

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT APRIL 2019

Write and Know Who Your Elected Officials Are!

If you have an issue that affects you or your loved ones, **TAKE ACTION!!!** Here's their contact information. **Many of the articles in this month's TEN-HUT need action – by us!**

Senators

Amy Klobuchar, Call: 202.224.3244, Fax: 202.228.2186, Write: 425 Dirksen Senate Building, Washington, DC 20510, Website: <https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov>

Tina Smith, Call: 202.224.5641, Write: 720 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510, Website: <https://www.smith.senate.gov>

Representative

Jim Hagedorn, Call: 202.225.2472, Write: 325 Cannon HOB, Washington, DC 20515, Website: <https://hagedorn.house.gov>

Do You Know About ID.me?

By signing up for this free digital identity control program you'll be able to shop while enjoying **Military Discounts** on multiple websites. It's like having a physical ID card you carry around in your wallet – but for the internet. Get started and sign up today and enjoy shopping and getting a military discount. This benefit is for all veterans!

2020 Presidential Budget Proposal for VA Funding (\$220 billion)

President Donald J. Trump is proposing a total of \$220.2 billion in his fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), a 9.6 percent increase above fiscal 2019. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie stated, "The budget request will ensure the nation's Veterans receive high-quality health care and timely access to benefits and services," **Write our elected officials to support this proposal!**

The FY 2020 budget includes \$97 billion (an increase of \$6.8 billion, or 7.5 percent) in discretionary funding, including resources for health care, benefit administration, and national cemeteries, as well as \$123.2 billion (an increase of \$12.3 billion or 11.1 percent) in mandatory funding above 2019 for benefit programs inclusive of Compensation and Pensions, Readjustment Benefits, Housing and Insurance.

Budget highlights

MISSION Act: \$8.9 billion for implementation of the Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act) to provide greater choice on where Veterans receive their care, maintain care for current Choice Program users, provide a new urgent care benefit and expand the Caregivers program.

Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM): \$1.6 billion (\$496 million above FY 2019) to create and implement a single longitudinal electronic health record for military service members from their active duty to Veteran status, and ensure interoperability with the Department of Defense. The increase will support ongoing activities at the three initial deployment sites and the deployment to further sites, as well as additional site assessments.

Transforming Business Systems: Funds the continued deployment of a modern integrated financial and acquisition management system (\$184.9 million) and implementation of the Defense Medical Logistics Standard Support (\$36.7 million).

Improving Customer Service: \$8.1 million to maintain VA's trajectory of improving its customer service. The results of a recent customer-experience feedback survey of Veterans regarding their trust of the department's health care outpatient services showed "trust scores" for outpatient services increased from 84.7 percent in June 2017 to 87.9 percent in January 2019.

Preventing Veteran Suicide: \$9.4 billion (\$426 million above 2019) for mental health services, which includes \$222 million for suicide-prevention outreach, a \$15.6 million increase over 2019.

Women's Health: \$547 million (\$42 million above 2019) for gender-specific women's health care. This increase will help meet VA's goals of developing Designated Women's Health Primary Care Providers at every site where women access VA care, and improve the availability and quality of services to women Veterans.

Capital Investments: \$1.6 billion for major and minor construction, including \$410 million for the construction of a new hospital in Louisville, Kentucky, and \$150 million for the Manhattan, New York, medical center.

Purple Heart Recipients Are Added to VA Priority Claim Process

Those who hold the Purple Heart, the recognition of wounds taken in battle, will now receive priority consideration when it comes to claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs. With this amendment, Purple Heart recipients who submit initial disability compensation claims **on or after April 1, 2019**, will be added to nine categories of emergent claims requiring priority processing from VBA

Boots to Business Reboot

Boots to Business Reboot is an entrepreneurial education and training program offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The course provides an overview of entrepreneurship and applicable business ownership fundamentals. Veterans of all eras, Active Duty Service members (including National Guard and Reserve), and spouses are eligible to participate. Participants that complete an in-person B2B Reboot course can elect to further their study through one of many B2B online courses, offered at no cost to Service members, Veterans and military spouses. If you've already attended an in-person B2B course, visit <https://sbavets.force.com/> to sign up for one of the online B2B follow-on courses.

Winona County Veteran's Expo

When? April 23rd (1300 – 1700)

Where? Winona's American Legion Post 9 (302 E. Sarnia Street)

What's Happening?! Enjoy a spaghetti dinner while applying and learning about your benefits! Talk with community, state, and federal program representatives.

Need More Info? Contact Jerry Obieglo (Winona County Veteran Service Officer), 507.457.6455

Bankrupt vets can Lose Their Disability Benefits. This new Legislative Proposal Would Protect Them

Two senators (Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., and Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas) just introduced a bill designed to shield veterans' disability benefits from debt collectors.

When a disabled vet declares bankruptcy currently, the law allows debtors to count a veteran's disability benefits as disposable income, allowing them to seize his/her VA benefits.

Social Security disability benefits are exempted by law from being lumped into a person's disposable income in bankruptcy filings, and disability benefits in any form aren't taxable and therefore generally not considered disposable income.

The Honoring American Veterans in Extreme Need (HAVEN) Act seeks to create the same immunity in bankruptcy cases for benefits provided by the VA and Department of Defense to disabled veterans and their surviving spouses. **Write our elected officials!**

Here are Some Surprising ways Troops and vets can cut Their Student Loan Debt

Hundreds of thousands of veterans, service members and their families have student loans. Most have no idea how much help is available to get those loans reduced or even eliminated entirely.

Surveys have shown that more than one-third of service members and half of junior enlisted service members have student loans. Even with their military education benefits, one-quarter of veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill have federal student loan debt when they graduate. Today, approximately 200,000 active duty members owe a collective \$2.9 billion in student loan debt. All told, student loan issues are quickly becoming a crisis in America. Click on this website for further information: <https://rebootcamp.militarytimes.com/veterans/2019/02/19/here-are-some-surprising-ways-troops-and-vets-can-cut-their-student-loan-debt/>

Help Support Our Female Veterans. Write our Elected Officials!

Today, females make up 14 percent the active duty military and 17 percent of the Reserve Component. Women are serving in combat conditions right alongside their male counterparts, which raises a whole new set of issues for these veterans. Support **“Deborah Sampson Act.”** This legislation was recently introduced in the Senate, sponsored by Sens. John Boozman (Ark.),

and Jon Tester (Mt.) and introduced in the House, sponsored by Rep. Julia Brownley (CA) that seeks to improve and expand VA's programs and services for women veterans. Major provisions of the bill include the following: • Empowers women veterans by expanding peer-to-peer counseling, group counseling and call centers for women veterans; • Improves the quality of care for infant children of women veterans by increasing the number of days of maternity care VA facilities can provide and authorizing medically-necessary transportation for newborns; • Eliminates barriers to care by increasing the number of gender-specific providers and coordinators in VA facilities, training clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy and improve the environment of care for women veterans; • Provides support services for women veterans seeking legal assistance, and authorizes additional grants for organizations supporting low-income women veterans; and • Improves the collection and analysis of data regarding women veterans, and expands outreach by centralizing all information for women veterans in one easily accessible place on the VA website.

H.R. 299, Navy Blue Water Vietnam Veteran Act of 2019, Reintroduced

It appears that Congress will pass the bill.

Buoyed by an appeals court ruling, House and Senate leaders began another push for a "Blue Water Navy" bill on [Agent Orange](#) benefits that failed last year following opposition from the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#). Sen. Johnny Isakson, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said he has enough votes in the Senate to pass the bill. He hopes to overcome two Senators who last year [blocked a Senate vote on the previous bill](#), which had passed 382-0 in the House. *Write our elected officials* in favor of [extending Agent Orange health care and benefits](#) to offshore sailors.

We Need to Support Burn Pit Information – Write our Elected Officials!

The Burn Pits Accountability Act would evaluate the exposure of U.S. service members and veterans to open burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals by:

- 1) Requiring the Secretary of Defense to record whether service members have been based or stationed at a location where an open burn pit was used or exposed to toxic airborne chemicals, including any information recorded as part of the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, in the Periodic Health Assessment (PHAs), Separation History and Physical Examination (SHPEs), and Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHAs).
- 2) Enrolling any service member who meets the above criteria in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, unless he or she opts-out.
- 3) Requiring the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to share information relating to exposure of burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals recorded in PHAs, SHPEs, and PDHAs.

Apple will let military veterans access their health records on the iPhone

Military veterans treated by the US Department of Veterans Affairs will soon be able to access their medical records on the iPhone Health Records app, [Apple announced today](#). It's the latest major collaboration between Apple and a health care system, and a sign of the company's growing interest in the world of electronic health records. Check out this website for additional information: <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/11/18220369/apple-electronic-health-records-military-veterans-administration-science>

February 19, 2019 - Effective date new Veteran appeals law - AMA

On February 14, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will discontinue the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP), which provided eligible Veterans with early resolutions to their appealed claims, ahead of full implementation of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (AMA) that takes effect Feb. 19, 2019.

The VA is set to implement a new process Tuesday, February 19, for veterans to appeal their claims for VA disability compensation - a system devised by VA. Under the current system, veterans wait three to seven years to reconcile their appeals. The new one could get veterans through the process in as little as 125 days, VA officials vowed.

The new system involves multiple avenues for veterans, including an option to appeal their claims with a higher-level adjudicator or directly with the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Another option is to add information to their claim and appeal it with the same adjudicator who reviewed it. According to VA, officials will track the amount of time it takes veterans to get through each option. The agency will make that information public to help veterans decide which route to take.

For more information on Appeals Modernization, visit <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp> and <https://www.bva.va.gov/>.

Do you use VA's website - VA.GOV?

VA completed its redesign of its main website va.gov in November 2018, by reorganizing and reframing web pages to make it easier for veterans to find the information they needed.

The project organized the many benefits veterans receive into **eight content areas** - healthcare, disability, education and training, careers and employment, pension, housing assistance, life insurance, and burials and memorials - plus a records section that helps vets find out what information the agency has on them. **The site also gives users the ability to change their address information online, and that change will be made across the VA-wide system.** Previously change of address could only be done over the phone.

Wave of elderly veterans creates financial worries for VA's nursing home services

More than one million veterans will be eligible for taxpayer-funded [nursing home services](#) within the next five years, according to the latest estimates from [federal administrators trying to](#)

[balance the costs](#) of institutional care with alternative options allowing those individuals to stay in their homes.

By law, VA officials must provide nursing home care for veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 70 percent or more. The department currently maintains 156 state homes across all 50 states. Read the details at: https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/02/20/wave-of-elderly-veterans-creates-financial-worries-for-vas-nursing-home-services/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ebb%201.02.19&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Military%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

House VA committee launches investigation of bots using fake news to target veterans, service members

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs launched an investigation into "anonymous internet actors" impersonating congressionally chartered veterans service organizations in an effort to scam veterans and service members. Foreign actors are using "shadowy practices" to disseminate false information to service members, veterans and their families.

Vietnam Veterans of America has investigated the issue since 2017, when the organization discovered a Facebook page using its name and logo. The page posted politically divisive posts and was followed by nearly 200,000 people – tens of thousands more than the official VVA page.

Kristofer Goldsmith, associate director for policy and government affairs at VVA, discovered the page in mid-2017. Since then, he's worked to shut down more fake accounts that target veterans and servicemembers with disinformation. For additional information see:

https://www.stripes.com/news/us/house-va-committee-launches-investigation-of-bots-using-fake-news-to-target-veterans-servicemembers-1.571515?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%203.6.19&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Military%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief#.XH8Nx3Z5To.twitter

Here's what's coming next in the battle over burn pit benefits Write our Elected Officials!

House lawmakers on Tuesday advanced legislation to improve tracking of troops' exposure to toxic chemicals from [war zone burn pits](#), but the real political fight over how to help those ailing veterans is set for later this spring.

A group of lawmakers led by California Democrat Rep. Raul Ruiz is planning a push to classify combat [burn pit exposure](#) as the presumed cause of a range of lung diseases for veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, opening the door for easier access to medical care and disability benefits.

The proposal is likely to face [fierce opposition from VA leadership](#), which has emphasized the need for clear scientific links between war zone exposures and illnesses later in life before making large-scale benefits decisions.

The department's official position is that "research does not show evidence of long-term health problems from exposure" to burn pits. You will find out more details at:
https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/03/06/battle-over-burn-pit-benefits-coming-to-congress-soon/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ebb%2007.03.19&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Military%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

DoD/CDC Look at Water Contamination at Bases

The Department of Defense (DoD) recently announced it is teaming up with the Centers for Disease Control to begin a formal review of water contamination on military bases and is expected to continue through 2020. The study will look specifically at the levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in 10 affected locations. PFAS are chemicals that were used in firefighting foam on bases and are also present in many household products. PFAS have been linked to various cancers and developmental delays for babies and children. The study comes in the wake of a Pentagon report released in 2018 that found dozens of defense installations and surrounding communities had PFAS contaminated groundwater and well water. Sites being reviewed include: Naval Air Warfare Center Warminster, Francis S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base, Shepherd Field Air National Guard Base, Peterson Air Force Base, Eielson Air Force Base, Barnes Air National Guard Base, Reese Technology Center, Stewart Air National Guard Base, New Castle Air National Guard Base, and Fairchild Air Force Base. For more information on this issue [go online](#).

Interesting Question: Can Retired Military Personnel be Prosecuted Under the UCMJ?

The short answer is **YES!** A retired individual is subject to civilian prosecution and can be prosecuted under the UCMJ. It is not double jeopardy! The key word is pay. "Retired members of a [regular](#) component of the [armed forces](#) who are entitled to [pay](#). Pension is considered pay.

Section 802. Art. 2. This website outlines the military personnel subject to the UCMJ. Refer to: <http://www.ucmj.us/>

In a recent case, the SCOTUS decided not to review the case of a retired Marine who was court-martialed and convicted of sexual assault. This decision upholds the Pentagon's authority to prosecute retirees for crimes they commit even after leaving the service. This particular Marine left the Corps after 20-years of service. A military judge sentenced him to eight years confinement, a reprimand, and a dishonorable discharge.