



## Federal Update for May 27 - 31, 2013



### ***HUD & VA Team UP to Provide Permanent Homes to 9,000 Homeless Vets***

WASHINGTON – Approximately 9,000 homeless Veterans living on the streets and in the nation’s shelter system will soon find a permanent place to call home. U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced today that HUD will provide \$60 million to local public housing agencies across the country to offer permanent supportive housing to homeless Veterans, many of whom are living with chronic disabling conditions.

The supportive housing assistance announced today is provided through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program which combines rental assistance from HUD with case management and clinical services provided by VA. Since 2008, a total of 48,385 vouchers have been awarded and 42,557 formerly homeless Veterans are currently in homes because of HUD-VASH.

Donovan and Shinseki announced this additional support for homeless Veterans in an address to the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans conference today in Washington.

“It’s a national tragedy that those who served our Nation in uniform can end up living in our shelters or on our streets,” said Donovan. “Today we make another investment in meeting President Obama’s challenge that we end Veteran homelessness once and for all.”

“These HUD-VASH vouchers are a critical resource to accomplish our shared goal of ending Veterans’ homelessness in 2015,” Shinseki said. “With the continued support of President Obama, Congress, and our community partners, we will end homelessness among Veterans and provide these brave men and women with the earned care and benefits that help them live productive, meaningful lives.”

HUD-VASH is a critical part of the Obama Administration's commitment to end Veteran and long-term chronic homelessness in 2015. Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness serves as a roadmap for how the federal government will work with state and local communities to confront the root causes of homelessness, especially among former servicemen and women. HUD's annual "point in time" estimate of the number of homeless persons and families for 2012 found that Veteran homelessness fell by 7.2 percent (or 4,876 people) since January 2011 and by 17.2 percent since January 2009. On a single night in January 2012, 62,619 veterans were homeless.

The grants announced today are part of \$75 million appropriated this year to support the housing needs of homeless veterans. Local public housing authorities provide rental assistance to homeless Veterans while nearby VA Medical Centers (VAMC) offer supportive services and case management. This is the first round of the 2013 HUD-VASH funding. HUD expects to announce more HUD-VASH funding this summer.

VAMCs work closely with homeless Veterans then refer them to public housing agencies for these vouchers, based upon a variety of factors, most importantly the duration of the homelessness and the need for longer term more intensive support to obtain and maintain permanent housing. The HUD-VASH program includes both the rental assistance the voucher provides and the comprehensive case management that VAMC staff provides.

Veterans participating in the HUD-VASH program rent privately owned housing and generally contribute no more than 30 percent of their income toward rent. VA offers eligible homeless Veterans clinical and supportive services through its medical centers across the U.S., Guam and Puerto Rico.

HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. HUD is working to strengthen the housing market to bolster the economy and protect consumers; meet the need for quality affordable rental homes; utilize housing as a platform for improving quality of life; build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination; and transform the way HUD does business.

VA is the federal government's second-largest cabinet office. Secretary Shinseki has outlined three key priorities for the department: increase Veteran access to VA services and benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end Veteran homelessness. VA provides health care to more than 6 million people each year, in 91 million outpatient visits and 960,000 hospitalizations. This year, VA will provide over \$1 billion in specialized homeless program funding, more than \$58 billion annually in disability pay and pensions to 4.5 million Americans, \$10 billion in educational assistance, \$1 billion for home loans and \$2.6 billion for life insurance.

### ***TRICARE West Deadline This Week***

To avoid losing coverage, beneficiaries enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) or TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR) who pay monthly premiums by check were requested to switch to an electronic form of payment. TRICARE will only accept monthly premium payments using recurring automatic payments by credit or debit card, or by recurring electronic funds transfer (EFT) from a linked bank account. The deadline is May 31, 2013. Those members who do not have this requirement established by May 31, 2013 will have their coverage suspended and possibly terminated for 12 months beginning June 1. To avoid confusion, beneficiaries should verify that their bank sends EFT payments electronically.

### ***McCollum Introduces Legislation to Establish a U.S. House "Special Committee on Sexual Assault and Abuse in the Armed Forces"***

Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum today (May 14<sup>th</sup>) introduced legislation to establish a special U.S. House committee to conduct oversight, ensure accountability, and report on sexual assault and abuse in the U.S. military. Responding to the on-going and ever growing problem of sexual violence and abuse committed by members of the military, the "Special Committee on Sexual Assault and Abuse in the Armed Forces" would focus congressional attention on necessary reforms to the Department of Defense's prevention, prosecution, and victims' services efforts. The Pentagon's "Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military," released last week, indicated that an estimated 26,000 sexual assault or incidents of "unwanted sexual contact" took place in 2012, compared to 19,300 in

2011 (based on an anonymous survey). Actual assaults reported in 2012 were 3,374, an increase over 2011.

“Sexual violence and abuse in the military needs to end - period. It is an unfair stain on the honorable service of all the men and women who put on the uniform that must be extinguished. An all out culture change from top-to-bottom is required, along with reforms that reflect the severity of the problem,” McCollum said. “This special committee will allow Congress to address this problem in a focused, comprehensive and bipartisan manner. This will require on-going attention. The Pentagon’s budget exceeds \$500 billion, we are at war in Afghanistan, and global threats are constantly emerging, all of which distract Congress from holding military leaders accountable for making real change. This special committee will maintain on-going pressure on the Pentagon to end a culture in which rape and abuse are far too common and all too commonly dismissed,” McCollum concluded.

High profile incidents of sexual assault committed by members of the military plague all branches of the Armed Forces, even as leaders claim to be making this issue a top priority. Last week, the Air Force’s officer in charge of sexual assault prevention programs was arrested in Arlington, VA for sexual battery highlighting a federal department with a problem that is out of control.

The *Washington Post*, in a front page story entitled, “Pentagon’s sex-crime crisis extends to military recruiters,” reported yesterday that a Marine in Alaska convicted of first-degree sexual assault in the rape of a civilian woman but not sentenced to prison. The story also told of an Air Force recruiter in Texas who will soon face charges of rape and forcible sodomy with 18 young women he tried to recruit in recent years. The “Pentagon’s sex crime crisis” has been on-going for years and is a greater threat to the force now because of the greater number of women serving and the dependence by all branches of the military for an ever expanding role for women service members.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum serves on the House Appropriations Committee’s Defense Subcommittee.

**H.RES.213** [113th]

**Latest Title:** Establishing the Special Committee on Sexual Assault and Abuse in

the Armed Forces to conduct oversight, ensure accountability, and report on the activities of the Department of Defense to prevent, reduce, prosecute, and provide victims' services for cases of sexual assault and abuse in the Armed Forces.

**Sponsor:** Rep McCollum, Betty [D-MN-4] (introduced 5/14/2013) **Cosponsors:** 35

**Committees:** House Rules

**Latest Major Action:** 5/14/2013 Referred to House committee. Status: Referred to the House Committee on Rules.

## ***VA Caregiver Program Update***

On 25 APR Chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Bernie Sanders introduced S.851, the Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act of 2013. This bill would expand eligibility for comprehensive benefits and services to family caregivers of all veterans who were severely injured in the line of duty while serving in the armed forces. Currently, only family caregivers of veterans severely injured on or after September 11, 2001, are eligible for these benefits and services such as: caregiver training; support groups, counseling and other support services; a monthly stipend; health coverage through CHAMPVA; respite care; mental health services and counseling related to the caregiver role and burden. A survey by the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) of caregivers who are caring for veterans from combat eras dating from World War II to the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that the overwhelming majority of veteran caregivers are women. Twice as many veterans' caregivers said they have been caregiving for 10 or more years compared to national statistics, three times as many caregivers reported spending 40 hours a week or more providing care compared to the national total, and six out of ten caregivers of veterans surveyed are at least 50 years of age including one in eight who is 65 or older. The military community is encouraged to support this bill by contacting their legislators with a request they sign on as a sponsor to the bill and ask that it be brought to the floor for a vote and enacted as soon as possible. [Source: DAV Action Alert 8 May 2013 ++]

## ***Vet Motor Vehicle Crashes***

For men and women who have fought in the country's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, death behind the wheel is becoming another lethal aftereffect of

combat. After they leave military service, veterans of the two wars have a 75 percent higher rate of fatal motor vehicle accidents than do civilians. Troops still in uniform have a higher risk of crashing their cars in the months immediately after returning from deployment than in the months immediately before. People who have had multiple tours in combat zones are at highest risk for traffic accidents. The phenomenon has been revealed by various pieces of evidence — research as well as observations of service members, veterans and counselors. The most common explanation is that troops bring back driving habits that were lifesaving in war zones but are dangerous on America's roads. They include racing through intersections, straddling lanes, swerving on bridges and, for some, not wearing seat belts because they hinder a rapid escape.

That's probably not the whole story, however. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suffered by thousands of veterans, increases aggressive driving. Drunken driving and thrill-seeking also are more common after combat, according to a few studies and the testimony of many veterans. If further research supports the observations, motor vehicle crashes will join suicide and interpersonal violence as a fatal, if indirect, consequence of the war on terrorism. Motor vehicle crashes have long been a serious problem in the military. From 1999 through 2012, a period spanning peacetime and the two wars, as many active-duty military personnel died in noncombat motor vehicle crashes both on and off duty (4,423) as were killed in the Iraq war (4,409). "Before suicides became the leading cause of non-battle injuries, motor vehicle injuries were," said Bruce H. Jones, a physician and epidemiologist who heads the Army's injury prevention program at Aberdeen Proving Ground, in Maryland. War, however, worsens the problem. Men who served in the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan have a 76 percent higher rate of dying in vehicle crashes, and women a 43 percent higher rate, than people in the general population, according to an unpublished study by Han K. Kang, an epidemiologist with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The same phenomenon was seen in Persian Gulf War veterans and took five years to dissipate. Fatal motorcycle crashes in particular spiked during the wars. They accounted for 14 percent of military traffic deaths in 2001, but 38 percent in 2008. The absolute rate of motorcycle deaths also tripled over that period. "A lot of people come home and buy a motorcycle to have that adrenaline rush again," said Steven Acheson, 27, a former forward observer in the Army and an engineering student in Wisconsin. He spent time at Fort Stewart in Georgia, where the post put vehicles from fatal crashes on display as a form of warning. "There were once six

or seven completely mangled motorcycles out in front of the gate,” Acheson recalled.

One of the best pieces of evidence that combat raises a person’s risk for car crashes comes from an in-house study by USAA, an insurance company in San Antonio that covers thousands of military personnel. The company offers a reduced-price insurance premium if vehicles are stored securely during deployment. Almost all of the company’s active-duty customers opt for it. As a consequence, USAA has before-and-after records for 171,000 deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Troops had more at-fault accidents in the six months after their return from deployment than in the six months before they left. The increase was highest for people in the Army (23 percent) and in the enlisted ranks (22 percent). Tellingly, there was a “dose-response relationship” between deployment and risk. Troops with three deployments had 36 percent more accidents, compared with 27 percent more in the twice-deployed and 12 percent in people deployed only once. But the problem isn’t just a carry-over of habits.

One-quarter of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans enrolled in a 60-day residential treatment program for PTSD in California said they drove after drinking. One-fifth said they used seat belts “less than sometimes,” in part because they get in the way of a rapid escape from a vehicle. “Failure to adapt the unique combat driving behaviors used in the current conflicts cannot be the only explanation for deployment-related risky driving behavior and excess mortality,” wrote Mark A. Zamorski, a Canadian military physician, and Amanda M. Kelley, a civilian U.S. Army psychologist, in a report to NATO on the subject. “All of the likely mechanisms could be mediated by distress or mental disorders,” they wrote. The military is beginning to pay attention to the particular risks facing — and needs of — Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who resume driving when they get home. The Army gives out a brochure called “Post-Combat Driving: The American Road” that includes data from a survey that an occupational therapist at the University of Minnesota, Erica B. Stern, conducted with deployed and non-deployed reservists. (Forty-nine percent of returning troops said they were anxious when cars approached quickly; 25 percent said they had driven through stop signs in the previous month.) The publication has tips on how to increase self-control; one is to tape a drawing by one’s child to the dashboard. VA has new training materials for clinicians advising them to talk about driving with veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, some of whom are enrolling in the department’s driver-

rehabilitation programs offered at 40 VA medical centers across the country, which have traditionally been used by people with physical disabilities.

The VA hospital in Palo Alto, Calif., is conducting a study aimed at identifying the best techniques for relieving driving anxiety while on the road. Veterans drive hour-long trips near the medical center that incorporate their “triggers” — underpasses, bridges, construction sites, busy intersections. Their pulse and breathing are monitored. When they feel panic, they pull over and try various self-calming techniques. Getting permission for the study from scientific review boards wasn’t easy. There haven’t been any disasters so far. Woodward hopes one day to extend it to an even more overlooked group — returning veterans who aren’t yet confident enough to resume driving. [Source: Washington Post | David Brown | 5 May 20113 ++]

***DoD Sexual Abuse Update*** Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel is vowing to change the culture that allows sexual assault to be a serious problem for the Defense Department. In a memo released 7 May Hagel announced a number of initiatives to eradicate sexual assault. "While the department is putting in place important new programs to combat this crime, it is clear that we must do much more to eliminate this threat to the safety and welfare of our men and women in uniform, and the health, reputation, and trust of this institution," he wrote. Army Maj. Gen. Gary S. Patton, the director of the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention and response office, discussed the secretary's initiatives in an interview ahead of the memo's release. Patton said the secretary's initiatives will work to change the culture in the armed forces. The initiatives include:

- Dealing with the command climate and enhancing commander accountability, requiring that the results of command climate surveys will be provided to the next higher echelon of command.
- Directing the service chiefs to develop methods to assess the performance of military commanders in incorporating sexual assault prevention and victim care principles into their commands," Patton said.
- Directing the service chiefs to look at methods to incorporate this into annual assessments -- what would be appropriate ways to tie sexual assault prevention and response accomplishments into an evaluation or

assessment system? The chiefs have to report back to Hagel with their conclusions 1 NOV.

- Directing the services and defense agencies have been directed to conduct a comprehensive visual inspection of department work places, including the service academies, by 1 JUL. This is similar to an inspection the Air Force conducted late last year to ensure workforces do not display degrading, offensive materials.
- Improving overall victim care and trust in the chain of command, to increase reporting of the crime, and to reduce the feelings victims have of being ostracized.
- Preventing sexual assault in the recruiting and early training process. This includes DOD-wide recruiting organizations, the military entrance processing centers [and] ROTC to assess them on their sexual assault prevention programs. This follows recent assessments conducted by the services of their military academies and initial entry training programs.
- On the military justice side, Hagel asked for the acting DOD general counsel to incorporate the rights afforded to victims through the Crime Victims' Rights Act into military justice practice. He also wants to evaluate the Air Force Special Victims Counsel pilot program to ensure victims of sexual assault are provided the advice and counsel they need to understand their rights and to feel confident.
- The defense secretary is asking a congressionally mandated panel to speed up its work on an independent review of the systems used to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate sexual assault crimes. The legislation gives the panel 18 months to finish its review. Hagel is asking them to finish in a year.

[Source: AFPS | Jim Garamone | 7 May 2013 ++]

## ***Arlington National Cemetery Update***

Arlington National Cemetery leaders are working on what could be one of the largest expansions in decades, warning that without more burial space the nation's iconic military burial ground will run out of new grave sites for veterans within a dozen years. Workers just finished construction on a giant structure that can hold tens of thousands of cremated remains; cemetery officials hope to begin a controversial 27-acre expansion this fall; and they will soon start designing a 38-acre addition around the Air Force Memorial near the Pentagon.

The dramatic expansion plans are part of a whirlwind of modernization and improvements put in place since investigators revealed widespread problems several years ago. The changes, including digitized records that allow cemetery visitors to look up burial sites online, have transformed internal operations and the visitor experience at the cemetery, which dates to the Civil War. But one project — which officials say would beautify the area and add more than 27,000 much-needed interment sites for veterans on the northern side of the grounds — has sparked opposition. Critics say the Millennium Project, as the 27-acre expansion is called, doesn't fit the historic site, would damage a stream and raze hundreds of trees in place since the Civil War. And some ask whether it would make more sense to begin planning for the inevitable: the day when the cemetery will be full. It's no small question for a place that attracts more than 4 million visitors a year, with graves that span U.S. history, including Revolutionary War soldiers, U.S. presidents, Abner Doubleday, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Joe Louis, Pierre L'Enfant and many thousands of others who served the country. "I love Arlington. But it's not big enough for all future wars," said Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN), a member of the House Armed Services Committee. "It seems like we need to be preparing for Arlington Two, making sure it's just as nice and wonderful and historical as Arlington One."

On 9 MAY, the cemetery will dedicate a new columbarium court, nearly as long as two football fields, where more than 20,000 cremated remains can be stored. Without it, Arlington would have run out of what cemetery officials call "niche" space by 2016. Now the focus is on new grave sites with the Millennium Project. "This is important," said Kathryn Condon, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries, "because if we do nothing today, we will run out of in-ground burial space in 2025." There are about 22 million living U.S. veterans now, said Paige Lowther, of the National Cemetery Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and each day many hundreds die. Nationally, only a little more than half of the VA's 131 national cemeteries — administered separately from Arlington, which is run by the U.S. Army — are fully open for new burials. The VA is planning to expand, as well, with five enormous new cemeteries. But Arlington's history sets it apart. Federal troops took over the Arlington House estate that had been home to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and his family during the Civil War and began burying Union soldiers there, including 1,800 killed at Bull Run. Arlington conducts 27 to 30 interments a day on its formal grounds, where magnolias bloom over seemingly endless rows of white headstones,

caissons roll past and Old Guard soldiers give three-volley salutes as a final honor. Some families wait six months for an in-ground burial there.

On the southern side of Arlington, heavy machinery is demolishing a 1 million-square-foot Navy Annex office complex on a hill overlooking the Pentagon to make more space for another expansion. Cemetery officials are starting the \$19 million planning and design for that this year and project that the three projects together would allow new veteran interments into the 2050s. After that, there's nowhere else to grow. "Eventually, Arlington is going to close because there is no more space. That's a given," said Joe Davis, a spokesman for Veterans of Foreign Wars, which supports the expansions. "We want Arlington to continue to serve as the final resting place for all of our nation's fallen warriors for as long as it possibly can. "But Arlington does have a life span."

In 2010, cemetery leaders asked the Army Corps of Engineers' Norfolk District for "a more environmentally friendly design," cemetery officials said. But critics such as H. Hedrick Belin, president of Potomac Conservancy, said last month that the recent plans would "totally devastate the topography of the region," tearing down trees and leaving "some real questions about the impact on water quality in the Chesapeake Bay." The stream valley would be altered, he said. "We want to preserve this place, a wonderful place to reflect on their sacrifices," said Rob Nieweg of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "We oppose what we consider to be a ham-handed design."

"Arlington wants to bulldoze [one section] essentially, remove 800 native trees and an extraordinary amount of earth." Those woods that one section would replace are historic, he argued. "These are the last remaining bits of the Arlington estate. The Custis-Lee mansion at one point was surrounded by 1,100 acres." Stephen Van Hoven, the cemetery's urban forester, said the work will preserve the stand of trees next to Arlington House, so the view from that site will remain the same. Lt. Col. David Fedroff of the Army Corps said the design requires cutting into the slope for safety reasons; a cemetery can't be put on a steep hill. The project, which will be submitted to the National Capital Planning Commission for final approval in June or July, would also remove invasive species that choke native plants and vines that strangle trees, Van Hoven said. Plans call for nearly 800 new trees, thousands of bushes and seedlings, efforts to improve water quality and restoration of the eroded streambed. All the trees have been

numbered with small metal tags, which helps track the different species. After earlier criticism, the design of a road was changed to save some trees. Orange ties around trunks mark a wetlands area as off-limits, and an arched bridge design allows animals to cross the stream; earlier plans had concrete embedded in the water, project manager Greg Hegge said. Hegge said cemetery officials think that they have addressed almost all of the criticisms, although “some individuals have expressed such a degree of concern over the living trees on the site that they will accept no tree removal.” The officials won’t be able to satisfy those concerns, he said. “And we owe it to our veterans and our loved ones who served this country to make that balance,” Condon added.

But Arlington officials would not have so many environmental issues to juggle, said Cooper, the congressman from Tennessee, if they were not trying to expand into land so ill-suited for a cemetery. He wondered what the cost per grave will be and asked whether it is truly patriotic to spend so much. “I don’t mind paying top dollar, and our veterans deserve to be honored,” he said. “But anything we purchase — literally — would be cheaper than what we’re doing now.” Cemetery officials should be looking ahead and finding a beautiful new site, he said, rather than staying in denial. The Millennium Project has cost \$17 million so far, including planning and design, storm-water retention and stabilizing the stream, and \$82 million has been budgeted for construction, Arlington officials said. The new columbarium court cost nearly \$16 million. And it’s too soon to know how much the Navy Annex project might cost. “It’s tough,” said Davis, the VFW spokesman. “That’s where everyone wants to go. Even people whose immediate family doesn’t live anywhere near here. Because they’re surrounded by all their brothers. “My parents are buried there. I want to go there — knock on wood they have space for me.” [Source: Washington Post | Susan Svrluga | 4 May 2013 ++]

## **NDAAs 2014**

The House was expected to begin its consideration of the FY2014 defense authorization bill in early MAY. Below is an estimated timeline of FY2014 defense bill process:

- *April 10:* The president submitted his annual budget proposal to Congress two months later than usual due in part to sequestration. The

administration proposed a military pay raise cap, dramatic TRICARE fee increases, and more.

- *Late May:* Six weeks after the President delivers his budget to Congress, congressional committees are required to submit their “views and estimates” of spending and revenues within their respective jurisdictions to the House and Senate Budget Committees.
- *May-June:* The House and Senate Armed Services Committees will likely begin work on the FY2014 Defense Authorization Bill, including any changes that may be imposed by budget resolution spending limits.
- *June-July:* Full House and Senate pass their respective versions of the defense bill.
- *July-October:* House and Senate negotiators resolve differences between their respective versions.
- *October-December:* Final Defense Authorization Bill passed by House and Senate and becomes law. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 3 May 2013 ++]

## **VA Bonuses Update**

The chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee proposed legislation that would ban all bonuses for senior executives in the Veterans Affairs Department for the next five years. The move by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) is in response to VA’s disability claims backlog and patient deaths in VA hospitals. “The fact that so many VA executives collected huge performance bonuses year after year while continually failing at their jobs calls into question whether department leaders even know the meaning of the word ‘accountability,’ ” Miller said. Nextgov has learned that from 2007 through 2011, VA paid 398 bonuses to members of the Senior Executive Service totaling \$16.8 million. Last month, the department said senior executives in the Veterans Benefits Administration will not receive 2012 performance bonuses. The funds will instead be used to accelerate plans aimed at eliminating the claims backlog. That decision was insufficient, Miller said. “While recent VA decisions to forego certain executive bonuses and review others are steps in the right direction, they don’t go nearly far enough. VA owes every American an explanation for why it rewarded failing executives with bonuses, and we are calling on the department to conduct a top-to-bottom review of its performance appraisal system to prevent similar outrageous payments in the future. [Source: NextGov | Bob Brewin | 8 May 2013 ++]