April 3, 2017

VETERANS
MONTHLY INFORMATION PACKAGE

FLAGLER COUNTY

DAVID LYDON
County Veterans Service Officer

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Feel free to make copies and distribute throughout your organization.
VA and GAO Agree: Appeals Reform Needed

Current legal process detrimental to Veterans

WASHINGTON – In response to a report released by the Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) report, VA Disability Benefits: Additional Planning Would Enhance Efforts to Improve the Timeliness of Appeals Decisions, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released the following statement:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appreciates the work of the Government Accountability Office (GAO). This report confirms that the current law and process for adjudicating appeals is not consistent with the commitment we have made to our nation’s Veterans.

“Veterans are waiting far too long for decisions in our current appeals process,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin. “We have made bold changes to remove the bureaucratic red tape that has caused Veterans to wait an average of three years before they get a decision.”

VA has developed sound and aggressive plans regarding hiring, training, and mitigations strategies that are already being aggressively implemented. In addition, VA recognizes the importance of effective management practices for the development of information systems to help integrate and streamline the appeals process. Our new Caseflow system will help us anticipate new information requirements, allowing us to quickly address challenges and provide our employees the support they need.

There is broad consensus that the current VA appeals system is broken and in urgent need of reform. Our proposal for a new appeals process was designed in conjunction with Veterans Service Organizations and other key stakeholders. VA strongly disagrees with GAO about the need for any type of piloting, which would only unnecessarily delay the implementation of the bold changes Veterans expect us to make.

“We have a number of reports and studies, including this one from GAO, that have helped us clearly identify the problems in the current system,” said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Tom Murphy.

VA is working to make as many changes to the system allowed by current law.

“We need our partners in Congress to act swiftly so that we can implement the changes we all agree need to be made,” continued Secretary Shulkin. “I am personally committed to work with Congress over the coming months to get this done.”
VA fixes Veterans Crisis Line

WASHINGTON — In response to the recently released VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report that reviewed processes from June 6 through Dec. 15, 2016, of the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the following statement: "The Department of Veterans Affairs is proud to announce that the challenges with the Veterans Crisis Line have been resolved. Prior to the opening of our new Atlanta call center, our call rollover rate often exceeded 30 percent. Our current call rollover rate is less than 1 percent, with over 99 percent of all calls being answered by the VCL."

“Suicide prevention is one of our highest priorities,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin. “Fixing the Veterans Crisis Line was a critical step in keeping our commitment to Veterans.”

To reach a VA professional, who is specially trained to attend to emotional crises for Veterans and service members:

- Dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number, 800-273-TALK (8255). Veterans should choose option 1 to reach a VCL responder;
- Text 838255 — A VCL responder will text back.
- Chat online at https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/

###
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 8, 2017

VA Secretary Announces Intention to Expand Mental Health Care to Former Service members With Other-than-honorable Discharges and in Crisis

WASHINGTON – Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin while testifying in a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on March 7, 2017, announced his intention to expand provisions for urgent mental health care needs to former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges. This move marks the first time a VA Secretary has implemented an initiative specifically focused on expanding access to assist former OTH service members who are in mental health distress and may be at risk for suicide or other adverse behaviors.

“The president and I have made it clear that suicide prevention is one of our top priorities,” Shulkin said. “We know the rate of death by suicide among Veterans who do not use VA care is increasing at a greater rate than Veterans who use VA care. This is a national emergency that requires bold action. We must and we will do all that we can to help former service members who may be at risk. When we say even one Veteran suicide is one too many, we mean it.”

It is estimated that there are a little more than 500,000 former service members with OTH discharges. As part of the proposal, former OTH service members would be able to seek treatment at a VA emergency department, Vet Center or contact the Veterans Crisis Line.

“Our goal is simple: to save lives,” Shulkin continued. “Veterans who are in crisis should receive help immediately. Far too many Veterans have fallen victim to suicide, roughly 20 every day. Far too many families are left behind asking themselves what more could have been done. The time for action is now.”

Before finalizing the plan in early summer, Shulkin will meet with Congress, Veterans Service Organizations and Department of Defense officials to determine the best way forward to get these former service members the care they need.

“I look forward to working with leaders like Congressman Mike Coffman from Colorado, who has been a champion for OTH service members,” Shulkin added. "I am grateful for his commitment to our nation’s Veterans and for helping me better understand the urgency of getting this right."

Veterans in crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text 838255.

###
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 14, 2017

VA’s rule establishes presumption of service connection for diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in water supply at Camp Lejeune

VA to provide disability benefits for related diseases

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) regulations to establish presumptions for the service connection of eight diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, are effective as of today.

“Establishing these presumptions is a demonstration of our commitment to care for those who have served our nation and have been exposed to harm as a result of that service,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. David J. Shulkin. “The Camp Lejeune presumptions will make it easier for those Veterans to receive the care and benefits they earned.”

The presumption of service connection applies to active-duty, reserve and National Guard members who served at Camp Lejeune for a minimum of 30 days (cumulative) between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, and are diagnosed with any of the following conditions:

- Adult leukemia
- Aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes
- Bladder cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Liver cancer
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma
- Parkinson’s disease

The area included in this presumption is all of Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Air Station New River, including satellite camps and housing areas.

This presumption complements the health care already provided for 15 illnesses or conditions as part of the Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012. The Camp Lejeune Act requires VA to provide health care to Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune, and to reimburse family members or pay providers for medical expenses for those who resided there for not fewer than 30 days between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987.

###
VA Establishes Commission to Recommend Under Secretary for Benefits

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the establishment of a search commission to help identify candidates for the position of Under Secretary for Benefits.

The Under Secretary for Benefits is the senior official within the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), which oversees a variety of benefits and services to service members, Veterans and their families.

Search commission candidates will be selected based on criteria governed by law, along with appropriate skills, knowledge and attributes as leaders, managers and educators. The commission is a prerequisite to the president’s appointment of a successful candidate, subject to Senate confirmation.

By law, the appointment is made without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability, both in fiscal management and in the administration of programs of VBA or of similar content and scope.

VBA includes a network of 56 regional offices and more than 21,800 employees. Nearly 4 million Veterans currently receive compensation for disabilities incurred in service or pensions for wartime Veterans, who become totally disabled in civilian life. In addition, more than a half million widows, children and parents of deceased Veterans are paid survivor compensation or death pensions.

Other programs administered by the Under Secretary for Benefits include: education benefits, vocational rehabilitation and employment for Veterans, and life insurance; as well as VA-guaranteed home loans for both active-duty personnel and Veterans.

The commission, once named, is expected to complete its work by April 20. For more information about this position, go to https://www.usajobs.gov/getjob/viewdetails/447997000.
VA study highlights benefits of enhanced aspirin in preventing certain cancers

WASHINGTON — Researchers know of aspirin’s benefits in preventing certain ailments — from cardiovascular disease to most recently colorectal cancer. But while the link to those two conditions was made, researchers also questioned how and if this “wonder drug” could work to ward off other types of cancers.

Thanks to a team led by Dr. Vinod Vijayan at the DeBakey Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Houston and Dr. Lenard Lichtenberger of the University of Texas Health Sciences Center, new studies verify their theory of cancer-prevention benefits based on aspirin’s effects on platelets—blood cells that form clots to stop bleeding. The findings appear in the February 2017 issue of Cancer Prevention Research journal.

“Along with clotting, platelets also play a role in forming new blood vessels,” Vijayan said. “That action is normally beneficial, such as when a new clot forms after a wound, and new vessels are needed to redirect blood flow. But the same action can help tumors grow. It’s this process that aspirin can interrupt.”

Their lab tests showed how aspirin blocked the interaction between platelets and cancer cells by shutting down the enzyme COX-1, thereby curbing the number of circulating platelets and their level of activity.

Some of their experiments used regular aspirin from a local drug store. In another phase, the researchers used a special preparation of aspirin combined with phosphatidylcholine, a type of lipid, or fat molecule. The molecule is a main ingredient in soy lecithin. The product, known as Aspirin-PC/PL2200, is designed to ease the gastrointestinal risk associated with standard aspirin.

The enhanced aspirin complex was even stronger against cancer than the regular aspirin. Summarizing their findings, the researchers wrote: “These results suggest that aspirin’s chemopreventive effects may be due, in part, to the drug blocking the proneoplastic [supporting new, abnormal growth, as in cancer] action of platelets and [they support] the potential use of Aspirin-PC/PL2200 as an effective and safer chemopreventive agent for colorectal cancer and possibly other cancers.”

In collaboration with researchers at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, the group said they plan to test the lipid-aspirin complex for safety and efficacy in people at high risk for colorectal cancer. Meanwhile, they said their results, so far, “support the use of low-dose aspirin for chemoprevention.” They added that Aspirin-PC/PL2200 has “similar chemopreventive actions to low-dose aspirin and may be more effective.”

The research study was supported by the National Institutes of Health. For more information about VA research on cancer, visit www.research.va.gov/topics/cancer.

Lichtenberger is a professor of integrative biology and pharmacology at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center. Vijayan, an expert in platelet biology, is with the Center for Translational Research on Inflammatory Diseases at the DeBakey VA Medical Center. He is also an associate professor at Baylor College of Medicine.
### Employment Facts and Statistics

**Office of Economic Opportunity**

**Veterans Benefits Administration**

**BLS Figures (non-seasonally adjusted)**

### February-17

#### Unemployment

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<th>Rate</th>
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* Does not meet BLS publication criteria

- 33,000 (13%) of all 18-54 Veterans (257,000) are enrolled in school either part time or full time

#### Unemployed by State Data

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<th>Highest Rates</th>
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<td>Ohio</td>
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* Does not meet BLS publication criteria

#### Employment Sectors

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Year-Over-Year Comparison

Veterans vs Non-Veterans

18-24 yrs old

25-34

55+

35-44

45-54
VA secretary wants Congress to extend Choice program

By HOPE YEN
Associated Press
March 8, 2017

WASHINGTON — Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin says Congress needs to act quickly to extend a program aimed at widening veterans' access to private-sector health care, pointing to a growing demand for medical treatment outside the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Shulkin also pledged additional efforts by his agency to combat suicide, saying he wanted to expand mental health care to former service members who receive "other than honorable discharges" from the military, typically for behavior problems such as violence or use of illegal drugs. Shulkin did not release specific details, but said the VA will act on its own to expand coverage without waiting for legislation. Pentagon data has indicated that thousands of service members have had such discharges in recent years.

"We are going to start doing that now," he said, referring to the expanded mental health coverage. "So many veterans that we see are so disconnected from our system."

Testifying before a House panel Tuesday night, Shulkin acknowledged that the Choice program offering access to private care that was put in place in 2014 following a wait-time-for-care scandal was hastily done, and had problems of its own in providing timely care. But the physician says improvements to the Choice program have resulted in more than 1 million out of 9 million veterans in the VA system now using some Choice care, with data pointing to even greater use this year.

Shulkin, who previously served as VA's top health official in the Obama administration, says Congress must hurry to extend the Choice plan beyond its Aug. 7 expiration date, or the VA will lose nearly $1 billion left over in that account. That money can provide stopgap care until a broader revamp is designed, he said.

"There is no time to waste," Shulkin told the House Veterans Affairs Committee. "Many veterans are using the Choice program today, and it is important to continue to care for and support those veterans."

On Tuesday, Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., introduced legislation with Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., that would extend the Choice plan until its money
runs out, likely in early 2018. The bill also calls for fixes in the program to speed up VA payments and promote sharing of medical records.

"Have no doubt: If we let this program lapse, more than a million veterans will lose their ability to visit a community provider, the VA system will once again become overwhelmed, and veterans will go back to the pre-scandal days of unending wait-times for much-needed care," McCain told the House committee, noting that the VA has said a broader revamp could take two years.

That panel led by Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., was scheduled to consider a House version of the bill Wednesday.

Major veterans’ organizations and Democrats are closely watching the VA’s planned overhaul of the Choice program, after President Donald Trump's transition team signaled in late December it was weighing a "public-private" option. Under that plan, veterans could get all their medical care in the private sector, with the government paying the bill. Veterans groups generally oppose that as a threat to the viability of VA medical centers.

After Trump selected him to be VA secretary, Shulkin has said he would not privatize the VA. He expressed support for an "integrated model," without sketching the full details.

He says he wants to eliminate restrictions in which veterans may seek outside care only in cases where they had to wait more than 30 days for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles to a facility. But Shulkin also says he wants the VA to handle the scheduling and "customer service" for those outside appointments, something that the Government Accountability Office, Congress’ auditing arm, indicated could be problematic.

GAO recently reassigned a "high-risk" rating to VA's health programs, citing in particular problems with its choice program. Randall Williamson, GAO's health care director, said veterans could wait up to 81 days to receive outside care due to bureaucratic problems, in contrast to a stated goal of 30 days or less.

Williamson said the VA also faced significant challenges in overhauling the Choice program, citing the department's outdated information technology systems as well as likely additional costs and staffing needed to administer the changes.

On Tuesday, Shulkin said he hopes to propose a broader overhaul to Congress within six months and said the VA would consider "off-the-shelf" IT programs such as those developed by Microsoft to speed the process. The VA also wants to create a
broader network of outside providers, predominantly federally run medical centers by the Pentagon and the Indian Health Service, plus academic teaching hospitals.

Currently, more than 30 percent of VA appointments are made in the private-sector, up from fewer than 20 percent in 2014, as the VA's 1,700 health facilities struggle to meet growing demands for medical care.
Colleagues and Fellow Veterans,

Everyone knows VA provides many programs for veterans and their families to assist with life after the military, but did you know that VA has GI Bill programs that offer education assistance to survivors and dependents of veterans? There are many wonderful nonprofit organizations that offer scholarships to the families of our heroes. We honor and encourage all of them, but want everyone to ensure they do not accept them in lieu of what the VA provides. Families have earned the programs discussed below – it is not an either or situation.

The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship (Fry Scholarship) is available for children and spouses of Service members who died in the line of duty while serving on active duty on or after September 11, 2001. Children may use benefits until their 33rd birthday; and spouses’ eligibility ends at the earlier of 15 years from the date of death or the date of remarriage. See our fact sheet for more detailed information.

Eligible beneficiaries attending school may receive up to 36 months of benefits. This includes full in-state tuition & fees for public schools, and private or foreign school tuition & fees are capped at a statutory maximum amount per academic year. Additionally, students may receive a monthly housing allowance and stipend for books & supplies. We’ve worked hard to support and implement laws that make programs like this available. On December 16, 2016, a new provision of the law extended the benefit eligibility period to January 1, 2021, for the spouses of Service members that died between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2005. This provides surviving spouses with additional time to use the Fry Scholarship benefits. Check out our letter to spouses for more information on what has changed. Federal law also requires schools to charge in-state tuition and fee amounts to qualifying dependents using the Fry Scholarship at a public institution of higher learning located in the state where they currently live. We’re working to ensure that all states come into compliance, and the public can track our progress through the use of a map available on our website.

Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) offers education and training benefits to the spouses and children of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-related condition, veterans who died while on active duty, or who died as a result of a service-related condition. Children must generally use benefits between the ages of 18 and 26; and spouses generally have a 10 year period in which to use benefits, or a 20 year period for spouses of Service members who die on active duty or veterans that receive a permanent and total rating effective within 3 years of release from active duty. Benefits may be used for degree and certificate programs, apprenticeships, and/or on-the-job training. See our DEA pamphlet for more detailed information.

Sometimes it can seem as though the VA is a giant government organization that only processes claims. However, the majority of our employees here are either veterans or the family member of a veteran. In fact, many of us use or have used these benefits ourselves. We assure you that each day we’re working hard to provide the best care and benefit programs and upholding the VA motto, “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”
**County Commissioners Proclaim Women Veterans Week**

On hand on March 6 at the Flagler County Commission meeting to receive the county’s proclamation of Women Veterans Week (March 12-18) were Bea Schmucker, USA, and wife of MOAA member Rolland Schmucker; Patricia Przybysz, USN; and MOAA Secretary Deidre Wright, USAF.

Following the proclamation reading, directed at Flagler’s 1,170 women veterans, the women veteran representatives expressed thanks to the Commissioners stating, “Thank you for recognizing women veterans, the work we’ve done, and what we’ve accomplished.”

MOAA is proud of all its member women veterans and female veteran spouses of its members, and is pleased to offer our thanks for their service. MOAA 41 female veterans include: Jill Altman (USAF), Helen Delaney (USN), Peggy Hengeveld (USA), Vivian Jones (USA), Mary Lou Keener (USAF), Kathy Oswald (USN), Catherine Tymensky (USN), and Deidre Wright (USAF).

*Pictured above, left to right. Top row: County Commissioners Donald O’Brien, David Sullivan, Nate McLaughlin, Gregory Hansen and Charles Ericksen. Bottom row: Bea Schmucker, Patricia Przybysz, Deidre Wright, and MOAA President and County VSO David Lydon.*

The full Proclamation held in the photo by Deidre Wright follows.
A PROCLAMATION OF THE
FLAGLER COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PROCLAIMING THE WEEK OF MARCH 12 – 18, 2017 AS
FLAGLER COUNTY WOMEN VETERANS RECOGNITION WEEK

WHEREAS, the total women veteran population in the United States and its territories as of September 30, 2016 was 2,051,484; and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida is ranked third in the United States with the number of women veterans; and

WHEREAS, Flagler County is home to nearly 13,000 veterans, of which just over 9 percent or over 1,170 are women; and

WHEREAS, the number of women serving in the United States Armed Forces and the number of women veterans continue to increase; and

WHEREAS, women veterans have served their country with honor and bravery and contributed greatly to the security of the United States through honorable military service, often involving great hardship and danger; and

WHEREAS, Flagler County recognizes the tremendous sacrifices of women veterans while in uniform; and

WHEREAS, the County readily acknowledges that women veterans are equally valued, equally qualified and have equally served; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs and Northeast Florida Women Veterans have partnered to promote the observance of Women Veterans Recognition Week; and

WHEREAS, Flagler County joins the great State of Florida and the nation in honoring the invaluable impact that women veterans make both locally and throughout the world.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE FLAGLER COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS that they hereby proclaim the week of March 12 – 18, 2017 as “Flagler County Women Veterans Recognition Week” and encourage all Flagler County residents to commemorate the week with all appropriate observances of the contributions and sacrifices of the women who honorably served the United States Armed Forces.

Adopted this 6th day of March, 2017.

Attest:

Tom Bexley, Clerk of the
Circuit Court and Comptroller

Flagler County Board of
County Commissioners

Nate McLaughlin, Chair
March 17, 2017

In This Issue:
1. VFW Shares Concerns with President
2. Camp Lejeune Exposure Update
3. TRICARE Contract Start Date Delayed
4. Legislation Impacting Veterans Clears the House
5. HASC Sequestration Hearings
6. SASC Hearing on Marine Scandal
7. DOD Releases Service Academy Report
8. VA Seeks Under Secretary for Benefits
9. MIA Update

1. VFW Shares Concerns with President: VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan M. Gallucci met with President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, and senior administration staff at the White House today to share the concerns of America’s largest and oldest major war veterans organization. Gallucci discussed what the VFW sees as the future for veterans’ health care, to include consolidation of VA’s community care programs. Gallucci focused on the VFW’s recent “Our Care 2017” report, which shows that many veterans choose to utilize their earned VA health care benefits even when they have other options in the community. However, Gallucci recognized that today VA has far too many purchased care programs, which are confusing to veterans, only exacerbating health care access issues. The VFW is calling for a single, easily-understandable community care program so that veterans can access their earned health care benefits where and when they need them, serving as a complement to the VA health care system. Gallucci also echoed VFW Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy’s support for the president’s proposal to reverse the impact of sequestration on the Department of Defense in the FY 2018 budget – one of the VFW’s top legislative priorities since the arbitrary budget policy took effect in 2011. Gallucci also expressed the need to expedite claim decisions and to ensure veterans who suffer from toxic wounds receive the care and benefits they deserve. The VFW views this as the start of a positive dialogue to ensure that the Trump administration lives up to its promises to provide for our service members, veterans, and their families.

2. Camp Lejeune Exposure Update: For years the VFW has worked with Congress and VA to establish a streamlined disability compensation process for veterans who suffer from health conditions associated with exposure to toxic water at Camp Lejeune. This week, VA began to implement a rule which established a presumptive service-connection for veterans, reservists and
guardsmen exposed to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune from Aug. 1, 1953, through Dec. 31, 1987, who later developed one of the following eight diseases: adult leukemia; aplastic anemia and myelodysplastic syndromes; bladder cancer; kidney cancer; liver cancer; multiple myeloma; non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma; and Parkinson’s disease. If you are an affected veteran and would like assistance with a VA claim, please contact the VFW. Find a VFW Service Officer near you.

3. TRICARE Contract Start Date Delayed: Yesterday at a Military Health System MSO/VSO Executive Council meeting, the Defense Health Agency announced that they will delay the transition of the TRICARE contract from Oct. 1, 2017, to Jan. 1, 2018. The new contract reduces TRICARE from three regions — North, South and West — down to East and West, with Humana managing TRICARE Region East and Health Net managing TRICARE Region West. This delay aligns the rollout of the new regions and contractors with the transition to TRICARE Select, which will replace TRICARE Extra and TRICARE Standard, in order to reduce disruption for TRICARE beneficiaries. Other topics discussed during the meeting included the initial rollout of the Department of Defense’s new Electronic Health Record at Fairchild AFB, Wash.; an update on the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences which now has the authority to grant undergraduate credit and degrees; and an update on the National Capital Region Academic Health and Readiness System.

4. Legislation Impacting Veterans Clears the House: Three bills impacting veterans were passed by the House of Representatives this week. H.R. 1181, the Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act, would prevent veterans who need help only to manage their finances, and are not a threat to themselves or others, from being banned from owning firearms. Under current federal laws and regulations, needing even a minor amount of assistance that would require appointing a fiduciary forces veterans to be placed on the federal list of people banned from owning a firearm. The bill would require determination from a judge or magistrate stating the veteran is a threat before the veteran could be put on the list. H.R. 1259 the VA Accountability First Act of 2017, would strengthen the authority granted to the secretary of Veterans Affairs to discipline and fire employees at VA while still protecting the rights of those workers. It would also strengthen protections granted to whistleblowers. Lastly, H.R. 1367 would improve the authority of the secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and other employees. Section three of this bill was a direct collaboration between congressional staff and one of this year’s VFW-SVA Legislative Fellows. All of this legislation is actively supported by the VFW and will now go to the Senate for consideration. Continue to follow the VFW’s Action Corps Weekly for updates.

5. HASC Sequestration Hearings: The House Armed Services Subcommittees held several hearings this week on the impact sequestration and continuing resolutions have had on the military services. The Army, Marine Corps and Navy all testified on the impact budget cuts and budget instability have had on modernization and readiness. Across the board, the services testified that instability caused by continuing resolutions and budget caps are forcing the services to choose between current readiness and future modernization efforts, causing shortfalls in maintenance and other key areas, and inhibiting their ability to effectively plan to meet current and future threats which results in increased risk for service members and our nation. The Air Force is set to testify on Thursday next week.
6. SASC Hearing on Marine Scandal: On Tuesday, the Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing on the Marine Corps’ ongoing investigation into the “Marines United” website scandal. Acting Secretary of the Navy Sean J. Stackley, Commandant of the Marine Corps General Robert B. Neller, and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald L. Green testified on steps the Marine Corps is taking to identify and punish Marines who participated on the site, which shared nude photos of female Marines and included comments that advocated the denigration, harassment and, in some cases, sexual assault of these women. General Neller also testified that the Marine Corps was reviewing their recruit and officer candidate training to determine how they can address this as a Marine-culture topic from the beginning of a Marine’s career. The open hearing was followed by a closed session to discuss more details of the ongoing investigation. View the hearing webcast.

7. DOD Releases Service Academy Report: On Wednesday, the Department of Defense (DOD) released its Annual Report on Sexual Violence and Harassment at the Military Service Academies for the academic program year 2015-2016. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 required the department to produce an annual report on the effectiveness of policies, training, and procedures at each of the three Military Service Academies (MSAs). The report analyzes MSA performance in the areas of sexual assault prevention, response, retaliation, and sexual harassment. This year’s report shows that, while MSA cadets and midshipmen experience unwanted sexual contact at a rate lower than their civilian college student counterparts, the numbers have increased. 12.2% of women and 1.7% of men experienced unwanted sexual contact in the last year, which is a significant increase compared to the previous academic year’s percentages of 8.2% for women and 1.1% for men. The report also shows that cadets experience sexual harassment at a rate higher than their active duty counterparts. Going forward, DOD will focus on increased prevention efforts. Read the full report.

8. VA Seeks Under Secretary for Benefits: On Wednesday, VA announced that there will be a commission to identify the best candidate for the position of under secretary of benefits from a pool of applicants. The under secretary is responsible for nearly 22,000 employees located at 56 regional offices. More than 4 million veterans and 500,000 dependents receive benefits administered by this part of VA. Benefits that the under secretary would be responsible for include education, home loans, life insurance and disability compensation. The commission, with yet-to-be-appointed members, is expected to make a recommendation by late April. The recommendation goes to the president for consideration and any candidate would then have to be confirmed by the Senate.

9. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains of five Americans who had been missing in action from WWII and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:
   -- **Mr. Maax C. Hammer, Jr.**, 25, of Cairo, Ill., will be buried March 21 in Carbondale, Ill. Hammer, formerly in the U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve, was among a small group of American pilots training with the Flying Tigers to battle Japanese forces invading China in 1941. Hammer was killed during a training mission on Sep. 22, 1941, when his plane crashed near Toungoo, Burma, after a heavy rainstorm. Read about Hammer.
-- Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. John D. Mumford, 22, of St. Petersburg, Fl., will be buried March 23, in his hometown. Mumford was a P-51C “Mustang” pilot assigned to the 318th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group, 15th Air Force. On June 6, 1944, Mumford flew escort for B-17 “Flying Fortress” bombers on their mission to bomb and destroy a German occupied airfield at Galati, Romania. Following the bombing, the formation was attacked by German fighters. Mumford pursued two German fighters before crashing near present day Novi Troyany, Ukraine. Read about Mumford.

-- Navy Fireman 1st Class Charles R. Casto was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Casto was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read about Casto.

-- Army Cpl. Billie J. Jimerson was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit engaged with enemy forces near Anju, North Korea. Jimerson could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action as of Nov. 28, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read about Jimerson.

-- Army Pfc. Robert E. Mitchell was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On Sept 6, 1950, North Korean forces penetrated the Naktong Bulg portion of the Pusan Perimeter near Am-sin, South Korea, and engaged with Mitchell’s unit. Mitchell could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. Read about Mitchell.


As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.
Marine veteran who lost both legs in Afghanistan sworn in as NY police officer
Published March 25, 2017

FoxNews.com
A Long Island man who served in the Marines and lost both legs below the knees after stepping on a bomb in Afghanistan was sworn in Friday as possibly the first fully active duty double amputee police officer in the country.

Matias Ferreira, 28, graduated from the Suffolk County Police Academy in Brentwood, L.I. His first assignment as a precinct patrol officer begins next week. He told Fox 5 New York he isn’t worried if he breaks a leg on the job.

VIETNAM VET AWARDED BRONZE STAR FOR BRAVERY IN BATTLE

“If I break my leg I go the trunk of my car and put on a new one and I’m back on duty,” he told the station.

The 2011 blast in Afghanistan shattered his legs, forcing doctors to amputate. The machine-gunner spent nearly a year recovering in a hospital outside Washington.

Ferreira stands on titanium prosthetics, Newsday reported. He dreamed of being a cop as a kid.

Ferreira completed 29-weeks of training at the academy, passing the same rigorous challenges as other recruits.

VETERAN WHO HELPS HOMELESS VETS AIMS TO MAKE IT A NATIONWIDE MOVEMENT

He was born in Uruguay and moved to the U.S. when he was 6, Fox 5 reported.

Tiffany Ferreira said she was proud of her husband.

“To watch my husband achieve his dream that I think most people would think wasn’t even possible is really special,” she told the station.
Save the Date!

Flagler County Centennial

Main Event Day!
April 29, 2017
From 9am – 3pm

Join us for a day of celebration.

9am - Fun run/walk for all ages and geocaching registration begins.

10am – 3pm - Opening ceremony, car show, photo contest, tour of the Emergency Operations Center, music and kids’ zone with crafts, games, train rides and more!

11 am – 3 pm – Food trucks

1 pm – 3 pm – Speeches by State and local dignitaries, historical re-enactments of the First County Commission and School Board Meetings; Henry Flagler re-enactor and a performance of the Three Wives of Henry Flagler.

3 pm – Closing ceremony.
DAV VOLUNTEER DRIVERS ALWAYS NEEDED

ASK THE FC VSO ABOUT DETAILS

OR CALL DAV DISPATCHER RAY O’CONNOR

(386) 439-2122

27 FLORIDA PARK DR

PALM COAST, FL
ALL HANDS ON DECK
for our Annual
St. Johns River Cruise

Join the Flagler County Military Officers Association of America’s all-military organization roundtrip cruise, north from Historic Downtown Sanford aboard the Steamship Barbara-Lee.

Thursday, May 18, 2017 11:00 AM-3:00 PM

Enjoy a sit-down three-course luncheon of entrées (selected once on board), decadent dessert, and peel-and-eat shrimp, accompanied by the ship’s live musical entertainer.

Cost of the cruise is $57.92 per person, including tax and gratuities. Reservations are required. Call 1-888-235-1266 or 321-441-3030. Use Reserve Group code “MOAA-Jones”. Reservation deadline is Friday, May 12, 2017.

Free parking at the Sanford wharf. Information: David Lydon, (386) 315-4628
The CPR, AED, and First Aid Training is on April 5th from 10am - 4pm. This class includes ALL 3 trainings. You will get a Heartsaver (CPR/AED) certificate and a First aid certificate. The cost is $5. Scholarships are available if needed. Everyone is invited to attend. No medical background is required. It is at the Emergency Operations Center. 1769 E. Moody Blvd Bldg #3 RSVP is REQUIRED. There is a minimum/maximum class size. PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE TO RSVP, FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SIGN UP. 386-597-2950 Or flaglervolunteer@cfl.rr.com

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO IN THE COMMUNITY
Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard Presents:

Florida’s 30th Annual

Vietnam and All Veterans Reunion

The Nation’s Largest Veterans Reunion

Supported by the Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida, Inc. - VVOF.org

May 4th – May 7th

Additionally, come visit The Vietnam Traveling Memorial WALL April 30- May 7

LIVE MUSIC

FOOD & DRINKS

MILITARY VENDORS

MILITARY DISPLAYS

POW / MIA CEREMONIES

THE LAST PATROL

THE MOVING TRIBUTE

Wall Escort April 30, 2017 Leave at 10am

Eastern Florida State College Cocoa Campus

Also visit the Reunion Web Page at:

florida veterans reunion.com

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Wickham Park
321-255-4307 - Melbourne, FL
Take I-95 to Exit 191 or old Exit 73

No Coolers, Glass or Pets allowed in the Reunion Area

Per Wickham Park: Golf Carts Permitted
For the Handicapped Only And Must Abide By FL Highway Laws

Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall
http://travelingwall.us

Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard, Inc
PO Box 237225

Cocoa, FL 32923-7225

Call For Info
321-408-2698
321-652-4185

Vendor call 321-652-4185
Vet.reunion.vendor@gmail.com
RaRusso1962@gmail.com
Candy1540@yahoo.com

Club Escort Lineup Info.
reunionesort@aol.com
The City of Jacksonville’s Military Affairs and Veterans Department & WJCT Public Broadcasting invite you to honor Vietnam Veterans

THE WALL THAT HEALS
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL REPLICA & MOBILE EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND
FOUNDERS OF THE WALL

APRIL 13 - 16, 2017
METROPOLITAN PARK
24 hours a day, rain or shine, free to the public

• Escort Arrival • Opening Ceremonies • Information Booths •

The Wall That Heals honors the more than three million Americans who served in the US Armed forces in the Vietnam War and it bears the names of the more than 58,000 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam.

To volunteer & to find out more information visit:
★ wjct.org/storiesofservice ★

Email storiesofservice@wjct.org, or leave a message at (904) 358-6392.
Veterans Appreciation Day
April 10, 2017

Join us for a celebration of our veterans!

Hosted by:
Dr. Tim Brady, Daytona Beach Chancellor, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Keynote Speaker

Lt. Col. David Panzera is the Director of the Program Integration Office of the New York Air National Guard’s 109th Airlift Wing. Lt. Col. Panzera is responsible for all coordination efforts in the modernization, enhancement or modification of the LC-130 aircraft fleet. He has deployed to Antarctica in Support of Operation Deep Freeze for two months every year for 18 years with hundreds of landings all over the ice cap as well as in Greenland. He is an Embry-Riddle alum (’92, DB), graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in Professional Aeronautics.

Veterans Appreciation Ceremony

Monday, April 10
11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Location: ICI Center
• Presentation of Colors
• Keynote Address: Lt. Col. David Panzera
• Missing Man Table Ceremony
Free lunch following the ceremony

Speaker Series: Honoring our Veterans with Lt. Col. David Panzera

Monday, April 10
7:00 p.m.
Location: Lemerand Auditorium, Willie Miller Instructional Center
Moderated by Marc Bernier and followed with Q&A.

Contact Embry-Riddle’s Veteran Student Services at 386-226-6350 for more information.