

RAO Bulletin Update

> 15 July 2007

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> THIS BULLETIN UPDATE CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES:

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- > -- DoD Mental Health TF [05] ... (Mental Health Shortfalls)
- > -- DoD Disability Evaluation System [02] . (Pro Bono Effort)
- > -- DoD Disability Evaluation System [03] .... (NDAA Includes S.1606)
- > -- Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) .. (What it Does)
- > -- SVAC [01] ..... (5 Bills Cleared)
- > -- NDAA 2008 [06] ..... (Senate Debate Begins)
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- > -- VA Cemetery Iowa ..... (\$7.6 Million Grant)
- > -- VA Cemetery Wisconsin ..... (\$622,580 Grant)
- > -- BRAVE & GIVE Acts ..... (SSA Rating Acceleration)
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- > -- Florida Vet Benefits [03] ..... (4 New Laws)
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- > -- Okinawa Agent Orange Use ..... (BVA 1998 Ruling)
- > -- Identity Theft [08] ..... (Prevention, Identification & Mitigation)
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- > -- Concurrent Receipt Status .... (570,000 Not Yet Eligible)
- > -- SSA Retirement Application ..... (Applying Online)
- > -- VA 2007 Survey ..... (Starts 8 July)
- > -- Navy Body Modification Policy ..... (Clarified)
- > -- Tricare Member Choice Center ..... (New Program)
- > -- Cell Phone Payment Suspension... (90+ Day Deployments)
- > -- Vet Benefits New York ..... (New Veteran Measures)
- > -- Funeral Honors [02] ..... (Bugler Ranks Thinning)
- > -- Psoriasis ..... (What it Is)
- > -- Travel Immunizations ..... (What to Get)
- > -- SSA Future Benefit Estimate ..... (Where you stand)
- > -- Vietnam War Facts ..... (Stats)
- > -- Veteran Legislation Status 13 JUL 07 ----- (Where We Stand)

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> Editor's Note 1: The article on "Manila DEERS/RAPIDS Workstation" was sent in error 13 JUL to some of the non-Philippine subscribers. It only applies to veterans residing in the PI and should be disregarded by all

others.

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> Editor's Note 2: Attached is a listing of veteran legislation with current cosponsor status that has been introduced in the 110th Congress. To see any of these bills passed into law representatives need input from their veteran constituents to instruct them on how to vote.

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> SHAD UPDATE 04: A group of Navy veterans says that findings from a study of the health effects of at-sea biological and chemical weapons testing on thousands of sailors 40 years ago are flawed because the study ignored those with the highest levels of exposure. The \$3 million study, paid for by the Department of Veterans Affairs but conducted by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy, took four years to complete. It was commissioned after years of complaints from veterans that the tests made them sick. The Institute of Medicine is a private organization created by the federal government to perform medical tests. Findings from a medical records survey and questionnaire mailed to more than 6,000 sailors who were aboard 22 Navy ships and Army tugs during the tests cast doubt on claims that exposure to the tests led to severe medical problems in ensuing years. The findings, released last month, found that participants had higher death rates from cardiovascular disease and had higher self-reported rates of memory loss, attention problems and neurodegenerative disorders than a group of sailors who did not participate in Project SHAD, or Shipboard Hazard and Defense. But scientists were unable to point to medical links between these problems and the real and simulated chemical and biological weapons used during the tests. Moreover, since participants also reported higher rates of medically insignificant symptoms such as earlobe pain, scientists questioned whether some of the discrepancies were caused by participants' belief that something was wrong with them.

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> However, retired Cmdr. John Alderson, who served as a commanding officer of the five Army light tugs (numbered 2080, 2081, 2085, 2086 and 2087) that were a central part of the tests, said the study was incomplete because it failed to include many of the sailors who served on the tugs, at a test laboratory on Johnston Island ( a small island about 700 miles west of Pearl Harbor) and at a base near Pearl Harbor where the weapons were mixed. The study's director William Page confirmed Alderson's claims but said he could not be sure what effect the omission had on the findings because he did not know how many people were excluded or the severity of the illnesses they reported. Page said, "We got as many people on the light tugs as possible. They didn't have complete rosters. We would have loved to have included the light tug personnel, but we just couldn't find all of them". Alderson estimated that more than 500 sailors served on the tugs during the experiments. Neither he nor Page could say how many were included in the study, but Page admitted that the majority of tug sailors were never

contacted. The IOM report says tug crew members were exposed to a nerve agent, staph bacteria and bacterial agents that could cause rabbit fever and Q fever. Alderson said tug crew members were exposed to at least four other biological weapons not mentioned in the findings, but he said he could not name them because they are still classified. A second veteran confirmed Alderson's account, but asked not to be identified. Although the tugs' crews were required to stay inside during the tests, and state-of-the-art paper filters and specially designed air conditioning systems were used to protect the crews, the filters sometimes failed after they were soaked with sea water. Sensors in the boats' interior spaces periodically detected trace amounts of biological and chemical agents.

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> According to Navy officials the SHAD tests, which were classified until a few years ago, were conducted between 1962 and 1973 to determine whether Navy crews could be protected from chemical or biological attacks. Alderson said he thinks the study had a more nefarious purpose: to determine how effective American chemical and biological weapons could be against enemy navies. The five tugs were sent to sail in a line formation that could be as long as 100 miles. Two Marine A-4 Skyhawks would then drop substances close to the first ship. Scientists would measure readings on each ship to determine how far weapons clouds would travel before they dispersed to levels that were ineffective. The larger ships had simulants blown aft from their bows by giant fans or had them dropped from passing aircraft which were later found to be toxic. Alderson said, "One reason they say it took so long to notice problems, is that most of the skippers are dead from cancer or respiratory illnesses." Bernard Edelman, deputy director for policy and government affairs for the Vietnam Veterans of America, said sailors were given inoculations but that they were not entered on the sailor's medical records, meaning the sailors don't know what they received. We are still trying to uncover the facts, he said As Yogi Berra said, "It ain't over til it's over." [Source: NavyTimes Chris Amos article 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> DOD MENTAL HEALTH TF UPDATE 05: The Co-chairs of a recent DoD mental health task force pulled no punches at a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee on 12 JUL. Navy Surgeon General VADM Donald Arthur told the panel that military mental health programs and awareness had become deemphasized and atrophied over the last three decades in which the services experienced no sustained combat, and that urgent action is essential to meet spiraling mental health needs caused by repeated wartime deployments. "We must give equal attention to mental and physical health as we train for war," he said. He also stressed the important role of leadership emphasis and sensitivity to mental health issues in building members' resilience in the face of stress. Co-chair Dr. Shelley MacDermid, a Purdue University

professor and Director of the Military Family Research Institute, said the primary need is increased and permanent funding. The real key is to increase the number of military mental health professionals and increase Tricare reimbursement to providers to expand participation by civilian providers. She pointed out that payments to mental health providers were recently reduced, and that Tricare pays proportionally even less for mental health than for other conditions. In many cases, Tricare coverage is limited - not covering intensive outpatient therapy, for example. She highlighted that coverage for Guard and Reserve families is a particular problem, and that DoD needs to improve its coverage to 'hometown USA'. Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) Dr. S. Ward Cassells also testified at the hearing and endorsed the task force report, emphasizing that the need is for family members as well as servicemembers. He told the panel the top priority for DoD health care is mental health, indicating he expects to have an action plan by SEP 07. He emphasized the need to attack the stigma often associated with mental health, particularly for those worried about how it may affect their security clearances, and leadership opportunities. The Committee members indicated their strong support, but requested prioritization of the task force's top 10 issues out of the seven pages of recommendations and asked for specific funding amounts needed to address them. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 13 Jul 07 ++]

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> DOD DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM UPDATE 02: Wounded service personnel who allege that the government is downplaying their injuries and cheating them out of benefits have some new legal ammunition: three major law firms offering free legal services. Concerned that injured soldiers are getting a raw deal upon returning home, three firms - Foley & Lardner; Atlanta's King & Spalding; and New York's LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae - have offered to do pro bono work on behalf of veterans who are appealing low disability ratings made by the government. Those ratings dictate how much money injured veterans are entitled to, along with any medical and retirement benefits. According to attorneys, numerous veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have claimed that the military is underrating their injuries, thus shortchanging them of benefits they've earned. Ehren Halse, one of 15 King & Spalding attorneys, who has spoken with about 10 injured soldiers in the last week, noted that the bureaucracy and administrative procedures that involve disability rankings are confusing enough for attorneys, let alone injured soldiers who may not even be aware of their rights.

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> Walter Reed, U.S. Army and U.S. Department of Defense officials were unavailable for comment.

> Discrepancies in the disability rating system came to light about a year ago, when the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), a nonprofit organization

that guides injured veterans through the medical evaluation process, started spotting low ratings. The DAV investigation coincided with recent media reports that exposed poor conditions at Walter Reed, sparking a congressional investigation. Ronald Smith, deputy general counsel for DAV who has handled several disability claims on behalf soldiers said the demand for DAV services has been very high. To date, he knows of at least 30 cases at Walter Reed in which injured soldiers received substantially low ratings and are appealing their medical evaluations. Among those is Fred Ball, an explosion victim with two children who had a substantial part of his skull blown off in Iraq and a metal fragment embedded in his brain. According to Smith, the military should have given Ball a 100% disability rating, entitling him up to \$2,471 a month. Instead, he got a 10% rating, entitling him to \$337 a month. He's been declared unfit for duty, but not hurt enough to receive full benefits which Smith finds extremely troubling.

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> Participating attorneys will focus much of their energies on helping injured soldiers appeal their low disability rankings. They'll appear with the veterans at formal hearings before what is known as the Physical Evaluation Board. This is the panel that actually gives out the ratings based on a medical evaluation by military doctors. If veterans disagree with the rating, they then request a formal hearing before the board. Some lawyers also plan to appeal the soldiers' cases directly to the U.S. Court of Federal Claims in Washington, which has jurisdiction over disability ratings appeals. Among the key arguments that lawyers plan to make before the court is that the military is unlawfully operating outside the congressionally mandated Veterans Affairs disability-rating system, which dictates exactly how much soldiers will be compensated for their injuries or diseases. Under the existing guidelines, a 20% or lower rating entitles a veteran to one severance check and no other benefits. Ratings above 30% entitles a veteran and his family with lifetime benefits. [Source: New York Lawyer Tresa Baldes article 19Jun 07 ++]

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> DOD DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM UPDATE 03: A package of improvements in treatment and benefits for wounded service members - including some precedent-setting changes in DoD disability policies - was attached 12 JUL to the Senate's \$648 billion NDAA defense policy bill, approved by a 94-0 vote. The bill S.1606 initially introduced by Sen. Carl Levin (MI) called the Dignified Treatment of Wounded Warriors Act, would make a variety of changes in current policies, especially in helping troops whose injuries are so severe that they are unable to continue serving in the military and cannot get post-service treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill orders a review of all recent disability discharges where a service member received a lump-sum severance payment instead of the lifetime disability retired pay that would come from being rated with a disability of

30% or more. It would also radically change the entire military review process by assuming that anyone who has served in the military was physically and mentally fit before entering service.

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> The assumption of fitness, which would apply to anyone who has served at least six months, would prevent the services from deciding that a service member's post-deployment problems, especially mental health issues, were the result of a pre-service condition that does not warrant severance or disability pay. Anyone medically retired from the military for combat-related reasons would be eligible for three years of military health care after discharge, a move aimed at reducing problems getting post-service treatment. The bill would address concerns that the military's process for evaluating service members seems adversarial, and that the services - especially the Army - seem to consistently assign lower disability ratings than would be assigned by the VA by ordering the military to use the VA's disability ratings schedule unless the military's ratings are higher. The House of Representatives also included a wounded warrior package as part of its version of the defense authorization bill passed earlier this year, which means congressional negotiators who meet later this year to work out a compromise bill will face questions about treatment, medical retirement and other issues. [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 12 Jul 07 ++]

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> SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (SVAC): The Senate Veterans' Affairs

Committee (SVAC) was created in 1970 to transfer responsibilities for veterans from the Finance and Labor committees to a single panel. From 1947 to 1970, matters relating to veterans compensation and veterans generally were referred to the Committee on Finance, while matters relating to the vocational rehabilitation, education, medical care, civil relief, and civilian readjustment of veterans were referred to the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. Congressional legislation affecting veterans changed over the years. For the members of the armed forces and their families in the nation's early wars -- the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War and the Spanish-American War -- the response of the federal government had been essentially financial. This was clearly the legislative mission of the Senate Committee on Pensions which was created as one of the Senate's original standing committees in 1816 and continued until its termination in the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946.

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> During World War I the nature of the congressional response to veterans' needs changed towards a more diversified set of programs. A war risk insurance program, which was referred to the Senate Finance Committee, changed the consideration of veterans benefits in the Senate. The Finance Committee was the Senate standing committee most responsible for veterans programs from 1917 to 1946. After World War II, the Finance Committee

handled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the "GI Bill of Rights," which extended to servicemen and their families, a number of benefits including unemployment assistance, education, vocational training, housing and business loan guarantees, as well as the traditional medical and pension benefits of previous times. Many experts believe this law was one of the most important elements in the expansion of the middle class following World War II. The Veterans Affairs Committee had nine members in its initial congress, the 92nd Congress (1971-73). It now has a total of 14 members inclusive of its Chairman. At present Daniel K. Akaka from Hawaii is Chairman and Larry E. Craig from Idaho is the Ranking Member.

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> The Standing Rules of the Senate direct that to this committee shall be referred all proposed legislation, messages, petitions, memorials, and other matters relating to the following subjects:

> - Compensation of veterans.

> - Life insurance issued by the Government on account of service in the Armed Forces.

> - National cemeteries.

> - Pensions of all wars of the United States, general and special.

> - Readjustment of servicemen to civil life.

> - Soldiers' and sailors' civil relief.

> - Veterans' hospitals, medical care and treatment of veterans.

> - Veterans' measures generally.

> - Vocational rehabilitation and education of veterans.

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> The SVAC is an oversight, investigative, and legislative committee. It solicits and appreciates learning of problems, concerns, and areas of success that can be applied nationally to help all veterans. Input can be made at <http://veterans.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?pageid=1>. However, if you have a specific problem or need specific help with the VA or other federal agencies, the Senators from your home state can best assist you in that regard. Contact either one of your state's two Senators by referring to [http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm).

> [Source: <http://veterans.senate.gov/public/> Jul 07 ++]

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> SVAC UPDATE 01: The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) cleared five

bills during a Senate mark-up. The bills now move to the full Senate for a vote. Three of them should clear easily within a week, while the other two may require some debate. They are:

> - S. 1233 which would open enrollment to new Category 8 veterans who have been prevented from enrolling since JAN 03. Opponents of the measure argue that there is not sufficient funding to pay for the numbers of veterans who would have access to the VA. The DAV, PVA, VFW, and AMVET veteran organization's Independent Budget has asked for an additional \$1.3 billion

to fund their care.

> - S. 1315 which is a large omnibus benefits bill that would improve and expand VA insurance programs, adaptive housing grants and automobile assistance, among other enhancements. Critics, however, expressed concern that the benefits awarded to Filipino veterans would be too generous with respect to the lower cost-of-living in the Philippines.

> - S. 423 which would provide an annual cost-of-living adjustment for veterans' benefits should pass easily;

> - S. 1163 which would provide benefits to veterans with partial sight in their second eye should pass easily; and

> - S. 479 which would expand programs to deal with suicide prevention and other mental health problems among veterans should pass easily.

> [Source: VFW Washington Weekly 13 Jul 07 ++]

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> NDAA 2008 UPDATE 06: When the Senate returned from its Independence Day on

9 JUL, it immediately began deliberations on the 2008 NDAA. So far several very important amendments have been offered to the bill. These include:

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> - Amendment 2000 by Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL), which would end the deduction of VA survivor benefits from SBP annuities and would start the "paid-up" provision of SBP premiums this October instead of next year.

> - Amendment 2046 by Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) which is based on her bill S. 1444 known as the Supply Our Soldiers Act. The amendment would give deployed and wounded troops a voucher every other month to allow families and loved ones to be able to send a letter or small package free of postage.

> - Amendment 2018 by Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) to provide .5% pay increase over the Employment Cost Index (ECI) for the military in each of the next five years.

> - Amendment 2049 by Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) to lower retirement age for reservists who have served since 9/11.

> - An amendment by Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI) which would improve the capacity of VA to care for veterans with Traumatic Brain Injuries, extend the time from two years to five that a veteran would have to receive care from the VA upon their release from active duty, address potential homelessness among newly discharged servicemembers, ensure access to VA mental health and dental programs and recognize the importance of the National Guard and Reserve forces in VA's outreach programs. It also orders a review of all recent disability discharges where a service member received a lump-sum severance payment instead of the lifetime disability retired pay that would come from being rated with a disability of 30% or more, and calls for a review of DOD's entire disability ratings system, to include the use of VA standards to make disability determinations. The Senate has already accepted this amendment and incorporated it into the bill.

> - A joint amendment by Senators Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Hagel (R-NE) would

specify that the percentage increase in retiree TRICARE fees in any year can't exceed the percentage increase in retired pay.

> - An amendment by Sen. Lincoln (D-AR) would authorize 10 years of post-service benefit use by mobilized Guard and Reserve members (who now lose all benefits upon separation).

> - Amendment 2006 by Sen. Sessions (R-AL) would reimburse up to \$300 for drill-related travel expenses for drill periods conducted outside commuting distance.

> - An amendment by Sen. Landrieu (D-LA) would authorize tax credits for employers to help offset impacts of mobilizations on their businesses.

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> Other proposed amendments are:

> 2014 Hagel: Allow designation of portion of death gratuity

> 2015 Hagel: Expand family readiness council to include servicemembers and spouses

> 2016 Hagel: \$25K accession bonus for mental health professionals

> 2017 Hagel: G/R retirement age reduction proportional to longer service

> 2019 Levin: Wounded warrior bill passed by SASC

> 2026 Klobuchar: Allow unlimited sites for family assistance program  
(delete max of 6)

> 2027 Pryor: Authorize R&R for members whose Iraq tours extended to 15 mos

> 2029 Gregg: Protect child custody for deployees (like House)

> 2030 Gregg: Ban deployment of both member spouses (like House)

> 2031 Gregg: Support for children of deployed members

> 2032 Hagel: Limit to 12-month deployment

> 2034 Murray: Military family leave program

> 2035 Murray: Child care

> 2036 Murray: G/R benefits at discharge

> 2037 Coleman: Authorize 3% end strength variance (vice 2%) (like House)

> 2039 Coleman: Reserves eligible for assignment incentive pay

> 2040 Coleman: 3% end strength variance (dupe?)

> 2043 Durbin: Incentive programs for nurses

> 2047 Clinton: Transportation for additional people to burial ceremonies

> 2050 Chambliss: Report on patient satisfaction survey

> 2051 Coleman: G/R licensure

> 2054 Lieberman: Female mental health

> 2055 Lieberman: Info requirements for separatees

> 2056 Harkin: Family support for deployed members

> 2057 Feingold: Cell phone contract termination protection

> 2059 Cornyn: Cut fed funds to schools denying JROTC access

> 2060 Sanders: Gulf War Illness

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> The White House released its Statement of Administration Policy on the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. The document outlines the President's position on several components of the bill and stipulates his intention to veto potential amendments. Among the provisions that are not

supported by the White House are those relating to the Insurrection Act and reduced retirement age. Amendments that would likely draw a veto of the NDAA if passed include those relating to Iran, Guantanamo Bay, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. A copy of the statement can be found at the White House's Office of Management and Budget site at [www.whitehouse.gov/omb](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb). Veterans are encouraged to let their elected officials know how they feel about these and any other issues that affect them. This can be easily done by referring to website [www.naus.org](http://www.naus.org) and clicking the CapWiz area, selecting the issue of concern, and entering their zip code. Once the Senate completes action on the NDAA, the House and Senate will meet in conference to iron out differences and submit a single version of HR 1585, the Defense Authorization Act of 2008. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 13 Jul 77 ++]

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> WOUNDED WARRIOR ASSISTANCE UPDATE 02: The Wounded Soldier and Family

Hotline Call Center received more than 3,000 calls during the three months since it began operating 19 MAR. The line was established for soldiers and family members in response to scandals regarding unsatisfactory treatment and living conditions, and unconscionable delays in processing for evaluation and compensation for wounds at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Col. Ed Mason, director of the hotline, said that when a caller phones the hot line, the person who answers puts the caller in direct contact with the agency needed to address the problem. The hot line, staffed by Army officers and civilians at Human Resources Command in Alexandria VA, reports its findings to senior Army echelons in order to avoid the information vacuum that existed before the Walter Reed scandal broke. The Wounded Soldier and Family Hotline Call Center is at (800) 984-8523. [Source: Armed Forces News Issue 13 Jul 07 ++]

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> RESERVE RETIREMENT AGE UPDATE 11: Senator Chambliss introduced S. 648

earlier in this session of the 110th Congress to reduce age 60 as the age in which members of the Reserve Component are eligible to receive retirement pay. S.648 as originally introduced would have amended Title 10 to reduce the eligible age for receipt of non-regular military service retired pay for members of the Ready Reserve in active federal status or on active duty for significant periods on or after September 11, 2001 (i.e. age to be reduced by three months for each 90 days of being called to active duty for Title 10 wartime duty or Title 32 response for a national emergency declared by the President). Under this provision, the age may not be reduced below 50 years of age. The Senate Armed Services Committee in its markup of the National Defense Authorization Act, S. 1547, incorporated most of S. 648 but would credit only qualifying service after the legislation is enacted, not any

active duty service retroactive to September 11, 2001. To correct this inequity Senator Chambliss has offered a Senate floor amendment to the Fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, SA 2049, to restore the key omitted language of S. 648 by crediting all qualifying active duty service on or after 9/11. The National guard Association of the United states (NGAUS) is asking all concerned to contact their legislators to support this amendment. This can easily be dne by referring to [www.ngaus.org/content.asp?bid=1805&False](http://www.ngaus.org/content.asp?bid=1805&False) and entering your zip cod. [Source: NGAUS Leg Alert 13 Jul 07 ++]

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> VA CEMETERY IOWA: Ensuring that Iowa veterans have a final resting place to honor their service to the nation, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the award of a \$7.6 million grant to establish a new state veterans' cemetery in Van Meter. The Iowa Veterans Cemetery, the first state veterans' cemetery in Iowa, will be located in Dallas County near Des Moines. Nearly 70,000 veterans and their families live within its service area. The grant will pay 100% of allowable costs for the cemetery's construction, which is scheduled to begin this fall. It also covers construction of nearly 10,000 full-casket gravesites, 750 in-ground cremation sites, 768 columbarium niches, a memorial walkway, a storage building, utilities, landscaping and irrigation. Interments are expected to begin in the fall of 2008. Keokuk National Cemetery, operated by VA in the southeastern part of the state, has space available to accommodate both casketed and cremated remains. VA's State Cemetery Grants Program complements VA's 125 national cemeteries across the country. The program helps states establish, expand or improve veterans cemeteries. To date, the VA program has helped establish 66 state veterans' cemeteries in 35 states, Saipan and Guam, which provided more than 22,000 burials in fiscal year 2006. VA has awarded 155 grants totaling more than \$283 million. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the VA Web site on the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000. Information about Iowa's state veterans cemetery can be obtained from the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs at <http://www.iowava.org/asp/cemetaries.asp> or (515) 242-5331. [Source: VA Press Release 12 Jul 07 ++]

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> VA CEMETERY WISCONSIN: Continuing its mission of providing a final resting place for Wisconsin veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced the award of a \$622,580 grant to the state to expand the Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spooner. The grant will pay for the construction of 460 full-casket burial sites, 444 in-ground cremation burial sites, 704 columbarium niches, a memorial walkway, a storage building, utilities, landscaping and irrigation. The Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery, which began interments in 2000, was

also developed through VA's State Cemetery Grants Program. VA funded two other state veterans' cemeteries in Wisconsin: the Central Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in King, and the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Union Grove. VA's State Cemetery Grants Program complements VA's 125 national cemeteries across the country. The program helps states establish, expand or improve state veterans cemeteries. To date, the VA state cemetery program has helped establish 66 veterans' cemeteries in 35 states, Saipan and Guam, which provided more than 22,000 burials in 2006. Since the program began in 1980, VA has awarded 154 grants totaling more than \$276 million. Information about Wisconsin's veterans cemeteries can be obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs at <http://dva.state.wi.us/Cemeteries.asp> or 608-261-0179. For more info on VA burial benefits refer to from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices at 1(800) 827-1000. [Source: VA News release 10 Jul 07 ++]

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> BRAVE & GIVE ACTS: Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD-03) introduced legislation on

29 JUN that if approved will streamline the process in which disabled war veterans receive government benefits. The Benefit Rating Acceleration for Veterans Entitlement Act (H.R.2953), or BRAVE Act will allow a veteran who receives a 100% disability rating from the VA to receive Social Security benefits quicker than the prolonged waiting period now in place. The legislation, currently has 37 cosponsors and has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.. "If you're a veteran and you're deemed 100% disabled ... the Social Security Administration still makes you go through a lengthy process," said Pia Carusone, a spokeswoman for Sarbanes. "If the VA says you're 100% disabled, the Social Security needs to agree with that, and expedite the process."

> Additionally, Sarbanes offered an amendment to the Generations Invigorating Volunteering and Education Act (H.R.2857) or GIVE Act, that seeks to support our nations veterans and veterans service organizations. The National Conversation on Veterans and Community Service amendment was accepted by a unanimous vote in the final mark up of the GIVE Act and passed by the Education and Labor Committee. The Sarbanes' amendment would require:

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> 1.) The Corporation for National and Community Service, in conjunction with Veterans Service Organizations, the Department of Veterans Affairs, State Veterans Agencies, the Department of Defense and other organizations deemed appropriate by the Corporation, to initiate a "National Conversation". It would identify:

> - specific areas of need for veterans.

> - how existing volunteer corps and programs could better serve veterans.

- > - gaps in service to veterans.
- > - prospects for better coordination of services.
- > - prospects for better utilization of veterans as resources and volunteers.
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- > 2.) A report on the results of the conversation, together with a plan for a pilot program using promising strategies and approaches for better serving and utilizing the talents of veterans, which would be transmitted to Congress not later than one year following the date of enactment of this Act.
- > 3.) Implementation of the pilot program based on the findings of the report above.
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- > The GIVE Act was voted out of the Education and Labor Committee on 27 JUN by a vote of 46-0 and will reach the House floor for passage in the coming weeks. [Source: Rep. John Sarbanes Press Release 11 Jul 07 ++]
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- > VA HOMELESS VETS UPDATE 05: Homeless veterans in 37 states will get more assistance, thanks to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) selection of 92 community organizations to receive funds for transitional housing this year. VA has identified the public and community non-profit groups eligible to receive payments for housing and supportive services to homeless veterans through three VA programs:
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  - > \* Fifty-three organizations will receive \$10 million to provide about 1,000 transitional housing beds under VA's per diem program;
  - > \* Thirty-six groups will receive \$12 million for programs for homeless veterans who are seriously mentally ill, women, including women with children, frail elderly or terminally ill;
  - > \* Three organizations will receive about \$2 million for various technical assistance projects.
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  - > The grants are part of VA's continuing efforts to reduce homelessness among veterans. VA has the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country. In many cities and rural areas, VA social workers and other clinicians working with community and faith-based partners conduct extensive outreach programs, clinical assessments, medical treatments, alcohol and drug abuse counseling and employment assistance. Much work remains to be done, but the partnership effort is making significant progress. Today, it is estimated that fewer than 200,000 veterans may be homeless on an average night, which represents a 20% reduction during the past six years. For more info about VA's homeless programs refer to <http://www.va.gov/homeless>. [Source: VA News Release 11 Jul 07 ++]

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> TUITION AID FOR RC: The federal GI Bill has provided education benefits to veterans since 1944. Under the current program full-time servicemembers get up to \$37,500 (not including \$1,200 they must pay in). It can be used for up to 10 years after they leave the military. The Reserve contingent (RC) National Guard and Reserve get \$11,124 (with increases for consecutive service of 90 days or more). It can be used only while in the Guard and Reserve. A growing number of states are cutting college tuition for recent veterans in a show of gratitude, but also in some cases to fill gaps in the federal GI Bill. Though most of the state laws honor veterans for their sacrifices, some also address disparities between the treatment of members of the regular military (Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force) and of RC troops, over whom states have jurisdiction. Today, every state offers some sort of tuition benefit for members of its National Guard units. With about 240,000 more Guard members (many of them college students) deployed to combat zones since 9/11, many state legislators are looking for ways to help them and other recent veterans. State benefits typically are available only to those attending state-supported institutions and who meet certain academic requirements. Following are highlights of recent developments for the RC:

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> Alabama - No tuition breaks for veterans, but since 2003, tuition has been waived for spouses and children of National Guard members called to active duty in Iraq.

> Alaska - A bill enacted this year is designed to ensure that a tuition waiver program for Guard members is fully funded.

> Arizona - A tuition waiver for widows and children under 30 of U.S. soldiers killed in the line of duty goes into effect Sept. 9. A tuition proposal this year that would have benefited current or former Guard members who have received a Purple Heart since 9/11 did not pass.

> Arkansas - A 2005 resolution encourages state schools to participate in a partial tuition waiver for Guard members. Under federal law, state Guard members can have 75% of their tuition waived at a state-sponsored institution. Schools that choose to participate cover the remaining 25%.

> California - California doesn't reduce or eliminate tuition or fees for veterans in state-supported colleges. A pending bill would waive resident fees for Californians after they leave active duty and exhaust federal GI Bill benefits. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the democratically controlled Legislature currently are at odds over his proposal for a \$1.7 million college-fees assistance program for National Guard members to aid recruitment and retention.

> Colorado - A law this month makes members of the armed forces and their dependents eligible for in-state tuition if the member gets stationed in Colorado. A proposal that did not pass would have allowed schools to seek reimbursement from the state for refunds given to activated military

personnel.

- > Connecticut - The state has waived tuition for veterans since 1974; legislation did not pass this year that would have expanded the benefits to include fees.
- > Delaware - No legislation has been introduced or passed that would waive or reduce tuition for recent veterans enrolled in state-supported colleges or universities.
- > Florida - Proposals this year that would have required state universities and community colleges to waive a percentage of the in-state tuition rate for veterans did not pass. Last year, Purple Heart veterans became eligible for tuition waivers.
- > Georgia - In 2005, the state passed the HERO (Helping Educate Reservists and their Offspring) Scholarship for Guard and Reservists who, as of May 3, 2003, served in a combat zone.
- > Hawaii - Bills to waive tuition for Hawaii National Guard members to attend state schools have been introduced nearly every year for the last few years, but none have passed.
- > Idaho - A 2004 law says Guard members called up for duty beyond training for 30 days or more will have lost tuition refunded.
- > Illinois - Veterans have generally been given a free ride at state schools since 1920, but state funding in recent years has come up short. A proposal this year would ensure colleges that absorb the cost get reimbursed by the state.
- > Indiana - Legislation this year that would have provided free tuition to state universities for Indiana National Guard members called to active duty since Sept. 10, 2001, died.
- > Iowa - The state last year expanded a longstanding War Orphans Fund to include dependents of soldiers killed in action in a combat zone after 9/11.
- > Kansas - The state Legislature this year for the first time appropriated \$250,000 for scholarships for Kansans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan for at least 90 days after 9/11. The Kansas Board of Regents plans to distribute the funds on a first-come, first-served basis.
- > Kentucky - Tuition waivers for children and spouses of disabled and deceased National Guard and armed forces members were changed this year to increase the age of eligible children from 23 to 26 and to extend waivers from 36 to 45 months.
- > Louisiana - No new tuition legislation was introduced in 2007. A 2005 law exempts some Guard members from all or part of tuition imposed by certain Louisiana public institutions.
- > Maine - A bill introduced in the 2007 session that would have established a tuition waiver for veterans did not pass.
- > Maryland - The Legislature created a scholarship for veterans who fought in Iraq or Afghanistan since 9/11, and funded it this year at \$500,000. Available to eligible applicants on a first-come, first-served basis, it has been offered to at least 67 veterans and 41 dependents.
- > Massachusetts - The state waives tuition, but not fees, for all veterans.

Fees were waived for the first time last year for Guard members. A fee waiver for all veterans was reintroduced this year. Fees can represent up to 75% of college costs.

> Michigan - A pending proposal would waive tuition for recent veterans and the families of soldiers killed in action. Since 2005, Michigan has had tuition grants for the children of veterans who are killed, missing in action or are permanently disabled.

> Minnesota - Veterans attending public or private colleges in the state who served in the armed forces on or after 9/11, and who have exhausted other federal and state benefits, can be reimbursed \$1,000 per semester up to \$10,000 under a law that took effect this month. This also applies to Minnesota National Guard members with five years or more of service and surviving spouses and children of those who died serving in the military on or after 9/11. The state allocated \$52,000 to extend education benefits to spouses, as well as children, of soldiers killed in action.

> Mississippi - A handful of bills were introduced this past session, which ended in the spring. One passed; it expands tuition assistance for National Guard members to include room and board. No new funds were appropriated.

> Missouri - In April, lawmakers debated but ultimately failed to approve a bill that would give combat veterans a 75% reduction in credit-hour costs. The bill may have failed because of high revenue losses that state universities likely would see. The University of Missouri, for example, projected a \$1.3 million tuition shortfall if the bill had passed. The second-largest public university, Missouri State University, projected an \$850,000 tuition shortfall, with no state money earmarked to make up the difference.

> Montana - The state since 1989 allows state colleges and universities to waive tuition for veterans. That program was expanded in 1997 to include waivers for National Guard members.

> Nebraska - No new legislation regarding tuition assistance for veterans or Guard members was introduced this year. In 2005, a bill was enacted that changed the tuition waiver for Guard members from 50% to 100%. Tuition has long been waived for dependents of veterans killed in combat.

> Nevada - Lawmakers in 2005 made permanent 2003 legislation guaranteeing free tuition at state universities and colleges for Nevada National Guard members, including recruits. Lawmakers also approved legislation to reimburse Guard members for textbook expenses.

> New Hampshire - A bill effective July 1 establishes a tuition voucher program for Guard members and changes the source of funding of Guard tuition assistance from schools to the state.

> New Jersey - In January, a law passed that extended eligibility for tuition to former members of the New Jersey National Guard and increased the number of tuition-free credits available to Guard members and dependents. It extends the eligibility to 16 credits per semester and allows Guard members whose education was interrupted by their duty to continue to receive the free tuition benefit following discharge for one semester or a period of

time equal to their length of deployment, whichever is longer. In the event of medical discharge as a result of illness or combat injury, a Guard member who was enrolled in a degree program can continue to receive the free tuition benefit through completion or for five years. Last year, New Jersey prohibited public colleges and universities from imposing non-resident tuition fees on members of the state Guard and their surviving children or spouses if the member was killed in the line of duty.

> New Mexico - Legislation that was introduced this year but did not pass would have extended a scholarship for Vietnam veterans to include recent veterans. Certain dependents of combat veterans are eligible for full tuition waivers.

> New York - Several bills that would have increased tuition awards for veterans died in the New York Legislature. Currently, veterans are eligible for awards of \$1,000 per semester for full-time study or \$500 per semester for part-time study.

> North Carolina - Lawmakers this year proposed helping National Guard members pay off their student loans. It would be another expansion of the state's tuition assistance program for the Guard, following changes in 2005 that raised the maximum tuition payment and provided money for buying textbooks. The tuition breaks, funded out of the state budget, help students at public and private colleges. Another recent change in tuition laws has allowed active-duty military personnel stationed in North Carolina, and their dependents, to take advantage of in-state tuition rates at public universities. Lawmakers this year have proposed expanding that benefit to all Defense Department employees, which would mean universities would lose revenue.

> North Dakota - A 2005 law waives tuition for dependents of deceased veterans. A bill passed this year extends Guard tuition assistance to include all accredited post-secondary schools.

> Ohio - No tuition-related laws passed recently to benefit recent veterans; a 2004 law requires public and private colleges to grant leave to students called to active duty and either refund or offer credit for tuition paid.

Also in 2004, legislators expanded eligibility for a 25-year-old Ohio War Orphans Scholarship Program to include Iraq veterans' families.

> Oklahoma - No tuition assistance is offered to combat veterans. A bill currently pending would require the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to provide a tuition grant program for National Guard members taking graduate or professional courses.

> Oregon - Under a proposal passed this year and expected to take effect this fall, resident student-veterans would receive up to \$150 a month for up to 36 months. The aid could be used only after the student had exhausted federal GI Bill benefits.

> Pennsylvania - A state agency extended the eligibility period for the Armed Forces Loan Forgiveness Program to the end of this year. The program forgives loans of up to \$2,500 for veterans who haven't defaulted and who were on active duty between 9/11 and Dec. 31, 2007.

> Rhode Island - While colleges are given state-appropriated money for Guard members, there has been little legislative action for combat veterans or their dependents. In 2005, a bill failed that would have given military Reserve members the same tuition assistance that is now offered to Guard members.

> South Carolina - In South Carolina, Gov. Mark Sanford last month signed into law a bill that will offer members of the National Guard free tuition at state-supported colleges and universities and some private institutions. Another bill that would provide tuition assistance for full-time military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan was introduced and is expected to go forward next year. The state also offers free tuition to the children of veterans who were killed, wounded or are missing in action. The new National Guard tuition program pays all tuition and fees up to \$18,000. The Legislature appropriated \$1.3 million for tuition grants for that program and another \$1.7 million for a program that pays student loans for Guard members.

> South Dakota - No legislation was introduced in 2007 pertaining to special tuition rates for veterans. But there were several laws passed in 2006 and 2004 that improved educational access for military members and their families:

> Tennessee - The state this year will begin freezing college tuition for members of the Reserves or the National Guard if they are mobilized for at least six months of active duty. The law went into effect on June 25. Under this law, if a Reservist or Guard member is enrolled at a state school at the time their status changes to active duty, all school fees will be frozen at the rate when they departed school. The University of Tennessee system this August will increase tuition 6%. Upon their return, fees would not increase for a time period equal to one year plus the amount of time served on active duty. The offer is good only for servicemembers who complete their military obligations under honorable conditions and who re-enroll in a state school within six months from release of active duty.

> Texas - Congress tweaked its 84-year-old tuition exemption so that veterans can use both the federal GI Bill and the state exemption in the same semester.

> Utah - A law this year waives undergraduate tuition at state institutions of higher education for surviving dependents of Utah resident military members killed while serving in federal active duty.

> Vermont - The 2004 Armed Services Scholarship expanded an existing benefit for children of National Guard members to also include Guard members, military veterans and spouses and children for both.

> Virginia - The state this year created an in-state tuition benefit for active-duty servicemembers and for activated members of the National Guard and Reserve who are stationed in Virginia but are not Virginia residents.

> Washington - Colleges are not required to waive tuition, but because waivers are available, legislation enacted last year directs state colleges and universities to take steps that would help them identify and assist

veterans who need financial aid. Beginning this month, tuition and fees will be waived for dependents of combat veterans who are totally disabled, reported missing or killed in combat.

> West Virginia - Beginning this month, tuition is waived for honorably discharged veterans who earned a Purple Heart. Legislators also passed a bill that covers tuition costs for active-duty National Guard members pursuing a master's degree.

> Wisconsin - In 2006, Wisconsin passed legislation that waived 100% of tuition for veterans, up from a 50% waiver, enacted in 2005. But as the program's costs balloon, some lawmakers want to stop funding graduate school tuition and create a 10-year limit for claiming benefits.

> Wyoming - Since 2006, Wyoming has had free tuition for overseas combat veterans, as well as widows, and orphans of deceased veterans. The state reimburses the schools for waiving tuition.

> [Source: USA Today article 10 Jul 07 ++]

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> FLORIDA VET BENEFITS UPDATE 03: Gov. Charlie Crist on 11 JUL paid tribute to the military services with the ceremonial signing of four new laws passed in the Florida 2007 legislative session. Tammy Wise-Thrash attended the ceremonial signing of the law named for her son, an Army specialist who was killed in Iraq in 2003. The Robert A. Wise Military Protection Act increases civil penalties for unauthorized use of photos or other images of military members on commercial products. After Wise was killed, his picture was used on anti-war T-shirts, without his family's permission. Sen. Jeff Atwater, R-Palm Beach Gardens, said hucksters have peddled phone cards and other products with photos of service members, preying on the patriotism of potential purchasers. The bill provides fines up to \$1,000 per item for products depicting service members without family authorization. Brandon Hensler, a spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, said there could be First Amendment problems if the law is selectively enforced. He said a person or family can protect names and images from commercial exploitation, but that use of news photos or other information "in the public domain" is protected in political demonstrations. Other new laws would:

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> - Extend need-based emergency financial assistance to service members and dependents for up to 120 days after members leave active duty, to help with housing and other living expenses as they return to civilian life.

> - Provide a permanent hiring preference for veterans seeking jobs with state government. Previously, the veterans' preference could be used only once.

> - Provide greater property tax relief for wounded veterans. Under the new law, a veteran with a combat-related disability would get a tax reduction in proportion to their disability classification. Rep. Stan Jordan, R-Jacksonville, said that under his bill, a veteran with a 75% disability

would get a 75% cut in property taxes. The exemption applies only to veterans over age 65 who were Florida residents when they joined the service.

> [Source: Pensacola News Journal ill Cotterell article 11 Jul 07 ++]

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> INDIANA VET INITIATIVES UPDATE 02: The Indiana Military Family Leave Act

Public Law 151 is taking effect 1 JUL. The act will extend employment protections to Indiana resident family members in of military personnel. The law allows a relative of a military member called to active duty to take up to 10 days of unpaid leave per year from his job. The leave can be taken prior to deployment, during leave or after a tour of duty is completed. The law only applies to employers with 50 or more employees. Employees that are covered under the law must have worked for the business for 12 months, have worked at least 1,500 hours during the last year for the company and be a spouse, parent, grandparent or sibling of the military member, and must give their employers 30 days notice that they intend to take the leave.

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> A number of other measures that benefit past and present members of the Hoosier military will be enacted into law on 1 JUL that will:

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> - Give National Guard members priority placement in any employment or training program administered by the Indiana Department of Workforce Management.

> - Enable all males aged 16-26 to register for the Selective Service at any branch of the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). Registering for the Selective Service entitles young men to various benefits, including access to student loans and eligibility for state or federal jobs. Indiana was one of only 12 states not equipped to handle Selective Service registration at the BMV. As a result, only 77% of qualified 18 year old men in Indiana are currently registered for the Selective Service. The BMV is required to have this system in place by January 2009.

> - Extend the six year time frame that a National Guard member has to use their scholarship benefits if he or she is deployed into active duty.

> - Establish employment qualifications for the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs.

> - Extend eligibility for resident tuition rates at a state college or university to all active duty soldiers stationed in Indiana and their dependents.

> - Provide for honorary diplomas being awarded to Korea or Vietnam conflict veterans who were unable to complete their high-school education because of their involvement. the opportunity.

> [Source: Indiana House Democratic Caucus 29 Jun 07 ++]

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> LCD SCREEN CLEANING: Last week I woke up from a nap to find my 3 year old

grandson had found a Sharpie Permanent Marker pen on my desk and with it used my laptop LCD screen for a drawing board. I went to several places that sell computers and they could not tell me how to remove these black marks without damaging the screen. I subsequently mentioned the problem at the doctor's office and the receptionist told me to try a Magic Eraser made by Mr. Clean and sold at WalMart. Following the instructions I wet a small part of the sponge like eraser and using single straight gentle strokes found to my surprise the black marks disappeared. I do not recommend this for general LCD cleaning for which there are many products available. I tried a couple of these more expensive products and they would not remove the marks. If you experience a particular difficult mark/stain to remove on your computer or TV LCD screen you might try a Magic Eraser. [Source: Editor, RAO Bulletin 10 July 07]

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> SILVER STAR: The Silver Star is the is the fourth highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of any branch of the United States Armed Forces and the third highest award given for valor (in the face of the enemy). Well-known recipients include: Lt. Col. Oliver North, Generals George S. Patton and Douglas MacArthur, Senators John Kerry and John McCain. The Silver Star honors service personnel who display exceptional valor while engaged in military combat operations against an enemy force. Personnel can also be honored for their service with friendly foreign troops in combat situations, even if the opposing force is one that the U.S. is not engaged in military conflict with. It also can be awarded posthumously. In 1944, four nurses became the first female recipients of the Silver Star. 1st Lt. Mary Roberts, 2nd Lt. Elaine Roe, 2nd Lt. Virginia Rourke, and 2nd Lt. Ellen Ainsworth (posthumous) were cited for their bravery in successfully evacuating the 33rd Field Hospital at Anzio, Italy on 10 FEB. They remained the sole female recipients until Leigh Ann Hester was awarded the Silver Star in 2005. Acts of heroism that earn a Silver Star, though not deserving of a Distinguished Service Cross or a Medal of Honor, must have been "performed with marked distinction."

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> The Silver Star was first awarded in 1932 to replace the Citation Star, which had been pinned on the ribbon of a service medal and given for gallantry from the Spanish-American War to World War I. The U.S. military then allowed World War I veterans to apply to have the Citation Star converted to the Silver Star. Despite its name, the medal is mostly gold. Gold rays emanate from a tiny silver star, encircled by a golden laurel wreath and then a larger gold star. The pendant hangs from a ribbon striped in red, white and blue. An inscription on the back reads "For gallantry in action." The Silver Star is awarded to a recipient in person, and usually with a ceremony. A commander-in-theater with at least the rank of three-star

general must recognize the recipient for acts of valor. The next lower in precedence award is the Defense Superior Service Medal. Any false verbal, written or physical claim to the Silver Star, by an individual to whom it has not been awarded, is a federal felony offense punishable by up to a year in jail and up to a \$10000 fine. [Source: About.com U.S. Military Rod Powers article Jul 07 ++]

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> OKINAWA AGENT ORANGE USE: According to a board ruling uncovered by Kyodo

News the U.S. Board of Veterans' Appeals found in 1998 that the hazardous chemical defoliant Agent Orange was most likely used in Okinawa, and ruled in favor of a former U.S. service member who sought compensation for prostate cancer he blamed on his work there in the early 1960s. The discovery comes as the Defense Department has still to confirm whether Agent Orange was stored or used in Okinawa during the Vietnam War that ended in 1975. In its ruling, issued on 13 JAN 98, the board concluded that "credible evidence sustains a reasonable probability that the veteran was exposed to dioxins while serving in Okinawa." The board further said it was granting him service-connected disability compensation "for prostate cancer as being the result of Agent Orange exposure" while in Okinawa between 1960 and 1961. It found entirely believable his testimony about the U.S. military's mixing, storage and even use of Agent Orange in Okinawa at a time when Japan's southernmost prefecture was still under the control of the United States, which used it as a strategic transport hub during the Vietnam War.

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> Agent Orange, a herbicide mixture containing the highly toxic substance dioxin, was sprayed by U.S. military aircraft over the southern portion of Vietnam from 1961 to 1971 to clear jungles and deny cover to communist fighters. It has since been blamed for numerous health problems, including various types of cancer and birth defects. The former service member, who worked as a motor transport operator on Okinawa Island but had never been to Vietnam, said in his testimony that while Agent Orange was mainly used to defoliate trees and shrubbery in lush war zones like Vietnam, "in Okinawa, we had other uses for it, particularly near base camp perimeters." He said herbicides thought to include Agent Orange were sprayed from trucks or backpacks along roadsides, used for landscaping and also taken to the densely forested northern part of Okinawa Island to clear foliage to facilitate war game maneuvers there. Subtropical Okinawa's heavy rainfall, he said, created a demand for non-water-soluble defoliants such as Agent Orange that would not just wash away with the next rain. He testified that personnel were not told or warned about the hazards of the herbicides that they were handling, nor were they issued any protective clothing".

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> As recently as NOV 04, DoD stated that it has been unable to find any records of Agent Orange being used or stored on Okinawa Island during the

Vietnam War era. The statement came in response to queries made in JUL 04 by then U.S. Rep. Lane Evans, a ranking Democrat on the House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs, who wrote to then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld requesting any information on the use or storage of Agent Orange on Okinawa. That was replied to by Gen. Richard Myers, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who told Evans in NOV 04 that "records contain no information linking use or storage of Agent Orange or other herbicides in Okinawa." Myers further said there was "no record of any spills, accidental or otherwise, of Agent Orange. Therefore, there are no recorded occupational exposures of service members in Okinawa to Agent Orange or similar herbicides." The Board of Veterans' Appeals ruling said that while the U.S military had been "generally unable to document the use of herbicides in Okinawa," experts who attempted to verify specific dioxin exposure there "do not negate that possibility."

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> Hundreds more former U.S. service members who were stationed in Okinawa during the Vietnam War have lodged medical compensation claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, citing Agent Orange exposure, according to information viewable online in the archives of the Board of Veterans' Appeals. But most cases have either been denied or sent for review on the grounds of insufficient evidence linking their illnesses to Agent Orange exposure. The various documents surface at a time when Washington and Tokyo are realigning the U.S. military presence in Japan following years of protests from Okinawans who have long complained about crime, noise and crowding associated with U.S. bases on the island since the end of World War II in 1945. U.S. bases occupy about 20 percent of Okinawa's land area and have also been viewed as being a large part of the island's environmental problems. Under the realignment, about 4,000 hectares of the 7,800-hectare U.S. jungle warfare training area in northern Okinawa, mentioned as a place where Agent Orange was sprayed, are due to be handed back to Japan. Kunitoshi Sakurai, president of Okinawa University who specializes in environmental engineering, expressed concern over the possibility of residual dioxin there, pointing out that the northern area is the source of most of Okinawa's water supply. [Source: Marine Corp Times 9 Jul 07 ++]

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> IDENTITY THEFT UPDATE 08: Are you as safe as you think you are? Take the

identity fraud safety test at [www.idsafety.net](http://www.idsafety.net). In 2006 identity theft affected 8.4 million Americans, resulted in \$49.3 billion in losses, and cost victims an average of \$587 in out-of-pocket costs plus 40 hours of their time to resolve. Of identified thieves 53% were known by their victims. Obtaining your personal information without your permission is considered identity theft. Use of that data to commit fraud or theft is considered identity fraud. Months or years and thousands of dollars are spent each year cleaning up the mess the thieves have made of good names

and

credit records. Identity theft results in loss of job opportunities, loans for education and weddings, housing, cars, or even arrests for crimes people didn't commit. Despite the best efforts of many victims, skilled identity thieves gain access to their data through:

- > - Stolen wallets and purses.

- > - Stealing your mail or diverting your mail to another location.

- > - Rummaging through your trash, or the trash of businesses, for personal data in a practice known as "dumpster diving."

- > - Fraudulently obtaining your credit report.

- > - Obtaining information from the businesses in a practice known as "business record theft" (customer, employee, patient or student; bribing an employee who has access to your files; or "hacking" into electronic files).

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- > ATM use can expose users to a practice known as skimming through equipment designed to obtain your card information. Equipment typically used is:

- > . False fronts on terminals with built in magnetic stripe readers.

- > . Hidden cameras to capture you entering your PIN with the information being transmitted to a nearby crook. Recent cases have Bluetooth transmission to a remote receiver

- > . Sniffing devices installed in ATMs that can capture the credit or debit card PIN and magnetic stripe information before encryption. These devices are small enough to fit in the palm of your hand and can capture over 2500 credit card account numbers, expiration dates and CVV codes. The units which cost about \$500 can operate continuously for 40 hours on a single 3V battery (6000 swipes) and are designed to erase all info with the press of a button by the user to avoid prosecution. .

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- > Phishing is another instrument of identity theft. They scam you, often through email, by posing as legitimate companies or government agencies you do business with. Last year 73 million adult email users reported receiving more than 50 phishing emails during the year. Of these, 11 million reported clicking on the links provided in the messages and 2.42 million reported losing money because of phishing attacks (\$929 million). Pay Pal and E bay are the top spoofed sites. Citibank is the primary bank target for phishing scams. The following guidance can be used to determine if a message is a phishing action:

- > 1.) Does the email ask you to go to a website and verify personal information? Banks won't ask you to verify your personal information in response to an email.

- > 2.) What is the tone of the mail? Most phish emails convey a sense of urgency by threatening discontinued service or information loss if you don't take immediate action.

- > 3.) What is the quality of the email? Many phish emails have misspellings, bad grammar, or poor punctuation.

- > 4.) Are the links in the email valid? Deceptive links in phishing emails

look like they are to a valid site, but deliver you to a fraudulent one. Many times you can see if the link is legitimate by just moving your mouse over the link.

> 5.) Is the email personalized with your name and applicable account information? Many phish emails use generic salutations and generic information (e.g. Dear Customer or Dear Account Holder) instead of your name.

> 6.) What is the sender's email address? Many phish emails come from an email address not from the company represented in the email.

> 7.) When in doubt type the valid web address of the alleged sender directly into your web browser. If you suspect an email to be phishing, don't click on any links in the email. .

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> With Your Personal Information, Identity Thieves can Counterfeit checks or credit/debit cards on open accounts, Change the mailing address on your accounts, Open a new credit card, checking or wireless account, file for bankruptcy under your name, buy cars by taking out auto loans in your name, use your identity during an arrest, etc. Risk cannot be eliminated but it can be minimized by:

> - Placing passwords on your credit card, bank and phone accounts.

> - Using a Firewall and Virus Protection and Anti-Spyware Software.

> - Securing personal information in your home.

> - Asking about information security procedures in your workplace.

> - Routinely ordering a copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus. This can be done by phone at 1-877-322-8228 or online at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com).

> - Knowing when your bills should arrive and following up if they do not.

> - Not giving out personal information on the phone, mail or over the Internet.

> - Guarding your mail and trash from theft.

> - Carrying only the identification information and credit and debit cards that you'll actually need.

> - Giving your SSN only when absolutely necessary.

> - Being wary of promotional scams and keeping your purse or wallet in a safe place at work.

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> If you are a victim you can receive free and confidential assistance from trained counselors at 1-866-ID-HOTLINE. Your first 5 steps should be:

> 1.) Notify Credit Bureaus and review your credit reports.

> 2.) File a report with your local police or the police in the community where the identity theft took place.

> 3.) Contact the Fraud Department of Creditors.

> 4.) File a complaint with the FTC.

> 5.) Close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.

> [Source: NCMA World Congress Briefing 22 Apr 07 ++]

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> TSGLI UPDATE 01: Service members who have suffered serious injuries resulting from their wartime service are reminded they can get financial help thanks to two congressionally legislated programs. Congress established the Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) program in 2005 in response to the experiences of some former and current military members who found themselves financially strapped after they suffered severe injuries during the war on terrorism. Coverage applies to active-component and reserve-component members. This program provides up to \$100,000 per event, depending on [the type of] injury. All service members covered under the Servicemembers Group Life Insurance program, whether active duty, reserve or National Guard, were enrolled for TSGLI coverage on 1 DEC 05. To date, the Army has paid out a total of more than \$126 million under TSGLI, The TSGLI benefit has both retroactive and prospective aspects. The benefit is provided retroactively for service members who suffered severe combat-zone-related injuries between 7 OCT 01, and 1 DEC 05. The prospective aspect applies to service members with injuries received "any time, anywhere" from Dec. 1, 2005, forward. [Source: TSGLI Army Human Resources Command Chief Col. John Sackett 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> CBO MILITARY COMPENSATION REPORT UPDATE 01: The House and Senate Armed Services Committees have both endorsed a small improvement over the Pentagon proposed 3% military pay raise for 2008. Both agreed with The Military Coalition (TMC) that Congress hasn't yet eliminated the pay gap caused by decades of capping military raises below private sector pay growth, and bumped the 2008 raise to 3.5%. The House of Representatives went a step further, approving a plan to reduce the current 3.9% shortfall by one-half percentage point a year for the next five years. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported to the Senate Budget Committee on 29 JUN that the full compensation package for active-duty enlisted personnel increased by 21% between 2000 and 2006 and that the military-civilian pay gap is dwindling. This conclusion may be used by DoD to argue for increases in TRICARE costs, etc. The report also addressed the possibility of substituting cash for non-cash benefits like tax-free grocery allowances (while consolidating commissaries and exchanges), giving a tuition grant of \$8,600 a year per student (while closing domestic schools) and "cafeteria style" health plans for active duty members' dependents.

> The CBO report questions whether there's any shortfall to fix. They say their pay comparisons put the average enlisted member in the top 25-30% of equivalent civilian workers' earnings. CBO also cites various studies that claim average enlisted pay actually amounts to \$90,000 to \$138,000 a year, once the cost of all military and veterans' benefits is added in.

MOAA contends it is not unreasonable to compare military people's earnings with their private sector counterparts', but hanging your hat on some arbitrary percentile leaves you at the mercy of whatever assumptions the budget analysts choose to make. Unknown is whether or not CBO comparisons take into account:

> - The fact that large numbers of civilians can't meet mental or moral or other standards for military entrance?

> - The military's up-or-out system that winnows out the less capable performers over the span of a two or three decade career?

> - Comparison of military people to their true equivalents - people who spend their entire careers with a single company - or does it include the income-depressing effects of layoffs and other career interruptions among private sector workers?

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> If comparisons are going to be made by CBO they should use the transparency, clarity, and independence provided by the same measure of private sector pay growth that the government sees fit to use for every other purpose - the Employment Cost Index (ECI) measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. MOAA tracked military pay basic pay raises vs. ECI growth year-by-year since 1982, when military pay was last generally recognized as "reasonably comparable" with the private sector. And by that objective measure - even giving credit for extra raises "targeted" at specific grade and years-of-service combinations - cumulative military raises still lag cumulative ECI growth by 3.9%. As for trying to claim military pay comparisons should include the cost to the government of every military benefit, that's pure hogwash. The budgeters like to:

> - Add up every nickel of the cost of military and VA health care and disability compensation, while completely ignoring the cost of those disabilities to wounded servicemembers and their families.

> - Add up the cost of every PCS move, and refuse to recognize that those reimbursements only cover about 70% of the costs members incur in complying with government-ordered moves.

> - Add up the cost of child care facilities and omit any reference to the overtime and deployment requirements that forced the troops to use that care.

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> Military retirement, health, disability, and other benefits have nothing whatsoever to do with pay comparability. They're essential offsets to all of the unquantifiable but extraordinarily arduous demands and sacrifices inherent in a multi-decade service career. They ought to be pretty clear to anyone who reads the front page of the morning paper or the lead story on the evening news. At least most members of 110th Congress seem to get it, even if the budget analysts don't. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> CONCURRENT RECEIPT STATUS: Last month, the Army recognized its

100,000th

Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) applicant at an Army Personnel Command ceremony in Alexandria, VA. The CRSC program, initiated in 2003, has

grown substantially over the past four years and effectively eliminates the offset for qualifying members with combat or operations-related disabilities. Members with 50% or greater non-combat disabilities are in the fourth year of a 10-year phase-in of Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP). Today, a little over 30% of all disabled retirees are eligible for payment under either the CRSC or CRDP programs. As of the end of FY2006 54,000 retirees were in receipt of some amount of CRSC and 199,000 were in receipt of some amount of CRDP. Disabled vets not yet eligible for concurrent receipt total 432k retirees (20+ years) with VA rating 10-40% and 138k Chapter 61 retirees less than 20 years. Both the House and Senate versions of the FY2008 Defense Authorization Bill contain provisions that would extend eligibility to some (House) or all (Senate) Chapter 61 retirees with less than 20 years of service who endured combat-related injuries. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> SSA RETIREMENT APPLICATION: In a few short months, the first of America's 77 million baby boomers will start applying for Social Security retirement benefits. That's about 10,000 boomers every day. If you're one of them, think about applying online. It's quick, easy and secure. Just visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/applytoretire](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/applytoretire). Here you can:

> - Apply for Retirement/Disability/Spouse's Benefits

> - Restart your incomplete application.

> - Check your claim status.

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> You cannot use this Internet application to:

> - Apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. However, you can begin the process of applying for SSI disability benefits for an adult or child by completing an online disability report at [www.socialsecurity.gov/applyfordisability/](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/applyfordisability/)

> - Apply for benefits for children.

> - Apply for benefits as a surviving spouse.

> - Apply for the Lump Sum Death Payment.

> - Apply for Medicare coverage only (e.g., you are working and do not intend to file for monthly retirement or spouse's benefits at this time).

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> For these non-Internet actions call 1(800) 772-1213 M-F 07-1900. If you are deaf or hard of hearing call the TTY number 1(800) 325-0778. If you have previously filed for Social Security disability and have been denied those benefits within the last 60 days, do not use the Internet application to file an appeal. If you are not sure whether you are still within your appeal period, call the 800 number for assistance before proceeding with your

Internet application. If you want to use your local SSA office to apply at you can choose to have a representative help you when you do business with Social Security. SSA will work with your representative, just as they would work with you. If you are acting as someone's authorized representative to do business with the Social Security Administration, you must first complete Form SSA-1696-U4 (Appointment of Representative). This can be downloaded at [www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ssa-1696.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ssa-1696.html). To review a comprehensive explanation of the 'Representative' process, refer to [www.socialsecurity.gov/representation](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/representation). [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> VA 2007 SURVEY: The VA has asked VSOs and MSOs to pass the word that the

VHA's Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health (ADUSH) for Policy and Planning will soon be conducting the 2007 update of their national VHA Survey of Enrollees. The purpose of the survey is to provide information for its annual projections of enrollment, utilization, and expenditures. The 15-30 minute telephone survey provides information on veteran use of health services and is used in projecting the resources and services needed in developing the healthcare budget. The survey collects information on a random sample of 42,000 veterans enrolled in the VA system. Each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) will have approximately 2,000 enrollees surveyed. The survey will begin on 8 JUL and will continue for 8 weeks. Your support in this survey will help ensure that VA provides its best care, where it is needed, when it is needed, and to those who need it. This is NOT a fishing expedition to get information on specific veterans. Your participation will benefit ALL veterans. If there is a need to discuss the survey or there are any questions, contact Anita Taylor or Crystal Elliott at 1(866) 922-7173. Previous survey reports are available at <http://www.va.gov/vhareorg>. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> NAVY BODY MODIFICATION POLICY: The Navy Uniform Matters Office has clarified what is acceptable for servicemembers regarding body modification. According to the Navy Uniform Regulations, any mutilation of the body is prohibited. The Navy Uniform Regulations Manual gives several examples of mutilation: (1) forking the tongue; (2) enlarged or stretched holes in the ears; (3) foreign objects under the skin that create a design or pattern; (4) intentional scarring; (5) intentional burns; and (6) dental ornamentation. Body piercings are prohibited while in uniform, working in any Navy-related capacity or while on any military property. Women, however, are allowed to wear one ball-studded earring in each ear. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> TRICARE MEMBER CHOICE CENTER: Express Scripts Inc., the company that runs

the Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy (TMOP), is implementing a new program for Tricare beneficiaries. Effective 29 AUG the new program will give Tricare beneficiaries access to a Member Choice Center (MCC), where live customer service representatives will assist in making the registration process easier. This new program will also reach out to physicians to make them aware that prescriptions can be filled through mail order. Tricare Management Authority will advertise the program to beneficiaries through various communication materials to include newsletters, websites, and military base publications. This communication effort will begin in late August and will run through the year and into early 2008. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> CELL PHONE PAYMENT SUSPENSION: The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee has

approved The Veterans' Benefits Enhancement Act of 2007 (S.1315), which includes a provision to suspend or terminate cell phone call-plan payments without penalty for deployed service members. They must be deployed overseas for 90 days or longer to be eligible. The provision is needed, says chief sponsor, Sen. Russell Feingold (D-WI) because deploying service members often have long-term contracts that are expensive to cancel. In addition to individual plans, the measure also would apply to group and family plans. It would not affect transfers within the United States. The bill will now go to the floor for a vote.

> [Source: Armed Forces News 6 Jul 07 ++]

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> VET BENEFITS NEW YORK: The New York Legislature recently passed several

measures to provide assistance to veterans and their families, according to Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, D-Endwell, chair of the Assembly Subcommittee

on Women Veterans:

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> \* New York Military Family Relief Fund: Provides grants of up to \$2,000 annually to members of the National Guard and their families if their military pay is 30% less than their civilian pay. Also provides monetary grants for those who sustained injury or died.

> \* Veterans' Geriatric Mental Health Act: Creates a demonstration program for older veterans and provides grants to mental health service providers. Also, establishes an interagency mental health planning council.

> \* Veteran Burial Fund: Provides grants to honorably discharged New York veterans who would like to be buried or interred in their own communities,

rather than in a veterans' cemetery.

> \* Gold Star Parents Annuity: Awards a \$500 annual annuity to gold star parents of deceased veterans.

> \* Eligibility for Veterans Homes: expands the eligibility for admission for veterans' spouses to conform to federal requirements that the marriage must have lasted for one year, rather than 10 years, prior to the spouse's application for admission.

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> The legislation awaits approval by Governor Eliot Spitzer. For additional info on New York state's veteran benefits refer to

<http://www.veterans.state.ny.us/benefits.htm>. To locate a New York VA office in your area refer to <http://www.veterans.state.ny.us/ofcs.htm>.

[Source: Press & Sun Bulletin article 2 Jul 07 ++]

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> FUNERAL HONORS UPDATE 02: Every veteran is entitled under federal law to

be laid to rest to the iconic strains of taps. But the number of military buglers is dwindling at the same time burials are increasing, forcing national veteran cemeteries, and organizations working with them, to come up with creative alternatives. South Florida is one of the busiest veterans cemeteries among 125 nationwide, averaging 73 burials weekly since it opened 1 APR. Only four buglers are officially on call there, and three of them also travel and perform with Florida's Army Band. Buglers, a generic term that encompasses musicians who play several types of horns including trumpets and cornets, once were a fixture in military life. But they have become more scarce as their routine duties were eliminated, so cemetery officials have lined up other options. The South Florida cemetery honor guards are equipped with a "ceremonial bugle". This is a \$500 nickel-plated faux horn sold by a New York company that plays taps through a tape recorder hidden inside. It was developed in response to the bugler shortage and was considered a more respectful alternative to punching the button of a boom box. The military has purchased more than 3,500 horns since 2002. The committal shelter at South Florida, where services are held, also has a tape recorder loaded with taps that is discreetly lodged in the rafters and can be activated by remote control.

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> To fill the bugle gap civilians are stepping forward. Christina Encinosa, an Episcopal priest at the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Lake Worth, is part of an organization called Bugles Across America (BAA). Founded seven years ago by Tom Day, a Chicagoan who taught Army ROTC high

school classes and has been involved in military drum and bugler corps since childhood, the organization has 5,200 volunteer horn players nationwide, with 256 in Florida, willing to play gratis at local military funerals. For additional info on BAA and to request their services refer to

<http://www.buglesacrossamerica.org/volunteer.php>. Few honor guard buglers play an actual field bugle, an instrument with no valves, but military regulations aren't specific. Day has heard taps played on a French horn.

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> Buglers once were part of all Army units, a job that included clerical duties as well as sounding calls that signaled wake-up time, flag raisings and lowerings, assemblies and the end of the day. But bugler positions were eliminated sometime between 1944 and 1950, according to the U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C. Bugle calls still regulate military life but now, at most bases, they are taped and played over a speaker system. The Department of Defense estimates there about 500 buglers in the armed forces today, with most performing in honor details when possible. They are stretched thin, as the ranks of World War II soldiers and sailors, who once numbered 16 million, die at the rate of about 1,200 a day. There were 96,797 deceased interred in national veterans' cemeteries last year, according to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. This is the most on record since the VA took over the cemetery administration 34 years ago. [Source: South Florida Sun-Sentinel Diane Lade article 3 JUL 07 ++]

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> PSORIASIS: Psoriasis is a common and chronic condition that usually causes patches of itchy, scaly and sometimes inflamed skin. Although they can appear anywhere, these patches -- called plaques -- are most likely to crop up on your knees, elbows, hands, feet, scalp, or back. According to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD), the fingernails and toenails are also affected in about 50% of cases of active psoriasis. The symptoms of psoriasis can vary a great deal depending on its severity, ranging from mildly annoying to truly debilitating. While the itchiness and pain can be unpleasant, some of the worst effects of psoriasis can be emotional. People with severe psoriasis sometimes are so overwhelmed by their condition and self-conscious of their appearance that they feel isolated and depressed. AAD estimates up to seven million people in the U.S. have psoriasis. That's about 2.6% of the population. Unfortunately, there isn't a cure. But there are many effective treatments that can help keep psoriasis under control.

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> Psoriasis normally is the result of cell turnover. Normally, skin cells are constantly being formed deep beneath the surface of your skin. Over about a month, these cells are pushed up to the surface. The cells eventually die and flake off, revealing new skin cells. In people with psoriasis, the skin cells grow too quickly. Cell turnover can happen in a matter of days. Layers of skin build up, forming a whitish, flaky crust. Blood vessels increase flow in an attempt to nourish this skin, which leads to redness and swelling. The classic symptoms of psoriasis are reddened, inflamed skin with a whitish, flaky layer of dead cells on top. Although psoriasis usually appears as a skin condition, recent discoveries show that

its real cause is a problem with the immune system. Your body naturally fights infections and heals injuries with blood cells that battle viruses or bacteria. Normally, these cells go to the site of infection or injury to help repair wounds and prevent infection. One byproduct of this normal process is inflammation (redness and swelling).

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> For reasons that doctors don't yet understand, the immune systems of people with psoriasis malfunction. One type of white blood cell - the B-cell - begins creating antibodies that destroy normal skin cells. Another type of white blood cell - the T-cell - begins overproducing a substance called cytokines. This overproduction turns off a signal that controls the growth of skin cells. Thus, psoriasis is considered an autoimmune disease - your own immune system malfunctions and attacks normal body tissues. Other autoimmune diseases include lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Psoriasis of the skin or nails may look like a rash or fungus, but you cannot catch psoriasis from another person, give it to anyone else, or spread it from one part of your body to another by touch. Experts now know that if psoriasis runs in your family, your chances of developing it are higher. There are several different types of psoriasis. About 90% of all cases of psoriasis are plaque psoriasis, but other varieties include:

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> - Guttate psoriasis. This form of psoriasis usually affects children, teenagers, and young adults. It often appears after a bacterial infection, such as strep throat. Its typical symptoms are red, scaly, raindrop-shaped spots on the skin, usually over the abdomen, arms, legs and scalp. It can often clear up on its own without treatment.

> - Pustular psoriasis. The typical symptoms of pustular psoriasis are pus-filled blisters on the skin. The blisters usually dry up, turn brown, become scaly and peel off. The lesions usually occur on the hands and feet.

> - Erythrodermic psoriasis. Symptoms include red and scaly skin over large areas of the body. This condition can evolve from other forms of psoriasis or be triggered by psoriasis treatment. It can also be triggered by withdrawal from drugs such as corticosteroids (often taken for diseases such as asthma).

> - Inverse psoriasis. In people with this condition, dry and bright red patches appear in folds of skin, for instance under the breasts, in the armpits, or on the genitals. This type of psoriasis can be exacerbated by obesity.

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> Psoriasis doesn't have any set way of progressing. It develops differently depending on the person. Some people may only have occasional and minor symptoms for their entire lives. Others may have to cope with severe symptoms on a regular basis. In most people, the symptoms come and go. Flare-ups might be brought on by some of the conditions mentioned above, such as dry weather or stress. Untreated, extremely severe psoriasis can be dangerous. Although it happens very rarely, if lesions cover enough of the

body, the immune system can become overwhelmed. This increases your risk of developing serious bacterial infections. Be sure to see your doctor immediately if your psoriasis spreads to cover large parts of your body or if you show signs of infection, such as fever. Coping with psoriasis can be exhausting and frustrating. It's important to try to stay emotionally and physically healthy during treatment. [Source: WebMD article 26 May 07 ++]

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> TRAVEL IMMUNIZATIONS: Travel immunizations and vaccines can ensure better health on your trip and for years afterward. Even domestic travel may put you at risk if you go to an area with a high rate of certain infectious disease such as hepatitis A. Diseases that are rare in this country are still prevalent elsewhere. Check with your health care provider well in advance of any extended travel plans to see if any special immunizations are recommended. If vaccines are required, they can take as many as four to six weeks to take effect, and some may require more than one shot. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) divides vaccines for travel into three categories:

> - Routine. These are the vaccines that the CDC and The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (AICP) recommend that all adults and children receive to protect them from infectious diseases here at home. You can check the schedule for yourself and your family by looking at the most recently updated schedules available at: [www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/adult-schedule.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/adult-schedule.pdf) ; [www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule-bw-print.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule-bw-print.pdf) ; and [www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule.htm#chgs](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule.htm#chgs) .

> - Recommended. These are vaccines that the CDC recommends to protect you

from diseases that could be present in other countries and to prevent the spread of infectious disease from one country to another. The recommended immunizations and vaccines vary based on the country, your travel plans once in that country, and your age and overall health. You can find a world map with recommended immunizations at [www.cdc.gov/travel/vaccinat.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/vaccinat.htm).

> - Required. International Health Regulations currently require only two vaccines for travel to specific parts of the world. They are Yellow fever for travel to certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South America & Meningococcal vaccination required by the government of Saudi Arabia for annual travel during the period of the Hajj

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> The CDC generally recognizes that if you are traveling to most industrialized nations, such as Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, your risk of exposure to infectious disease is no greater than it is here in the U.S. However, for those with certain health conditions, such as individuals with compromised immune systems, the risk can be greater no matter where you travel. If you know that you have an immuno-deficient condition, including HIV/AIDS, discuss your travel plans with your health care provider. More information about travel vaccines and compromised

immunity can be found at

[www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/ybGet.asp?section=special&obj=hivtrav.htm](http://www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/ybGet.asp?section=special&obj=hivtrav.htm).

> Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding also have specific concerns and different recommendations when it comes to international travel and immunizations. Pregnant women or breastfeeding moms can find more information at

[www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/ybGet.asp?section=special&obj=pregnant.htm](http://www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/ybGet.asp?section=special&obj=pregnant.htm)

. Or check with your own doctor four to six weeks prior to traveling. And finally, what you do when you travel can increase your risk. The following activities can increase your exposure to disease and local infectious organisms: Visiting rural areas, zoos, farms, and other animal habitats; Hiking and backpacking; Staying with local persons; Extended length of stay. [Source: WebMD Medical Reference & CDC 30 Mar 07 ++]

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> **SSA FUTURE BENEFIT ESTIMATE:** Whether you plan to retire in 5 years or 25, it's good to know what you can expect to receive in Social Security benefits. You've probably heard that Social Security is in financial trouble, and the 2006 Social Security Trustees Report says that the Social Security Trust Fund has declined from 2005. SSA provides three different types of easy-to-use earnings calculators at

[www.ssa.gov/planners/calculators.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/planners/calculators.htm) that will provide information based on present projections which assume the program will remain viable. They can show you the amount of Social Security benefits you can expect to receive based on your estimated income and the number of years you plan to work. The calculators will also show your disability and survivor benefit amounts if you should become disabled or die. When using the calculators you should be aware that:

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> . None of these calculators are linked to your Social Security earnings record. They use the earnings amounts you enter.

> . All the calculators assume you have enough credits to qualify for benefits. They produce an estimate even if you do not actually have enough credits. Information on credit requirements can be found at [www.ssa.gov/retire2/credits.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/credits.htm).

> . Calculator estimates will differ from those on your Social Security Statement if you use different assumptions. For example, if you had earnings last year, your Social Security Statement benefit estimate assumes you will have similar earnings for every future year until you turn 62. However, if in using the calculator you indicate you will stop working before the year you turn 62, the calculator estimates will not include earnings for the years after you stop working.

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> This website is also a good place to look for answers to questions about your annual Social Security statement, and to correct name or address changes, or incorrect information about your annual earnings. If you need a

benefit estimate on someone else's record, such as your spouse or parent contact your nearest social security office or call 1(800) 772-1213. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, use 1-800-325-0778 .If you are over age 25 and pay Social Security taxes on your income, you should receive a statement from the Social Security office every year about three months before your birthday. This statement includes:

- > - The adjusted gross income for every year you worked, and
- > - The current estimated amount of Social Security benefits you will receive when you retire at three different age levels, starting at age 62.
- > The longer you continue to work and pay into the Social Security system the more you can expect to receive in benefits once you retire. Of course, this assumes that Social Security will continue to pay benefits at current levels. [Source: [www.ssa.gov/planners/calculators.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/planners/calculators.htm) Jun 06]

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#### > VIETNAM WAR FACTS:

- > -- 9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the official Vietnam era from 5 AUG 64 to 7 MAY 75.
- > -- 2,709,918 Americans served in uniform in Vietnam which represented 9.7% of their generation.
- > -- 240 men were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War
- > --58,148 were killed in Vietnam. The first man to die was James Davis, in 1958. He was with the 509th Radio Research Station. Davis Station in Saigon was named for him.
- > -- 75,000 were severely disabled of which 23,214 100% were disabled
- > -- 5,283 lost limbs & 1,081 sustained multiple amputations
- > -- Average age of men killed: 23.1 years. Of those killed, 61% were younger than 21, 11,465 of those were younger than 20 years old, and 17,539 were married
- > -- Five men killed in Vietnam were only 16 years old. The oldest man killed was 62 years old.
- > -- As of 15 JAN 04, there are 1,875 Americans still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War
- > -- 97% of Vietnam Veterans were honorably discharged
- > -- 91% of Vietnam Veterans say they are glad they served
- > -- 74% say they would serve again, even knowing the outcome
- > -- Vietnam veterans have a lower unemployment rate than the same non-vet age groups.
- > -- Vietnam veterans' personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18%.
- > -- 87% of Americans hold Vietnam Veterans in high esteem.
- > -- There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non-Vietnam Veterans of the same age group (Source: Veterans Administration Study)
- > -- Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison. Only one-half of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes.

> -- 85% of Vietnam Veterans made successful transitions to civilian life.  
> [Source: NM e-Veterans News 9 Jan 06 - Research accredited to Capt. Marshal Hanson, USNR (Ret.) & Statistical Source Capt. Scott Beaton]  
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> VETERAN LEGISLATION STATUS 30 JUN 07: For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community that have been introduced in the 110th Congress refer to the Bulletin attachment. By clicking on the bill number indicated you can access the actual legislative language of the bill and see if your representative has signed on as a cosponsor. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication on that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. A cosponsor is a member of Congress who has joined one or more other members in his/her chamber (i.e. House or Senate) to sponsor a bill or amendment. The member who introduces the bill is considered the sponsor. Members subsequently signing on are called cosponsors. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can also review a copy of each bill, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d110/sponlst.html>. The key to increasing cosponsorship on veteran related bills is letting our representatives know of veteran's feelings on issues. At the end of some listed bills is a web link that can be used to do that. Otherwise, you can locate on <http://thomas.loc.gov> who your representative is and his/her phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making. [Source: RAO Bulletin Attachment 30 Jun 07 ++]  
>  
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>  
AL/AMVETS/DAV/FRA/NAUS/NCOA/MOAA/USDR/VFW/VVA/CG33/DD890/AD  
37 member