



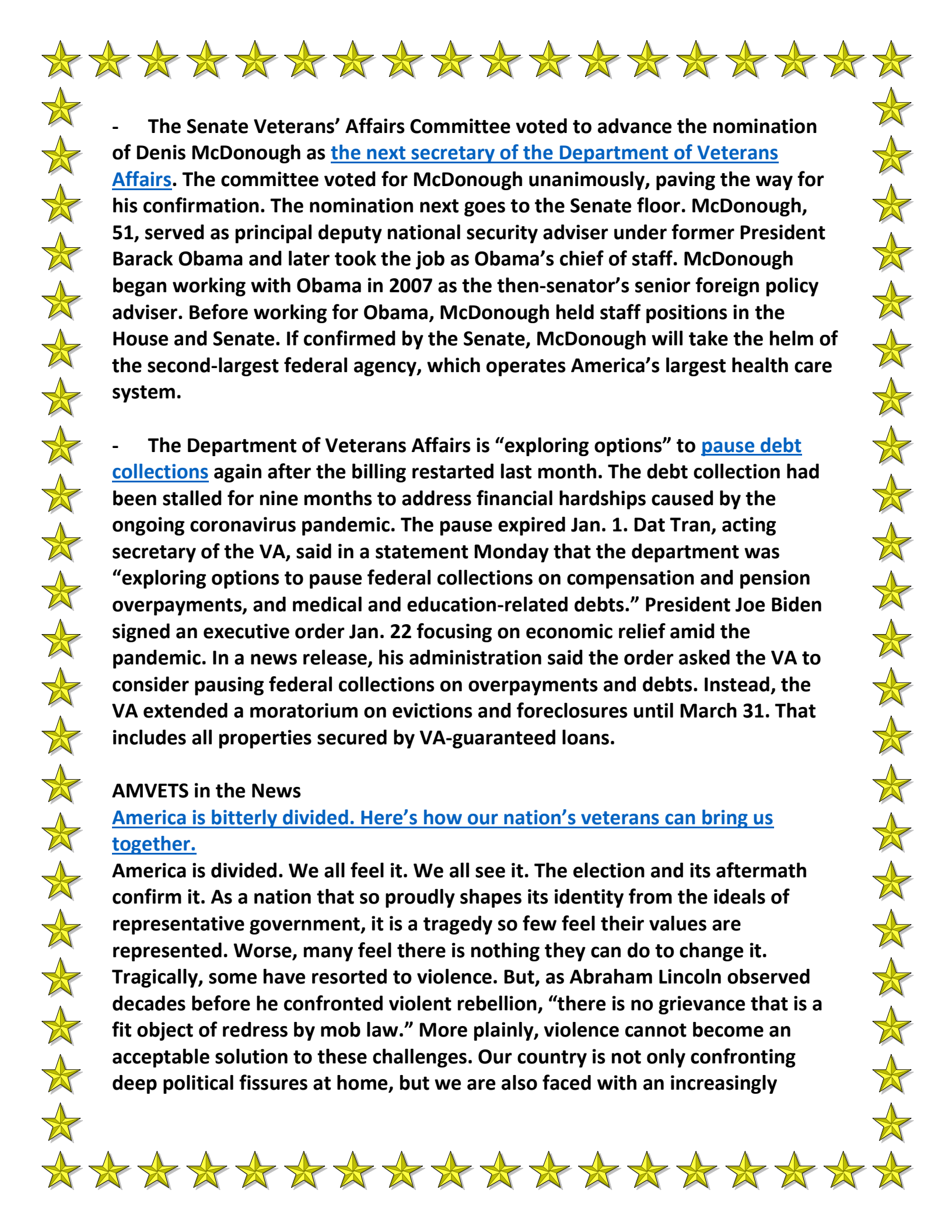
# AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## FEBRUARY 9, 2021

### News Driving the Week

- As the White House prepares to release its plan for the [2022 federal budget](#), veterans groups are calling on President Joe Biden and Congress to prioritize vets with an \$11 billion increase to the Department of Veterans Affairs budget. In 2021, the VA budget reached about \$243 billion, second only to the Pentagon and more than five times the 2001 total. The increase the veteran groups are seeking for 2022 is intended to address continued deficiencies in veteran care, the groups argued. Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars released their annual "Independent Budget" last week. The groups highlighted major priorities in the next budget, including addressing access to care and benefits including for community care through the Mission Act, an expected spike in medical appointments as the pandemic abates, more veterans who may qualify for benefits because of pandemic layoffs, thousands of vacancies at the department, construction and infrastructure needs and more. The VSOs are seeking billions more for veteran health care and for construction and infrastructure projects, especially on aging VA medical facilities.

- The [unemployment rate for veterans](#) worsened slightly in January — especially for younger veterans — even as the national rate continued to improve after last year's historic job market upheaval. According to estimates released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the veterans unemployment rate rose from 5.3 percent in December to 5.5 percent in January. That was the second time in the last four months the figure has increased, even as other sectors of the U.S. economy show consistent signs of recovery. Veterans from the recent wars saw their unemployment rate rise even higher, from 5.1 percent in December to 6.3 percent in January. Veterans employment rates have routinely outpaced the general public in recent years. Only once in the last four years has the general population's unemployment rate been lower than the overall veterans figure.



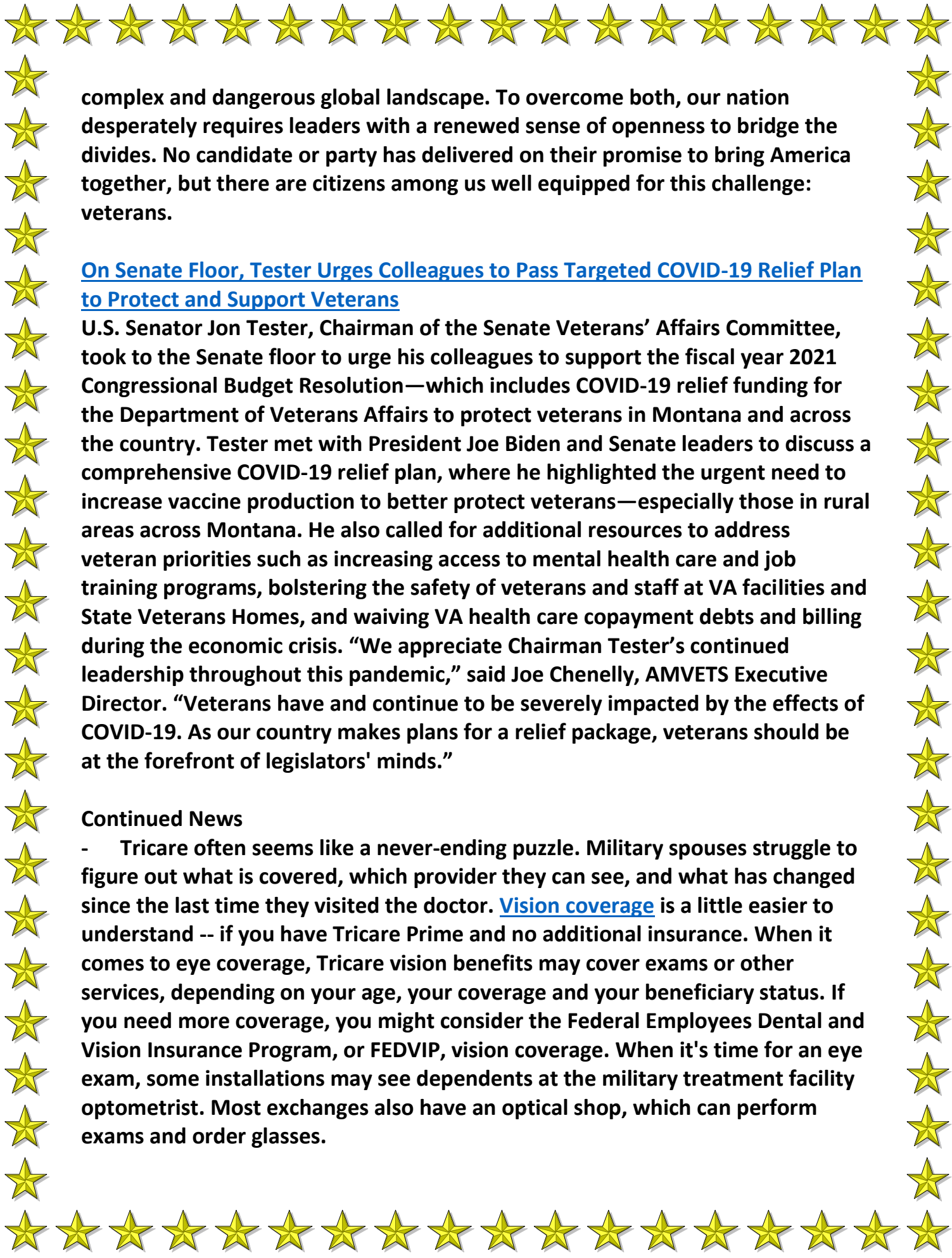
- The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee voted to advance the nomination of Denis McDonough as [the next secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs](#). The committee voted for McDonough unanimously, paving the way for his confirmation. The nomination next goes to the Senate floor. McDonough, 51, served as principal deputy national security adviser under former President Barack Obama and later took the job as Obama's chief of staff. McDonough began working with Obama in 2007 as the then-senator's senior foreign policy adviser. Before working for Obama, McDonough held staff positions in the House and Senate. If confirmed by the Senate, McDonough will take the helm of the second-largest federal agency, which operates America's largest health care system.

- The Department of Veterans Affairs is "exploring options" to [pause debt collections](#) again after the billing restarted last month. The debt collection had been stalled for nine months to address financial hardships caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The pause expired Jan. 1. Dat Tran, acting secretary of the VA, said in a statement Monday that the department was "exploring options to pause federal collections on compensation and pension overpayments, and medical and education-related debts." President Joe Biden signed an executive order Jan. 22 focusing on economic relief amid the pandemic. In a news release, his administration said the order asked the VA to consider pausing federal collections on overpayments and debts. Instead, the VA extended a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures until March 31. That includes all properties secured by VA-guaranteed loans.

#### AMVETS in the News

[America is bitterly divided. Here's how our nation's veterans can bring us together.](#)

America is divided. We all feel it. We all see it. The election and its aftermath confirm it. As a nation that so proudly shapes its identity from the ideals of representative government, it is a tragedy so few feel their values are represented. Worse, many feel there is nothing they can do to change it. Tragically, some have resorted to violence. But, as Abraham Lincoln observed decades before he confronted violent rebellion, "there is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law." More plainly, violence cannot become an acceptable solution to these challenges. Our country is not only confronting deep political fissures at home, but we are also faced with an increasingly



complex and dangerous global landscape. To overcome both, our nation desperately requires leaders with a renewed sense of openness to bridge the divides. No candidate or party has delivered on their promise to bring America together, but there are citizens among us well equipped for this challenge: veterans.

**[On Senate Floor, Tester Urges Colleagues to Pass Targeted COVID-19 Relief Plan to Protect and Support Veterans](#)**

U.S. Senator Jon Tester, Chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, took to the Senate floor to urge his colleagues to support the fiscal year 2021 Congressional Budget Resolution—which includes COVID-19 relief funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs to protect veterans in Montana and across the country. Tester met with President Joe Biden and Senate leaders to discuss a comprehensive COVID-19 relief plan, where he highlighted the urgent need to increase vaccine production to better protect veterans—especially those in rural areas across Montana. He also called for additional resources to address veteran priorities such as increasing access to mental health care and job training programs, bolstering the safety of veterans and staff at VA facilities and State Veterans Homes, and waiving VA health care copayment debts and billing during the economic crisis. “We appreciate Chairman Tester’s continued leadership throughout this pandemic,” said Joe Chenelly, AMVETS Executive Director. “Veterans have and continue to be severely impacted by the effects of COVID-19. As our country makes plans for a relief package, veterans should be at the forefront of legislators' minds.”

**Continued News**

- Tricare often seems like a never-ending puzzle. Military spouses struggle to figure out what is covered, which provider they can see, and what has changed since the last time they visited the doctor. [Vision coverage](#) is a little easier to understand -- if you have Tricare Prime and no additional insurance. When it comes to eye coverage, Tricare vision benefits may cover exams or other services, depending on your age, your coverage and your beneficiary status. If you need more coverage, you might consider the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP, vision coverage. When it's time for an eye exam, some installations may see dependents at the military treatment facility optometrist. Most exchanges also have an optical shop, which can perform exams and order glasses.

- In the wake of the assault on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, the Department of Veterans Affairs deployed two of its [mobile mental health units](#) to make sure survivors and first responders have access to support. The centers set up on the grounds of the Capitol this week to provide free counseling and mental health resources to Capitol police, members of the National Guard and Congressional staff. While Capitol Hill is home to hundreds of lawmakers, thousands of support staff also work in and around the Capitol complex.

- [Opinion](#): Enough with America's 'thank you for your service' culture. It's betrayal, not patriotism.

