



Good afternoon fellow AMVETS,

If you want to rewatch the 'Ask AMVETS: Legislation with Paul Shipley' event, you can find the video on AMVETS Facebook page. Thank you to everyone who participated in the event and brought great questions.

-Paul Shipley, AMVETS National Third Vice Commander

News Driving the Week

- Despite serious errors with [the department's electronic records overhaul](#) so far, Veterans Affairs officials told lawmakers they are confident in the new system and their ability to finish the project on time in fiscal 2028. VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy acknowledged the patient safety issues — issues like missing medical information or potential medication conflicts — presented a serious threat, but he also said none of the problems resulted in harm to any patients at the initial rollout sites. The deputy secretary also defended the Cerner system, noting it has been successfully implemented in numerous private-sector health care systems. VA leaders have said despite not being involved in the last administration's decision to buy the system, they do not have any plans to abandon it. The department is planning a revamped roll-out schedule, to start with sites in two regional networks next year. They include sites in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. VA officials also said they are unsure if the new deployment schedule will increase the costs of the massive project. Remy said a full cost estimate is expected next year, a timeline that brought criticism from several lawmakers.

- Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough vowed to get all homeless veterans living in the area known as ["veterans row" in Los Angeles](#) into housing by November 1. About 40 people live along veterans row, a homeless encampment just outside the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center. McDonough visited the facility two weeks ago and spoke to veterans living there. The VA assigned a social worker and an employee who specializes in homelessness resources to speak with the veterans and help get them into housing, McDonough said. In addition to the goal of eliminating the veterans row encampment by November, McDonough announced that the VA would house another 500 homeless veterans in Los Angeles by the end of 2021.

- A nonprofit veterans legal organization has created a program to help veterans file claims for [illnesses related to burn pits](#) and airborne pollutants found in combat zones. The National Veterans Legal Services Program, or NVLSP, announced Monday that its new Burn Pits Claims Assistance Program will represent former service members seeking disability benefits for diseases that may have been caused by the fumes and chemicals emitted from open-air

waste disposal sites used in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, as well as pollution from oil well fires and other hazards in the first Persian Gulf War. The announcement follows a move in August by the Department of Veterans Affairs to designate three respiratory illnesses as presumed to be related to burn pit exposure: asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis. VA officials say they will consider expanding the list of burn pit-related illnesses that may be eligible for fast-tracked compensation and health benefits but are currently reviewing the science to determine whether there's proof the conditions are linked. Numerous veterans organizations have employees on staff who can help veterans to file federal disability claims. Groups with veterans service officers include the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, Disabled Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the American Legion.

- Veterans Affairs leaders are relaunching their search for the department's top health official after problems surfaced with the previous commission assigned to review candidates for the job. The department has been without a Senate-confirmed [head of the Veterans Health Administration](#) since the start of 2017, despite attempts by the past two presidential administrations to fill the post. VA officials announced they have established a new commission to identify and interview candidates for the next head of the Veterans Health Administration. It's the second time this year the commission has been stood up, and the fifth time since spring 2017 that the panel has been authorized in an attempt to find suitable candidates. In July, the acting head of the Veterans Health Administration — Dr. Richard Stone — stepped down from that post after the previous hiring commission informed him he was no longer being considered for the permanent job. VA's Under Secretary for Health oversees the country's largest health care system, providing care for more than 9 million enrolled veterans and employing more than 306,000 full-time health care workers.

Clients in the News

[Sanders Introduces Legislation to Expand Veterans Dental and Health Care](#)

Sen. Bernie Sanders introduced two bills to expand and improve comprehensive health care for veterans. The Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act of 2021 will eliminate the current eligibility restrictions for VA dental care and expand eligibility to all veterans receiving VA health care. It will also work to address the shortage of dentists in the U.S. by incentivizing dental school enrollment and service to our nation's veterans, and ensure the VA maintains dental clinics in all states to meet the needs of veterans from all parts of the country. In addition to Sens. Blumenthal, Booker, Gillibrand, Hirono, and Menendez, the Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act of 2021 has the support of a wide array of veteran and health care organizations, including: The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), The American Heart Association, The American Legion, AMVETS, The Coalition of Veteran Organizations (CVO), Common Defense, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Justice in Aging, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Modern Military Association of America (MMAA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and VoteVets.

[Portman, Sinema Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Assist Low-Income Veterans Pursuing VA Disability Claims](#)

U.S. Senators Rob Portman and Kyrsten Sinema introduced the Veterans Pro Bono Corps Act, bipartisan legislation that will establish a five-year pilot program authorizing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to award grants to medical residency and fellowship programs to provide independent, pro bono medical examinations and opinions to help eligible low-income veterans substantiate their VA compensation benefits claims "AMVETS supports the passage of the Veterans Pro Bono Corps Act of 2021," said Joseph R. Chenelly, Executive Director, AMVETS. "As an organization that represents more than 75,000 veterans and veteran family members, we know the challenges veterans face when seeking medical examinations that lead to their ultimate disability rating. We know the financial costs that comes with paying private medical examiners to provide independent disability evaluations can be a burden that most veterans don't want to take on. The Veterans Pro Bono Corps Act would provide veterans another option when seeking a medical examination."

[Tester, Murkowski Renew Legislative Push to Support Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma](#)

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester and U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski reintroduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation this week to improve military sexual trauma (MST) survivors' access to benefits and health care, as well as bolster MST claims processing. The Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021 would modify the burden of proof for survivors applying for VA disability benefits, given that many assaults during military service go unreported, so that MST survivors can have equal access to the benefits and care they have earned. The bill would also ensure all former Guard and Reserve members can receive MST-related care and counseling from the Department of Veterans Affairs. "The effects of untreated MST can be devastating to the overall health of veterans and in the transition successful

transitioning back home into their families and communities,” said AMVETS Executive Director Joseph Chenelly. “Senators Tester and Murkowski’s Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act will require the VA to have specially trained claims raters processing MST-related benefits claims and ensure that more mental health diagnoses related to MST qualify for VA service-connected benefits. MST is a heinous crime which is a disgrace to all of those who have worn the uniform of the Armed Services, and it is our hope that upon passage of this bill the VA will be able to better assist survivors in the many ways that they need it.”

Upcoming Events

House Veterans Affairs Committee

EO Subcommittee

A Whole of Government Approach in Support of Servicewomen

Tuesday, October 26 10:00 AM

Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee

Technology Modernization Subcommittee

Next Steps: Examining Plans for the Continuation of the Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization Program

Tuesday, October 26 2:00 PM

Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee

Health Subcommittee

Lessons Learned? Building a Culture of Patient Safety Within the Veterans Health Administration

Wednesday, October 27 10:00 AM

Watch [here](#)

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Success After Service: Improving Veterans’ Employment, Education, and Home Loan Opportunities

Wednesday, October 27 3:00 PM

Watch [here](#)

Forging the Next Greatest Generation

Panel discussion with Matt Iseman, Captain Charlie Plumb, and Ken Falke

Wednesday, November 17 8:00 PM

Register [here](#)

Continued News

- The Navy has agreed to review and potentially [upgrade other-than-honorable discharges](#) given to Navy and Marine Corps veterans dating back to March 2012, as part of a settlement reached this month. The agreement is pending approval by the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. It orders the Navy Discharge Review Board to reconsider cases in which the board denied upgrades despite evidence that veterans were struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or military sexual trauma when they separated from the military. A hearing is scheduled for Dec. 16, during which the court will decide whether to give final approval to the settlement. The lawsuit was filed in 2018 by Iraq War veteran Tyson Manker, who was kicked out of the Marine Corps after being caught with marijuana, which he said he used to self-medicate. He was later denied a discharge upgrade despite being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

- Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester and Ranking Member Jerry Moran are urging Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough to [improve the use and management of VA’s emergency cache system](#) to support veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. VA’s emergency cache system is a backup reserve of emergency medical supplies and medication designed to assist the Department or local and state partners in the event of interrupted supply lines during catastrophic events such as a natural disaster or public health emergency. In 2018, VA’s Office of Inspector General released a report outlining issues with the emergency cache system and recommendations to serve as a reliable backup supply in the case of a national emergency. In 2021, the OIG released another report evaluating the emergency cache’s use during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which found the system underutilized and outlined steps for VA to take to ensure the system operates at full-capacity moving forward. Tester and Moran underscored their concerns with the findings—including persistent expired supplies and low staff awareness of caches.

