



# AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

## FEBRUARY 24, 2020

### News Driving the Week

- The mother of a Navy veteran who killed himself in the parking lot of a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital last year filed [a wrongful death lawsuit, accusing the VA of negligence](#) in her son's death. Mabelle Wilson of Forsyth, Ga., is seeking \$8.25 million from the VA. Her claim states that a VA doctor abruptly discontinued her son's opioid prescription, which he used to manage chronic hip and back pain. The lack of medication caused him to suffer pain and withdrawal symptoms and pushed him into crisis, the claim says. Gary Pressley, 28, a former aviation ordnance man in the Navy, shot himself in the chest April 5 in the parking lot of the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin, Ga. He had just left the hospital's pharmacy, where he tried in vain to have his pain medication refilled. In her son's case, Wilson wants people to know how he had suffered and what drove him to shoot himself. "I definitely need his story to be told, because this was uncalled for," she said. "He didn't need to take his life if he would've gotten the help he needed." Pressley was under VA care from 2013 to 2018, when his VA doctor referred him to a private medical provider. He developed a good relationship with his private doctor, but in February 2019 she stopped treating veterans. The agency owed her thousands of dollars in reimbursement for treating VA patients, the claim states. Wilson blames the VA's lack of payment for her son's eventual suicide. The wrongful death claim states that Pressley's suicide could have been prevented "if the VA would have honored its financial obligation" and reimbursed his doctor. Pressley's sister, Lisa Johnson, tried to warn VA police. Pressley had contacted his family to let them know he was in crisis. The hospital in Dublin, Ga., was two hours away from their home in Forsyth, so Johnson called the VA hospital, the claim states. The lawsuit alleges that hospital staff were not properly trained about how to respond to calls like Johnson's.

- Following the Department of Veterans Affairs's announcement that it will delay the launch of its [new EHR system](#), the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) program, members of The House Veterans Affairs Committee say the VA must be more transparent moving forward. The committee met at a House Veterans Affairs Technology Modernization Subcommittee hearing later last week following the VA announcement that the EHR rollout would be delayed until further notice due to integration issues with the department's IT infrastructure. "Getting it right is far more important than hitting a date on a calendar, and if there needs to be a delay to get the system to a place where veterans' lives are not at risk and the VA staff are ready to use it, then that's the right thing to do," said Rep. Susie Lee, subcommittee chairman. "However, I'm concerned that as we've moved closer to the go-live date, we have been told repeatedly that there were no show-stoppers in the implementation, that testing was going great and things were on track," continued Lee. "I get that in software development and testing conditions can change rapidly. But I require that the VA be transparent and accountable for its actions."



- Even with the Department of Veterans Affairs slated to see its largest budget ever in fiscal 2021, a coalition of advocates believes the government needs to spend even more next year to meet the increasing health care and transition needs of veterans across the country. Officials from Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars unveiled their annual [independent budget proposal for VA](#), calling for about \$4 billion more in spending than what the White House has requested for next fiscal year. Their proposal calls for roughly \$4 billion in additional planned VA spending, including nearly \$1 billion more in anticipated increased usage of department health care services over the next year (VA officials have said they expect only modest increases) and \$2 billion for additional medical program funding. The group is also calling for about \$1.7 billion more in major construction funding, noting overdue seismic corrections work at numerous existing VA facilities nationwide along with other infrastructure needs.

- Veterans increasingly need [long-term care from the Department of Veterans Affairs](#), and VA may struggle to meet that demand, a recent watchdog report shows. Disabled veterans rely on VA long-term care for everything from help around the house to round-the-clock care, including help eating or bathing. Demand for this type of care increased by about 14 percent in fiscal years 2014-18 and spending for that care jumped 33 percent. VA projects that demand will continue to increase and spending could double by 2037. But according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report this week, VA faces multiple challenges in meeting the needs of those veterans -- finding enough staff, providing care to veterans in more rural or remote areas and providing specialty care. As the veteran population ages and the number with service-connected disabilities increases, spending will rise, according to VA. To cut costs, VA plans to expand veterans' access to noninstitutional programs, or allow more care at home, instead of in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. VA's plans so far include focusing on hiring for programs that already have waitlists and providing telehealth to veterans in rural areas.

#### AMVETS in the News

##### [Hippocratic or hypocritical? The problem with doctor-assisted suicide](#)

As Maryland lawmakers prepare to hold public hearings on whether the state should join nine others that allow terminally-ill patients to choose physician-assisted suicide, it begs a serious question with no easy answer: Is suicide wrong? Granted, the question of the humanity of physician-assisted suicide is a complicated one. According to a 2018 report, 2,217 people chose to die with the help of a doctor, with 1,459 patients dying in this manner as of February 2019. However, the general consensus is a person with a terminal illness does not want to die. What he or she wants is an escape from pain and uncertainty, and likely prefers that this desire be satisfied without dying if given the option. Some argue that a dearth of options is precisely why an otherwise rational person may choose to die and justify supporting doctor-assisted suicide. However, I challenge those who support doctor-assisted suicide to process their own thoughts and experiences, which may include periods of profound hardship, and consider the question of whether a life saturated with pain or suffering can still be meaningful. If the answer is yes, then how do we find ourselves now in a

place where human beings are not only not preventing suicide, but encouraging it for people who have hit the absolute height of vulnerability?

**[‘Rolling To Remember’ Launches Rider Community on REVER GPS App, Uniting Riders](#)**

AMVETS has partnered with REVER to give Rolling to Remember riders a GPS app that will allow them to plan, track, and share their ride to Washington D.C. for the three day veteran demonstration May 22 to 24, 2020. As the official GPS app of Rolling to Remember, REVER will host several routes to the National Mall designed by motorcycle organizations across the country, including four cross-country rides organized by Run For The Wall. The Rolling to Remember community will also host meet up points and the official route around the National Mall on Sunday, May 24, 2020. “AMVETS is excited by the opportunity to collaborate with REVER and provide Rolling to Remember riders this enhanced traveling experience,” said AMVETS National Commander Jan Brown. “As we continue the tradition of this pro-veteran motorcycle ride, we want to offer those traveling here the ability meet up with fellow bikers and to communicate with all participants. We encourage all participants to download the app to make this ride as efficient and impactful as possible.”

**[Seeking the Military Suicide Solution Podcast, Episode 6: Joseph Chenelly](#)**

The latest Military Times Military Suicide Solution Podcast features Joseph Chenelly of AMVETS.

**Upcoming Events**

House Veterans Affairs Committee  
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
Legislative Presentation of the Disabled American Veterans  
Tuesday, February 25 2:00 PM  
Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee  
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
Legislative Presentation of AMVETS National Commander Jan Brown  
Wednesday, February 26 2:00 PM  
Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee  
VA Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2021  
Thursday, February 27 10:00 AM  
Watch [here](#)

House Appropriations Committee  
Oversight of VA’s Electronic Health Record Modernization Implementation  
Thursday, February 27 1:00 PM  
Watch [here](#)

**AMVETS Legislative Priorities**

**[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH**

**[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH**

**[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR**

**[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT**

**[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS**

**[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV**

**Continued News**

- Kuwait has pledged \$10 million to help build the [National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial](#) in Washington, D.C. Scott Stump, CEO and president of the National Desert Storm War Memorial Association made the announcement on Monday. Stump said the organization is honored and humbled by the show of support. "This lead donation by the Government of Kuwait is an important validation of the historical importance of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, and is a display of the deep, special, and lasting friendship between our two countries," he said. As of Dec. 31, NDSWA has raised \$9 million of the \$40 million needed to construct the memorial. The memorial is planned for a site near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

- [Opinion](#): A call to action at the VA on sexual harassment and assault

- [Opinion](#): There's More Than One Right Way to Treat PTSD in Veterans

- [Opinion](#): As VA's budget continues to increase, greater oversight is required



**February 24, 2020**