



**Federal Update
for
February 16 – 20, 2015**



VA and Community Partners Release West Los Angeles Homeless Plan

On January 28, 2015, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert A. McDonald and attorneys representing homeless veterans in Los Angeles announced a historic agreement that dedicates the West Los Angeles VA campus to serving veterans in need. The agreement is an important step forward in carrying out President Obama’s commitment that no veteran should live on the streets, or forego available medical and psychological services.

Today pursuant to this agreement, VA is releasing its written plan to help end veteran homeless in Greater Los Angeles. The plan focuses on serving veterans, particularly homeless veterans, women veterans, aging veterans and veterans that are severely disabled. VA’s efforts will be done in coordination with pertinent Federal, State, and local authorities; legislators; Veteran Service Organizations; Faith Based organizations; community partners; charitable organizations; and Veterans. As part of this Plan, VA is committed to utilizing the West Los Angeles Medical Center in a more Veteran-centric manner going forward.

“This plan demonstrates what can be accomplished for our Nation’s veterans when we come together as a community – everyone working together toward the higher goal,” said Secretary McDonald. “This is an important first step toward ending Veteran homelessness in Greater LA and a model of what we will do across the country.”

SECDEF Update ► Senate Confirms Carter 93-5

The Senate overwhelmingly approved Ash Carter as the new defense secretary on 12 FEB, giving the longtime Pentagon bureaucrat the reins to a military that is facing budget battles at home and unconventional fights abroad. Carter is the fourth defense secretary to serve under President Obama and takes over the role from Chuck Hagel, who announced his departure in November. The Senate voted 93-5 to confirm him. He’s a Rhodes scholar with degrees in theoretical physics and medieval history, well respected by lawmakers for his thoughtful work as a senior official in the Pentagon. But while he has enjoyed a warmer welcome to the job than his predecessor — Hagel’s nomination process was fraught with confrontations with senators and a largely partisan confirmation vote — that honeymoon won’t last long.

Carter will immediately be thrust into the budding debate over Obama's request for a new authorization for military force in the fight against Islamic State forces in the Middle East, and the decision whether to provide more arms to Ukrainian forces in their fight against Russia. On the latter topic, he has already told senators he would be inclined to increase U.S. help to Ukraine, in opposition to administration moves so far. Carter also will start his work as lawmakers begin digging into the annual defense budget. During his confirmation hearing, he lamented looming sequestration cuts that military leaders say will cripple force readiness, and pledged to push Congress to fix the issue before this fall. But no clear legislative solution has emerged so far, leaving the Defense Department with months of uncertainty as the new fiscal year looms.

The only criticism Carter faced in his confirmation process had more to do with his new boss than his own résumé. Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO) said he did not vote for Carter because of Obama's micromanagement of national security issues. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, offered similar complaints, but praised Carter's credentials and character and endorsed his selection. Carter had spent much of the past month meeting with senators in advance of the confirmation vote, and is expected to return to Capitol Hill within weeks for budget and national security hearings. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb 12, 2015 ++]

MCRMC Update ► "Man Up" and Accept the Recommendations

A U.S. congresswoman implored her colleagues to "man up" and accept the recommendations from a blueribbon panel to overhaul military benefits. Rep. Jackie Speier, a Democrat from California and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, praised the recent work of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. The panel called for offering troops 401(k)-like retirement plans and military families a choice of commercial health insurance plans in lieu of Tricare, among other proposals. "We've just now have got to inject a little guts into all of us to do the right thing," she said 11 FEB during a hearing of the committee's military personnel subcommittee, which received testimony from commission members.

The hearing was the latest in what will be a series of debates on Capitol Hill over the future of military compensation. Members of the congressionally mandated panel have said their 15 recommendations were designed to give troops, military families and retirees more benefits choices while saving the Pentagon an estimated \$12 billion a year in personnel costs by 2040. While the hearing touched on many of the proposed reforms, including retirement, much of the discussion focused on health care. Speier, in particular, sought to downplay the financial impact of the health care proposals to working-age retirees. Under the panel's recommendations, retirees younger than age 65 would initially pay 5 percent of the cost of a private plan, but the figure would increase 1 percent a year until reaching 20 percent of the premium -- or until they're eligible to switch into Medicare and Tricare for Life. "It's costing about, let's just say

round numbers, \$500 a year," Speier said. "A 1-percent increase is \$5. I mean, I think we have to pitch this for what it is: You're going to have better health care, you're going to have a bigger network, and it's going to cost you one Starbucks Latte a year. Are you in?" Commissioner Stephen Buyer responded, "Bingo. Thank you."

Buyer, a former Republican congressman from Indiana who headed the Veterans' Affairs Committee, also noted that working-age retirees paid a bigger share of their health care costs in the early 1990s. "In 1994, when it started, it was a 27-percent premium," he said. "It's eroded to 5 percent." Commissioners defended their proposal to do away with the three Tricare plans for military families, reservists and working-age retirees while retaining Tricare for Life for elderly retirees. The new health care program, called Tricare Choice, would be similar to the one for federal civilian employees and allow recipients to choose from a list of commercial health care plans. "Tricare is a broken program," Buyer said, noting that it's only accepted at a relatively small number of health care providers. "You are going to receive a lot of pressure from those across the river," he added, referring to the Pentagon, "and institutions and the contractors to convince you otherwise ... do not get sucked into the status quo. That's my best counsel to you."

Commissioner Edmund Giambastiani, a retired Navy admiral, was even more blunt. "Tricare is in a death spiral," he said. The term is another way of describing how the Defense Department seeks to save money when renewing contracts for the program by restricting or eliminating procedures, reducing the number of coverage zones and making other marginal changes "to capture every dollar," Giambastiani said. "The bottom line is that service continues to get less and less," he said. [Source: Military.com | Brendan McGarry | Feb 11, 2015 ++]

DoD Suicide Policy Update ► Clay Hunt Act Passes Congress

The Vice President of Public Policy at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), John Madigan, releases this statement:

"With veterans accounting for one out of every five suicides in our country, passage of the Clay Hunt Act is a major victory not just for veterans but for the larger fight against suicide. AFSP has set the bold goal of reducing the annual suicide rate 20% by 2025, and it's legislation like the Clay Hunt Act that will make it happen.

We would like to thank Representatives Jeff Miller (R-FL), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee for his introduction of H.R. 203 in the House, Corrine Brown (D-FL) ranking member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, Tim Waltz (D-MN), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL). We would also like to thank Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) for his leadership as Chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, along with Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) ranking

member on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Senators John McCain (R-AZ), and Richard Durbin (D-IL), one of the original cosponsors.”

When fully implemented, the Clay Hunt Act will:

- Increase access to mental health care by creating a peer support and community outreach pilot program to assist transitioning service members as well as a one-stop, interactive website of available resources.
- Help meet the demand for mental health care providers by starting a pilot program which will repay student loan debt incurred by physicians who choose to practice psychiatric medicine in the VA or those enrolled in their final year of a psychiatry residency program.
- Boost the accountability of mental health care by requiring annual evaluations of the suicide prevention practices and programs of the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention leads the fight against suicide. We fund research, create educational programs, advocate for public policy, and support those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, AFSP has 75 local chapters with programs and events nationwide. For additional info on AFSP refer to <http://www.afsp.org>. [Source: PRNewswire-USNewswire | Feb. 3, 2015 ++]

DoD 2016 Budget ► Pentagon Wants 4.4% Increase over 2015

The Pentagon is seeking an overall budget increase for 2016, but spending on military personnel will remain essentially flat, squeezed by cuts in the size of the force and recent efforts to scale back troops' pay and benefits. The Defense Department's budget request for fiscal 2016, which starts 1 OCT, seeks a total budget of \$585.3 billion, roughly 4.4 percent more than this year's total defense budget. Meanwhile, the portion of the budget that accounts for military personnel will tick downward by a small fraction to \$139.9 billion, or about \$55 million less than the amount approved for this year, according to budget documents released Monday. Those figures include both the base budget and funding for overseas operations. Most of the 4.4 percent increase in the overall Pentagon budget will fund new weapons systems and more research and development for new technologies, the budget documents show. The nominal decline in personnel spending sought for 2016 could make it the fifth consecutive year that the personnel budget account has dropped since reaching a peak of \$152 billion in 2010. The bulk of that reduction stems from a drawdown in the size of the total force, in particular the Army and Marine Corps, which have shed more than 70,000 service members over the past several years and brought the total size of the active-duty force down to about 1.3 million troops. Specifically, this year's budget projects that the total force will shrink by another 11,900 troops. That includes cutting 15,000 soldiers from the Army while expanding the Navy by 1,500 sailors and the Air Force by 1,700 airmen.

Pentagon officials note that the per-troop costs have risen significantly since 2001 as Congress granted a series of generous pay raises and new benefits to troops during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Top Pentagon officials say that cost growth is unsustainable and continue to seek reductions to military compensation in an effort to scale back the growth in per-troop costs. "The department cannot allow its personnel costs to crowd out investments in the readiness and modernization portions of the budget which are essential to providing needed training and equipment for its warriors to carry into combat and accomplish the incredible array of missions undertaken around the globe every day," DoD officials wrote in their budget overview published 2 FEB.

The budget request for next year also urges Congress to approve new cuts to Basic Allowance for Housing rates, new health care fees and reductions to the commissary benefit. Spending on personnel, which includes health care, comprises about 33.5 percent of this year's budget, down from 36.1 percent in 2014, budget documents show. The budget request includes another modest pay raise for service members next year, a proposed 1.3 percent that would mark a nominal uptick but would fail to keep pace with the projected growth in average private-sector wages. If approved by Congress, the 1.3 percent raise would cut into the real spending power for military families because it would fall well below the estimated 2.3 percent rise in annual private-sector wages, according to DoD budget documents.

Go to <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=5580> for a transcript of the Department of Defense Briefing by Deputy Secretary Work and Adm. Winnefeld on the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget in the Pentagon Briefing Room. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | Feb. 02, 2015, 2015 ++]

DECA Budget Cuts Update ► Commissary Subsidy Reduced \$300M

Defense officials want to reduce operating days and hours of most commissaries, as part of an effort to sharply reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars going to support the stores. Supporting documents for DoD's fiscal 2016 budget request, released 2 FEB, indicate defense officials want to reduce the commissary subsidy by about \$300 million, to about \$1.15 billion. Most commissaries would remain open at least five days a week, according to the budget documents. But similar to a proposal floated last year, DoD has bigger plans for reducing the commissary budget, and for raising prices, starting in fiscal 2017.

Officials are asking for legislative changes that would allow them to expand the types of items commissaries sell, and to allow "variable pricing" — i.e., price markups. The surcharge money is used to build, repair, maintain and modernize commissaries, and to pay for store equipment. Taxpayer dollars are used to cover the costs of overhead and employee wages and benefits. "This will allow goods to be priced above cost to increase revenues on certain items, while providing more savings to a market basket of goods that affect junior members with families

the most," according to the budget documents. Currently, all items in commissaries are sold at cost plus a 5 percent surcharge added at the register. With the help of those additional proposed cuts starting in fiscal 2017, DoD would save a cumulative \$4.4 billion from fiscal years 2016 to 2020, according to the budget documents. In their budget request last year, DoD officials proposed cutting \$200 million in Defense Commissary Agency funding, the first phase of a proposed three-year plan to slash the DeCA budget by \$1 billion. In the end, lawmakers restored that \$200 million to the budget.

It remains to be seen whether lawmakers will be receptive to the latest proposed cuts. Recommendations released by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission on 29 JAN proposed more modest cuts in the subsidy, and also suggested consolidating the commissary and exchange systems into one retail agency. Defense officials said the commission's report has not been taken into account in deliberations specifically on the 2016 budget request. The proposals have raised alarms in some quarters. "If you cut hours, cut days and cut savings, the benefit is no longer a benefit," said Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association. Draft documents obtained by Military Times note that proposed reductions in operating hours would save more than \$29 million in fiscal 2016, and cuts in days of operation would save \$58 million. DeCA operates 241 stores around the world, including 178 domestic locations. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

VA Secretary Update ► Rep. Mike Coffman Chastised by McDonald

Rep. Mike Coffman has been a harsh critic of the Veterans Affairs Department in recent months, blasting department leaders repeatedly for continued program mistakes and shortfalls. On 11 FEB, VA Secretary Bob McDonald reached his limit. McDonald, a corporate CEO turned Cabinet secretary, angrily chastised Coffman after the Colorado Republican delivered another blistering rant about VA operations, turning a relatively sleepy budget request hearing before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee into a surprising defense of VA's progress. Coffman — incensed over continued problems with construction of a VA hospital in Denver — called McDonald's characterization of the problem nonsensical and overly positive. "That's characteristic of your glossing over the extraordinary problems confronted by your department," Coffman told McDonald. "This is a department mired in bureaucratic incompetence and corruption. I fundamentally believe ... when this president ends his term, you will not have made a dent in changing the culture of VA."

McDonald called that attack "highly offensive" and told Coffman he was more concerned about reliving years-old missteps than fixing problems. "I've been here six months," McDonald said. "You've been here longer than I have. If there's a problem in Denver, you own it more than I do." The response — unusual for any congressional witness, let alone a high-ranking

administration official unanimously confirmed by the Senate just a few months ago — drew gasps and chuckles from the crowd of veterans advocates and VA staff in attendance.

McDonald has spent the last few months working not only to correct problems in VA care delivery and operations, but also to reform the department's image. In the months before and after his predecessor's resignation last May, VA was besieged with scandals concerning lengthy wait times for patients and data manipulation from administrators protecting their own bonuses. McDonald also has made outreach to Congress a key point of his reform efforts, promising more transparency and a better working relationship with lawmakers. He has given out his personal cellphone number to dozens of senators and representatives, promising prompt responses and an open dialogue on all issues. That made Wednesday's exchange all the more shocking, with McDonald glaring at Coffman as he dismissed accusations that no progress can be seen within VA. "If you want, I can give you my cellphone tonight, and you can answer some of the calls, and hear from veterans about the difference that we make," McDonald said. "Or go on the websites, see what the veterans are saying there. Ask the" veterans service organizations." Coffman brushed off the rebuttal, saying simply, "I don't think [change] is going to happen, but I hope it does."

The exchange came a week after McDonald and lawmakers involved in veterans' issues held a news conference at VA headquarters to discuss rebuilding the relationship between the two sides. Lawmakers said they hope to highlight "good news" stories from VA while still providing close oversight of its programs and funding. In testimony later in the hearing, representatives from the veterans community offered praise for McDonald's efforts so far, saying they have noticed improvements already. Committee chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) echoed that sentiment. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb. 11, 2015 ++]

GI Bill Update ► Budget Proposal Closes For-Profit Loophole

President Barack Obama's \$4 trillion budget for 2016 contained a proposal that could alter higher education for many Americans. He proposed closing a loophole that allows for-profit colleges' to cash in on veterans' GI Bill benefits. As it stands now, for-profit colleges must abide by the so-called 90-10 rule, which keeps them from getting more than 90% of their operating revenue from federal student aid money. But that rule doesn't consider GI Bill benefits government funding. Meanwhile, veteran enrollment at for-profit colleges has soared. Thirty-one percent of veterans attended for-profit schools in 2013, up from 23% in 2009, giving such institutions access to \$1.7 billion in post-9/11 GI Bill benefits in the 2012-2013 academic year, up from \$640 million in 2009-2010. Obama's budget proposal aims to curb that trend by counting veterans' education benefits toward for-profit schools' federal money cap.

If the GI Bill loophole were closed, dozens of for-profit institutions would be in violation of the 90-10 rule, according to a Department of Education analysis, which found that 133 for-profit

schools receive more than 90% of their revenue from a combination of Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, and GI Bill funds. Senate Democrats have tried to rein in for-profits colleges' access to GI Bill benefits in the past, but such efforts have gone nowhere (and with Congress controlled by Republicans, Obama's budget could meet a similar fate.)

For-profits' recruitment of veterans—especially those from the post-9/11 era, whose education benefits cover \$19,000 per year in tuition for four years—has raised red flags with some lawmakers and the Obama administration because such institutions report poor graduation rates and are more expensive for the taxpayers funding the GI Bill. Tuition is \$10,900 per year at a for-profit, compared to \$4,900 at public colleges. Students who attend for-profits are also more likely to incur student debt: 88% of students at for-profit colleges held student loans in 2012, compared to 66% of public college students and 75% of students who attended private colleges, according to The Institute for College Access and Success.

On 2 FEB, Senator Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois who in 2012 proposed a bill to alter the way federal funds are allocated to for-profit colleges, said in a statement that “closing the 90/10 loophole will put an end to the powerful incentive for-profit colleges currently have to aggressively recruit service member and veterans. The exclusion of billions of dollars from the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs in the federal 90/10 rule has led to well-documented cases of exploitation of servicemembers and veterans by for-profit colleges.” The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities opposes Obama's budget proposal and the 90/10 rule in general, says Michael Dakduk, the group's vice president of military and veteran's affairs. The rule, he says, is arbitrary and does not indicate a school's quality, but instead measures the socioeconomic position of an institution's student population. [Source: Fortune | Claire Zillman | Feb. 03, 2015 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program ► VA Want to Shift Budgeted Funds

Veterans Affairs officials don't know how many veterans are using the new "choice card" program, but it's a small enough total that they want to start taking money out of the program. The move is likely to ignite a lengthy fight on Capitol Hill with lawmakers who created the program last summer following the department's patient-wait-time scandal and who doubt VA's ability to serve veterans in a timely and effective manner. As part of the agency's nearly \$169 billion fiscal 2016 budget plan, White House officials said they will submit legislation to "reallocate a portion of Veterans Choice Program funding to support essential investments in VA system priorities in a fiscally-responsible, budget-neutral manner."

Congress approved \$15 billion in funding for two years of the program, with \$5 billion for physician hiring and the rest to establish a temporary program making it easier for veterans to seek private, non-VA health care. The goal was to provide quicker appointments, after tens of thousands of veterans nationwide were found to be waiting more than a month for medical

visits and physician consults. But on 2 FEB, VA assistant secretary for management Helen Tierney said officials have "a strong indication that this is not their preferred choice" and "would prefer to remain in the VA" for medical care. About 8.5 million choice cards have been issued to veterans, who are eligible for the program if they live in rural areas or face more than a month wait for medical appointments. Tierney could not say how many veterans are using the program, how many are eligible but preferred to stay in VA care, or how much money might be moved around. But she said the funding could be used to supplement more "essential" services at the department.

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) blasted the department's announcement as short-sighted and potentially harmful to veterans. "If there's one thing we've learned over the last year, it's that VA's numbers cannot be trusted," he said in a statement. "The president's idea to reallocate a portion of Veterans Choice Program funding to other areas of VA is a complete non-starter, which I will not support. "When a near-unanimous Congress worked with President Obama last year to create the choice program, we made a promise to veterans to give them more freedom in their health care decisions. I will not stand idly by while the president attempts to renege on that promise."

Tierney promised to lay out a stronger case for using the money elsewhere in months to come. But in recent weeks, several Republicans on Capitol Hill have questioned whether VA should be shifting more health care appointments outside their facilities, not bringing veterans back in. The issue is likely to become the most controversial aspect of the VA budget discussions, even before any specific figures are outlined. The VA budget grew almost \$100 million from fiscal 2004 to fiscal 2014, and lawmakers have promised to more closely scrutinize that spending in wake of last year's scandal. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb 02, 2015 ++]

Vet Advocates ► HillVets Choices | 100 Most Influential

HillVets on 4 Feb released its choices for the 100 most influential personalities on veterans issues, highlighting the lawmakers, business leaders, community organizers and advocates "giving back to those that have sacrificed so much for our nation." HillVets are bipartisan Veterans focused on empowerment of themselves and their fellow Veterans through networking, community activism, and education. The full list, available at <http://hillvets.org>, was compiled from outside nominations by a 13-member panel of veterans working on Capitol Hill. Officials from HillVets — whose stated goal is to increase the number of veterans working in government — said the intention was to draw attention to both the honorees and their work, in an effort to keep veterans issues at the forefront of national conversations. Organizers said they included both veterans and nonveterans, looking for individuals with a strong influence and impact on the broader veterans community. The list is broken down by fields of endeavor. Some of those included were:

- Lawmakers House Veterans' Affairs Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla.; House Armed Services Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz.; former Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairman Bernie Sanders, IVt., and Iraq war veteran Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark.
- Marie Tillman, widow of Army Ranger Pat Tillman, is honored for founding the Tillman Foundation in the wake of his death.
- Bob Woodruff — injured by a roadside bomb while reporting in Iraq in 2006 — and his wife, Lee, were both recognized for their foundation's work with transitioning veterans.
- The list lauds Michelle Obama and Jill Biden for their work with the Joining Forces initiative, and singles out departing Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, the first enlisted veteran to serve in that post.
- Former Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, acknowledging his resignation last May but also citing his efforts to end veterans homelessness and improve the veterans benefits process.
- Dr. Sam Foote for his whistleblower role in the VA's patient wait times scandal last year, which forced Shinseki's departure.
- Media members Daily Show host Jon Stewart, former Military Times congressional correspondent Rick Maze, and current Military Times congressional correspondent Leo Shane III.
- Lobbyists from prominent veterans advocacy groups — like Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion — and organizers in newer, innovative veterans organizations — like Team Red, White and Blue and Wounded Warrior Project — also received praise from the group. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Feb. 04, 2915 ++]

Crisis Hotline ► What it Offers to Vets

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. (Users need not identify themselves). Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, chat online at <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx?account=Veterans Chat>, or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Support for deaf and hard of hearing individuals is available.

People experience emotional and mental health crises in response to a wide range of situations—from difficulties in their personal relationships to the loss of a job. For Veterans, these crises can be heightened by their experiences during military service. When emotional issues reach a crisis point, it's time to call on the Veterans Crisis Line for support. Sometimes a crisis may involve thoughts of suicide. Learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger

- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

Many Veterans may not show any signs of intent to harm themselves before doing so, but some actions can be a sign that a Veteran needs help. Those in crisis may show behaviors that indicate a risk of harming themselves. Crisis, stress, depression, and other issues affect people in different ways. Maybe you're having trouble sleeping or feel out of control. Maybe your energy level is down or you feel anxious all the time. If these issues and others seem to be leading to a crisis, treatment can help. The Crisis Hotline website <https://www.vetselfcheck.org/Welcome.cfm> offers a confidential, anonymous risk assessment to see how you might benefit from VA or community-based services. The assessment is done in 3 easy steps:

- 1) Fill out a brief online Self-Check Quiz, which takes about 10 minutes.
 - 2) A VA Chat Counselor will review it and leave a personal response for you on this secure website, usually within 10-15 minutes. If the volume is especially high, it may take up to 30 minutes. The Counselor's response will offer options for follow-up if it's felt that could be helpful.
 - 3) You decide what's next. You may enter the online Veterans Chat and continue talking with a Counselor without identifying yourself. You may want to get a referral to see someone in person.
- Or, you can decide to do nothing further at this time. It's all up to you. No follow-up services will be provided unless you request them.

When the recent Oscar nominations were announced, "Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1" received In the Documentary short category a nomination. The 40 minute film was produced by HBO Films and shown on HBO on Veterans Day 2013. You can see more about it at: <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/crisishotline-veterans-press-1#/>. [Source: <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net> Jan. 2014 ++]