



The COMMUNICATOR is the official publication of the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO). Opinions expressed are those of contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of CACVSO officers, members, or the editorial staff. The newsletter reserves the right to edit, amend, or reject any contribution submitted for publication.

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#### COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS BRING IN OVER HALF-BILLION DOLLARS FOR CALIFORNIA VETERANS

California's County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) helped veterans receive more than \$500 million in new federal benefits by filing disability and compensation claims in 2017-2018, at a cost of only \$5.6 million in state funds. This remarkable success continues the CVSOs long tradition of cutting through federal red tape, to receive billions of dollars in hard-earned and badly needed assistance for men women who have served in defense of our freedoms.

These veterans are now linked to federal benefits and assistance. The half billion dollars in new money pumps up the California economy and eases the burden of state and local spending on social services.

"The total of \$505.5 million tells only part of this success story" said Scott Holwell, president of the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers. "Of these new claims, the total includes \$333.5 million which will be annually-recurring for the rest of the veterans' lives."

"The impact of these benefits spreads far beyond the veterans we serve," Holwell said. "Thanks to their new income, veterans no longer need to turn to state and local government social services for assistance. In addition, the entire California economy grows stronger as veterans use their benefits to pay rent, food, medicine and many other necessities in our state."

Veterans earn a variety of benefits through their service in defense of our nation. Many of the 1.7 million veterans living in California are eligible to receive these benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Some do not know they are eligible. Others do not know how to apply. CVSOs help all of them.

Veterans have a right to these benefits and managing to receive them is often very difficult. That's where CVSOs provide critically needed help. These highly trained, hardworking and dedicated professionals guide veterans through a maze of regulations to access benefits and programs available to them. CVSOs then help them successfully apply.

*Continued on Page 5*

### This Month's Featured County

Inyo County is located in east-central California in the southwestern United States, on the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and south of Yosemite National Park. Death Valley National Park is 5,216 square miles (3.3 million acres) and is the largest National Park in the lower 48 states, is a fascinating study in topographic contrasts. Marvel at Telescope Peak towering 11,049 feet, while Bad water, North America's lowest point, sits at 282 feet below sea level. Death Valley is a popular destination during the spring desert wildflower bloom. Summer temperatures can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Mt. Whitney, is the tallest peak at 14,496 feet, is the tallest peak in the lower 48 states. The Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, home to the planet's oldest living trees; Palisade Glacier, the southernmost glacier in the western hemisphere; and miles of mountain biking and backpacking trails. The City of Bishop is located at the northern end of Inyo County in the beautiful Owens Valley where Highway 395 meets U.S. Route 6. While Bishop has the largest population and is the only incorporated city in Inyo County, it definitely maintains a friendly home-town atmosphere. Just under 4,000 people reside within the 1.8 square miles of the city limits and another 5,000 or so live in the outlying areas. In 2008, well known author Tom Stienstra surveyed fellow members of the Outdoor Writers Association of California and determined that Bishop is California's #1 City to live for Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts. "Bishop was No. 1 on most ballots and in the top 10 of most writers taking the survey," writes Stienstra. "They highlighted trout fishing at lakes and streams, great hiking, horseback riding and exploring near Bishop Pass, backpacking into the John Muir Wilderness, tracking Sierra bighorn sheep and mule deer, and four-season mountain weather, complete with sensational fall colors from aspens, yet without much snow."



## The Airborne Hazards Center of Excellence – Offering specialty health exams and conducting research



The Airborne Hazards Center of Excellence (AHCE) provides comprehensive, multi-disciplinary,

specialty medical evaluations for Veterans who have health concerns about airborne hazards exposures and are seeking expertise that may not be available at their local VA medical center. In addition to clinical evaluations, the AHCE also conducts research studies to evaluate novel assessments of cardiopulmonary function, along with tests on non-pulmonary systems, to learn about vascular and cellular function in deployed Veterans. The AHCE is located at the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) in East Orange, New Jersey.

To get a specialty medical evaluation at the AHCE, Veterans need to ask their VA provider for a referral. As a part of this evaluation, Veterans receive an extensive environmental exposure assessment and a thorough examination from a pulmonologist who specializes in airborne hazards. The evaluation may also include state-of-the-art assessments of lung function and exercise capacity. All of the findings, along with a Veteran's past medical history, are used to develop recommendations focused on improving quality of life and symptom management. Any recommendations are shared with a Veteran and their referring provider for follow-up care.

Researchers at the AHCE also look at findings from these specialty medical evaluations to help them develop research questions to investigate. For example, AHCE researchers are currently evaluating new, non-invasive ways to assess small airway mechanics and gas-exchange at rest and during exercise. They hope that these research findings will ultimately be used to improve clinical practice.

Learn more about the [AHCE enhanced evaluation for airborne hazard concerns](#), including how to get a referral, and about WRIISC research and education efforts at [www.warrelatedillness.va.gov](http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov).

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Choice Program (VCP)

## Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) How to Obtain Your Specialty or Primary Care Appointment

The Veterans Choice Program (VCP) is an enhanced benefit to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3) program. VCP provides eligible Veterans with access to primary care, inpatient and outpatient specialty services, and behavioral health care.

With VCP, you can seek care from private-sector providers if:

You face wait times longer than 30 days for care from a VA medical facility;

The closest VA medical facility is greater than 40 miles from your home; or

The closest VA medical facility is not easily accessible from your home; due to geographic barriers (mountains, large body of water, etc.) or you have some other hardship that precludes significant travel. If you believe you're eligible, you should contact TriWest at 1-866-606-8198 to verify eligibility and obtain authorization for care.

You're encouraged to access care through TriWest's network providers, who have already been certified to meet VA's quality standard. However you do have the option of seeking care outside of our network.

*(Note: We will make every effort to work with the provider that you choose. Ultimately, however, if the provider won't accept VCP and you still choose to see that provider, you may be responsible for all costs associated with your care.)*

### Appointment Information

Once TriWest verifies your eligibility and your treatment is approved, remember to bring the following information with you on the day of your appointment:

**Your Veterans Choice Card** – it contains information that is important to your physician.

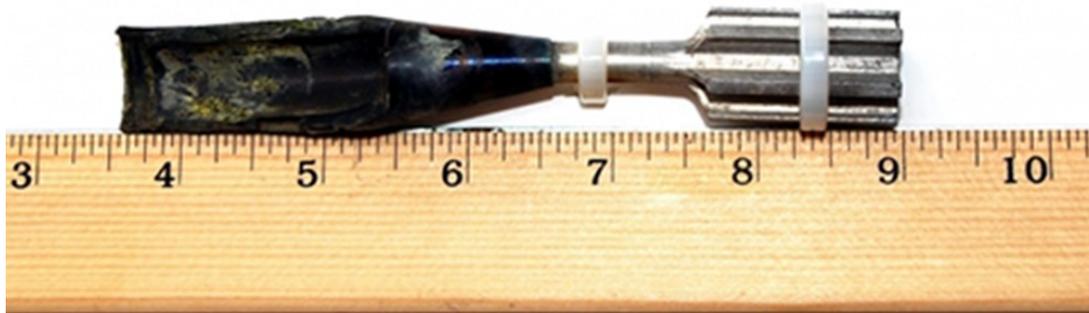
**Any Other Health Insurance Card You Have** – your physician will need to record this information. If you do not have another health insurance plan, you only need to bring your Choice Card.

**A Form of Picture Identification** – this helps the doctor match you with the name on your card.

### Contact TriWest for Assistance

The toll-free number to contact TriWest is: 1-866-606-8198. If you have any questions or concerns, you may call us to speak with a patient service representative. Our hours of operation are 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. in your location.

# Understanding Depleted Uranium Exposure



M101 spotting round showing depleted uranium in black. Photo Credit: By Sgt. Angela Gilmore, U.S. Army, Pacific Public Affairs Office

You may have heard about “depleted uranium,” and while you probably are aware that uranium has some radioactivity associated with it, you probably do not know what it means to have the word “depleted” in front of it.

The process of manufacturing enriched uranium used in nuclear reactors or weapons starts with natural uranium found in the earth’s crust and involves removing some of the radioactivity from the natural uranium to concentrate it for the ‘enriched’ product. What remains of the natural uranium is called “depleted” uranium (DU). DU has 60 percent of the radioactivity of natural uranium (hence, the word “depleted”), and since it is a heavy metal, it has the same chemical toxicity as natural uranium.

Because of DU’s density, easy availability, and relatively low cost, the U.S. military found it to be useful in manufacturing tank armor and some bullets to penetrate enemy armored vehicles. The large-scale use of DU for this purpose began during the Gulf War.

While DU that enters the body can become a potential health hazard because of its radiation properties, the potential for long-term risks from its chemical toxicity are also of concern. Veterans who may have been exposed to DU include those who were on, in, or near vehicles hit with “friendly fire.” When a projectile made with DU penetrates a vehicle, small pieces of DU can scatter and become embedded in muscle and soft tissue. Also, these service members may have inhaled or swallowed small airborne DU particles. Other Veterans who may have been exposed to DU were near burning vehicles, near fires involving DU munitions, or involved in salvaging damaged vehicles. Simply riding in a vehicle with DU weapons or DU shielding will not expose a service member to significant amounts of DU or external radiation. Veterans may have been exposed to DU during the first Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), or Operation New Dawn (OND), or deployment to Bosnia.

VA has been conducting a surveillance program for Gulf War Veterans exposed to DU through “friendly fire” incidents for more than 25 years. Some Veterans enrolled in this program have ongoing DU exposure resulting from DU fragments embedded in their bodies. It is important to note that, to date, no health effects related to DU exposure have been found. Nevertheless, the potential for long-term effects remains, and this group continues to be under surveillance.

VA also maintains a registry for Veterans who are concerned about possible DU exposure during their service. If you think you were exposed to DU and would like to enroll in this registry, talk to your local [Environmental Health Coordinator](#). You will be asked to submit a urine sample and to fill out an exposure questionnaire to screen for DU exposure. Learn more about [DU](#) and VA’s [DU Follow-up Program](#).



**VA**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# News Release

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## Office of General Counsel—Legal Help for Veterans

Some VA facilities host non-VA legal service providers that can assist Veterans free of charge. [Click here](#) to see a list of those legal service clinics. The [VA Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist](#) at the closest VA Medical Center may be another source of information about the clinics.

If a Veteran needs legal assistance, you may contact one of the listed legal service clinics, visit [www.statesidelegal.org](http://www.statesidelegal.org)\*, <http://vetlex.org>\* or [Pro Bono Resources for Veterans](#)\*. You may also contact your local VJO Specialist who may know of community resources for legal assistance.

Please note: VA assumes no responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the legal service providers which appear on this list. VA does not endorse or recommend any of these organizations.

[List of Organizations Providing Pro Bono Legal Services for Veterans](#) \*

\* External Link Disclaimer: Links marked with an asterisk ( \* ) are external links. By clicking on these links, you will leave the Department of Veterans Affairs website. VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked website. The link will open in a new window.

## VA seeks public comment on Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, as amended by VA MISSION Act of 2018

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will accept public comments for 15 days on how to implement certain changes to the [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) (PCAFC) required by the [VA MISSION Act of 2018](#).

Through PCAFC, VA provides family caregivers of eligible Veterans certain benefits, such as training; respite care; counseling; technical support; beneficiary travel (to attend required caregiver training and for an eligible Veteran's medical appointments); a monthly stipend payment; and access to health care (if qualified) through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA). "VA values the knowledge, skill, and perspectives of all caregivers," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This public comment period demonstrates our desire to create a program that best serves the participating caregivers and Veterans."

The VA MISSION Act of 2018 expands eligibility for PCAFC to family caregivers of eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty before Sept. 11, 2001 using a phased approach, establishes new benefits for designated primary family caregivers of eligible Veterans and makes other changes affecting program eligibility and VA's evaluation of PCAFC applications.

Submitted responses will be used to guide future regulatory modifications and implementation of the expanded PCAFC. More information about the VA Caregiver Support Program and a link to submit comments is available at [www.caregiver.gov](http://www.caregiver.gov).

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### ***County Veterans Service Officers bring in over half-billion dollars for California Veterans Continued from Page 1***

The response of CVSOs to a new driver's license law highlights their determination to go the extra mile. Beginning in 2015, veterans were allowed to request the Department of Motor Vehicles add the designation VETERAN to their drivers' license. In the first 26 months, 64,000 veterans visited CVSOs to request the change.

The CVSOs handled their DMV applications, but didn't stop there. They examined the veterans' military records and found thousands were not receiving the benefits they had earned. The CVSOs helped these veterans gain \$31 million in annual benefits and \$17 million in retroactive benefits.

#### **About the CACVSO:**

The California Association of County Veterans Services Officers is a professional training and legislative organization, representing 56 counties, including 54 with their own County Veterans Service Officers. CACVSO serves not only the state's 1.7 million veterans but also their dependents and survivors. For more information about CACVSO, including our annual report, go to [http://www.cacvso.org/](http://www.cacvso.org)

# Here's how troops, veterans could be affected by the latest government shutdown threat

By: Leo Shane III and Joe Gould November 21, 2018

*When lawmakers return to town next week, they'll have just a few days to work out funding for a host of federal departments for the remainder of fiscal 2019 or face a partial government shutdown. (Carolyn Kaster/AP)*

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers will face yet another threat of a partial government shutdown when they return to Capitol Hill next week, but this one carries much less significance for military families and veterans than many of the last showdowns. Both Republicans and Democrats have downplayed the possibility of a shutdown in recent days, saying they believe the two sides can agree on final details of seven still unresolved full-year spending deals for federal agencies. Before the mid-term elections, Congress extended their budgets until Dec. 7.

President Donald Trump has also signaled optimism about a deal, but last week told reporters at the White House he thought now could be "a good time" for a government shutdown if lawmakers don't back funding of his plans for a border wall in the southern U.S. states.

"If I was ever going to do a shutdown over border security, when you look at the caravans, when you look at the mess, when you look at the people coming in, this would be a very good time to do a shutdown," he said.

Trump had objected to immigration issues in the spending bill, but said the military funding included in the measure made it too important to scrap.



By: Leo Shane III

Among the spending bills still to be finalized are those for the Departments of Justice, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, State and Homeland Security. Missing from that list are the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, because lawmakers finished work on those appropriations measures earlier this year. That means even if the White House and Congress can't reach an agreement on the outstanding appropriations issues by the Dec. 7 deadline, those budgets will continue unaffected for the rest of the fiscal year. But even though troops' paychecks and veterans services won't be affected, another partial government shutdown could have secondary impacts on those groups.

A State Department shutdown, for example, could mean troops deployed to allied countries overseas would see some overseas services

curtailed, and troops in Afghanistan and other combat areas could see civilian colleagues' schedules upended by personnel limits. Department facilities would be minimally staffed, and chiefs of mission would decide which personnel are "excepted" from the shutdown because their work is essential to national security. Others would be furloughed.

Consulates can remain operational so long as there are sufficient fees to support their operations, according to the most recent shutdown guidelines.

In addition, international aid payments to U.S. allies could be stalled while the funding issues are sorted out.

Shutting down the Department of Homeland Security could prove problematic for troops deployed along the southern U.S. border. Nearly 6,000 active-duty troops and 2,100 Guardsmen deployed to the region could see border patrol activities cut or canceled in coming weeks, further confusing the role of support forces there.

The vast majority of Homeland Security employees will remain on the job if the government shuts down, a department spokesman told CQ during the last budget stalemate. About 90 percent are considered essential staff because of the law enforcement missions of many of its agencies.

## Military death benefits won't be stopped by government shutdowns anymore

Military families mourning the loss of a loved one have been caught up in previous political fights over government spending.

By: Leo Shane III

The Coast Guard operated at 80 percent, but its services to maritime commerce and recreational boating would cease, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center.

VA officials work closely with HUD leaders on a host of homeless outreach efforts throughout the year, and a disruption in their funding could mean reducing or temporarily canceling some of those efforts.

For now, lawmakers are continuing work to avoid a shutdown.

CACVSO Communicator  
Legislative Advocate's article  
December 2018 edition

## **CACVSO TO SEEK INCREASE IN SUBVENTION FUNDING IN 2019**

By Seth Reeb, Veterans Advocate

The Association will pursue an increase in Local Assistance funding (aka Subvention) from the current \$5.6 million to \$11 million. We will be seeking this increase via the state

budget process, which begins in earnest on January 10 when the Governor submits his budget proposal to the Legislature.

The 2019-20 legislative session begins officially on December 3 when the new Legislature is sworn in. The new legislative session brings us a new Governor and Administration, some new constitutional officers, and some new legislators. As the Association's lobbyists, we have already been laying the groundwork for the funding increase. We have met with and briefed the Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst's office. We have also been briefing various legislators, legislative consultants, and CalVet on our budget increase campaign.

Since it is a new legislative session, committee members may change. We will keep the Association posted in the coming months.

We will continue to lay the groundwork for the budget increase. CVSOs should prepare themselves to ask their Boards of Supervisors for letters of support for the increase. We will be sending out a Board of Supervisors request for support and sample letters to the Association in the coming months. CVSOs can also get support letters from the other governmental organizations you partner with, local veterans service organizations, service providers, etc.

The Annual Report is one of the most valuable tools you have to show the great jobs you all do. A new edition for 2019 will be available at the February Training Conference. One of our tasks will be to get that report to every legislator so that they can become familiar with what you do and the new federal dollars you bring in to the state. As always, take every opportunity you can to meet with your local state legislators. Visit their offices, invite them to your outreach events, stand-downs, etc. If you don't know who your legislators are or how to get hold of them, please contact me at Seth Reeb: [sethreeb@comcast.net](mailto:sethreeb@comcast.net)

Also, please make use of the press release touting the dollars you helped bring in during the last fiscal year. It is included in this Communicator edition. If you would like an electronic copy, please email Dana Nichol: [dana.nichol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dana.nichol@sbcglobal.net)

# The Association Man

## Name and County unknown

I should introduce myself to all the newer members of our great Association. I am Association Man, also known as A-Man. I've tried to be known in a more politically correct manner as A-Person, but that just isn't euphonious.

I represent all of us, and our super-powers to bend the VA to our will. Sort of. I've been around far longer than nearly anyone in the Association, with the possible exception of Richard Garza, who was around when it was the Veteran's Administration and the regional office was in San Francisco.

I've been honored to write a few notes in this journal from time to time. I've been away far too long and will be back occasionally as time permits. This superhero gig takes time, you know.

So here it is, holidays are fast approaching, and even superheroes have to shop.

You would think that with all these cool super-powers I wouldn't be standing in this #@(\* line, waiting to see some fat old guy in an ugly, ratty, red fuzzy suit!

You would think that for all the good that I do to ensure truth, justice and 10% for tinnitus that I would get a private meeting with the guy.

You would think that at the very least I would get head-of-line privileges. These snotty-nosed brats in front of me don't have anything better to do.

But that's life, and I am, if nothing, super-patient. After all, this gives me time to review my list of needs. I hate to be unprepared when I go to sit on someone's lap.

I'm not here today just for myself, you know. I don't need much, just a small space with a box on which I can fill out claims. Maybe a nice chair for the clients. I can sit on this bucket.

What I really want the Man in Red to do is help my friends.

I'd really like him to bring some more people to the regional offices, people that are already trained and ready to grant claims if they can and deny if they must. And for those that are already toiling for the VA, I'd like him to give them an extra couple of hours every day for them to wade through the stuff we send them.

I'd like him to bring them a powerful new tool that automatically enters the Power of Attorney when a new claim is submitted. I'd really like that tool to include all of the many databases the VA uses. Actually, I'd like him to give the VA a single program to handle all of this stuff!

I'm going to ask him to bring a magic potion that will make all of the veterans service organizations work together for the common good. The potion would also work for CVSOs. How cool would that be?

I'm hoping he can bring every county a VA outpatient clinic. I want each one of them to have a great big red wagon to go get the vets and bring them to those shiny new clinics.

It would be nice if he could also bring new, meaningful jobs to our men and women who went away for a few years to help protect the country they so cherish. It is such a shame that so many come back to an old life as new people and find they are no longer needed where they used to work.

I'll ask him to give our dear friends at the California National Guard an even greater dose of energy, patience and courage to do so much with so little. I'll beg him to give them protection. I'll even suggest that since he doesn't have much to do the rest of the year that he watches over the families of deployed Guardsmen & women.

I'll ask him to give us all more room in our already-full hearts. I swear that mine is near bursting with joy and despair, often at the same time, as I work with some of the most amazing people. Maybe he can leave us all a couple of extra boxes of Kleenex while he's visiting?

OK, this is the toughest. I'm going to ask him to bring healing to the hearts and minds of all of our veterans who have been through far too much, who have seen and heard the Hounds of Hell and returned with scars on their souls. I want him to dry their tears and reunite their broken families.

That would be the best present ever.

Thank you Santa.



# DATES OF INTEREST

## DECEMBER 2018

- 2 Hanukkah or Chanukah (12/02-12/10)
- 4 National Cookie Day
- 7 National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- 10 Human Rights Day
- 13 National Guard Birthday
- 17 Wright Brothers Day
- 17 Pan American Aviation Day
- 21 First Day of Winter
- 22 Forefather's Day
- 25 Christmas Day
- 30 National Bacon Day
- 31 New Year's Eve

