



AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

APRIL 7, 2021

Good morning AMVETS Membership,

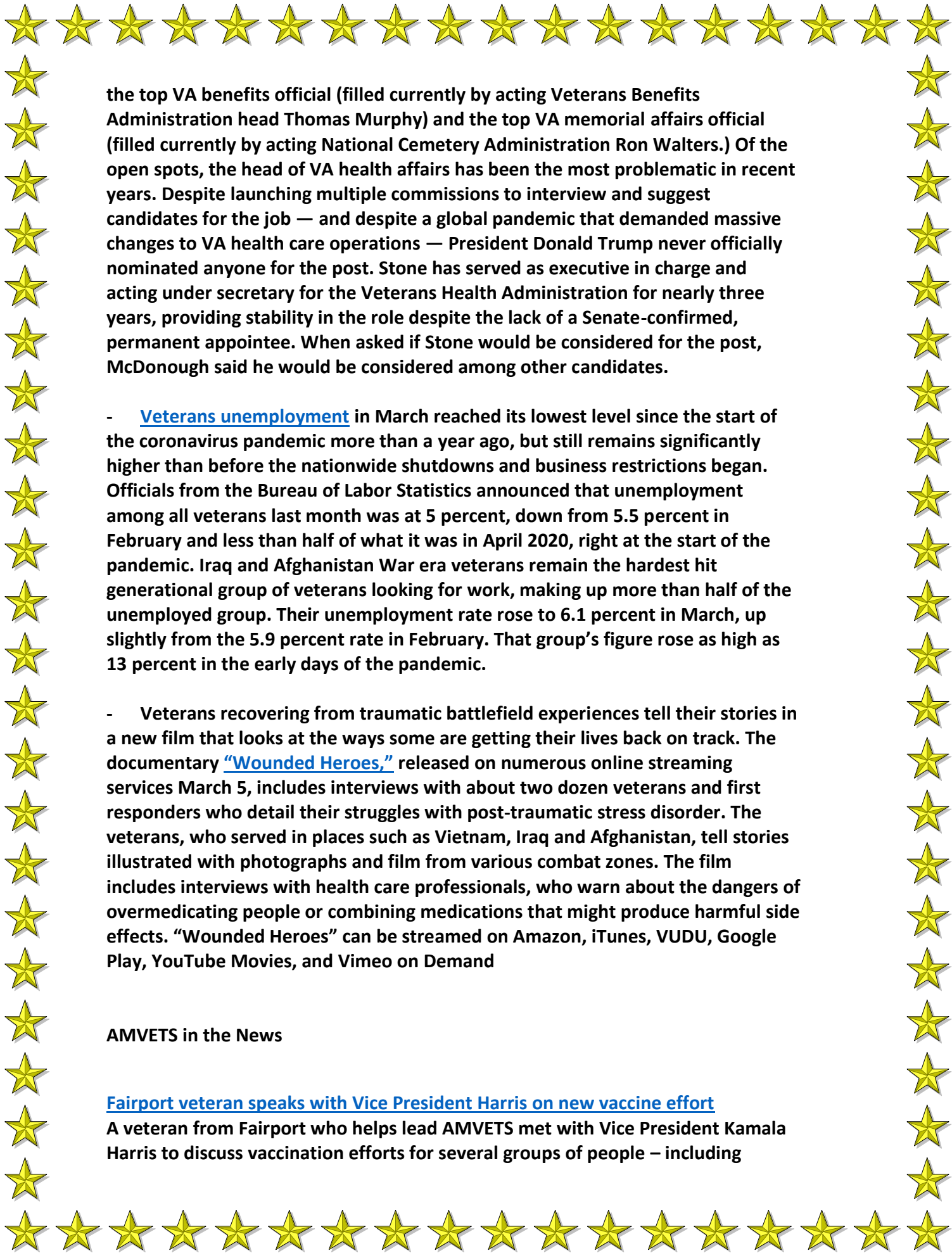
It was a pretty quiet week with Congress being in recess and Easter weekend. This week will be quiet as well since they are still in recess. Some good news: veterans unemployment in March reached its lowest level since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. We are actively watching for some new political appointees to fill the VA's top leadership vacancies. Be sure to check out the article below highlighting Joe Chenelly's conversation with the Vice President.

-Bill Clark, AMVETS National Third Vice Commander

News Driving the Week

- President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion infrastructure plan includes more than \$18 billion for upgrades to Veterans Affairs medical centers, work that veterans advocates have said is long overdue. The goal of the ambitious package — dubbed [the American Jobs Plan](#) — will be to “create millions of good jobs, rebuild our country's infrastructure, and position the United States to out-compete China.” Administration officials noted that while the median age of private-sector hospitals in America today is about 11 years, the median age of VA hospitals is roughly 58 years. The \$18 billion would be spread over a variety of modernization and new construction projects, with the goal of providing better facilities for VA medical care. “There is a backlog of high-efficiency projects that would help increase the health security of our veterans, put people back to work, and achieve an important national project,” officials said in a statement.

- More than two months since he took office, President Joe Biden still hasn't named nominees for most of the [Department of Veterans Affairs' top leadership posts](#) or given a timeline for when those appointments might occur. The delay risks jeopardizing the administration's plans for reform and improvements at the department, although VA Secretary Denis McDonough insists that the absence of permanent senior leaders has not had any negative impact on operations thus far. Among the spots without nominees are the second-highest ranking post in VA (filled currently by acting Deputy VA Secretary Carolyn Clancy), the top VA health official (filled currently by Acting VA Under Secretary for Health Richard Stone),



the top VA benefits official (filled currently by acting Veterans Benefits Administration head Thomas Murphy) and the top VA memorial affairs official (filled currently by acting National Cemetery Administration Ron Walters.) Of the open spots, the head of VA health affairs has been the most problematic in recent years. Despite launching multiple commissions to interview and suggest candidates for the job — and despite a global pandemic that demanded massive changes to VA health care operations — President Donald Trump never officially nominated anyone for the post. Stone has served as executive in charge and acting under secretary for the Veterans Health Administration for nearly three years, providing stability in the role despite the lack of a Senate-confirmed, permanent appointee. When asked if Stone would be considered for the post, McDonough said he would be considered among other candidates.

- [Veterans unemployment](#) in March reached its lowest level since the start of the coronavirus pandemic more than a year ago, but still remains significantly higher than before the nationwide shutdowns and business restrictions began. Officials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that unemployment among all veterans last month was at 5 percent, down from 5.5 percent in February and less than half of what it was in April 2020, right at the start of the pandemic. Iraq and Afghanistan War era veterans remain the hardest hit generational group of veterans looking for work, making up more than half of the unemployed group. Their unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent in March, up slightly from the 5.9 percent rate in February. That group's figure rose as high as 13 percent in the early days of the pandemic.

- Veterans recovering from traumatic battlefield experiences tell their stories in a new film that looks at the ways some are getting their lives back on track. The documentary [“Wounded Heroes,”](#) released on numerous online streaming services March 5, includes interviews with about two dozen veterans and first responders who detail their struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder. The veterans, who served in places such as Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, tell stories illustrated with photographs and film from various combat zones. The film includes interviews with health care professionals, who warn about the dangers of overmedicating people or combining medications that might produce harmful side effects. “Wounded Heroes” can be streamed on Amazon, iTunes, VUDU, Google Play, YouTube Movies, and Vimeo on Demand

AMVETS in the News

[Fairport veteran speaks with Vice President Harris on new vaccine effort](#)

A veteran from Fairport who helps lead AMVETS met with Vice President Kamala Harris to discuss vaccination efforts for several groups of people – including

veterans. “She was very direct and honest about why a lot of people are questioning whether the vaccines are safe or worth getting, and those are issues that we want to be able to address,” Chenelly said, speaking about his conversation with the vice president. “...I do want our veterans to make an informed choice with credible sources. So, we’re going to bring those trusted sources together so the veterans can make an informed choice.” Right now, Chenelly says about half of eligible veterans in the U.S. have gotten the vaccine.

Continued News

- [Sexual assault in the military](#) is nothing new, but the poor response by the National Guard — composed of militias from 50 states, three U.S. territories and the District of Columbia — stands out. Guard units have buried sexual assault allegations, withheld crucial documents from victims and retaliated against women who have come forward, including denying them career advancement, an investigation by the Cap Times, in conjunction with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, has found. The number of reported sexual assaults in the Guard jumped nationwide from 173 in 2009 to 607 in 2019 — more than a threefold increase. Beyond that, alarmingly little data exists. Even Guard officials are in the dark about the most basic information about sexual assault cases nationwide. Guard records show that the force does not know how many allegations are substantiated, how often soldiers are court-martialed and punished, and how often cases are referred to civilian police.
- [Opinion](#): Why mental health policy must harness the non-profit sector
- [Opinion](#): Female veterans served America, but the VA system doesn't serve and protect them
- [Opinion](#): Don't press pause on the PAWS Act

