



Veterans Affairs Media Summary and News Clips

3 August 2015

[1. Access to Benefits/Care](#)

1.1 - FOX News: [Veterans learn VA hospital dumped patient records with Social Security, personal info](#) (3 August, 42.1M online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

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1.2 - Star Tribune: [Pain Free Patriots charity offers free relief to veterans in chronic pain](#) (2 August, Mark Brunswick, 10.5M online visitors/mo; Minneapolis, MN)

For veterans haunted by chronic pain, Doug Huseby's charity does what the VA can't or won't. Pain Free Patriots rolls into church parking lots and shopping malls with mobile trailers equipped with state-of-the-art technology, offering free treatments, such as muscle and nerve therapy and spinal balancing.

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1.3 - AZCentral.com (The Arizona Republic): [VA continues to resist reform at all costs](#) (2 August, 5.4M online visitors/mo; Phoenix, AZ)

Our View: How do respected private contractors become incompetent when they work with VA?... In two separate developments last month, the Veterans Administration demonstrated yet again that its concrete-encased bureaucracy is willing and able to resist reform at all costs.

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1.4 - Chattanooga Times Free Press: [Veterans seek more funding. Federal lawmakers agree VA needs oversight to improve care](#) (3 August, Yolanda Putman, 1.6M online visitors/mo; Chattanooga, TN)

For the first time in at least two decades, the VA is using the electronic waiting list for veterans requesting in-home health care and adult day care services, according to licensed VA providers in Tennessee. Veterans and home health care providers are frustrated because the VA has not told them why they're on the waiting list or how long it will be before veterans receive the requested services.

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1.5 - Newsweek: [Could Pot Help Veterans With PTSD?](#) (2 August, Johnna Rizzo, 757k online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

Marijuana and the Veterans Affairs Hospital system's relationship is complicated. On the one hand, 23 states plus the District of Columbia say marijuana is legal for sanctioned medical use, and veterans are clamoring for it for their post-combat symptoms. On the other, marijuana is classified a Schedule I drug—the same as heroin.

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1.6 - Military Times: [Vet court advocates: 2nd chances saves lives](#) (3 August, Andrew Tilghman, 606k online visitors/mo; Springfield, VA)

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Advocates say about 11,000 former service members now have cases pending in Veterans Treatment Courts, which have expanded nationwide since the first one launched in Buffalo, New York, in 2008... The concept has strong backing of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald. He's declared an ambitious goal of ending veterans' homelessness nationwide and he says veterans courts are central to that mission.

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1.7 - KRDO-TV (ABC-13, Video): [Local musicians host concert to benefit veterans](#) (2

August, Dana Molina, 580k online visitors/mo; Colorado Springs, CO)

Local musicians came together Sunday to help an organization that fights to end suicide among veterans. The concert was held at Stargazers Theater and Event Center Sunday. It was to benefit 22 Until None, an organization that fights to end suicide among veterans.

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1.8 - Amarillo Globe-News: [Amarillo VA to expand emergency department](#) (2 August, Vanessa Garcia, 572k online visitors/mo; Amarillo, TX)

Thomas E. Creek VA Health Care System, 6010 W. Amarillo Blvd., is expanding its emergency department for veterans and their families. "It's almost three times the size of our current emergency department," VA spokesman Patrick Hutchison said.

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1.9 - Amarillo Globe-News: [VA in search of volunteers to drive patients](#) (1 August, Aaron Davis, 572k online visitors/mo; Amarillo, TX)

Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center is in need of volunteer drivers for its transportation program and is calling for Amarillo-area residents with a good driving record to chip in. "This program is very important for veterans to be seen on time and to get prescriptions on time," said Barbara Moore, Amarillo VA spokeswoman.

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1.10 - Providence Journal: [Veterans Journal: Learn about benefits at Aug. 4 town-hall meeting](#) (3 August, George W. Reilly, 441k online visitors/mo; Providence, RI)

Veterans, Medical Center and clinic patients, families and community partners are invited to a town hall-style meeting on benefits on Tuesday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Providence VA Medical Center.

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1.11 - Press of Atlantic City: [New veterans charity in Cape aims to meet all needs](#) (2 August, Michael Miller, 420k online visitors/mo; Pleasantville, NJ)

A new Cape May County charity aims to help military veterans in crisis by offering transportation, helping with benefits applications or, in some cases, giving cash. The Citizens-Veterans Advisory Council of Cape May County helps veterans who are facing eviction, need a ride to the doctor or want help with a disability or health-insurance claim.

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1.12 - Union Leader: [Walking 'In Their Boots' was eye-opener for those who work with veterans' services](#) (1 August, Shawne K. Wickham, 364k online visitors/mo; Manchester, NH) Robin Dame says she never realized how many services are available to veterans through the VA Medical Center. And she's worked there for 30 years. Dame, who works in the medical center's call center, was among 45 people who took part in the "In Their Boots" exercise held at the VAMC on Friday.

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1.13 - WAAY-TV (ABC-31, CNN): [Group traveling the country giving free cannabis to veterans](#) (2 August, 296k online visitors/mo; Huntsville, AL) "Grow-4-Vets" has been handing out cannabis to military veterans for a year in Colorado. But, the state's medical board has just ruled not to recognize marijuana as a treatment for PTSD.

[Hyperlink to Above](#)

1.14 - The Salem News: [Operation: Welcome Home kicks off Homecoming weekend](#) (2 August, John Castelluccio, 186k online visitors/mo; Beverly, MA) [Congressman Seth Moulton] and local officials kicked off Operation: Welcome Home, a social event for veterans at Lynch Park Saturday that was part of Beverly's annual Homecoming celebration. They urged veterans to connect and take advantage of numerous services offered by the veterans administration and local organizations.

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1.15 - Bucks County Courier Times: [Let's just issue everybody a Medicare/Medicaid card](#) (3 August, Warren D. Tochterman, 125k online visitors/day; Levittown, PA) After listening to President Obama being interviewed recently, I couldn't help but conflate our current for-profit health care debacle with an issue bandied about by presidents, political candidates, and politicians of every ilk; the Veterans Administration and veterans' health care.

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1.16 - Herald-Standard (Video): [Nielsen finds fulfillment helping other veterans](#) (3 August, Diana Lasko, 122k online visitors/mo; Uniontown, PA) Glenn Nielsen is not a combat veteran, but the result of injuries from his time in war-ravaged Vietnam are still obvious. Now, his ongoing battle to make sure veterans are given the respect they deserve is his life's mission.

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1.17 - Norfolk Daily News (World-Herald): [VA extends funds for vets on verge of losing care](#) (2 August, Steve Liewer, 109k online visitors/mo; Norfolk, NE) The VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System will continue to fund all skilled and non-skilled care services for veterans who already are receiving them through Sept. 30, VA officials announced Friday. But they also said it remains a question mark whether such care will continue when a new budget year begins Oct. 1.

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1.18 - KATC-TV (ABC-3, Video): [KATCTV3 News](#) (2 August, 26k broadcast viewers; Lafayette, LA)
This 20-second video announces that a new VA clinic may open in Lafayette, LA as soon as winter of 2016.

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1.19 - WKKJ-FM (94.3): [VA Mental Health Summit](#) (3 August, 15k online visitors/mo; Chillicothe, OH)
The Chillicothe VA Medical Center will be holding its third annual Mental Health Summit on Thursday, August 20th. According to the Chillicothe VA's Mental Health Care Line Manager, the Summit is meant to enhance the mental health and well-being of Veterans and their family members through increased collaboration between the VA and the community.

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2. Ending Veterans' Homelessness

2.1 - WOWK-TV (CBS-13): [Race Saturday In Hurricane Benefits Homeless Vets](#) (3 August, Tyler Kes, 227k online visitors/mo; Huntington, WV)
Area runners, joggers and walkers can help support the Veterans Administration as they help homeless veterans in the region by participating in a 5K run or two-mile walk Saturday evening August 8 at Valley Park in Hurricane.

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3. Ending the Claims Backlog – No coverage

4. Veteran Opportunities for Education/GI Bill

4.1 - Politico: [Colleges in the 2016 crosshairs: Democrats want to make college cheaper, or free. Republicans attack the higher education system.](#) (2 August, Kimberly Hefling, 8.3M online visitors/mo; Arlington, VA)
Presidential candidates from both parties are tapping into Americans' growing angst over paying for college, placing an unprecedented bright glare on higher education this election. For Democrats, the solution is making college cheaper, or free. Republicans want more innovation and efficiency.

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4.2 - Pensacola News Journal: [7 UWF students receive military, veterans scholarships](#) (2 August, 385k online visitors/mo; Pensacola, FL)
The University of West Florida Military and Veterans Resource Center awarded scholarships to seven students who are military veterans or dependents of active or retired military at the center's annual scholarship luncheon held Wednesday.

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4.3 - Law Street: [University of Phoenix Under FTC Investigation](#) (2 August, Anneliese Mahoney, 6k online visitors/day; New York, NY)

Late last week the parent company of the University of Phoenix, Apollo Education Group, released information that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was investigating the company. The investigation is attempting to determine if the University of Phoenix ran deceptive or unfair business practices. The investigation is particularly focused on its recruitment of veterans.

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[5. Women Veterans](#) – No coverage

[6. Other](#)

6.1 - The Washington Times (AP): [Event held in North Texas to recognize Vietnam veterans](#) (2 August, 3.8M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

The parade and celebration were...part of the “Welcome Home 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War,”... “No one called us warriors. No one called as heroes,” said Linda Schwartz, who was an Air Force flight nurse and is now assistant secretary for policy and planning for the U.S. Veterans Administration.

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6.2 - Tulsa World (Wagoner Tribune): [Health care facility that serves area veterans undergoes name change](#) (2 August, 681k online visitors/mo; Tulsa, OK)

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Muskogee is now officially called the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System. VA officials say the new name accurately reflects the geographic area that the VA covers, which is 25 counties in Eastern Oklahoma, including Wagoner County.

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6.3 - The Record: [A little leg work to settle a grave concern](#) (1 August, Michael Fitzgerald, 387k online visitors/mo; Stockton, CA)

I would like to think of this column as a place of knowledgeable civic debate and good storytelling. Occasionally, however, it becomes The Department of Very Odd Problems. The Department opened on Wednesday. A Carolyn Sneed called. Sneed, 69, said she was saddled with a tombstone.

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6.4 - New Jersey Herald: [Man has mission to find WWI veteran's family](#) (3 August, Joe Carlson, 219k online visitors/mo; Newton, NJ)

Robert A. Simpson died on June 10, 1957. Fifty-seven years later, a couple from Lafayette handed a group of Vietnam veterans a plaque meant for Simpson's grave that they found in the trash.

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6.5 - The Dallas Morning News: [Ex-Marine on death row says jurors should have been told more about PTSD](#) (2 August, Brandi Grissom, 205k online visitors/day; Dallas, TX)

Brazos County prosecutors argue the jury heard plenty of evidence about the traumatic experiences [John] Thuesen faced, along with evidence that he had a history of acting violently toward those he claimed to care for. The district court ruling in Thuesen's case is particularly important, his lawyers and others said, as the criminal justice system deals with an increasing number of veterans with PTSD.

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6.6 - The Keene Sentinel: [Cemetery thief gets a slap on the wrist](#) (2 August, Freddy Groves, 133k online visitors/mo; Keene, NH)

When you look up "lowlife scum" in the dictionary, the corresponding picture you see next to the definition might well be one Kevin Maynard of Rhode Island. Maynard worked at the Rhode Island Veteran's Memorial Cemetery in Exeter where, over the course of many years, he stole veterans' grave markers, which he took home for backyard projects.

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6.7 - The Daily Herald: [Senate passes a new highway bill](#) (2 August, Steve Tetreault, 97k online visitors/mo; Columbia, TN)

The Senate voted last week for a six-year extension of federal programs for highways, mass transit and infrastructure while acknowledging it needs to come up with more money to pay for the entire bill... The House voted 256-170 to make it easier for the Department of Veterans Affairs to fire corrupt or non-performing workers.

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6.8 - Valley News: [At the Hospitals: Aug. 2, 2015](#) (2 August, Aimee Caruso, White River Junction, VT)

Three nursing students recently completed a 10-week program at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in White River Junction. The VA Learning Opportunity Residency in an honors program for baccalaureate nursing students.

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1. Access to Benefits/Care

1.1 - FOX News: [Veterans learn VA hospital dumped patient records with Social Security, personal info](#) (3 August, 42.1M online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

A Veterans Affairs hospital in South Dakota has waited more than two months to notify 1,100 patients that files containing their Social Security numbers and other personal information were dumped in a trash bin.

The Rapid City Journal reports that the data breach at the VA Hot Springs hospital took place in May, but it wasn't until July 29 that anyone was notified. The paper said the breach was the most recent in a string of embarrassments that has engulfed the nation's VA system over charges of doctored wait lists, poor care and wasteful spending.

The VA Black Hills Health Care System blamed the breach on an employee who mistakenly tossed the patient files in a Dumpster. The records were found two days later by another employee who fished them out of the trash and notified hospital security guards.

"The investigation found that during a regular office move, that the box of files were inadvertently throw in the receptacle, VA Black Hills spokeswoman Teresa Forbes told the paper, calling it "an unfortunate mistake."

The VA alerted the 1,100 military veterans of the breach in letters mailed last Wednesday. The letter informed recipients they could request a free credit report to ensure their personal data was not being misused.

Forbes defended the lag in making the notification, saying that the VA was following procedures.

The files included names, Social Security numbers, phone numbers and addresses. They did not include medical histories.

The Journal said the VA is confident the information did not fall in to the hands of identify thieves.

That confidence did not satisfy one VA critic, Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), who said the breach demonstrated "gross mismanagement."

He also said it was "unfortunately illustrative of the continued decline of the Hot Springs VA and the indifference shown to it by the Veterans Administration."

The Black Hills health care system serves some 19,000 veterans living in South Dakota and four other states.

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1.2 - Star Tribune: [Pain Free Patriots charity offers free relief to veterans in chronic pain](#) (2 August, Mark Brunswick, 10.5M online visitors/mo; Minneapolis, MN)

For veterans haunted by chronic pain, Doug Huseby's charity does what the VA can't or won't.

Pain Free Patriots rolls into church parking lots and shopping malls with mobile trailers equipped with state-of-the art technology, offering free treatments, such as muscle and nerve therapy and spinal balancing.

Since it was started five years ago, more than 450 -veterans have been through the program, with testimonials from former Navy SEALs to Marine grunts from the Vietnam era. Almost all have tried conventional help through the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system with little or no success.

The 72-year-old Huseby, who made his money as the owner of Becker Furniture World, says he is able to offer results when the VA has failed because he cuts through stifling bureaucracy and embraces different approaches to treatment.

"Why is the post office not up to UPS or FedEx? Anything run by the government is going to be slower with more red tape," he said. "I'm a business guy. I go in and I've figured out how to fix people."

Few alternatives

Organizations like Pain Free Patriots are emerging as the VA struggles with how to handle hundreds of thousands of veterans in chronic pain. Almost 60 percent of veterans returning from the past decade of war list chronic pain as their most common medical problem.

For years, the VA's answer was to prescribe highly addictive painkillers called opioids. During an 11-year period ending in 2013, the number of prescriptions from the VA for pain meds like oxycodone and morphine surged 259 percent nationally.

But concerned about -misuse and overdoses, the VA abruptly changed its policies, drastically reducing the amount of opioids it prescribed. Critics say it has left many vets who relied on the medications with few alternatives; and it has left the VA ill-prepared for the consequences, leaving outside organizations to fill the void.

The mobile units of Pain Free Patriots come equipped with over \$250,000 in technology. The outside of the trailer is festooned with nearly as many sponsors and corporate logos as a NASCAR team.

Potential clients must show evidence of military service, either their discharge papers or a military identification, and fill out a one-page questionnaire about their ailments. Few are turned away. The vets are provided grants that average about \$5,000 for their treatments, which usually run several times a week for about three months.

Chiropractor Sheldon Osvold, who works with the program, said the advanced technology and protocols allow him to pinpoint treatments and speed recovery.

"For me, it's a way of helping somebody who is under served," he said. "Not necessarily that they don't have adequate care, just that they don't get this type of care and this allows them to have access to it at a reasonable rate. I can't take away that you were blown through a wall and you've got some significant structural damage, but if I can make your life as pain free as possible, that's my goal."

A typical treatment

On a recent Tuesday afternoon, Neil Krenz, who retired as a captain with the Minnesota National Guard, made his way to the Pain Free Patriots trailer parked next to the -Living Word Christian Center in Brooklyn Park.

Krenz was deployed to Iraq with the Guard in 2005 and served 12 years in the military. He never suffered any traumatic injury. Instead, the constant wear and tear of carrying 50 pounds of Kevlar plates and helmet left him with sharp pains in his neck and shoulders, coupling a pre-existing abnormal curvature of the spine with degenerative disc disease. The VA wanted to prescribe painkillers, but he resisted. The VA offered him chiropractic care, but would authorize only four visits.

“We all know that isn’t enough to scratch the surface. You are just getting started at four sessions,” Krenz said. He’s participated in the Pain Free Patriots program for more than a year, including twice-a-week sessions for the first four months.

“The everyday stress seemed to be lifted,” he said.

Ron Green, a Marine veteran who served during the Vietnam War era, gets treatment for foot problems that had nearly prevented him from walking. Green, who also has type II diabetes, said he was in tremendous pain with feet that were bleeding in June when he began treatment, but now his pain has all but gone away.

“It’s totally life changing,” Green said, adding that he stopped taking pain medication two weeks earlier. He says his doctors at the VA, who had once talked about the possibility of amputating his foot, are amazed by his progress.

“They just went nuts, they couldn’t believe it,” he said.

Offers to partner with the VA

Huseby says he has offered to partner with the VA in informal discussions, but each time the VA contact person has left the VA or the conversation has seemed to be quickly forgotten.

“I want to be the solution,” he said. “I want to go to the VA and say, ‘Let me help you.’”

The Minneapolis VA said it has no problems with a charity providing care to its veterans.

“If there is a grant available to our patients to access free, quality services outside the VA, we would welcome it with open arms,” said Minneapolis VA spokesman Ralph Heussner.

Pain Free Patriots operates under an umbrella BFW Charities, which posts modest revenue of several hundred thousand dollars a year.

Huseby has unabashed ambitions for the program. Nashville recording artist and Army veteran Rockie Lynne has signed on as a spokesman, producing a video for the charity’s website. Huseby says the History Channel has contacted him about a project to follow vets through their treatments.

The charity has a fundraising gala planned later this month, and Huseby hopes to expand the program, enlisting corporate sponsors for individual veterans.

He says it is the least they can do.

“Why wouldn’t you write a check out?” Huseby asked. “Every company should recognize that you wouldn’t have a company, you wouldn’t have freedom, if these veterans didn’t go out and risk their lives.”

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1.3 - AZCentral.com (The Arizona Republic): [VA continues to resist reform at all costs](#) (2 August, 5.4M online visitors/mo; Phoenix, AZ)

Our View: How do respected private contractors become incompetent when they work with VA?

The French army at Verdun in 1916 wasn’t this deeply entrenched.

In two separate developments last month, the Veterans Administration demonstrated yet again that its concrete-encased bureaucracy is willing and able to resist reform at all costs.

Early in July, Department of Veterans Affairs inspectors produced a 35-page analysis of the private-care alternative Congress created in 2014 to help alleviate the enormous backlog of veterans seeking health care through the VA.

Inspectors found the program, designed as a release valve for the crush of VA patients, was itself awash in delays and incompetence. Research of patients seeking care through nine VA facilities, including those in Phoenix, Tucson and Prescott, found tens of thousands of authorized doctor visits were never scheduled or carried out.

As reported by The Republic’s Dennis Wagner, one private contractor took an average of 146 days to return 50 unfilled-appointment authorizations for oncology patients. In another case cited in the report, 94 of 150 rheumatology appointments booked by one private provider involved waits greater than 30 days.

Has nothing changed with the VA? Government-supplied care? Private care? It all appears the same. No one, it seems, can provide prompt, quality health care to American veterans.

At first blush, anyway.

There are a number of explanations for this latest failure of care, and few reflect negatively on the private health-care system that represents the only real hope for sick veterans.

The VA bureaucracy has resisted reform from the beginning. The Patient-Centered Community Care program, known as PC3, suffered at its onset from the usual government-program plague of delays and cost overruns, but it suffered infinitely more from the bureaucracy’s determination to kill it.

Patient participation in the original 2014 reform, the \$10 billion “Choice Card” program giving vets in rural areas a private-care option, was grossly limited by VA rules restricting eligibility.

The agency hated the program, and last week won a stare-down with Congress over its funding. On Thursday, Congress approved moving \$3.3 billion from the Choice Card program into other VA programs.

As for PC3, its administration has been a mess. Private contractors hired by the VA appear to have become just as incompetent as the bureaucracy itself. The report noted the prevalence of “blind scheduling” — setting up doctor’s appointments without bothering to consult with the patients. An enormous swath of those appointments went unfilled. What a surprise.

Private insurers involved in PC3, such as TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp., enjoy excellent reputations for service in their contracts with other military agencies. Yet, somehow, they become instantly incompetent when linked up with the VA?

Perhaps some of the foibles noted in the report originated with the VA? You think, maybe? From the report: “VHA staff need to improve their timeliness in submitting authorizations to the PC3 contractors.”

Meanwhile, VA whistleblowers had their first chance to hear from the new VA chief watchdog at a Senate hearing last week. They were not much impressed.

The new VA Inspector General, Linda Halliday, told senators that whistleblowers often “are not in a position to know all the facts, or they overemphasize the(ir) viewpoint.”

That does not bode well for rooting out corruption and incompetence.

“I was incredibly disappointed to the point of being horrified,” said Dr. Katherine Mitchell, one of the key whistleblowers at the Phoenix VA hospital.

The more the VA changes and “reforms,” the more its deep-seated desire to remain exactly the same becomes clear.

It is going to be a long, hard struggle to refashion this agency into something more responsive to the veterans it serves.

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1.4 - Chattanooga Times Free Press: [Veterans seek more funding. Federal lawmakers agree VA needs oversight to improve care](#) (3 August, Yolanda Putman, 1.6M online visitors/mo; Chattanooga, TN)

Robert Porter sleeps on a broken hospital bed donated from Goodwill and rides in his wife's broken wheelchair. The bed won't properly adjust, so his back is up and his legs won't go down. The motorized wheelchair allows him to start a trip to the store, but the motor often stops on him and he has to wait, sometimes an hour, before it starts again.

The 55-year-old U.S. Army veteran served from 1980-1984; he also served nine years in the Army Reserve. He asked the U.S. Veterans Administration for a new bed and wheelchair in May but has yet to get them.

He's also asked the VA to provide a hospital bed for his wife, Wanda, who's bedridden after a stroke in 2003. She must sleep partially sitting up because the bed she has won't lay flat.

Not surprisingly, Porter also suffers from depression.

Instead of going to a nursing home, he wants to remain in his own house so he can care for his wife. And he also wants to visit an adult day care facility a few days a week where he can spend time interacting with other veterans.

He's on a new electronic waiting list for the bed, the wheelchair and the day care but hasn't heard back from the VA.

"Are they waiting for me to die?" Porter asked.

For the first time in at least two decades, the VA is using the electronic waiting list for veterans requesting in-home health care and adult day care services, according to licensed VA providers in Tennessee. Veterans and home health care providers are frustrated because the VA has not told them why they're on the waiting list or how long it will be before veterans receive the requested services.

"They're denying services as far as adult day care and in-home care. We haven't been given a straight answer [why]," said Steve Zagorski, a Nashville-based licensed VA provider for adult day care. "If they don't get the service, we've got veterans who are going to be forced into the nursing home."

It was a year ago when the VA stepped up measures to relieve waiting lists for veterans waiting to receive medical treatment after veterans allegedly died while waiting to receive service.

Zagorski, president of Centennial Adultcare Center in Nashville and a former board member of the Tennessee Association of Adult Day Services, said no veteran seeking adult day care or home care services has been put on a waiting list since the 1990s.

Back then, the VA told families and providers for in-home care that it ran out of money and that they had to wait one month until the next fiscal year to receive services. People waited and, at the scheduled time, they received services. But this time the VA has said nothing, Zagorski said.

Sharon Kelly, owner of Sharon's Senior Services, which has an adult day care center attended by several veterans, said an official in the system told her in June the VA established the waiting list because it doesn't have money to provide the services.

At a monthly town hall meeting in Harriman that focused on veterans, Steven Pharris, community-based care programs manager at the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, which provides health care services to veterans in Kentucky and Tennessee, also told her that a person receiving services may have to die before a new person can get help, Kelly said.

Pharris referred questions to Jessica Schiefer, Tennessee Valley Healthcare System public affairs officer.

"Due to current budget constraints, Tennessee Valley Healthcare System leadership made the decision to place all new first-time requests for non-institutionalized care on the Electronic Wait List until additional funding is received," Schiefer said in an email.

She said patients will be assisted based on their percentage of service to the military. A veteran or a loved one may submit a clinical appeal if there are extenuating circumstances, she said, and authorized services will continue for veterans currently receiving non-institutionalized care. She said the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System is waiting further guidance from its leadership.

She explained that VA Care in the Community funding was redistributed to the Veterans Choice Program through the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014. The Choice Act provides veterans access to care when medical appointments are not readily available or when veterans have trouble just getting to VA facilities because they don't have access to transportation.

The Choice Act does not provide health care services in the areas of non-institutionalized care services, which include services such as homemaker/home health aide, respite or adult day health care. These services were covered under the VA's community-based care program before funding was cut.

Older veterans from the World War II, Korea and Vietnam eras are among those most negatively affected by removing funds for these services, which allow the veterans to live in their own homes, Kelly said. If the program is defunded, they will be forced into nursing homes even though nursing home care is more expensive than care at home, she said.

The problem can only be changed if Congress makes sure that veterans have the money needed for their care. But VA officials at the Harriman meeting told her services for in-home and community care may not be reauthorized. She's concerned about several veterans who've been coming to her center whose adult day care services come up for reauthorization on Oct. 1.

U.S. Rep. Chuck Fleischmann, R-Tenn., said the VA needs to be fixed.

"It's clear that our Veterans Administration is not functioning properly and it's crucial that Congress use its oversight role to fix these problems," he said. "The men and women who put their lives on the line for our freedom have earned the right to timely, top notch care and we need to do what we can to ensure that happens."

U.S. Sen Bob Corker, R-Tenn., also stressed the need for oversight with the VA.

"It is important that Congress conducts proper oversight to ensure the VA is using its resources appropriately and equitably so our veterans receive the care they deserve," he said.

World War II Army veteran Curtis Sledge almost died 10 years ago while living in a nursing home. His daughter, Janice Sledge, said he lost the will to live. She moved him out of the facility and into her home. He's been thriving since then. At 92 years old, he has slight dementia but most times his mind is clear and he's alert, she said.

Seeing his friends and fellow Army veterans at Sharon's Adult Day Center keeps him focused. But his daughter is concerned because Sledge is among veterans up for reauthorization this fall.

Kelly worries that the VA will not continue authorizing the service. He's been attending about five days a week since 2008. He plays games like bingo and dominoes with friends while listening to music.

"I enjoy the people," he said recently after finishing a game of dominoes. Without the center, he said he would be at home watching television.

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1.5 - Newsweek: [Could Pot Help Veterans With PTSD?](#) (2 August, Johnna Rizzo, 757k online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

Marijuana and the Veterans Affairs Hospital system's relationship is complicated. On the one hand, 23 states plus the District of Columbia say marijuana is legal for sanctioned medical use, and veterans are clamoring for it for their post-combat symptoms. On the other, marijuana is classified a Schedule I drug—the same as heroin. Under the aegis of the government, the VA system, and by extension the veterans who use it, has been stuck in the middle.

Experts say as many as 20 percent of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. According to VA estimates in 2012, about 22 former members of the Armed Forces, on average, commit suicide every day. Antidepressants like Zoloft and Paxil, along with other heavy-duty pills, have been the traditional mainstays in VA doctors' arsenals. Non-FDA approved options, marijuana among them, haven't been options at all. But that has started to change. New Mexico has recently begun allowing VA Hospitals to prescribe medical marijuana for American soldiers' PTSD. Maine became one of the first few states to follow suit.

In November 2014, Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D–Oregon) and Dana Rohrabacher (R–California) introduced the Veterans Equal Access Act, which aims to open the entire VA system to judicious prescription of medical cannabis. In May 2015, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted to back the amendment. Prior to its introduction, VA doctors couldn't even discuss cannabis with their patients, much less prescribe it. Senator Steve Daines (R–Montana), who introduced the amendment, called forbidding such conversations unconstitutional. "They can't discuss all the options available to them that they could discuss if they literally walked next door to a non-VA facility," he told The Washington Post. "I don't believe we should discriminate against veterans just because they are in the care of the VA."

Nascent Research

In the past, marijuana studies have almost universally looked at harm, not efficacy, in treatment. Brain scientists are lending tentative support for the latter. "One way of thinking about PTSD is an overactivation of the fear system that can't be inhibited, can't be normally modulated," Dr. Kerry Ressler of Emory University told NPR in 2013. In other words, the PTSD brain can't get out of overdrive. Studies on mice in Germany beginning about a decade ago showed evidence that cannabis can help. Unfortunately, Ressler added, the fix may not be sustainable—prolonged exposure may make brain cells less sensitive to the chemicals in cannabis that are helping.

Practical research has begun its first toddling steps. The Washington Post reported last fall that researchers at New York University's Langone Medical Center had begun developing cannabis-

related medications for PTSD, according to the study's supervisor Alexander Neumeister, targeted at unregulated receptors in the PTSD brain, which are activated when a person uses marijuana—a program its researchers say is still in far too early days to go mainstream, especially because possible deleterious side effects—such as potential short-term memory loss—haven't been properly studied yet. Even studies that seem to praise cannabis's power as a PTSD remedy emphasize caution alongside a call to arms. A study published in 2013 by George Greer in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* reported a 75 percent reduction in CAPS (a clinician administered PTSD metric) scores when patients were using cannabis: "Conclusions: Cannabis is associated with reductions in PTSD symptoms in some patients, and prospective, placebo-controlled study is needed to determine efficacy of cannabis and its constituents in treating PTSD."

Veterans, for their part, are finding it hard to wait for such studies to work out the cannabis-related kinks. If anecdotal evidence is to be trusted, many aren't waiting at all.

PTSD Pot Pioneer

Enter Arizona psychiatrist Sue Sisley. At first blush, Sisley may not seem the obvious go-to advocate for cannabis as PTSD treatment. She's never smoked marijuana herself, is a self-proclaimed "lifelong Republican" and has introduced anti-workplace-smoking legislation. But she's also spent two decades treating patients with PTSD, and by her own admission, she doesn't feel she can deny the boons presented to her patients. "Over the last decade, patients have slowly started telling me they were using marijuana successfully to manage their PTSD symptoms. I was extremely dubious at the beginning. I was thinking these guys are just drug seeking," Sisley says. "I am trained in a very conservative medical field, where we only cover FDA-approved medicine. So for me to hear all these reports, it was discouraging, and I felt like a failure because they had to resort to this highly dangerous drug. Then slowly I stopped being so judgmental and started really listening to them." Patients kept sharing their marijuana treatment success stories. Family members, too, told her "this plant" was giving them their spouse or father back. "All we have now is Zoloft and Paxil. And if you know much about those meds, you know there are many side effects, and they often don't work. If they are effective, then patients are dealing with these side effects like weight gain and sexual dysfunction," Sisley adds. "Vets come home from service, and they just want to reintegrate into their family. And we make them fat and impotent and mired in a bunch of disabling side effects."

After what she calls "a mountain of anecdotal evidence that was piling up over the last decade," she partnered with a nonprofit in Santa Cruz, California, about five years ago that had been advocating for marijuana research for 20 years and began advocating for medical marijuana approval in Arizona. "One of the things I kept hearing from people was it would be negligent to use the medical marijuana law because there is not enough research," she says. "I would keep telling them in the meantime people are suffering, and they need safe legal access."

One of the first large-scale studies into the effectiveness of marijuana in combating PTSD will be Sisley's own, funded by a \$2 million-grant from Colorado's Medical Marijuana Scientific Advisory Council. Sisley will treat 38 of the 76 veterans approved to participate; Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore will treat the other half. It wasn't an easy road to get to approval. She initially submitted a study design to the FDA in 2010—a triple-blind, controlled trial looking at four different strains of smoked marijuana in 76 military veterans that have treatment-resistant PTSD. "The hypothesis is that we think marijuana will reduce or ease the symptoms of PTSD in a dose-dependent manner. We also believe CBD-rich strains of marijuana may be most optimal for treating PTSD," Sisley says of her study. "You've heard all that about CBD-rich marijuana

supposedly buffering the negative side of THC. We believe that THC is the culprit when it comes to causing anxiety or paranoia. We think higher CBD will buffer those negative side effects.”

Why Mary Jane?

When asked why marijuana might be better than other options, Sisley’s quick to answer: “I think the most intriguing thing is that a single plant can provide monotherapy for this whole constellation of symptoms.” Research suggests CBD receptors through the brain and spinal cord are particularly concentrated in the emotional center of the brain, she says. Structures there, like the amygdala and hippocampus, are heavily involved in anxiety. “There is a unique neural pathway between all of those structures that deals with fear and memory. The thinking is there may be excessive firing within those structures in patients that have PTSD. So the calming effect [of marijuana] may reduce the neuronal firing in those structures,” she says. It offers “a capacity not to forget bad memories but to not fixate on them.”

The fact that cannabis seems to work for Sisley’s patients is only part of the story. The other side is how fast-acting the relief often is. “Vets would say they would have sleep deprivation,” Sisley says. “After their first dose of marijuana they would get their first good night of sleep. I don’t want to tell you that every patient gets incredible relief on the first time. Some patients need to try it four or five times before they get therapeutic effects. Your endocannabinoid system may not be immediately active to external cannabinoids.” But even at its slowest, cannabis works faster than traditional PTSD meds, which often take months to achieve therapeutic effect, she adds. “You think about how if you start Zoloft at 50 milligrams, you can’t go up too quickly because you will get a lot of side effects. What ends up happening is many patients won’t get relief unless they are up to 200 milligrams of it. It could take four months,” she says. “If you are a vet, you can get impatient if you don’t see results in a month. Then they go to their buddy who teaches them about marijuana.” Once they’ve tried it, many vets don’t look back. “The medical community wants the patients to be obedient; we call it compliance. Sometimes we don’t earn the compliance,” Sisley adds. “Unfortunately when it comes to PTSD, we are failing all over the place. Vets are literally walking away from their pills. I have seen videos of vets chucking their pill bottles on the floors saying, ‘No, we are not going to take these anymore.’”

Weed 4 Warriors and Grow 4 Vets are two outside groups that are taking matters into their own hands, she says, using peer mentoring to introduce marijuana therapies. “Vets are a highly conservative group that want to be on the side of the law. So this is really confusing to them. The government put them in this predicament where they come back, and they are broken. And then the government does not offer them any solutions,” Sisley says. It’s confusing for Sisley herself. “It is very ironic that I do this. It’s actually frustrating for me because I don’t like [smoking], but I acknowledge that we have to do a real world study because this is what veterans are doing. I don’t have any political agenda here. Most people think this is a legalization strategy. That is not what any of us are about. We are scientists. We want effective data.”

Still, Sisley admits cannabis is not a cure-all. “There is no doubt that marijuana is a drug. It has benefits, risks and side effects. Anybody who tells you marijuana has no side effects, well that’s not true. We are trying to do a study where both efficacy and benefits are addressed.”

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1.6 - Military Times: [Vet court advocates: 2nd chances saves lives](#) (3 August, Andrew Tilghman, 606k online visitors/mo; Springfield, VA)

After having his separation date extended under the military's "stop-loss" policy during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, former Marine Corps Sgt. Tim Wynn spent several months in the gunners' turret of a soft-skinned Humvee, riding around Baghdad and central Iraq providing security for convoys.

Then, in a jarring transition that lasted just a few days, he returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, got his military discharge papers and drove back to his home in northeastern Philadelphia.

On his first night there, he got into a bar fight — "I exploded," is how he described it in an interview — and ended up in handcuffs.

It was the start of a decade adrift. Wynn drank too much, became addicted to cocaine, racked up 19 arrests, suffered from post-traumatic stress and thought often about suicide.

But his life turned around in 2013 after yet another arrest, this one for assault, led him to a court-appointed attorney who got him out of the traditional criminal justice system and into Philadelphia's startup Veterans Treatment Court.

"I wasn't just another number on the docket," the former Marine said. "The whole court staff knew my name after meeting me only once. That's when I realized, OK, these guys are here to help me."

Wynn is one of thousands of veterans removed from the daily grind of the U.S. court system to receive treatment and support in specialized courts. Staffed by professionals who understand veterans' issues, the courts offer troubled vets an opportunity to have criminal charges dismissed upon successful completion of drug treatment and mental health care programs.

Advocates say about 11,000 former service members now have cases pending in Veterans Treatment Courts, which have expanded nationwide since the first one launched in Buffalo, New York, in 2008. They have grown along with other similar specialized courts for drug treatment and mental health treatment, alongside a broader criminal justice reform effort.

"I think we are at a tipping point because these courts are working and nothing can beat success. These are veterans who are receiving life-saving treatment and who are coming back into our community to lead productive lives," said Melissa Fitzgerald, senior director for Justice for Vets, a nonprofit group that advocates and provides funding and training for Veterans Treatment Courts.

But, she added, "Right now funding is a very, very major issue for us."

That's why Justice for Vets helped organize an aggressive push on Capitol Hill on July 29, when hundreds of veterans, judges, lawyers and others went door to door urging lawmakers to allocate a small sliver of the federal budget to further expand the program nationwide.

Specifically, the Justice Department this year doled out about \$5 million in grants to local jurisdictions to fund additional courthouse and support staff for Veterans Treatment Courts. Advocates are seeking \$15 million in 2016, money that will help fund the training and additional staff that local governments need to launch the program, Fitzgerald said.

Fitzgerald and others say funding the courts saves taxpayers money in the long run by keeping veterans out of the criminal justice system and costly social service networks.

The concept has strong backing of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald. He's declared an ambitious goal of ending veterans' homelessness nationwide and he says veterans courts are central to that mission.

"There is an inextricable link between criminal justice involvement and homelessness. We need to give veterans an off-ramp from that inextricable link," McDonald told hundreds of attorneys and advocates at a Veterans Treatment Court conference near Washington, D.C., on July 27.

He also said the veterans courts can help provide vital services to the 15 percent of vets who did not receive an honorable discharge and thus are ineligible for all VA benefits.

Wynn, 35, is today a married father of two who has learned to manage his PTSD. He said the most important thing his Veterans Treatment Court gave him was a social network of fellow veterans and mental health care from professionals who fully understood his experience.

"Nothing worked for me the way being around veterans did," he said. "Just being able to get things off my chest and not sound crazy ... it's amazing what that does for you."

And he's paying it back; he has has a full-time job with the Philadelphia Department of Health, counseling troubled veterans who face the same problems and struggles that he has gone through.

He said he believes Veterans Treatment Courts play a role in helping to prevent veteran suicides, estimated to number as many as 22 a day.

"Most of the guys who come through veterans court are so grateful for that arrest — because they didn't up being one of the 22."

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1.7 - KRDO-TV (ABC-13, Video): [Local musicians host concert to benefit veterans](#) (2 August, Dana Molina, 580k online visitors/mo; Colorado Springs, CO)

Local musicians came together Sunday to help an organization that fights to end suicide among veterans.

The concert was held at Stargazers Theater and Event Center Sunday. It was to benefit 22 Until None, an organization that fights to end suicide among veterans.

"I was shocked when I found out that 22 veterans commit suicide a day. That just broke my heart," performer Baylee Parks said.

Many of the performers are veterans themselves, and they know the struggle. They said they want to prompt others to take action.

"Let's get these vets the help they need, the medical care they need, help them weigh through all the bureaucracy and red tape at the VA," Rikki Dee Hall said.

He hopes other veterans take away a message too.

"Tomorrow's another day," he said. "Have faith."

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1.8 - Amarillo Globe-News: [Amarillo VA to expand emergency department](#) (2 August, Vanessa Garcia, 572k online visitors/mo; Amarillo, TX)

Thomas E. Creek VA Health Care System, 6010 W. Amarillo Blvd., is expanding its emergency department for veterans and their families.

"It's almost three times the size of our current emergency department," VA spokesman Patrick Hutchison said. "It will add more individual room for the exam rooms. It'll also have a bigger waiting room. It'll have drive-up access at the front of the building, rather than the back where our (emergency department) is currently."

On Thursday, Dennis Elliott, who served in the Army for three years, said relocating the emergency department is a good move because veterans will have easier access.

Other than the relocation, the new building will feature three exam rooms, three trauma rooms, an isolation exam room and a decontamination area.

"It's a completely new addition," Hutchison said.

"We'll actually have rooms for if someone is having a mental health crisis. There will be rooms in the (emergency department) that will accommodate them and their needs far better than probably anybody else."

Texas Panhandle Honor Flight Director Dennis McManaman, a Vietnam War veteran who served in the Army for more than two years, said the VA's expansion will have better facilities to work in, but he also hopes extra staff is hired.

"You can have the biggest ER in the world," McManaman said. "You're still not going to get any more accomplished. You need to be adequately staffed, and it's the same with the hospital."

The VA doesn't anticipate hiring staff at this time, although staff may increase in the future, Hutchison said.

The construction of the new building started in November, and the completion is set for December, with the building expected to be available for use in January.

“It really is just a natural progression,” Hutchison said. “We built up and expanded so much over the years with the additions of the specialty care building and our center for therapy and recovery.”

The cost for the 12,620- square-foot building is \$3.5 million. Funding for the new building is approved at the federal level, meaning the funds didn’t come out of Amarillo’s VA coffers.

The larger space and relocation of the emergency department are two important needs for patients, Hutchison said.

“If you’re in an emergency situation ... those two things to make it better right from the start are access to care and the room, the availability,” Hutchison said.

“I think that’s exactly what we’re doing, what we’re going to give veterans.”

For visitors and family, the waiting rooms will be larger with new bathroom accommodations, Hutchison said.

“As far as the new emergency department, from ground up it’s been designed to benefit the veteran and the veteran’s family,” Hutchison said. “Be it a larger waiting room or bigger exam rooms, or the upgraded equipment that will go into those rooms. From top to bottom, it is designed for the veteran, and that’s exactly the right way to do it.”

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1.9 - Amarillo Globe-News: [VA in search of volunteers to drive patients](#) (1 August, Aaron Davis, 572k online visitors/mo; Amarillo, TX)

Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center is in need of volunteer drivers for its transportation program and is calling for Amarillo-area residents with a good driving record to chip in.

“This program is very important for veterans to be seen on time and to get prescriptions on time,” said Barbara Moore, Amarillo VA spokeswoman.

“Potter and Randall counties are more metropolitan, but we’re largely a rural area. There are lots and lots of people that live a pretty far distance away, and either they have a medical condition that makes it hard for them to come in on their own or financial issues.”

Moore said that the VA Transportation Service has regular service from Clayton, N.M., to Amarillo and goes as far north as Liberal, Kan., and out to Albuquerque.

The VA central office recently awarded a grant to the Amarillo office for a formal veterans transportation program, Moore said.

With that, they got a dispatching program and are now able to manage more drivers.

“We all need to reinvigorate this issue, as a community, with possible future drivers from our areas,” wrote Ed Edwards, department service officer of the Disabled American Veterans organization.

“The Amarillo VA hospital urgently needs help for their scarcity of volunteer drivers.”

Disabled American Veterans, a veterans advocacy and assistance group, helps manage some volunteer drivers to supplement the drivers that the VA already has.

Additionally, the DAV also supplies vehicles for the program and replaces them when they are ready to be retired.

“Right now, it’s hit or miss,” said Jason Shaffer, mobility manager at the VA.

“If we have a request for transportation and it’s outside of Amarillo, then the DAV gets it. If we send out a request for drivers and no one responds, then we can’t get to them.”

Shaffer emphasized that if residents are interested in helping the VA provide services, but cannot commit to a driving schedule, they can volunteer at the DAV, which raises funds for these programs.

“When it comes down to transportation, we have always heard of it as the circle of life,” Shaffer said.

“The transportation here is the circle to life. When veterans do not have access to the services here, their quality of life goes down.”

If residents are interested in driving a van for the DAV or VA, call 877-426-2838 or go online to www.dav.org

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1.10 - Providence Journal: [Veterans Journal: Learn about benefits at Aug. 4 town-hall meeting](#) (3 August, George W. Reilly, 441k online visitors/mo; Providence, RI)

Veterans, Medical Center and clinic patients, families and community partners are invited to a town hall-style meeting on benefits on Tuesday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Providence VA Medical Center, 830 Chalkstone Ave.

The event, held in the fifth-floor auditorium of Building 1, is sponsored by the Providence VA Medical Center and the Veterans Benefits Administration's Providence Regional Benefit Office. Staff will provide updates on benefits and answer questions from the audience.

"We're inviting all area veterans to come tell us how we're doing, and learn about new developments in both the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration," says Dr. Susan MacKenzie, director of the Providence VA Medical Center.

Before the meeting, the Regional Benefit Office will hold two benefit clinics in the fifth-floor's classroom 2 of Building 1. There will be a service connection clinic from 1:30 to 2:40 p.m. and a non-service-connected pension and survivor benefits clinic from 2:50 to 4 p.m. Free parking will be available in the general parking lots.

Research on PTSD and TBI

According to a study published July 1 in the PLOS One Journal (bit.ly/1JfpUU1), it is estimated that more than 7.7 million people suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder at any one time, along with 2 million new traumatic brain injuries suffered every year in the United States.

Military veterans are especially vulnerable, with 400,000 of them suffering from PTSD, TBI or both, as confirmed by the Department of Defense statistics. Symptoms often overlap, ranging from anxiety, irritability, insomnia, poor concentration and low impulse control, emphasizing the importance of proper diagnosis.

The PLOS One Journal article covers how the medical problems of PTSD and TBI affect military personnel when they return home from service and how each diagnosis has very different treatments, and the dangerous consequences that can occur when they are misdiagnosed. Also being studied is the overlap of the symptoms of the two disorders and the importance of being able to distinguish between them and treat them properly.

Daniel G. Amen, a psychiatrist and lead researcher of the study, is also founder of the Amen Clinics (bit.ly/1ODSMsQ) and has built the world's largest database of functional brain scans relating to behavior, totaling more than 110,000 SPECT scans on patients from 110 counties. Amen is a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and the author of more than 60 professional scientific articles and 10 New York Times bestselling books.

A SPECT scan, according to the Mayo Clinic's website, is a type of nuclear imaging test, which means it uses a radioactive isotope substance, along with a special camera, to create 3-D pictures that show how bodily organs work, namely, how blood flows to tissues and organs. This is more valuable to the study than simple x-rays which show what the structures inside a body look like, and help scientists diagnose possible medical problems years before they occur.

Many in the scientific and medical community do not agree with Dr. Amen's approaches with SPECT scans and some of the criticism may be seen at bit.ly/1gqyfNW.

To read further about the Amen studies, go to bit.ly/1K30D52 and wb.md/1KD0ltQ (sign-up required for access with a free account).

Victory Day in R.I.

The Pawtucket Veterans Council will observe Victory Day in Pawtucket on Monday, Aug. 10, with a ceremony and wreath laying at 11 a.m. at Veterans Memorial Park, at the corner of Roosevelt Avenue and Exchange Street, adjacent to City Hall. Mayor Donald Grebien, city council and administration officials and all Pawtucket veterans groups have been invited to attend. Jack Lucas, American Legion state officer, will be master of ceremonies. Kenneth Lafontaine, a Korean War veteran and chaplain, will open and close the ceremonies.

In case of rain, the ceremony will take place at Gatchell VFW Post, 171 Fountain St. For more information call Jack Lucas at (401) 725-0191.

Victory Over Japan Day, also known as VJ Day, marks the anniversary of the Allies' victory over Japan during World War II. It followed the devastating dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on Aug. 6 and Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945, 70 years ago. VJ Day is a state holiday only in Rhode Island and is observed on the second Monday in August.

Many believe that there is a need for such a day to remember the sacrifices that veterans made during World War II, including those who were taken as prisoners of war, were tortured, injured or killed. Critics claim, however, that the day itself is discriminatory due to its reference to Japan in light of modern times. There have been many attempts to change the holiday's name, but so far it remains known as Victory Day.

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1.11 - Press of Atlantic City: [New veterans charity in Cape aims to meet all needs](#) (2 August, Michael Miller, 420k online visitors/mo; Pleasantville, NJ)

A new Cape May County charity aims to help military veterans in crisis by offering transportation, helping with benefits applications or, in some cases, giving cash.

The Citizens-Veterans Advisory Council of Cape May County helps veterans who are facing eviction, need a ride to the doctor or want help with a disability or health-insurance claim.

What makes the group unique is its network of connections to hospitals, public service agencies and other charities that know how to solve problems fast, member Carol Cohen said.

She is director of the Southern Shore chapter of the American Red Cross, which covers Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Salem counties.

"We're not trying to be a social-service agency. We just want to know what the veteran wants right now to help them get back on the road to sustainability," she said.

The group has about 40 volunteer members and is getting its federal nonprofit status, she said.

Already it has been able to help numerous people in need, she said.

"We modeled it after the Red Cross' long-term recovery group that was working after Hurricane Sandy," she said.

The group focuses on preventing homelessness, helping people get access to Veterans Administration benefits to which they are entitled and providing transportation.

The group helped secure a second van for another local nonprofit, the Disabled American Veterans, based in Lower Township. That group takes veterans daily to doctors' appointments at VA clinics and hospitals as far away as Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware.

Johnnie Walker, of Lower Township, a longtime member of Disabled American Veterans, said the new advisory council is effective because of its members, who have ties to Cape Regional Medical Center, the One-Stop Career Center in Wildwood, the Family Success Center in Middle Township, veterans groups such as the American Legion and church groups such as Catholic Charities.

“We put a network together to handle just about any situation that arises: medical, transportation, housing, you name it,” Walker said. “We have the network contacts to get assistance.”

U.S. Army veteran Kevin Johnson, of Wildwood Crest, needed help this year when his car broke down. He didn't have the money for repairs, which made it difficult to get to doctor's appointments or take his 5-year-old daughter, Angelina, to school, he said.

“I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis four years ago, so it's rough. I'm on a fixed income and there are times when the ends just don't meet,” he said.

The charity arranged to make the \$900 in repairs to his car, he said.

“You don't know how grateful I was,” he said. “It makes me so happy to know people care.”

Walker said he thinks the charity can be effective because it provides intervention when veterans need help most.

“Our thing is to help provide emergency help when people need it today. They can't wait six months or eight months. By then they're lost,” he said.

Once the group secures nonprofit status, it can begin fundraising in earnest. Walker said he thinks local residents will support the charity's mission.

“We have so many compelling stories of veterans right in our own community, people like (Assemblyman) Robert Andrzejczak, D-Cape May, who lost his leg in Iraq,” Walker said. “Those stories hit so close to home for families in Cape May County. And when we have veterans coming home, this community recognizes it. They really do (the homecoming) right.”

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1.12 - Union Leader: [Walking 'In Their Boots' was eye-opener for those who work with veterans' services](#) (1 August, Shawne K. Wickham, 364k online visitors/mo; Manchester, NH)

MANCHESTER — Robin Dame says she never realized how many services are available to veterans through the VA Medical Center.

And she's worked there for 30 years.

Dame, who works in the medical center's call center, was among 45 people who took part in the “In Their Boots” exercise held at the VAMC on Friday.

Designed to help service providers better understand what a veteran experiences when they come to the VA for help, it drew participants from 13 community agencies as well as some VA staff.

Participants were divided into groups; each was assigned a veteran character and scenario to follow on a sort of scavenger hunt through the halls of the medical center. They were given

props to represent some of the challenges veterans may face: crutches, a wheelchair, weights — even stuffed toys to represent young children who have to come along to appointments.

On the hunt

Each group followed a different path through the facility, collecting information about the medical, behavioral, home-based and court-based services available through the VA. But some found that navigating those services could be confusing or overwhelming.

Kelvin Parks, associate director of the medical center and a Navy veteran, said the exercise previously was held for staff. This time around, he said, the VAMC wanted to open it to community agencies that work with veterans to solicit suggestions for improving services.

“Our friends tell us when we do good,” he said. “Our very good friends tell us when there's an opportunity for improvement.”

Bill Rider, president and CEO of Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester, joined up with Wendy Winslow from Community Partners Mental Health Center of Strafford and Sue MacKillop from Service Link of Grafton County. The group's case, “Tom,” was a Desert Storm veteran diagnosed with ALS.

Winslow sat in a wheelchair as they visited first a primary care provider, then a spinal cord injury specialist, who connected “Tom” with home health and transportation services.

Services available

In another group, Leslie Peterson from ProForce care coordination program, Kelley True from Easter Seals' military and veterans services, and Ian Lemmo from Harbor Homes were finding out about the legal, mental health and substance abuse services “Jim” could access.

Meanwhile, “Bill,” a National Guardsman previously deployed to Afghanistan, was having symptoms of PTSD.

His case went to Jane Russell and Tammy Masse, both from the Naval Branch Health Clinic at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, and Julie Brown-Nierman, a clinical social worker who is a community liaison for Easter Seals and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

Carrying stuffed toys to represent “Bill's” children, the three had to make several stops on different floors to meet with a case manager and an advisor from the Veterans Benefits Administration, which now has a satellite office here.

“This is where some people drop out,” observed Masse, a nurse case manager. “It's discouraging to get bounced around different places.”

“I want to see a real person,” complained Russell, who is supervisor of managed care at the shipyard, when offered the option of applying for benefits online.

A veteran coming to the medical center for a real appointment encountered the “Bill” group in an elevator. Unsolicited, he told them, “The VA's been nothing but great for me.”

What happened

At the end of each scenarios, participants learned the outcome for their veterans.

“Bill” is approved for mental health and substance abuse services. His wife gets a small stipend for providing him care.

“Oh good,” said Russell. “That’s a very happy ending. Now I feel that it was all worth it.”

“Tom” eventually is admitted to the palliative care unit at the Manchester VA’s Community Living Center. After his peaceful death, the chaplain helps the family plan services and a social worker offers bereavement counseling.

Not all stories ended so happily.

“Jim” was doing well for a time, but when an old friend shows up, the two go out drinking. “Jim” wakes up in a jail cell after a DWI crash that left someone critically injured.

It’s a real-life scenario, said Kristin Maxwell, a program manager at the VA who organized the “In Their Boots” exercise. “Everything doesn’t always work out.”

During a debriefing at the end, Masse said the experience will help her help her patients. “It gave me a better idea how to work them through the system,” she said.

Gained insight

And Russell said now she better understands what she hears from some veterans: “Some patients come back and say, ‘I spent the whole day at the VA.’ How the heck could you spend the whole day at the VA?”

Charles Creteau, who works for the ProForce care coordination program, said, “For me it’s really about seeing the facility, understanding what’s here and understanding what struggles and everyday experiences the veterans have here.”

“Everybody has their own story. And if we understand some of their stories, we’re getting closer to being in their boots,” he said.

And VA call center employee Dame said she learned about a lot of services she can offer veterans who have questions or problems. “We get these kinds of calls every day,” she said.

The exercise got high marks from a Navy veteran of the Korean war who happened by as it was beginning. “I’m a stowaway,” smiled Lewis Icenogle.

Icenogle, 81, who lives in Concord, had a few hours to kill between morning and afternoon appointments, so he joined one of the groups. “I’m impressed,” he said afterward.

“I didn’t realize there’s this many organizations to help us,” he said. “I sure am glad I stopped in.”

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1.13 - WAAY-TV (ABC-31, CNN): [Group traveling the country giving free cannabis to veterans](#) (2 August, 296k online visitors/mo; Huntsville, AL)

"Grow-4-Vets" has been handing out cannabis to military veterans for a year in Colorado.

But, the state's medical board has just ruled not to recognize marijuana as a treatment for PTSD.

So "High there!" a cannabis-sharing social network, teamed up with Grow-4-Vets to host an impromptu rally on their save a million vets tour.

Veterans lining up early in Rino's taxi district, most wearing their colors, letting folks know where they served.

Todd Mitchem came up with the first social sharing network for cannabis users and now he is partnering with "Grow-4-Vets," helping them get medication.

"Literally, we're going to every legal state in the country holding events like this giving cannabis to veterans as much as we can," said Mitchem.

Grow-4-Vets founder Roger Martin can't understand why the Colorado medical board voted the way they did.

In light of the fact we lose 50 vets a day, he says to prescription drug overdose or suicides related to depression from taking drugs for PTSD.

"We have vets that come to us taking 20-25 drugs for different prescription medications every single day," said Martin.

Martin says its not only vets who suffer PTSD and could be helped by cannabis.

"So many civilians suffer PTSD, rape victim, domestic abuse victims, victims of accidents, anybody who's been involved in a trauma," said Martin.

The "Save a million vets tour" stopped in Colorado before heading to Los Angeles, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico.

The tour hopes to raise a \$250,000 to support Grow-4-Vets' efforts of giving away free cannabis to vets around the United States.

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1.14 - The Salem News: [Operation: Welcome Home kicks off Homecoming weekend](#) (2 August, John Castelluccio, 186k online visitors/mo; Beverly, MA)

It wasn't until the 1990s that the phrase "The Greatest Generation" became a common reference to America's World War II soldiers and their families, Congressman Seth Moulton told a crowd of veterans and their families gathered at Lynch Park on Saturday.

That generation became so highly regarded in history not only for what it achieved during the war, but also what veterans accomplished after they returned home, said Moulton, an Iraq veteran. He added that the same could be said of veterans from the Korean and Vietnam wars, and can be true now for veterans in today's battlefronts.

"Just like we needed you overseas, we need you back here as well," he said.

Moulton and local officials kicked off Operation: Welcome Home, a social event for veterans at Lynch Park Saturday that was part of Beverly's annual Homecoming celebration. They urged veterans to connect and take advantage of numerous services offered by the veterans administration and local organizations.

A crowd of about 200 veterans were expected, who mixed with other families flocking to the seaside park to enjoy the beach, splash pad and other amenities on a sunny morning. Veterans enjoyed live music, free food, while numerous organizations and vendors set up booths to explain the services they offered to veterans.

Homecoming usually featured a barbecue the opening weekend of the celebration, but board members wanted to do something special this year for the 50th anniversary and reach out to local veterans and their families. So they scheduled a full day at Lynch Park.

Most of the veterans were silver-haired and accompanied by their wives.

Sam Gentile, a Beverly native who served in Korea with an Army military police unit near the end of the war, was a little disappointed at the turnout, but not surprised.

"As far as I'm concerned, they let all the veterans down," he said, speaking of the country's leaders in general, not of fellow veteran Moulton. "It started in Vietnam and soured all the veterans from there."

Gentile said he's been disgusted to see partisan bickering between Democrats and Republicans in Congress while veterans have to beg for basic medical care and services.

"When I got back from [Vietnam], they just wanted to sign me up again," he remarked dryly.

Gentile was there Saturday with some friends and fellow veterans. One of those vets, Joe, who also served in Korea but didn't wish to give his full name, agreed. He's a member of the Vittori Rocci Post and said many younger veterans aren't as connected or involved with local veterans organizations.

Then again, he said, many of those veterans could just be enjoying the park, as he looked at the hundreds of young families spread across the park.

For the full list of events through Aug. 9, check www.beverlyhomecoming.org.

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1.15 - Bucks County Courier Times: [Let's just issue everybody a Medicare/Medicaid card](#)
(3 August, Warren D. Tochterman, 125k online visitors/day; Levittown, PA)

Is anyone surprised at the health-care mega-mergers announced recently (Aetna/Humana \$37 billion, Anthem/Cigna \$48 billion)?

Since the Supreme Court defended the so-called Affordable Care Act against all challenges thus far, and because Republicans don't have a backup health care plan comporting with re-election, insurers are under the impression that they have thoroughly captured a market, and must therefore plunder it rapaciously. That bagged market is you and me; all American citizens, because we all intersect with our fractured health care system at some point.

After listening to President Obama being interviewed recently, I couldn't help but conflate our current for-profit health care debacle with an issue bandied about by presidents, political candidates, and politicians of every ilk; the Veterans Administration and veterans' health care. No other issue enjoys such unanimity of vocal support, and such a failure of delivery and performance as the shameful health care we provide to our noble veterans. Sometimes VA facilities are just too far away for veterans, or the archaic administration of veterans' health care services fails wretchedly, the consequences of which have been premature deaths and untold suffering for thousands of men and women, the defenders of our nation to whom we solemnly promised such care.

First, we owe veterans quality and accessible health care, currently provided by an entirely separate and insufficient health care delivery system. Second, we already provide Medicare/Medicaid to a burgeoning population of seniors (at a small fraction of the overhead and administrative costs of for-profit insurers). And third, the purpose of the Affordable Care Act seemed to be to get as many American citizens health care coverage at the most affordable rates, with insurance subsidies doled out as necessary; nonetheless, still failing to cover tens of millions of American citizens. Three uncomplimentary systems, two insufferably inadequate. Only Medicare/Medicaid, mainly because it is a single payer system, serves a growing population at a lower administrative and overall cost.

What if we just offered everyone, veterans, seniors, and everyone else the same deal; a single payer system whereby we essentially issue everyone a Medicare/Medicaid care card? Private providers such as doctors and hospitals would negotiate with the Medicare/Medicaid system as most do already, and Shazam! Everyone would be covered/insured/protected. Our citizenry, including our gallant veterans, would be more secure, our collective health care administrative costs would be much lower, and we can get on board with the rest of the civilized world in recognizing health care as a basic human right.

"We the people, in order to form a more perfect Union . . . and . . . promote the general welfare . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America." [italics added for those who forgot this part of the Constitution], The Constitution of the United States, 1787. If "general Welfare" does not include health security in our current milieu of spiraling costs, medical bankruptcies at all-time levels, and absolute fear for those tens of millions left out of our patchwork health care system, one must ask if "general Welfare" means anything at all.

Let us please get serious about universal health care. It is too important an issue to let lobbyists for insurers write our health care laws. Call a politician, write a letter, vote accordingly — do something! Please . . .

Warren D. Tochtermann, Bensalem, is an attorney licensed to practice in Pennsylvania.

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1.16 - Herald-Standard (Video): [Nielsen finds fulfillment helping other veterans](#) (3 August, Diana Lasko, 122k online visitors/mo; Uniontown, PA)

Editor's note: The following story is part of an occasional series of profile articles that highlight the service and sacrifice of those from Fayette County who served during the Vietnam War.

Glenn Nielsen is not a combat veteran, but the result of injuries from his time in war-ravaged Vietnam are still obvious.

Now, his ongoing battle to make sure veterans are given the respect they deserve is his life's mission.

Nielsen was 17 years old when he enlisted in the U.S. Army. Too young to be sent into combat areas, Nielsen was sent to Thailand. When he turned 18 in December 1969 he was assigned to Tan Son Nhut Airbase in Vietnam where he was serving as a mechanic operator of heavy equipment until a motorcycle ride changed his life.

Nielsen and a friend were on R&R in Thailand when the two hopped on a motorcycle to run to the store.

"My friend Kenny Boggs married a woman from Thailand, and we were using our three days R&R to go back to Thailand and pack up his wife and children to move them. He told his wife we were taking the motorcycle and running to get some steaks for dinner," said Nielsen. "We came up over the top of a little hill. The sun had already gone down, but it was still light. We were headed west. When we got to the top of the hill I saw three headlights and that's the last I remember until I woke up laying alongside the road next to the motorcycle. We were left laying along the road. It was daylight when it happened. When I woke up it was dark."

The driver of the vehicle that struck Nielsen and Boggs did not stop. Nielsen was left lying in the road bleeding with extensive arm and leg injuries. Boggs didn't survive the crash.

"MPs found Kenny laying down over the hill in the weeds. He was dead. He was 20 years old," said Nielsen.

Nielsen was sent to an army hospital in Japan, where he spent several days before being relocated to Fort Dix in New Jersey for one night and then transferred to Valley Forge Hospital, where he spent 14 months.

"I didn't have much experience in Nam. I really wasn't there that long to experience it. My biggest experience was in Valley Forge Hospital. There was guys there with no arms or legs. Burned. It was hell," Nielsen said.

After his long recovery, Nielsen left the hospital in 1971 and got married in November of the same year. That year he was granted a medical retirement from the U.S. Army as well.

"I've been dealing with the V.A. ever since. I can't really complain about the V.A. They've taken care of me."

Nielsen, now 63, still has limited mobility due to his injuries and walks with a visible limp.

It is the work he and others do in support of veterans that Nielsen finds fulfilling.

He is a lifetime member of the AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars and a charter member of Vietnam Veterans Inc.

“I got involved in veterans organizations after watching a Veterans Day parade in Brownsville, and my mother said, ‘You should be out there marching with those boys’ and I said, ‘Mom, I can’t march.’ But that’s what got me involved,” Nielsen explained.

Together with founding President Frank Voytek, VVI was formed in 1984 and in 1986 the organization erected a memorial wall to the 50 soldiers from Fayette County who were Killed In Action during the Vietnam War. The only two chapters of VVI are located in Fayette County and Pittsburgh.

“VVI — we’re unique. Once we are gone, the organization will die, but the wall will be here forever. That makes me feel like I did something other than be a mechanic and get run over by a car. That’s my story,” said Nielsen.

The organization now has 140 members and remains active through outreach to members and their families and education initiatives.

“Our main goal is to do what we can for Vietnam vets and their families. Even once a guy dies, we keep the family involved,” said Nielsen.

The group gathers weekly at the AMVETS Post 103 in Hopwood for meetings and sessions with counselors from the Veterans Affairs center in Morgantown. During this time, Vietnam veterans discuss how to understand post traumatic stress disorder and other issues stemming from their service as well as coping and communication skills to assist in the ongoing healing process.

“The group is about continued healing. Even though there’s flashbacks and memories, you’re not sitting there by yourself. You’re with someone that cares and understands,” Nielsen said.

The sessions are helping Vietnam veterans as they transition into a more active role in honoring military veterans, especially those who are coming home.

“What we learned from the Vietnam War is never mistreat the veterans when they return home,” said Nielsen.

And making sure veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are receiving the benefits they’ve earned is also an ongoing endeavor by older vets, according to Nielsen.

“Many young veterans come up to me and thank me for what they are receiving because they know we won’t let any vets be treated the way we were,” said Nielsen, noting how Vietnam veterans’ complaints, especially about Agent Orange, were widely ignored by the V.A. when they came home.

Educational outreach is also a concern for VVI, and Nielsen said he takes every opportunity to help young people understand the war and its impact on society.

“It seems like they don’t teach anything in schools about the Vietnam War. Kids today — many are interested in the war, and we try to give them our stories and share our experiences to help them understand. Once we are gone, the history is gone.”

Nielsen said he is especially grateful for area high school Jr.ROTC members for being part of the annual vigil at the Vietnam War Memorial in Hopwood and their gratitude, which, in the end, is all those who have served are seeking.

“People need to understand Vietnam Vets aren’t a bunch of drug-crazed alcoholics. A lot of people put that label on us back then,” Nielsen said. “The guys did their time, either volunteered or drafted. They didn’t run to Canada, and they just want people to thank them. That’s all we ask for is a ‘thank you.’ “That’s all we want.”

Fifty Fayette County veterans died during Vietnam. All of their names will be listed throughout the duration of the project. This article is in memory of the following five:

John William Earnesty
Army, SSG
Everson
Born: Oct. 2, 1928
Died: Dec. 11, 1966

Denny Ray Easter
Army, CPL
Brownsville
Born: Aug. 28, 1950
Died: Jan. 13, 1971

Merle Clayton Eicher Jr
Marine Corps, LCPL
Smithfield
Born: Oct. 17, 1947
Died: Jan. 12, 1968

Joseph George Evans Jr
Marine Corps, LCPL
Uniontown
Born: March 12, 1948
Died: Oct. 18, 1968

William Donald Hicks
Air Force, SMSGT
Smock
Born: Nov. 29, 1929
Died: May 16, 1965

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1.17 - Norfolk Daily News (World-Herald): [VA extends funds for vets on verge of losing care](#) (2 August, Steve Liewer, 109k online visitors/mo; Norfolk, NE)

The VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System will continue to fund all skilled and nonskilled care services for veterans who already are receiving them through Sept. 30, VA officials announced Friday.

But they also said it remains a question mark whether such care will continue when a new budget year begins Oct. 1.

In June, the local VA had begun terminating the reimbursement for some veterans who receive home care and adult daycare through outside organizations like Comfort Keepers and the Franciscan Centre in Omaha. Funding for the program had run out because of a shortfall in the Department of Veterans Affairs' health care budget.

After angry public hearings with VA Secretary Robert McDonald, Congress passed legislation late this week giving authority to move money from another fund to plug the shortfall. Without that authority, McDonald had said, some VA medical facilities might have to close temporarily. The president signed the bill on Friday.

In Nebraska and western Iowa, reimbursement for home care and adult daycare services for up to 1,900 veterans had been scheduled to end Saturday. Friday's 11th-hour announcement was a welcome reprieve.

"They are faxing us renewals like crazy," said Jennifer Dil, a business development consultant with Comfort Keepers in Omaha. "This is fabulous news."

Home care involves an aide who visits a client at home and helps with nonmedical tasks such as cooking, cleaning, bill-paying or exercise. In adult daycare, clients are brought to an activity center and kept busy with singing, crafts and other activities.

Such assistance allows veterans to stay in their own homes instead of moving into a nursing home, said relatives of some veterans.

While the VA will continue to fund nonskilled care for most of its patients, Dil said the agency has told Comfort Keepers that it is cutting off care for at least three clients. She said that includes Harvey Ord, 90, a World War II Navy veteran from Council Bluffs who was featured in a World-Herald story last month. The company was not told why, she said.

But Dil also said an anonymous donor stepped forward

after reading Ord's story and paid for one additional month of care for him.

Omaha VA spokesman Will Ackerman said the future of home care and adult daycare after Oct. 1 is uncertain because Congress has told the VA to fold together several current programs — including the one that covers such nonskilled care — into the new Veterans Choice program.

Veterans Choice, however, covers only skilled nursing care by certified medical providers, Ackerman said, so some adjustments will be needed.

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1.18 - KATC-TV (ABC-3, Video): [KATCTV3 News](#) (2 August, 26k broadcast viewers; Lafayette, LA)

This 20-second video announces that a new VA clinic may open in Lafayette, LA as soon as winter of 2016.

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1.19 - WKKJ-FM (94.3): [VA Mental Health Summit](#) (3 August, 15k online visitors/mo; Chillicothe, OH)

The Chillicothe VA Medical Center will be holding its third annual Mental Health Summit on Thursday, August 20th.

According to the Chillicothe VA's Mental Health Care Line Manager, the Summit is meant to enhance the mental health and well-being of Veterans and their family members through increased collaboration between the VA and the community. It is held in partnership with Adena Regional Medical Center and Lowe's of Chillicothe.

"We're bringing together a diverse group of individuals and organizations from throughout Ohio who, through participation in a variety of plenary and small group discussions, will share information on services currently available to Veterans and their families. We'll also identify areas for improvement - the need for additional services, barriers to access, etc. - and how we can effectively address those areas by working together," says Dr. Robert Taylor.

The Summit will be held from 9 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. at the PACCAR Medical Education Center, located on the campus of Adena Regional Medical Center with registration starting at 8:30 a.m.

Participants are encouraged to pre-register by contacting Brenda Porter at (740) 773-1141, ext. 7898, or Dr. Taylor at ext. 7470.

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2. Ending Veterans' Homelessness

2.1 - WOWK-TV (CBS-13): [Race Saturday In Hurricane Benefits Homeless Vets](#) (3 August, Tyler Kes, 227k online visitors/mo; Huntington, WV)

Area runners, joggers and walkers can help support the Veterans Administration as they help homeless veterans in the region by participating in a 5K run or two-mile walk Saturday evening August 8 at Valley Park in Hurricane.

The fee is \$20 to pre-register or \$25 to register on site. The proceeds from the race will be given to the VA to help homeless veterans find places to live.

The race and walk start at 5:30 p.m. Saturday at Valley Park in Hurricane. On-site registration starts at 5:00 p.m. After the race, there is food and a pool party at the Hurricane Wave Pool from 6:15 p.m. until 8:15 p.m. For family members or friends of participants wishing to eat and swim but not run themselves. The cost is \$5.

The race is being put on by Snap Fitness and Generations Physical Therapy. Anyone with questions or who would like to pre-register can call Bethany at 304-840-0180 or email workitoutsnap@gmail.com. An online registration can be found [here](#).

WOWK TV chief meteorologist Spencer Adkins will also be on hand as master of ceremonies before and after the race for awards.

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3. Ending the Claims Backlog – No coverage

4. Veteran Opportunities for Education/GI Bill

4.1 - Politico: [Colleges in the 2016 crosshairs: Democrats want to make college cheaper, or free. Republicans attack the higher education system.](#) (2 August, Kimberly Hefling, 8.3M online visitors/mo; Arlington, VA)

Presidential candidates from both parties are tapping into Americans' growing angst over paying for college, placing an unprecedented bright glare on higher education this election.

For Democrats, the solution is making college cheaper, or free. Republicans want more innovation and efficiency.

The surge in candidates' collective interest in the issue isn't a coincidence: Nearly half the students who answered a recent UCLA survey on the importance of financial aid in their college decision making said it was "very important" — the highest percentage ever in the 42 years the question was asked. A Gallup poll earlier this year found more parents fret about having enough money to pay for their kids' college than other Americans worry about any other common financial concern.

Tuition sticker prices, adjusted for inflation, have tripled for public four-year colleges and more than doubled for private ones in the last three decades — helping push higher education issues into the forefront. And the nation faces a collective \$1.2 trillion in student loan debt. There's a fear among many voters that they or their children will be shut out of higher education altogether.

But the Democrats will have to come up with big bucks to pay for their proposals. And the GOP will have to go beyond criticizing the higher ed establishment to come up with solutions at scale.

For a higher education community used to autonomy and valuing the intellectual pursuit of a degree — not just the salary it leads to — the focus from across the political spectrum is in

many ways terrifying, said Barmak Nassirian, director of federal policy analysis at American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

“My worry is that we’ll end up with a series of politically appealing messages that represent really lousy policy,” Nassirian said.

The spotlight comes at a difficult economic time for the nation’s colleges and universities. College enrollments are down and even as most states have been restoring recession cuts, higher education funding remains well below pre-recession levels, with the average state spending 23 percent less per student than before the recession, the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities said last year.

Beyond debt-free college proposals, Hillary Clinton, former Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders frequently attack for-profit schools. Clinton has also embraced refinancing student loan debt, calling it “one of my biggest economic and educational priorities.”

Republican candidates, in turn, take swipes at the higher education system, with GOP Florida Sen. Marco Rubio going so far as to call the college accrediting system a “cartel.” It’s a message that could endear the GOP candidates to conservatives long skeptical of what they perceive as the liberal culture of academia.

As they make their case, candidates including Clinton, O’Malley and Rubio tell personal stories of struggling to repay student loans — and sometimes they go deep into the policy weeds.

At a Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Reno, Nevada, in June, Clinton called for an end to what’s known by critics as the “90/10 loophole.” Clinton said it had led to “false promises and deceptive marketing” directed at Iraq and Afghanistan veterans for their Post-9/11 GI Bill money. The so-called 90/10 rule bars for-profit colleges and universities from getting more than 90 percent of their revenue from federal student aid programs. But GI Bill benefits and Defense Department tuition assistance funds don’t count toward the 90 percent, so Clinton and others say it gives for-profit colleges an incentive to recruit veterans.

And then there’s Rubio. He has encouraged the expansion of “income share agreements,” a form of student aid that allows private investors to pay students’ college costs in exchange for a percentage of students’ future earnings. And he co-sponsored “right to know before you go” legislation that would make key facts available about each college. He has plans to reform the college accreditation system, too.

“Within my first 100 days, I will bust this cartel by establishing a new accreditation process that welcomes low-cost, innovative providers,” Rubio said this month. “This would expose higher education to the market forces of choice and competition, which would prompt a revolution driven by the needs of students — just as the needs of consumers drive the progress of every other industry in our economy.”

Rubio’s comment on breaking up cartels in many ways foretells the future of what candidates will say on the higher education front, said Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Budgets are strapped and there’s growing support at the state level and on Capitol Hill to drive down college costs, boost graduation rates, cut the amount of time it takes to earn degrees and get people employed.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker — who didn't graduate from college — has taken a different tack. He's also embraced "risk sharing" in which colleges have a small stake in whether graduates pay back their loans — an idea gaining traction on Capitol Hill. And he attempted to shut down a small state agency that oversaw for-profit programs.

He's also taken on the sacred ground of tenure in the name of more flexibility and financial leverage for the state university system. He signed a \$76 billion state budget that weakened tenure protections for university professors — a move that triggered an uproar from higher education groups. The budget included \$250 million in cuts to the state's public higher education system over two years as part of an effort to help keep tuition prices levels for four years.

Walker told a radio station earlier this year that "maybe it's time for faculty and staff to start thinking about teaching more classes and doing more work."

Similarly, Ohio Gov. John Kasich signed an executive order forming a state task force on affordability and efficiency and threatened to "take an ax" to state funding of Ohio's public universities and colleges if they fail to cut costs and make tuition more affordable, the Columbus Dispatch reported.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush was among the hosts of a conference last year focused on global higher education that emphasized innovation and online learning. He's challenged an Obama administration regulation that for-profit schools show graduates are "gainfully employed." At a Greenville, S.C., event this spring, the Greenville News reported that he said federal loan programs finance a "dramatic expansion" of buildings and "prestigious programs for universities for them to feel good about what they're doing."

Donald Trump has criticized the federal government for earning a profit from federal student loans, the Hill wrote. He's also facing legal action connected to his for-profit investment school Trump University.

Some, like New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, are also attacking the Democrats' focus on debt-free college.

"That is a typical liberal approach. It is wrong," Christie said recently. "If college graduates are going to reap the greater economic rewards and opportunities of earning a degree, then it seems fair for them to support the cost of the education they're receiving."

John Cheslock, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Penn State University, said that for Republicans, "it appears that they are best served during the primaries by aggressively criticizing or reforming higher education."

As Clinton ramped up her campaign this spring, former President Bill Clinton ended his work as honorary chancellor of Laureate International Universities, a for-profit network of online and campus-based schools. Critics viewed the move as a way to shield his wife from connections to the industry since Democrats have made it a punching bag. She also earned the endorsement of the American Federation of Teachers union, which has advocated for debt-free college plans.

One big hurdle for Democrats is paying for their proposals. The plans to refinance student loan debt and provide debt-free college have projected price tags that stretch well into the tens of billions of dollars. Sanders, for example, has said his plan to make four-year public colleges and

universities free would provide \$70 billion a year in assistance to replace what public colleges and universities now charge in tuition and fees. A federal-state partnership, with the federal dollars coming from imposing a tax on Wall Street transactions by investment houses, hedge funds and other speculators, would underwrite the proposal.

Clinton is expected to roll out a higher education plan focused on repaying student loan debt, one that will likely be influenced by Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

“My question is how is she going to pay for it? And, where is she going to get the money from?” Carnevale said.

President Barack Obama’s \$60 billion plan announced earlier this year to provide free community college shows the political complexities of such plans. It was criticized by both Republicans and Democrats with complaints such as that it was too expensive, chose one higher education sector over the other and would provide free college to students who might be able to afford it over providing deeper need to poor students. It gained little traction on Capitol Hill, although House Democrats filed a bill that extended the price tag to \$90 billion over a decade.

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4.2 - Pensacola News Journal: [7 UWF students receive military, veterans scholarships](#) (2 August, 385k online visitors/mo; Pensacola, FL)

The University of West Florida Military and Veterans Resource Center awarded scholarships to seven students who are military veterans or dependents of active or retired military at the center’s annual scholarship luncheon held Wednesday.

The Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Michael Ferguson Scholarship Endowment, Buzz and Larue Ambersley Memorial Scholarship and the Navy Federal Credit Union Scholarship made these awards possible.

Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Michael Ferguson created an endowment in 2001 to provide scholarships for veteran dependents to pursue their education at UWF. The Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Michael Ferguson Scholarship assists qualified sons and daughters of military veterans who demonstrate leadership capability and commitment to service. Through this scholarship, funds are provided annually to student scholars enrolled in the College of Business.

The Buzz and Larue Ambersley Scholarship was established with the UWF Foundation Inc. to provide assistance to a dependent child or spouse of a veteran, deceased or active duty, non-commissioned officer who is a resident of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa or Walton counties.

The Navy Federal Credit Union Scholarship was also established to provide assistance to military veterans and dependents attending UWF.

Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Michael Ferguson Scholarship Endowment recipients:

- Rylee Hart

- Zachariah Pritchard

- Dustin Retherford

- Alexandria Rodenbaugh

Buzz and Larue Ambersley Scholarship recipient:

- Tyler Milkeris-Zellar

Navy Federal Credit Union Scholarship recipients:

- Gloria Malpica

- Jillian Brown

Brown, one of two recipients of the Navy Federal Credit Union Scholarship, will begin her time at UWF this fall and enroll in the Master of Social Work program. She served four years in the Army, including a nine-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. After finishing her time in the Army in March, she applied to UWF to pursue a career in social work.

“I was thrilled to be awarded the scholarship,” said Brown. “With my military contract I still have to pay for a portion of my classes. It will be relief when I finish the program because I’ll be able to focus more on the jobs I’ll be doing instead of trying to find something else to pay for student loans. I’m hoping to work for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or the Vet Center here in Pensacola, and this will allow me to help the people I’m trying to help and not have the burden of trying to find another job.”

Milkeris-Zellar, the recipient of the Buzz and Larue Ambersley Scholarship, began her time at UWF during the summer semester and is an undergraduate student majoring in physics. She is interested in astrophysics and is a member of the Escambia Amateur Astronomers Association. Her mother, Lori Milkeris, spent four years of active duty and two years in the reserves for the Air Force. She was an F-16 crew chief and served a tour of duty Saudi Arabia.

“I was so excited when I found out,” said Milkeris-Zellar. “I worked really hard to get here. This has given me a big boost. I want to excel in physics, and I think I will enjoy it. This will give me more time to explore and concentrate on my studies. I feel very fortunate and grateful.”

The MVRC is committed to serving the educational and training needs of prospective and currently enrolled service members, veterans, their dependents, their survivors and others eligible to receive educational benefits under the various Department of Veteran Affairs programs. For more information about the MVRC, visit uwf.edu/militaryveterans.

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4.3 - Law Street: [University of Phoenix Under FTC Investigation](#) (2 August, Anneliese Mahoney, 6k online visitors/day; New York, NY)

For a while, it seemed like for-profit colleges were the newest, hottest frontier in higher education. But with current student debt problems, and many revelations about some of the predatory practices of for-profit colleges, the trend appears to have officially passed. Arguably the most well-known for-profit institution of higher learning—The University of Phoenix—may be the latest to find itself in hot water.

Late last week the parent company of the University of Phoenix, Apollo Education Group, released information that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was investigating the company. The investigation is attempting to determine if the University of Phoenix ran deceptive or unfair business practices. The investigation is particularly focused on its recruitment of veterans. The accusations claim that the company has left veterans with high levels of debt after collecting hundreds of millions in GI Bill money. It's not just the GI Bill money that the University of Phoenix has collected, however, according to financial records the company has collected over \$488 million in fees and tuition from veterans' own money for its online programs, and additional sums at various physical locations.

The University of Phoenix has been declining slowly for a little while now. Five years ago, the school reported almost half a million students. That number has been essentially halved since then. In 2012, the University of Phoenix was forced to close 115 of its campuses. In addition, revenue has been declining, and there have been many accusations levied against the company in regards to the way that it treats its students and potential recruits.

The controversy over the University of Phoenix is borne out of concerns that the school required participants to take out expensive loans, which could have been fine had those participants had the ability to pay back those loans after they graduated. However, the education provided at the University of Phoenix doesn't necessarily lead to employment, the credits usually don't transfer to other schools, and the degrees aren't always recognized by employers.

In order to cooperate with the investigation, as Apollo Education Group promised in its statement, the company will have to provide the federal investigators with documents such as financial information, marketing, billing, debt collection, accreditation, and military recruitment practices.

This investigation into the University of Phoenix is consistent with a theme of increased scrutiny on for-profit schools, many of which are struggling in the now seemingly turbulent educational environment. Last month, the Obama Administration began cracking down on for-profit schools. A new rule that took effect in July from the Department of Education is the "gainful employment rule" which "requires colleges to track their graduates' performance in the workforce and eventually will cut off funding for career training programs that fall short."

Equal opportunities for education are essential, but not if they hurt students more than they help. There's now significant suspicion that many for-profit institutions fall into the latter camp—University of Phoenix may just be the latest to get in trouble as a result.

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5. Women Veterans – No coverage

6. Other

6.1 - The Washington Times (AP): [Event held in North Texas to recognize Vietnam veterans](#) (2 August, 3.8M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

WHITE SETTLEMENT, Texas (AP) - Vietnam War veterans waved to friends and family along a parade route in a North Texas town as part of a belated welcome-home event.

The 2-mile parade route in White Settlement ended at Veterans Park on Saturday. Supporters waved American flags and embraced veterans, many of whom wiped tears from their eyes.

The parade and celebration were hosted by the Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base and the city of White Settlement, located just west of Fort Worth. The event was part of the "Welcome Home 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War," a 10-year Department of Defense program to recognize veterans, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram (<http://bit.ly/1ST7RrU>) reported.

During a ceremony, veterans spoke of feeling isolated upon returning home from war and of the survivor's guilt they felt.

"No one called us warriors. No one called us heroes," said Linda Schwartz, who was an Air Force flight nurse and is now assistant secretary for policy and planning for the U.S. Veterans Administration. "We could not even wear our uniforms on the streets of our own country."

Alan Abramson, who was an Army medic, said Saturday's event provided a measure of comfort.

"There is a true awakening of what we went through over there, and that helps," said Abramson, who lives in Long Island, New York, and attended the celebration with his son, who lives in White Settlement.

James Hotopp, a Navy machinist who served from 1967 to 1968, said as he watched supporters that he's finally begun to feel acceptance for his service. For others, the pain has not subsided.

"After all these years, a lot of guys couldn't show up today," said Hotopp, who lives in Crowley, located south of Fort Worth. "We all have to deal in our own way."

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6.2 - Tulsa World (Wagoner Tribune): [Health care facility that serves area veterans undergoes name change](#) (2 August, 681k online visitors/mo; Tulsa, OK)

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Muskogee is now officially called the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System.

VA officials say the new name accurately reflects the geographic area that the VA covers, which is 25 counties in Eastern Oklahoma, including Wagoner County. This includes the Muskogee hospital and outpatient clinics in Tulsa, Hartshorne and Vinita.

However, the name does not alter the congressionally authorized names for Muskogee and Tulsa.

The hospital in Muskogee is still named the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center and the clinic in Tulsa is still the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic.

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6.3 - The Record: [A little leg work to settle a grave concern](#) (1 August, Michael Fitzgerald, 387k online visitors/mo; Stockton, CA)

I would like to think of this column as a place of knowledgeable civic debate and good storytelling. Occasionally, however, it becomes The Department of Very Odd Problems.

The Department opened on Wednesday. A Carolyn Sneed called. Sneed, 69, said she was saddled with a tombstone. One she solemnly had agreed to find a proper place for before realizing she had not the faintest idea what the proper place was or how to figure it out.

She was driving around with the big tombstone in her back seat.

“A friend of mine found it in a house,” Sneed explained, not really. “He left it at my house.”

I tried to get more details. Sneed had a friend, an old veteran. He found the tombstone, possibly when he rented a house. The stone’s inscription said the decedent was U.S. Army veteran; the old vet felt deeply it should be returned to its proper place.

But he had to go in for surgery. So he entrusted it to her. She never heard from him again.

“I’m tired of driving around with this in my car,” Sneed said.

We were talking by phone. I asked Sneed if she could stop by. She pulled up outside the newsroom. I went out and snapped a picture of the tombstone.

It was a hefty rectangular concrete block inscribed with a cross. It said:

Cecil R. Bell

Tec 5 US Army

World War II

Apr 24 1921 Aug 30 1988

If Bell’s grave was missing its stone, to his family’s further grief, I thought I should arrange its return.

I walked down to the Veteran’s Service Office. A veteran’s representative confirmed the stone in my photo was government issue. But he said he had no record of Bell.

Back in the newsroom, I found Bell's obit in our library's old clippings. Cecil Reginald Bell was a mechanic. He lived part of his life in Stockton and part in Monterey.

He served in the war — Tec 5 is an old term for sergeant — and afterward owned a Standard service station at Pacific and Alpine avenues. Bell died of heart failure at age 67.

The obit said he was buried at Stockton Rural Cemetery.

I couldn't get them on the phone. So I took a drive up Cemetery Lane. Stockton Rural Cemetery was founded in 1862, and I am pretty confident its tiny office curiously situated out among the graves has not changed much since then.

Inside this museum piece a woman sat at a desk. She naturally wanted to make sure nothing was amiss with Bell's grave. We climbed into her SUV and drove to Lot 50, row 21, block 41, Bell's plot.

To the woman's relief, Bell's grave had a headstone on it. Two, in fact. Bell's wife was buried beside him beneath an identical headstone. The inscription showed she died years after Bell.

That suggested an obvious explanation. The family laid Bell to rest under the veteran's headstone. They removed it when his wife was buried beside him and installed matching headstones.

How Bell's first headstone ended up in the possession of Sneed's old veteran friend is anybody's guess. The cemetery woman told me old tombstones turn up in strange places. She said a Stockton woman excavating a pool turned over several garden stepping stones to discover they were all old grave markers.

There remained only one thing to do. I called the National Cemetery Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and asked its spokesman what to do with Bell's first stone.

"Government-furnished headstones or markers are always the property of the United States government," Michael Nacincik said. "The sole purpose of the marker is to mark the grave site of a vet. If the marker is not being used for its intended purpose, we will recover the marker and dispose of it properly."

The nearest office of the National Cemetery Administration is by a veteran's cemetery outside Dixon. A staffer from there would arrange to visit Stockton and collect the stone.

"We believe it is the proper thing to do, so a veteran's marker does not end up being displayed or used improperly," Nacincik said.

Sneed was relieved.

"I'm happy," she said. "I'm so happy that it was replaced and that he's not without a headstone."

She also was happy to regain the use of her back seat.

"That was bothering me," she admitted.

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6.4 - New Jersey Herald: [Man has mission to find WWI veteran's family](#) (3 August, Joe Carlson, 219k online visitors/mo; Newton, NJ)

Robert A. Simpson died on June 10, 1957.

Fifty-seven years later, a couple from Lafayette handed a group of Vietnam veterans a plaque meant for Simpson's grave that they found in the trash.

One year after that, the man who made it his mission to find Simpson's grave and return the plaque is still looking for the World War I veteran's family to let them know his final resting place is marked once again.

"I'm hoping to find his family, I'm sure he has grandchildren or great-grandchildren, and to let them know where he is and have a special service for them," said Glen Dingman, of Landing, who took on the task of tracking down Simpson's whereabouts.

According to Dingman, in June of 2014, he was at the Chatterbox restaurant in Frankford with other veterans from the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 337 for an event when Russel and Patricia Losey, of Lafayette, approached him with a bronze plaque.

"Russ said he was collecting scrap metal when he came across the plaque," Dingman recalls. "He wanted to know if we could help find where it belonged."

Losey, who has retired and lives in Manchester now, said he found the plaque in a trash container at the Carriage Acres Trailer Park on Route 94 in Lafayette.

"I'm a junk man, I go around and pick up scrap metal and sell it," he said. "The maintenance crew from the trailer park was cleaning out a trailer of a family who got kicked out and I went up and looked in the Dumpster and saw something that looked like a large piece of brass.

"I picked it up and I realized that it was a grave marker. It looked brand new," he continued.

The plaque, which Dingman and Losey recognized was designed for a grave, was intended for the grave of Robert Simpson, a World War I veteran who had died in 1957 at the age of 66.

Armed with only Simpson's name, rank, war, birth date and death date, Dingman went to work to find the man's grave and return his plaque.

"I sent an email to Veteran's Affairs grave registration division, which I was told would take a few weeks to respond," Dingman said. "They emailed me back within 30 minutes and they told me he was buried in the Laurel Cemetery in Totowa."

So Dingman called the cemetery and was told that Simpson was in fact buried there, but his grave was unmarked. Dingman went and marked the grave with a veteran flag holder so he knew where it was.

He got in contact with Sgobba Monument Works in Paterson who mounted the plaque on a piece of stone free of charge.

"I was blown away," Dingman said of not being charged.

Anthony Sgobba, the owner of the monument business said while he doesn't have a clear recollection of the events surrounding Simpson's plaque, he said the business tries to give back to the community.

"Our grandfather fought in World War I and we are always fond of veterans," Sgobba said. "We wanted to do something to give back and he (Dingman) was being so generous and using his personal time, we wanted to help him out."

The cemetery also put the stone in the ground for free as well, Dingman said.

All that was left is to find Simpson's family, which has proven to be a tough task.

After extensive research, Dingman learned through census data that in the 1940s, Simpson and his wife Margaret lived on Montgomery Street in Paterson and when he died in 1957, Margaret had filled out an application for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to manufacture the plaque and indicated her nearest train station for the plaque to be delivered was in Andover.

Dingman said his greatest accomplishment in 2014 was being able to get Simpson's plaque in the ground.

"It's the best thing they ever did," Losey said on Dingman's work to get the plaque placed on Simpson's grave. "Just thinking about it now gives me goosebumps."

Every so often he will scour the Internet to try to find more information regarding the World War I veteran and his family.

"I just want to let his family know where their grandpa or great-grandpa is," he said. "I'm proud of what I have been able to do thus far."

Anyone with information can contact Dingman at glendingman@att.net.

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6.5 - The Dallas Morning News: [Ex-Marine on death row says jurors should have been told more about PTSD](#) (2 August, Brandi Grissom, 205k online visitors/day; Dallas, TX)

To Tim Rojas, it feels like just yesterday that he and his Marine buddy John Thuesen were on the battlefield together, looking death in the face and trying to make sure they both got home to their families.

In reality, it's been more than a decade since they left Iraq. Rojas works at a high-powered Houston investment firm. Thuesen, though, is in a 6-by-10 solitary cell, hoping that Texas' highest criminal court will spare him from the death penalty.

“Hope is everything,” Rojas said.

Thuesen, 31, has been on death row since he was convicted in 2010 of fatally shooting his girlfriend Rachel Joiner and her brother Travis Joiner in their College Station home.

In July, Brazos County District Judge Travis Bryan III agreed with Thuesen’s appellate lawyers that the attorneys who defended Thuesen at trial didn’t adequately inform jurors about their client’s post-traumatic stress disorder after his return from combat. With more information about PTSD and its effects, Bryan said in court documents, the jurors who sentenced Thuesen to death may have decided differently. Bryan’s ruling is now under review by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, which will ultimately decide whether Thuesen should get a new trial and a chance at a lesser sentence.

Brazos County prosecutors argue the jury heard plenty of evidence about the traumatic experiences Thuesen faced, along with evidence that he had a history of acting violently toward those he claimed to care for.

The district court ruling in Thuesen’s case is particularly important, his lawyers and others said, as the criminal justice system deals with an increasing number of veterans with PTSD. The National Center for PTSD and the RAND Corp. estimate that up to 20 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan experience it. In 2008, The New York Times reported 121 veterans from those battlefields had been charged with killings.

911 call

In Texas, 10 of the 261 death row inmates reported some military service, according to the Department of Criminal Justice.

“Someone who has served his country, who’s seen traumatic situations while serving his country, who’s worked to save the lives of his fellow soldiers — that’s all important for a jury to know about when they consider what the right punishment should be,” said Kathryn Kase, executive director of the Texas Defender Services, a nonprofit organization that represents death row inmates.

Thuesen, who was a football player and champion turkey farmer in high school, signed up to be a Marine before he graduated. When he returned to his rural Texas home near College Station, his family and friends said, he had changed.

He was depressed and drank too much. A former girlfriend testified at his trial that he was violent with her. After an attempted suicide, Thuesen was briefly hospitalized, but despite his family’s concerns that he needed more treatment, doctors from the Veterans Administration sent him home.

About six months later, in March 2009, police responded to a 911 call from Thuesen and found him with the bullet-riddled bodies of Rachel and Travis Joiner. Thuesen told police he killed Rachel, a track star at Texas A&M University, because he was angry. He sneaked into her house while she was out and waited for hours, jealously stewing about time she spent with someone else. When her brother, also an A&M student, came to her aid, Thuesen shot him, too.

At his 2010 trial, jurors were told that Thuesen had lost a Marine buddy. They knew he had seen a young boy splattered with his family’s blood after Thuesen’s Marine unit sprayed their car with

bullets as it hurtled through a military checkpoint. But, his lawyers argue, the jurors didn't hear expert testimony that could have helped them understand the lasting effects of PTSD.

Had jurors been presented with such expert testimony, "they would have come to a different conclusion," said Cathryn Crawford, who served as special litigation counsel in Thuesen's appeal.

Exclusion?

Lisa Jaycox, a senior behavioral health scientist with RAND, said violent behavior isn't a hallmark of PTSD, but that the disorder can contribute to it. When those who have experienced trauma also struggle with depression and self-medicate with alcohol or other drugs, she said, that often causes problems at work or in relationships. The combination can be overwhelming.

"It can therefore spiral into people having worse and worse functioning over time," Jaycox said.

Anthony Giardino, a lawyer and veteran, argued in a 2009 Fordham Law Review article that there should be a categorical exclusion from the death penalty for combat veterans who had PTSD at the time of their offenses.

Courts, he wrote, "should find that it is unconscionable for the government to sentence soldiers and veterans to death for criminal actions that would likely not have happened but for their military service."

Some prosecutors have chosen not to seek the death penalty in capital cases against veterans. Though they didn't provide a public explanation, prosecutors in Erath County declined to seek the death penalty for Eddie Ray Routh, the former Marine convicted of killing Navy SEAL and American Sniper hero Chris Kyle and another man. Routh, who was sentenced to life without parole, had a history of mental health problems, and PTSD played a key role in his defense.

Complex disorder

Prosecutors in Brazos County have argued that Thuesen had a history of acting violently when he was angry. They told Bryan that the former Marine's trial lawyers gave jurors all the information needed to understand Thuesen's past. Jessica Escue, an assistant district attorney, said the defense did an "admirable" job, and that prosecutors will ask the Court of Criminal Appeals to affirm Thuesen's death sentence.

Rojas, Thuesen's friend, agrees with prosecutors on one point:

"PTSD is not some sort of allowance to do bad things," he said. He added, though, that Thuesen doesn't deserve to die. The disorder, he said, "impacts veterans in a unique way that causes horrific situations."

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6.6 - The Keene Sentinel: [Cemetery thief gets a slap on the wrist](#) (2 August, Freddy Groves, 133k online visitors/mo; Keene, NH)

When you look up “lowlife scum” in the dictionary, the corresponding picture you see next to the definition might well be one Kevin Maynard of Rhode Island.

Maynard worked at the Rhode Island Veteran’s Memorial Cemetery in Exeter where, over the course of many years, he stole veterans’ grave markers, which he took home for backyard projects.

Projects such as the floor under his makeshift garages (think: tarps on poles) and a shed. When finally caught, investigators found more than 200 grave markers. Most were inscription-side down in the mud, some under Maynard’s vehicle. (He stole full boxes of flags, too, also dumped in the mud.)

Granted, the grave markers were slated to be replaced because they were worn. Markers such as these are ground into dust — an honorable ending — before they are replaced. The National Cemetery Administration website says, “Marble and granite headstones or markers that are permanently removed from a grave must be destroyed, ensuring that the inscription is no longer legible.” Destined for dust or not, Maynard had no right to take them. It was theft, among other things.

On learning that he could get 10 years in the prison and be fined \$250,000, Maynard agreed to a plea deal in exchange for a more cushy sentence: a year of probation and 500 hours of community service.

What happened, one wonders, to the Let Our Veterans Rest in Peace Act of 2008? It provides sentencing guidelines for any offense involving theft (as well as other desecrations) of any object that marks a veteran’s grave. Sentencing is supposed to be “appropriately severe ... so that potential thieves will be deterred.”

Where’s the deterrent in a slap on the wrist?

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6.7 - The Daily Herald: [Senate passes a new highway bill](#) (2 August, Steve Tetreault, 97k online visitors/mo; Columbia, TN)

WASHINGTON – The Senate voted last week for a six-year extension of federal programs for highways, mass transit and infrastructure while acknowledging it needs to come up with more money to pay for the entire bill.

Senators voted 65-34 for the highway bill, setting the stage for a debate in the fall with the House over infrastructure needs and how to pay for them.

The six-year Senate bill would authorize \$350 billion in spending, enough only to cover three years. Still it was considered the most ambitious effort to enact a long-term highway bill since 2005.

Among other options, committees in the House and Senate are working on tax reform bills that lawmakers hope might yield additional revenue that could be pumped into patching the nation’s aging infrastructure. Most have ruled out increasing the federal gasoline tax.

With the latest highway bill about to expire, the House and Senate passed a three-month extension to tide over federal road programs while they negotiate a longer-term bill. It was the 34th short-term extension of highway funding since 2009 as lawmakers have been unable to compromise on anything of longer duration.

Supporters of the six-year bill said it was important to pass a bill that would allow states and contractors the certainty needed to plan major projects. Opponents said the bill was put together using budget gimmicks that will not be sustainable.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., voted for the bill. Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., voted against it.

Vote to reauthorize Export-Import Bank

Senators voted 64-29 for a highway bill amendment to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank, setting up a confrontation in the fall with the House where key Republican leaders are not sold on the bank staying in business.

Republican conservatives and the party's candidates for president decry the credit agency as an example of "crony capitalism" for the money it loans to exporters and overseas customers to help finance the sale of U.S. products. But bank supporters say it is a vital tool to maintain U.S. exports and the jobs they support, and to keep pace with foreign sales competitors.

The charter of the Export-Import Bank expired at the end of June after Congress was unable to resolve the issue. It is prohibited from making new loans although it is allowed to maintain ones it already approved.

Alexander voted to renew the Export-Import Bank. Corker did not vote.

VA workforce bill passes

The House voted 256-170 to make it easier for the Department of Veterans Affairs to fire corrupt or non-performing workers.

The "VA Accountability Act" broadened a law enacted last year that gave the VA secretary more authority to fire agency executives. The legislation stems from the 2014 scandal in which it was discovered that patient appointment records were being manipulated at a number of VA health centers to cover up long delays.

The latest bill speeds the process by which a fired employee must appeal and have the Merit Systems Protection Board issue a ruling. It also limits the time a worker can be on paid administrative leave and extends the probationary period for new employees from a year to 18 months.

At the same time, sponsors said it would increase whistleblower protections for workers reporting wrongdoing.

"With the scandals at the VA medical centers and reports of whistleblower retribution, it has become evident that there are more bad apples than we would like to believe," said Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn.

Roe said the bill would give the VA secretary flexibility “to remove these bad actors and send a message about the type of performance that we expect for our veterans.”

Opponents said the bill would strip due process rights from VA employees.

Rep. Matt Cartwright, D-Pa., said it would “transform 300,000 VA personnel to what we call at-will employees, capable of being fired based on anything, including their beliefs and not their merit necessarily. It effectively destroys the civil service as it is and as we know it at the VA.”

Reps. Scott DesJarlais and Marsha Blackburn, both R-Tenn., voted for the bill.

House passes anti-regulation bill

The House voted 243-165 to revive a bill giving Congress more power over costly regulations. It was called the REINS Act – Regulations from the Executive In Need of Scrutiny Act.

The measure championed by Republicans reflects the view that federal regulations have gotten out of control. It would require that any federal rule having an economic impact of \$100 million or more must be approved by Congress.

The bill has passed the House before but did not advance in the Senate.

President Barack Obama has threatened a veto if it ever did.

“Whether it’s IRS rules, Obamacare mandates or EPA regulations, there are no shortage of examples where bad regulation could have been avoided if federal agencies and Congress were held responsible for the harm done to people’s jobs and wages,” said Rep. Todd Young, R-Ind.

All but two Democrats voted against the bill. They said it would make it all but impossible for the government to propose and carry out necessary health or safety measures.

DesJarlais and Blackburn voted for the bill.

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6.8 - Valley News: [At the Hospitals: Aug. 2, 2015](#) (2 August, Aimee Caruso, White River Junction, VT)

[...]

Nursing Students Complete VA Summer Program

White River Junction — Three nursing students recently completed a 10-week program at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in White River Junction.

The VA Learning Opportunity Residency in an honors program for baccalaureate nursing students.

The students are recommended by the directors of their college of nursing and must have a GPA of 3.0 or higher to apply.

Participants, all rising seniors, develop and present performance improvement projects as part of the program. They also take part in other educational offerings, such as nursing grand rounds, wound and ostomy care classes, and have experiences in other areas of the hospital, such as the traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury clinics, Melissa Thompson, the nursing Valor program's coordinator, said in an email.

Nicole Levesque, of Colby-Sawyer College, worked in the medical center's Intensive Care Unit Project. Her project was called The Impact of Disinfecting Caps.

Sebastian Comas, a registered nurse attending Castleton University, was assigned to Ground East, a mental health unit. Comas' project, which promoted improved mental health, focused on outdoor access and exercise.

Elizabeth Ladd, of Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, was assigned to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit. Her project was Increasing Patient Knowledge Via Hospital-Patient Communication, an orientation guide for patients scheduled for surgical procedures.

The students are assigned a nursing preceptor who acts as a mentor during the summer.

They work with their preceptors and nurse managers to create their projects and receive coaching during the process.

The products of their projects are integrated into the medical center's care processes, for example, patient education resources or orientation materials for patients, said Thompson, is a coach and mentor to the students.

[...]

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