adjust for veterans benefits such as disability compensation, payouts for dependents, and other Veterans Affairs living allowances.

Under current law, those annual increases are automatic for Social Security benefits, determined by the executive branch without intervention from Congress. But veterans benefits fall into a different category, one that requires lawmaker intervention each year to become law.

“The current process leaves veterans and their families, who depend on these benefits to make ends meet, in limbo until Washington actually passes legislation,” said the bill’s sponsor, Rep. Ralph Abraham, a Louisiana Republican. This legislation would "end this uncertainty and ... enable VA beneficiaries to better plan for their financial future.”

The current process hasn’t resulted in problematic cost-of-living adjustments for veterans. In the last few decades, only one year — 2000 — saw uneven increases for Social Security recipients and veterans, and that came as a result of a rounding difference between the two rates.

But Abraham and other lawmakers point out that congressional infighting in recent years has sidelined other legislation assumed routine, including the budget fights which resulted in the 2013 partial government shutdown.

By making the veteran benefits increases automatic, that political turmoil is no longer an obstacle.

Veterans groups have supported similar efforts in the past, and offered backing for ways to make the COLA process simpler for veterans’ families. But proposals to solve the problem have stalled over questions about how to tie the rates together or whether to use other COLA calculations for veterans benefits.

Officials from the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees have been discussing an omnibus veterans reform measure to bring before both chambers later this spring, with the COLA fix among the issues under consideration.

Last year, neither veterans nor Social Security recipients saw an increase in their payouts, with federal officials citing a drop in consumer prices as evidence that an increase was not needed.

The bill would not affect adjustments for military retirement pay, which are calculated through other methods.

FORMER POW DIES

FRED CHERRY, VIETNAM POW FOR SEVEN YEARS, DIES AT 87

By Bart Barnes

Fred V. Cherry, an Air Force fighter pilot, was downed by enemy fire over North Vietnam in 1965, and he spent more than seven years as a prisoner of war.

He had grown up in the Jim Crow South, and his captors made it clear that he could mitigate the harshness of his incarceration, including routine torture, and improve his living conditions by speaking out against the racial injustice and discrimination he had faced as an African

American in the United States.

When beatings failed to bring him around, his jailers tried another tactic. They assigned a self-described “Southern white boy” as his cellmate, hoping that racial antipathy between the two men would weaken his resolve and produce a propaganda triumph for North Vietnam.

The plan failed.

Instead, the two men, Col. Cherry and a Navy fighter pilot, then-Ensign Porter Halyburton, became fast and lifelong friends. Each would credit the other with having saved his life.

Col. Cherry died Feb. 16 at a hospital in Washington. He was 87. The cause was heart ailments, said his companion of 24 years, Deborah Thompson.

He was a major and had more than 100 combat missions in Korea and Vietnam behind him on the day — Oct. 22, 1965 — that his F-105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber was hit by enemy antiaircraft fire.

“The plane exploded and I ejected at about 400 feet at over 600 miles an hour,” Col. Cherry wrote in a 1999 collection of war stories by POWs and Medal of Honor recipients. “In the process of ejection, I broke my left ankle, my left wrist, and crushed my left shoulder. I was captured immediately upon landing by Vietnamese militia and civilians.”

“I spent 702 days in solitary confinement,” he added, with the longest period lasting 53 weeks. “At one time I was either tortured or in punishment for 93 straight days.”

Early in his captivity, Col. Cherry was matched with Halyburton, a North Carolinian who had been shot down Oct. 17, 1965. For eight months, they would live together. But whatever mutual animosity their captors may have hoped for never materialized.

“I guess they thought if they had a Southern white boy taking care of a black man, it would be the worst place for both of us,” Halyburton said in a telephone conversation from North Carolina. “It turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me.”

For eight months, Halyburton changed the dressings on his cellmate’s infected wounds, fed him, bathed him and watched over him. “He said I saved his life, and he saved my life... Taking care of my friend gave my life some meaning that it had not had before.”

The two men lived in a succession of fetid 10-by-10-foot cells, sleeping on straw mats, benches or the floor.

“I was so inspired by Fred’s toughness,” Halyburton said. “He had grown up in the racial South [and] undergone a lot of discrimination and hardship. But he was such an ardent patriot. He loved this country. It inspired me, and it inspired a lot of others.”

For 2,671 days, Col. Cherry was held in captivity before his release on Feb. 12, 1973, with the first group of U. S. prisoners of war to come home.

Fred Vann Cherry Sr. was born in Suffolk, Va., on March 24, 1928. His parents were farmers. He attended racially segregated public schools and graduated in 1951 from Virginia Union University, a historically black college in Richmond.

He then joined the Air Force and, during the Korean War, flew more than 50 combat missions over North Korea.

In the summer of 1966, after eight months of sharing a cell, Col. Cherry and Halyburton were separated. Halyburton remembers it as “one of the saddest days of my life.” They did not see each other again until 1973, when they met at a military hospital at Clark Air Base in the Philippines after their release from captivity.

Col. Cherry, who later attended the National War College and the Defense Intelligence School in Washington, retired from the Air Force in 1981 as a joint staff officer assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency. He was a resident of Silver Spring, Md.

His medals included the Air Force Cross, awarded, according to the citation, for “extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as a Prisoner of War. ... extremely strong personal fortitude and maximum persistence in the face of severe enemy harassment and torture, suffering critical injuries and wounds.”

But Col. Cherry’s homecoming was painful. His wife, the former Shirley Brown, reportedly deserted him soon after he was declared missing, cleaned out his life savings and had a child with another man. The officer endured years of legal proceedings and negotiations with the military over issues involving back salary, child-support payments and allowances.

Survivors include his companion, of Silver Spring; four children from his marriage, Deborah Cherry-Jones and Donald Cherry, both of Norfolk, Va., Cynthia Cherry-Leon of Woodbridge, Va., and Fred V. Cherry Jr. of Springdale, Md. ; a son from another relationship, Frederick Stein of Los Angeles; 14 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

Col. Cherry and Halyburton, who retired from the Navy at the rank of commander, gave joint talks at military institutions and colleges. In 2004, they toured to promote a book about their story, “Two Souls Indivisible: The Friendship That Saved Two POWs in Vietnam,” by James S. Hirsch.

Col. Cherry also was featured in a public television documentary narrated by Tom Hanks, “Return With Honor,” about Vietnam fighter pilots held as POWs.

“I know that the faith in God, love and respect for my fellow man that my parents and family instilled in me during my youth carried me through some very difficult years as prisoner-of-war in Vietnam,” Col. Cherry wrote in the 1999 collection of POW war stories.

“I was always taught to love and respect others and forgive those who mistreat, scorn or persecute me... [This] allowed me overcome the damages of discrimination, Jim Crow, and the social and economic barriers associated with growing up a poor dirt farmer... My standard for making decisions is based on doing what is right.”

VET CONNECT - NAPA

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS

By Maria Sestito, Napa News

If you’ve served in the military, you’re probably a veteran entitled to veteran benefits. But are you receiving them?

Although there are nearly 11,000 veterans in Napa County, only 17 percent of them are receiving veterans benefits, said Patrick Jolly, veterans service officer with Napa County. Jolly is a veteran, too — he retired from the Navy after serving 20 years. With the help of other veterans and support from the county, Jolly holds a monthly one-stop-shop that showcases resources available for veterans.

During the “Vet Connect,” prior military members can find out if they are eligible for benefits, how to access those benefits and even get help in doing so. Jolly said many veterans don’t even realize they are eligible for benefits and don’t know what those benefits include.

“There are things available, probably things they didn’t even realize,” said Larry Jackson, a Vietnam veteran who volunteers his time every month to help out with the event. “I didn’t know anything was available for 30 or 40 years. I didn’t think anybody even cared.”

But times have changed, he added, and people do care.

Since Vet Connect started in November 2014, they have helped over 100 veterans gain access to benefits including compensation for disabilities, pensions, educational resources, home loans and survivor benefits. It can be confusing stuff, but they will help veterans navigate through it, Jolly assured.

Veterans of all ages and walks of life are welcome.

“Most of the veterans I’m working with now are Iraq, Afghan veterans,” said Almon Bundy, a Veterans Affairs peer support specialist and president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 702 in Yountville. Bundy himself benefited from Jolly’s help after being dismissed by Veterans Affairs for decades, he said. In 2006, a friend gave Bundy Jolly’s card, saying “Pat helped me and he told me that the only thing I had to do to pay him back was to give his card to another veteran.” Bundy went to him and finally started receiving help, including therapy.

Bundy’s diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder came as a relief, he said. “It wasn’t like I was weird or something. ... There’s an explanation for this.” Now, Bundy works hard to give back to veterans in need of help.

“My job is to model recovery,” he said. Bundy described himself as a coach and a mentor who can understand where other veterans are coming from even without hearing all the details of their stories. “Very quick they start realizing: Here’s somebody I can talk to, here’s somebody who’s walked the walk.”

Vet Connect is held the second Thursday of each month from 9 a.m. until noon at 650 Imperial Way in Napa.

For information, visit www.napavets.com or contact Patrick Jolly at patrick.jolly@countyofnapa.org or 707-253-6072.

VACCINE "GUNS" AT FAULT?

‘JET GUNS’ BEHIND ILLNESS, VETS SAY

But those who believe the vaccine injectors are to blame face an uphill battle to get VA benefits.

Lily Leung, Staff Writer

Near the end of the Vietnam War, Lynn Seiser lined up with other fresh-faced Army recruits to await a dread- ed, often bloody ritual.



Seiser, then 21, and millions of other members of the military received service vaccines not by disposable syringes but with needleless “jet guns” that blasted drugs into each arm using puffs of high pressure.

The military touted the medical device for its ability to immunize veterans en masse, cheaply and safely.

However, the guns often weren’t sterilized between uses and “if you flinched, it ripped you open,” said Seiser, a clinical psychology professor. “If anyone in the line had something, everyone would be exposed.”

Decades later, a growing chorus of Vietnam War veterans like Seiser and medical experts — including some doctors within the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs — argue that the inoculators, since removed from use, were a likely vehicle for the hepatitis C virus.

The VA and the device’s manufacturer dispute that. But the Vietnam Veterans of America, a Maryland-based nonprofit, in recent months adopted the jet gun issue as one of its causes, due to mounting evidence and concerns.

“There’s a growing body of doctors out there who believe that hepatitis C was caused by air gun injectors,” said Dr. Thomas J. Berger, executive director of the group’s Veterans Health Council.

The delayed reaction is explained by the nature of the disease, which can sit symptomless for decades or initially present minor symptoms such as fatigue and muscle aches. If left untreated, hepatitis C can lead to liver failure and death.

The illness has been deemed an epidemic in the veteran population since at least the early 2000s. It’s widely reported that up to 1 in 10 Vietnam veterans have hepatitis C — roughly five times the rate in the overall population.

The agency has identified about 175,000 hepatitis C patients within its health care system and roughly 45,000 additional vets who don’t even know they have it, VA numbers show. Of course, the total number of vets infected may be far higher, as the majority of veterans do not use the VA system.

VA officials in Washington, D.C., did not address questions about total jet gun claims filed and how many were granted or denied.

However, the Board of Veterans Appeals — an informal court that is part of the VA — does publish the results of claim appeals. More than 100 appeals mentioning jet guns have been granted since 1992, and half mention the devices as the sole probable cause, said Shaun Brown, the son of a deceased Vietnam vet who analyzes documents for his blog, jetinjectors.wordpress.com.

More than 500 cases were remanded to the appropriate VA regional office for another medical opinion, he added.

‘BIOLOGICALLY PLAUSIBLE’

Top VA leaders have said the transmission of the hepatitis C virus via immunization jet guns is “biologically plausible,” but the agency does not consider the device one of the “known modes of transmission” of the disease, a 2004 public record shows.

VA officials require jet gun claimants to rule out any other risk factors — including injection drug use, tattoos given by reused needles and unscreened blood transfusions before 1992 — before they will consider the idea that jet guns could have been the root of infection.

For some, proving their case has been as easy as filing a piece of paperwork, sometimes at the urging of a VA physician. For others, it can be a yearslong battle.

Seiser, semi-retired on the Florida Gulf Coast, is among the few veterans who have been successful at navigating what some call an inconsistent process.

Brown’s father, Larry, a Vietnam vet, died in 2009 of complications from hepatitis C. Shaun and his mother, Anna, filed a VA disability claim arguing jet guns were the likely source, absent of what the VA considers traditional risk factors.

After a five-year battle, the claim was granted, with a 100 percent service connection rating. That means the veteran has at least one disability that “significantly interferes with normal life functions,” according to the VA.

As a result, Anna now receives the maximum spousal compensation every month, the option of fully paid health care and other benefits. The money “means nothing to me,

” she said. “I’d rather the VA acknowledge it has infected a lot of people. I want people to be treated.”

The U. S. military used jet injectors to immunize millions of new recruits and troops heading overseas from the 1950s through the late 1990s. The now defunct Vernitron Corp. and the Walter Reed Army Hospital developed and patented the inoculator, which was branded as the Ped-O-Jet, government documents show.

During the Vietnam conflict alone, at least 4.7 million service members were administered vaccinations in this manner, based on one government report that said 235,000 recruits were injected by jet gun each year over a span of three decades. An FDA hearing cites much higher figures: It said the Department of Defense jet gun vaccinated 20 million to 40 million military personnel from 1965 to 1980.

Jet gun manufacturers alleged that one injector could deliver up to 1,000 injections an hour because syringes didn’t have to get changed out and vials were reused, which saved money.

Such devices also were used on the public. They have been credited for delivering hundreds of millions of vaccine doses in programs to fight diseases such as measles, smallpox and polio worldwide.

By 1997, the DOD stopped using the device because of liability risk and the Ped-O-Jet maker’s decision to discontinue production, on the heels of research that revealed concerns of contamination.

That research included:

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report citing a hepatitis B outbreak at a California weightloss clinic that used jet injectors on patients. “This potential risk for disease transmission would exist if the jet injector nozzle became contaminated with blood during an injection and was not properly cleaned and disinfected before subsequent injections,” the 1994 report states.

Two years later, a report from a meeting of researchers with the CDC and World Health Organization said once a jet injector was contaminated, “it does indeed have the potential to transmit disease.”

Around that time, the WHO’s global vaccine program banned the use of jet injectors, citing risks of disease transmission.

‘NEVER WIPED THE TIP’

Military officials at the time maintained they had not come across any reported cases of cross-contamination but imposed the jet gun ban out of an abundance of caution, records show.

Dan Hughes, a Northern California native who lives in Indiana, administered jet gun vaccinations as an Army medic during the Vietnam War. If recruits tensed up, he said, the high-pressure blast would create a cut and produce bloody blowback.

“We never wiped the tip of the gun off,” said Hughes, who has the infection but likely from a tainted blood transfusion.

At the time, the industry felt the infection concerns were “overly cautious and unrealistic,” according to the paper from the 1996 CDC-WHO meeting. The major jet gun manufacturers are no longer in business.

Robert Harrington, then president and chief executive of Vernitron Corp., which produced the Ped-O-Jet, said in a 1999 FDA hearing that the theory that jet injectors were unsafe and easily contaminated “has not been proven.”

“Life is not without risk,” testified Harrington, who was head of Vernitron from 1988 to the early 1990s. “I flew in Asia as a military pilot and a variety of people were killed; that was an acceptable risk again. And more dangerous than all of that, I drove on the Beltway this morning to get here and there’s an acceptable risk of driving on the Beltway.”

Seventeen years later, Harrington, retired in Philadelphia, stands by the Ped-O-Jet. He said the device played a key part in helping eradicate pandemics globally.

CLAIMS ‘NONSENSE’

Claims that his device was the source of hepatitis C infections among vets are “nonsense,” Harrington said.

He said the product used at the weight-loss clinic was not a Ped-O-Jet but a competitor’s device. Public records show it was a Med-EJet. Harrington said his product had a valve that wouldn’t pull in fluids, which made it “beyond safe.”

Discussion of the jet gun issue leads to the bigger issue of hepatitis C infections among vets. The VA in 1999 launched a massive program to screen and treat veterans passing through its facilities.

Two of the highest risk groups are intravenous drug users and recipients of unscreened blood transfusions and organ transplants, which were not tested before 1992. There is no definitive number of how many Vietnam vets used injectable drugs, but studies have reported a vast range, from 8 percent to 48 percent.

VA officials in 2004 said the “large majority” of hepatitis C infections are a result of these two categories. The agency did not address questions regarding the issue of jet guns.

The 1999 effort, which cost \$340 million, was fraught with “persistent reports of inconsistent outreach, perfunctory screening and limited access to testing and treatment,” according to a congressional hearing in 2001.

Around that time, Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, RN, J., reported the issue was “approaching epidemic proportions” in his region.

Frelinghuysen, now in his 11th term, attempted to pass two bills in the early 2000s to get all veterans tested and treated on a mass scale. Both measures lacked traction and died.

The VA hospital in Long Beach last summer sent letters encouraging patients with signs of advanced liver disease – the sickest of the sick – to come in for a consult. Only half responded, which was “a disappointment,” said Macy Ho, the facility’s clinical pharmacy program manager of the infectious diseases and hepatitis C program. Such a meager response rate has made it harder for the VA to proactively treat hepatitis C patients.

Regional VA systems like the one in Long Beach are also struggling to pay for pricey but effective treatments.

Last summer, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee discovered a multibillion dollar VA shortfall. The need to pay for increasingly expensive hepatitis C treatments for vets was a significant driver of the problem. Congress authorized the VA to access a nearly \$3.35 billion fund to avoid a VA health care shutdown.

Among those benefiting from the latest treatments are the veterans with successful jet gun claims, many of whom credit HCVets.com – an educational and support forum for vets with hepatitis C – for their victories.

Tricia Lupole, who heads the group, wants the VA to recognize the jet gun as an official risk factor of hepatitis C and encourage all vets who were inoculated this way to get tested. Lupole said her group has reached out to legislators but no one has yet signed on to take up the issue.

“The bottom line is, what was the (bigger) risk factor? Standing in line time and time again getting injections with reused vials or getting a tattoo after you got out of the service?” Lupole said.

W/LA VA LAND

Dog park and other tenants fight to remain on VA land in West L.A. - But what about the homeless veterans?

By Gale Holland - LA Times

Pet owners arrived at the Brentwood dog park one October morning to find that federal police had chained the gate shut.

It turned out that the park is operated by the city of Los Angeles, but the land is federal — part of the Veterans Affairs Department's West Los Angeles medical campus.

The next day, the chains came off, thanks to a Brentwood dog walker with a well-connected client, several park regulars said.

But the incident called attention to sidelight effect of the VA's promise in January to overhaul the campus with a sweeping plan to build housing for homeless veterans.

Barrington Park, which includes the dog park, is now among a handful of tenants fighting to hang on to their leases as the VA begins to transform the 388-acre campus in the wealthy Westside neighborhood into a model veterans' village.

Though the land was deeded to the government in 1888 as a home for disabled soldiers, federal officials over the decades allowed buildings to sit empty while they parceled out land rights to dozens of commercial and non-profit interests.

In 2013, nine leases were struck down by a federal judge who said they had nothing to do with medical care for veterans, and many advocates thought most tenants would be swept out.

But after a lobbying campaign in Los Angeles and Washington, UCLA and the VA reached a deal in January for Jackie Robinson Stadium — home to Bruins baseball — to stay on the property.

The city and the private Brentwood School are among the tenants negotiating with the VA to protect their turf. The VA had pledged to formulate "exit strategies" for leaseholders that were not "veteran-centric" — the dog park and ball fields among them.

"They've all lobbied up and lawyered up," Vincent Kane, special assistant to VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald, said of the leaseholders. "They saw the plan, they know the veterans want the land back, and they're talking now."

Even shopkeepers in the adjoining Brentwood Village are going "veteran-centric" — proposing to "rebrand" their

customer and employee parking area as "veterans' parking lots."

"If this was supposed to show the VA had changed, they're moving in the wrong direction," said Sean Smith, a Navy veteran.

The VA says that only tenants that pay fair market rent and offer direct benefits to veterans and their families will be allowed to remain. Commercial tenants — including a hotel laundry service and a movie-set storage lot — have been ousted and other leaseholders have received exit notices.

The Brentwood School says it has offered veterans "ample" access to 20 acres of the campus where it built its state-of-the-art athletic complex, including a pool, weight room, ball fields, and basketball and tennis courts.

The school in a November letter also said it had paid \$5 million in rent over 16 years and touted its "outstanding, supportive relationship ... [including] countless hours of direct service to veterans, as well as substantial physical improvement and pristine maintenance of land."

Kane said the school has started sharing its basketball courts with veterans, who held a tournament there last fall.

The Brentwood Village Chamber of Commerce has proposed that veterans run the parking lots and collect the receipts. The chamber's seven-point plan suggests the lots be used to train veterans in "booth/lot management, security, facilities maintenance, public affairs, crossing guard, concierge [services] and car washing/detailing."

Some veterans were not impressed.

"A few backdoor conversations and lending your gym to a few veterans in treatment does not make you a partner," veteran Jim Zenner said.

Many veterans believe the VA negotiated a good deal with UCLA.

"UCLA brings something sufficient to warrant their presence," said California American Legion Department Cmdr. Larry Van Kuran.

The university had leased 10 acres of the VA land, at bargain prices, for 35 years. Its \$16.5-million proposal includes raising its annual stadium rent payments to \$300,000 from \$60,000.

UCLA has also promised to launch campus legal and family support centers, to provide enhanced addiction and mental health services and to offer technical expertise in the campus building project.

"We believe this is a powerful partnership for veterans," UCLA spokesman Steve Ritea said.

Some veterans complained they were blindsided when UCLA released the terms before they had reviewed them.

Congress must pass a new leasing bill for the VA campus for any deals to become final. The VA says the bill will allow it to partner with nonprofit developers to finance and build the housing.

But some saw the bill as opening the door to more boondoggle leases.

See the most-read stories this hour >>

The bill allows the VA "to favor the private interests of UCLA, the Brentwood School and other illegal tenants over the rights of veterans and ... exploit veterans' land in a way that would not be possible" if the federal government paid for the housing directly, veteran John Aaron said.

Dog owners, for their part, feel they are pawns in a political fight not of their making.

"The park is being used as collateral for the injustices of the past," said Alex Davis, 28.

The Barrington ball fields opened in 1979 on a VA permit, city spokeswoman Rose Watson said. The dog park was added in 2002.

The city Recreation and Parks Department's lease with the VA expired in 1991, but the city continued to run facilities rent-free on a month-to-month basis, covering maintenance and operations costs.

Mayor Eric Garcetti, who supported keeping the dog park and ball fields, said resident access is "conditional" and could end if the VA has other plans.

"The West L.A. VA is here, first and foremost, to serve our veterans," Connie Llanos, the mayor's spokeswoman, said in a statement. "The mayor is also committed to ensuring that open space is put to good community use."

Kane said veterans could use the dog park to start a kennel, train therapy animals or learn the dog-walking business.

At the dog park one afternoon last month, most pet owners said they would welcome veterans to join them.

"I'm certainly not against vets," said Nick Miller, who came with his dog Heidi. "A lot of vets have dogs."

Some were optimistic a compromise could be reached.

"Parents are not going to go east of the 405 to watch their kids play ball, let's face it," Annie Nakamura said. "C'mon, it's Brentwood."

In Memorium

The following information was received from chapters:

Past Chapter 201 President Robert Beresford was in the Vista Manor Nursing Center. President Sanders paid a visit to him and gave him one of the Moose Lodge "Tommy Moose." President Sanders has just been informed that, within the last 24-hours, VVA Life Member and Past President of Chapter 201 ,Robert Beresford has passed away. President Sanders will be in touch with the family and additional information will be forthcoming when available.

Chapter 1031 has also been hit with recent member deaths:

John Perales - Recently joined 1031 as Life Member during the Fire Sale. He was a retired USMC (MGySgt). He had just returned from two weeks of golf in Texas.

Ray Fisher - Plank owner/Life Member of Chapter 1031, USN, and retired SD Sheriff Deputy. Ray had suffered from ALS for a number of years.

Since the chapter was chartered (Nov 3, 2009), there have been a total of five deaths.

Sadly, Greg Gillaspy, President of Chapter 1024 was killed in an accident. Full details have not been released yet, but he apparently was hit by a truck while walking near his home in Orange County.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to Betty Gillaspy, their family and the members of Chapter 1024.



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VVA CA State Council contact info inside - page 2

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To:

In this issue:
• Activities-Events/Photos
• Legislative News
• 2016 State Convention Info
• Agent Orange Info
And more...

VVA & CSC Meeting Dates & Events
April 29-May 1, 2016, Fresno, CA
State Convention June 23-26, Fresno, CA
August 26-28, 2016, Fresno, CA
October 14-16, 2016, Fresno, CA
Zephyr deadlines 5 weeks prior to each CSC meeting