



AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

MARCH 22, 2021

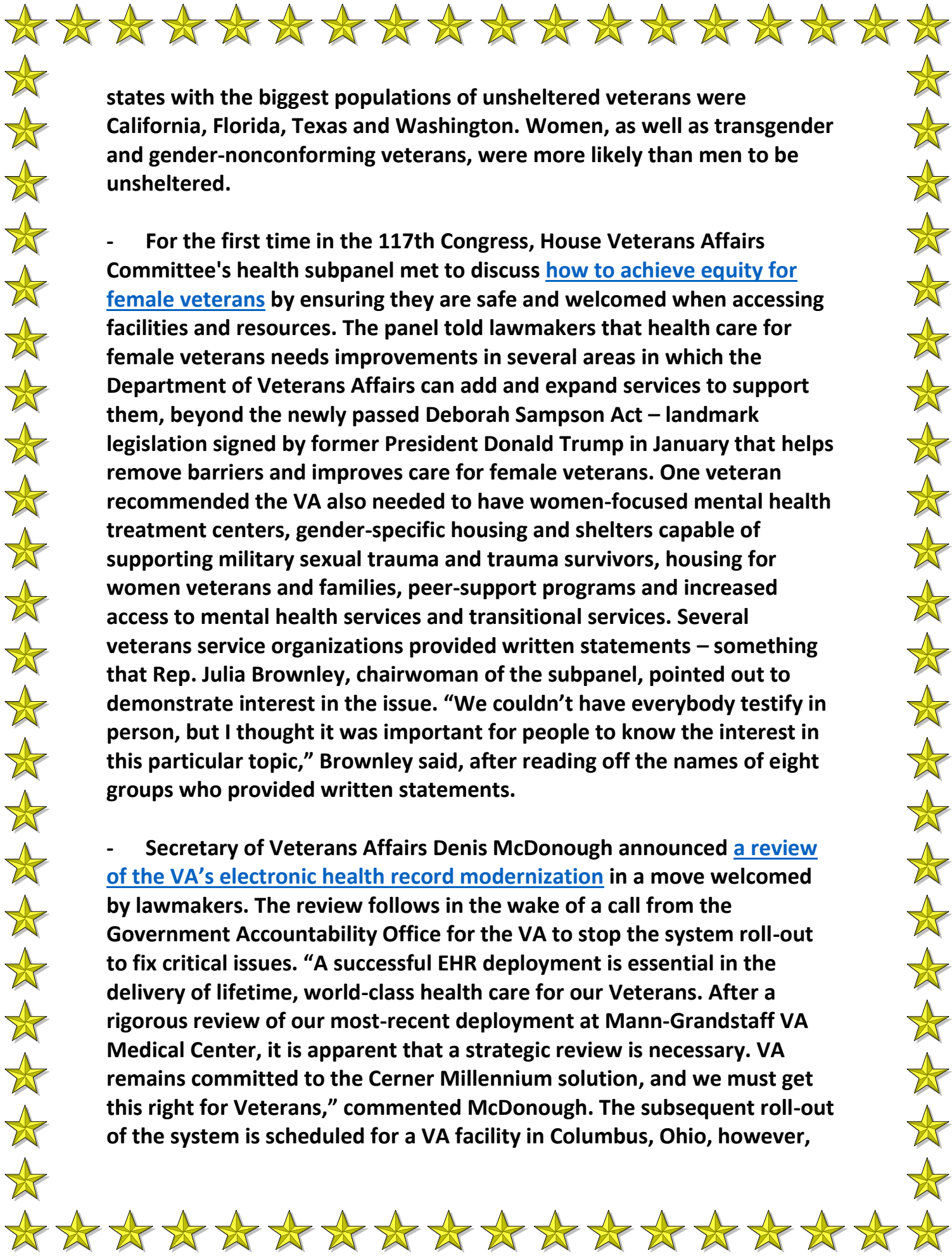
Good afternoon AMVETS Membership,

If you missed Commander Brown's testimony last week, please watch the YouTube video that Miles put together. This is the link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpZ2kt0YZz4. There are a few important hearings coming up this week. You can find the list of the hearings in the upcoming events section. AMVETS will be keeping a close eye on the hearings, especially the Senate hearing on veteran mental health/suicide prevention. As always, let us know if there's anything you think we should be tracking that wasn't included.

-Bill Clark, AMVETS National Third Vice Commander

News Driving the Week

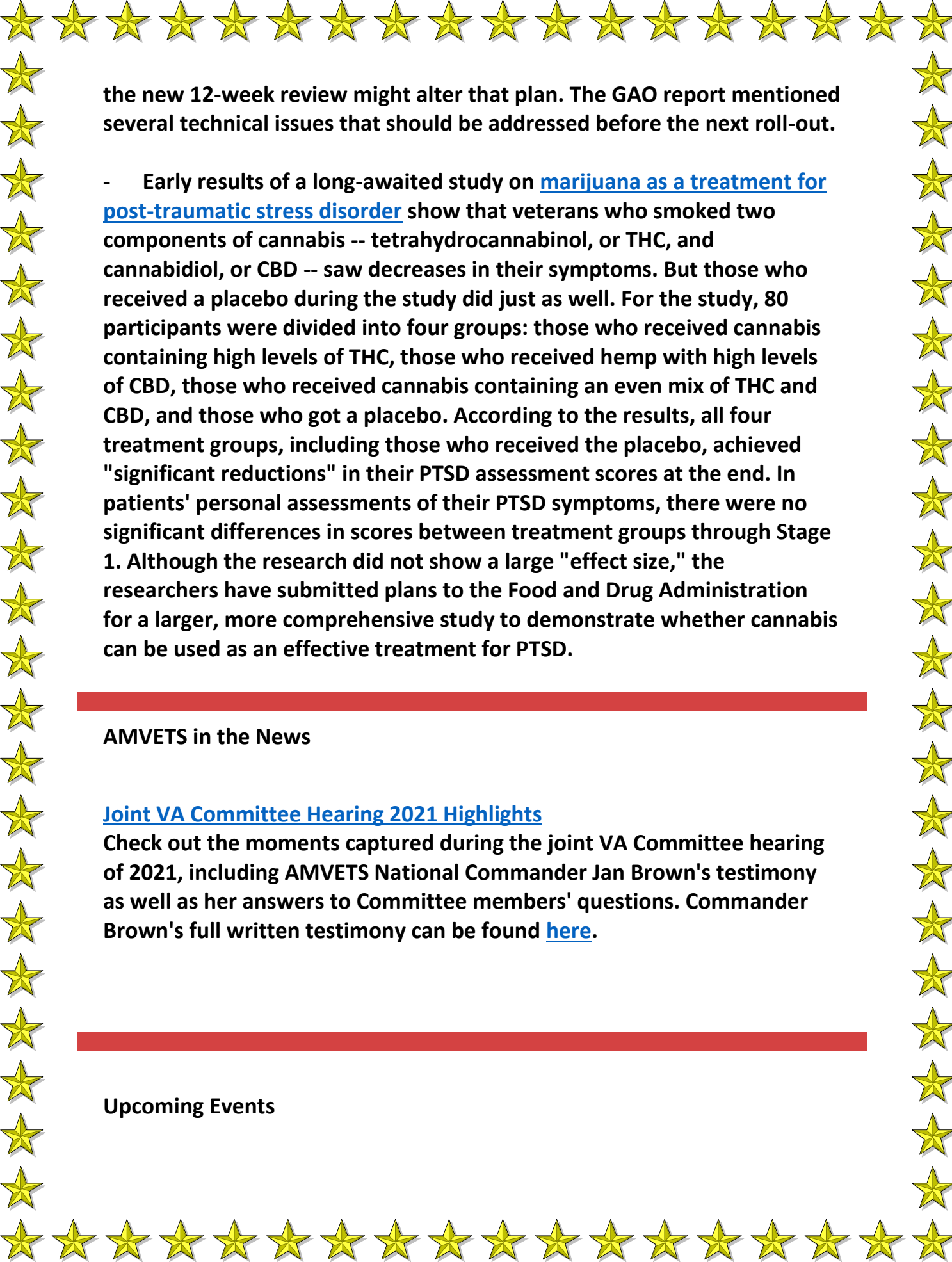
- A newly released federal report found the number of [homeless veterans in the United States increased from 2019 to 2020](#), stoking concern among advocates that the effects of the coronavirus pandemic will add to an already regressive trend. On a single night in January 2020, 37,252 veterans were experiencing homelessness — an increase of 167 veterans, or 0.4%, from January 2019, according to the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report. This marks the first increase in veteran homelessness since 2017. However, since 2009, veteran homelessness is down about 50%. Overall in the United States, 580,466 people were homeless, an increase of 12,751 people, or 2.2%, from 2019. Because the data was collected in January 2020, the report does not account for the economic effects of the pandemic. Veteran homelessness increased in 19 states and Washington, D.C., between 2019 and 2020, with the biggest increases in California, Nevada and Delaware. California accounted for 31% percent of all homeless veterans in the country. The number of unsheltered veterans increased by 6%, or 859 veterans, in that time. The



states with the biggest populations of unsheltered veterans were California, Florida, Texas and Washington. Women, as well as transgender and gender-nonconforming veterans, were more likely than men to be unsheltered.

- For the first time in the 117th Congress, House Veterans Affairs Committee's health subpanel met to discuss [how to achieve equity for female veterans](#) by ensuring they are safe and welcomed when accessing facilities and resources. The panel told lawmakers that health care for female veterans needs improvements in several areas in which the Department of Veterans Affairs can add and expand services to support them, beyond the newly passed Deborah Sampson Act – landmark legislation signed by former President Donald Trump in January that helps remove barriers and improves care for female veterans. One veteran recommended the VA also needed to have women-focused mental health treatment centers, gender-specific housing and shelters capable of supporting military sexual trauma and trauma survivors, housing for women veterans and families, peer-support programs and increased access to mental health services and transitional services. Several veterans service organizations provided written statements – something that Rep. Julia Brownley, chairwoman of the subpanel, pointed out to demonstrate interest in the issue. “We couldn’t have everybody testify in person, but I thought it was important for people to know the interest in this particular topic,” Brownley said, after reading off the names of eight groups who provided written statements.

- Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough announced [a review of the VA’s electronic health record modernization](#) in a move welcomed by lawmakers. The review follows in the wake of a call from the Government Accountability Office for the VA to stop the system roll-out to fix critical issues. “A successful EHR deployment is essential in the delivery of lifetime, world-class health care for our Veterans. After a rigorous review of our most-recent deployment at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center, it is apparent that a strategic review is necessary. VA remains committed to the Cerner Millennium solution, and we must get this right for Veterans,” commented McDonough. The subsequent roll-out of the system is scheduled for a VA facility in Columbus, Ohio, however,



the new 12-week review might alter that plan. The GAO report mentioned several technical issues that should be addressed before the next roll-out.

- Early results of a long-awaited study on [marijuana as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder](#) show that veterans who smoked two components of cannabis -- tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, and cannabidiol, or CBD -- saw decreases in their symptoms. But those who received a placebo during the study did just as well. For the study, 80 participants were divided into four groups: those who received cannabis containing high levels of THC, those who received hemp with high levels of CBD, those who received cannabis containing an even mix of THC and CBD, and those who got a placebo. According to the results, all four treatment groups, including those who received the placebo, achieved "significant reductions" in their PTSD assessment scores at the end. In patients' personal assessments of their PTSD symptoms, there were no significant differences in scores between treatment groups through Stage 1. Although the research did not show a large "effect size," the researchers have submitted plans to the Food and Drug Administration for a larger, more comprehensive study to demonstrate whether cannabis can be used as an effective treatment for PTSD.

AMVETS in the News

[Joint VA Committee Hearing 2021 Highlights](#)

Check out the moments captured during the joint VA Committee hearing of 2021, including AMVETS National Commander Jan Brown's testimony as well as her answers to Committee members' questions. Commander Brown's full written testimony can be found [here](#).

Upcoming Events

House Veterans Affairs Committee
DAMA Subcommittee
VA Compensation and Pension Exams During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Path Forward
Tuesday, March 23 10:00 AM
Watch [here](#)

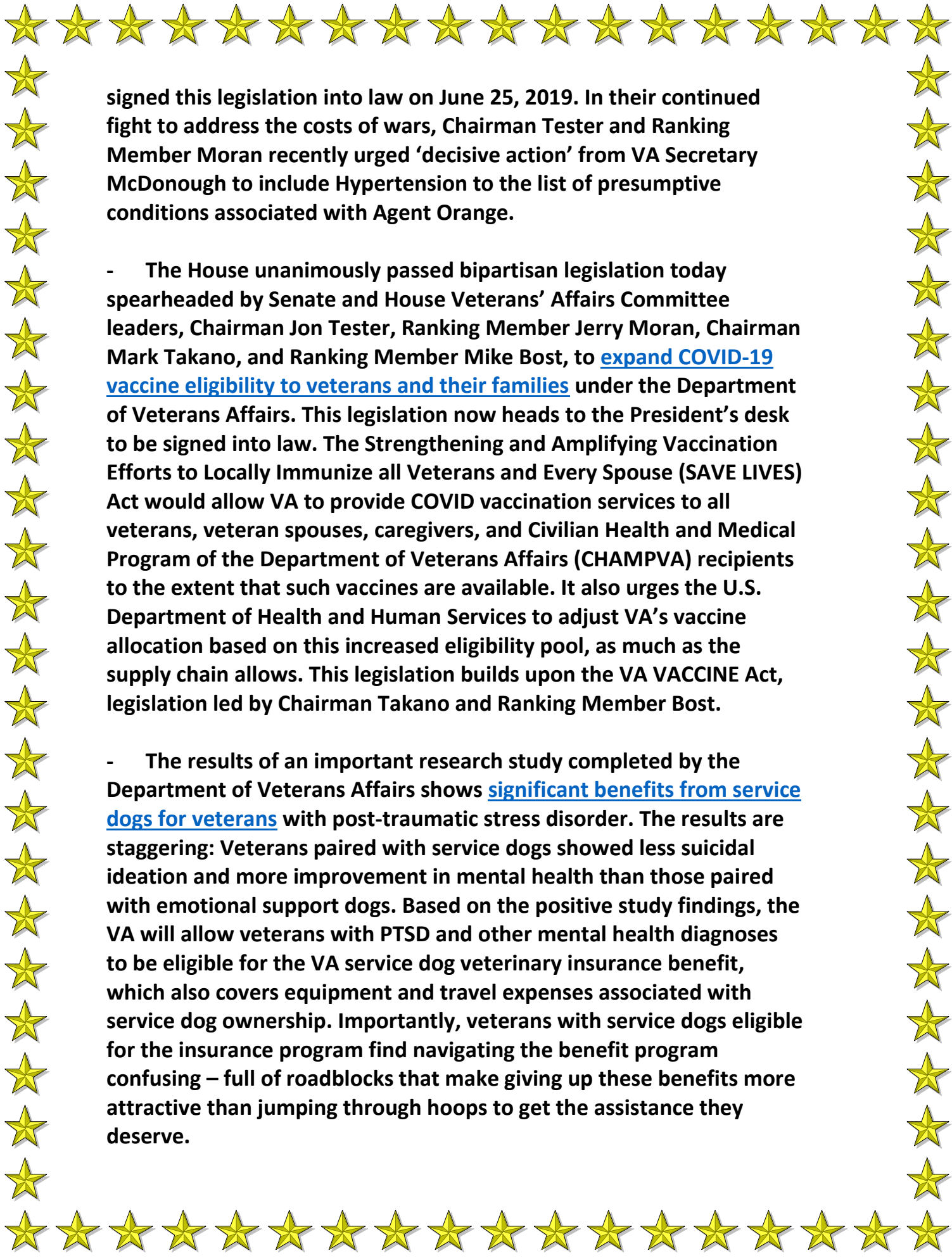
House Veterans Affairs Committee
OI Subcommittee
The Pandemic and VA's Medical Supply Chain: Evaluating the Year-Long Response and Modernization
Wednesday, March 24 2:00 PM
Watch [here](#)

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
Coping During COVID: Veterans' Mental Health and Implementation of the Hannon Act
Wednesday, March 24 3:00 PM
Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee
Restoring Faith by Building Trust: VA's First 100 Days
Thursday, March 25 2:00 PM
Watch [here](#)

Continued News

- Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester and Ranking Member Jerry Moran are urgently calling on Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough to implement provisions under the [Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act](#) to quickly provide long-overdue benefits and care to veterans suffering from Agent Orange exposure. The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act changed the law to guarantee that veterans who served off the shores of Vietnam and exposed to Agent Orange could access health care and benefits related to their exposure from VA. President Donald Trump



signed this legislation into law on June 25, 2019. In their continued fight to address the costs of wars, Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Moran recently urged ‘decisive action’ from VA Secretary McDonough to include Hypertension to the list of presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange.

- The House unanimously passed bipartisan legislation today spearheaded by Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs Committee leaders, Chairman Jon Tester, Ranking Member Jerry Moran, Chairman Mark Takano, and Ranking Member Mike Bost, to [expand COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to veterans and their families](#) under the Department of Veterans Affairs. This legislation now heads to the President’s desk to be signed into law. The Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize all Veterans and Every Spouse (SAVE LIVES) Act would allow VA to provide COVID vaccination services to all veterans, veteran spouses, caregivers, and Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) recipients to the extent that such vaccines are available. It also urges the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to adjust VA’s vaccine allocation based on this increased eligibility pool, as much as the supply chain allows. This legislation builds upon the VA VACCINE Act, legislation led by Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Bost.

- The results of an important research study completed by the Department of Veterans Affairs shows [significant benefits from service dogs for veterans](#) with post-traumatic stress disorder. The results are staggering: Veterans paired with service dogs showed less suicidal ideation and more improvement in mental health than those paired with emotional support dogs. Based on the positive study findings, the VA will allow veterans with PTSD and other mental health diagnoses to be eligible for the VA service dog veterinary insurance benefit, which also covers equipment and travel expenses associated with service dog ownership. Importantly, veterans with service dogs eligible for the insurance program find navigating the benefit program confusing – full of roadblocks that make giving up these benefits more attractive than jumping through hoops to get the assistance they deserve.

- **Opinion**: New solutions are needed to help with the military suicide stigma

- **Opinion**: Service dogs are saving veteran lives, despite limited access through VA

