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## Meetings

The Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, April 6, 2017 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford.

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, April 27 at 7:00pm. Call the Chapter office for any changes in schedule. Chapter members are welcomed to attend.

## Notice

If you have moved or changed your address, PLEASE notify us immediately. Call the Chapter office at (860) 568-9212, mail us at the address on the back of this newsletter or e-mail the Newsletter editor at [JRCVVA120@aol.com](mailto:JRCVVA120@aol.com).

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## VA's rule establishes presumption of service connection for diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in water supply at Camp Lejeune



The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) regulations to establish presumptions for the service connection of eight diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, are effective as of March 14, 2017.

"Establishing these presumptions is a demonstration of our commitment to care for those who have served our nation and have been exposed to

harm as a result of that service," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. David J. Shulkin. "The Camp Lejeune presumptions will make it easier for those Veterans to receive the care and benefits they earned."

The presumption of service connection applies to active-duty, reserve and National Guard members who served at Camp Lejeune for a minimum of 30 days (cumulative) between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, and are diagnosed with any of the following conditions:

- Adult leukemia
- Aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes
- Bladder cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Liver cancer
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease

The area included in this presumption is all of Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Air Station New River, including satellite camps and housing areas.

This presumption complements the health care already provided for 15 illnesses or conditions as part of the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012. The Camp Lejeune Act requires VA to provide health care to Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune, and to reimburse family members or pay providers for medical expenses for those who resided there for not fewer than 30 days between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987.

*For veterans affected by this VA rule, claims assistance is available from VVA Service Officers listed on the following page of this newsletter.*

**CHAPTER 120 OFFICE 568-9212****Board of Directors**

Paul Barry 569-3530  
 Peter Galgano 828-1999  
 William Chiodo 688-2518  
 Patricia Dumin 620-4131  
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 Jerome Blum, Vice President 267-2981  
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 New Haven (Area Code 203) 932-9899  
 Norwich (Area Code 860) 887-1755  
 Danbury (Area Code 203) 790-4000

**All Telephone Numbers are Area Code 860 unless otherwise noted**

**Chapter/State News****National Convention Delegate Elections**

Elections for six National Convention delegates and two alternates will be held at the Chapter 120 membership meeting on April 6, 2017. Three members of the Election Committee will also be elected on that date. If you are interested in running for a Delegate to the National Convention to be held in New Orleans, LA on August 8 - 12, 2017, you should start planning for your trip and consider expenses necessary to attend the Convention. Historically, the Connecticut State Council and Chapter 120 have assisted with the majority of expenses. For this year, the Chapter will provide \$600 and the State Council will provide an additional \$200. An estimated total cost of the trip to the convention is \$1,200. If you are interested in a Delegate position or wish to nominate a Chapter member for that position, please contact the Election Committee (Bill Chiodo, Ken Lewis or Tim Siggia). Election Rules are posted below.

**Connecticut Chapter 120 Election Rules**

*Revised November 2, 2006*

**Section 1. Annual Elections**

- A. The Chapter officers will be elected on even numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term in office. They are the following: President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer.
- B. The Board of Directors will be elected on even numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term of office.
- C. The State Council Delegates will be elected on even numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term of office.
- D. The Delegates to the National Convention will be elected on odd numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term in office.
- E. The three (3) member Nominating Committee will be elected at the April meeting and will serve a one (1) year term.

**Section 2. Candidates**

- A. Candidates must have been a member for a minimum of fifteen (15) days prior to the election.
- B. Candidates must have on file with the Chapter, or present to the Nominating Committee their DD-214, or other proof of qualification for membership.
- C. Candidates may be nominated from the floor on the night of the election. Candidates must be present to accept the nomination or have submitted a letter of intent to the Nominating Committee.
- D. Candidates will be allowed space in the newsletter to campaign but not to defame or slander the other candidates. Space allowable will be at the discretion of the Newsletter Editor.
- E. Candidates will be allowed five (5) minutes to speak at the April meeting if desired.
- F. Candidates may use the membership list for a mailing pursuant to the Chapter rules and Federal laws governing the membership list.

**Section 3. Voters**

- A. To be eligible to vote, you must have been a member for fifteen (15) days prior to the election. This would include new members or reinstated members that are not paid up for the prior year.
- B. Voting members must have on file with the Chapter, or present to the Nominating Committee, their DD-214 or proof of qualification for membership.
- C. Voting members must have paid their dues for the current fiscal year. Membership may be renewed the night of the election, but must be paid prior to casting their vote.

**Birthday Wishes**

Birthday wishes go to our members born in April. May you have many more!

<i>Robert Bagge</i>	<i>Arthur Bagnall</i>
<i>Stephen Clark</i>	<i>James J. Gavin</i>
<i>Steven Harris</i>	<i>Walter Korfel</i>
<i>William V. Loder</i>	<i>Nathaniel Milliner</i>
<i>David R. Motowidlak</i>	<i>William J. Neligon</i>
<i>John J. Orvis</i>	<i>John F. Panciera</i>
<i>Bruce E. Raccio</i>	<i>Gerald A. Sweeney</i>
<i>C. Daniel Thayer, Jr.</i>	<i>Robert J. Vanderhoff Jr.</i>

*And a special Happy Birthday to Gary Cutler who was born while his Dad, VVA Life member John Cutler, was in Vietnam.*

**Section 4. Election Procedures**

- A. The voting period will be from the close of nominations until 8:00 PM.
- B. The quorum required to hold the election should be 10 members.
- C. A candidate can request a recount of the ballots for his or her office if the margin between the candidates running for that office is 10% or less based on the number of total votes cast.
- D. The ballots will be kept for one (1) year in a sealed envelope signed by the Nominating Committee or their appointees.
- E. Results will be announced the night of the election.
- F. If a Nominating Committee member is running for an elected position, they shall appoint a volunteer vote counter from the floor.
- G. The vote will be taken by a secret paper ballot.

**Upcoming Events****Workshop for low-income veterans**

Peter Smith, estate planning attorney with Czepiga Daly Pope, will present a workshop for estate planning of low-income veterans at the Danbury Vet Center on April 25. For details, contact Peter Smith at Czepiga Daly Pope, telephone 860-236-7673. Email: peter@ctseniorlaw.com

**Shad Derby/Armed Forces Day Parade**

The Shad Derby/Armed Forces Day parade in Windsor CT will be held May 20. Form up at the Windsor High School at 10:30, with step off at 11:30am.

**Newsletter articles/stories/photos**

Any articles, stories and/or photos submitted for the newsletter must be received by the "cut off" date for any given month. Photos must be accompanied by text which describes the event, names, dates and any other pertinent facts so our readers understand the story behind the photo(s). The newsletter editor will announce the "cut off" dates at each Chapter meeting. The "cut off" date for our May 2017 newsletter is 21 April 2017. Due to space availability, the editor reserves the right to include or not include photos for a given month.

**Membership Renewals**

Is your membership renewal about to become due? Please renew today so you can continue to receive the Chapter newsletter, as well as the VVA Veteran! And as you renew, please consider joining the other 182 members who have chosen Life membership for \$100. You must submit a copy of your DD214 to qualify for Life membership.

**POW/MIA News**

*From National League of POW/MIA Families*

**Americans Recently Accounted for**

On March 7th, DPAA released an announcement that Captain Daniel W. Thomas, USAFR, listed as MIA on July 6, 1971 in South Vietnam, had been accounted for. Remains were recovered by a Vietnamese Unilateral Recovery Team (URT) in August, 2014, that

were identified in August, 2015, as those of Major Donald G. Carr, USA, the other person in the OV-10A piloted by Capt Thomas. Subsequent recovery efforts by the URT and repatriation of additional remains and material in April, 2016, brought the more recent ID of Capt Thomas. DPAA also listed on its website, under Statistics, the accounting for Colonel William E. Campbell, USAF, listed as MIA in Laos January 29, 1969. His remains were recovered April 17, 2014, identified August 29, 2016, and placed on the DPAA website this past week. On February 22nd, DPAA announced the ID of Capt Robert R. Barnett, USAF, listed as KIA/BNR on April 7, 1966 while piloting a B-57B over Laos. His remains were recovered June 18, 2015 and identified August 16, 2016. Earlier this year, a Marine Corps Reserve officer, 1st Lt William C. Ryan, was the first person since June of 2016 announced as accounted for from the Vietnam War. 1st Lt Ryan was listed KIA/BNR in Laos on May 11, 1969. His remains were recovered January 27, 2016, and identified December 7, 2016. The number still missing and otherwise unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War is now 1,614.

Of the 1,614 still missing (POW/MIA) and unaccounted-for (KIA/BNR), 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,260 (VN-463, VS-797); Laos-298; Cambodia-49; PRC territorial waters-7. These country-specific numbers can and do fluctuate when investigations result in changes to loss locations. Since formation in 1970, the League has sought the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for those still missing, and repatriation of all recoverable remains.

The total accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 969. There follows a breakdown by country of the 969 Americans accounted for since the April 30, 1975 end of the Vietnam War: Vietnam – 658, Laos – 268, Cambodia – 40, and the PRC, 3. In addition, 63 US personnel were accounted for between 1973 and 1975, for a grand total of 1,032. Of the 63, 9 were from Laos, 53 from Vietnam, and 1 from Cambodia. These Americans were accounted for by unilateral US effort in areas where access was possible, not due to cooperation with the post-war governments of Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. Added together, a total of 277 have been recovered and identified from Laos, 711 from Vietnam, and 41 from Cambodia.

At The Capitol



**VA Committee Reports out bills**

On 2 March, the CT VA Committee reported out the following bills:

- **HB05578** AN ACT ELIMINATING THE FEE FOR ISSUANCE OF PURPLE HEART NUMBER PLATES.
- **HB06061** AN ACT WAIVING THE FEE FOR HAVING DRIVER'S LICENSES OR IDENTITY CARDS REISSUED PRIOR TO EXPIRATION WITH AN INDICATION OF STATUS AS A VETERAN.
- **HB06065** AN ACT

CONCERNING BUS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FOR VETERANS.

- **HB06072** AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER ISSUES IMPACTING VETERANS INVOLVED IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.
- **HB06074** AN ACT REDUCING BY HALF CERTAIN FEES FOR CERTAIN OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES, CERTIFICATIONS, REGISTRATIONS OR PERMITS FOR VETERANS AND THEIR SPOUSES.
- **HB06285** AN ACT RENAMING THE STATE MILITARY TRAINING FACILITY IN NIANTIC AS CAMP NETT.
- **HB06506** AN ACT WAIVING CERTAIN VETERANS' RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STEP-UP PROGRAM.
- **HB07100** AN ACT CONCERNING AMERICAN LEGION STATE FUND COMMISSION TRANSPARENCY.
- **HB07101** AN ACT CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY FOR BURIAL IN THE STATE VETERANS' CEMETERY.
- **HB07102** AN ACT PROTECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND VETERANS.
- **HB07103** AN ACT CONCERNING THE RETIREMENT AGE OF GOVERNOR'S FOOT GUARD MUSICIANS.
- **HB07110** AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSIONERS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TECHNICAL AND MINOR REVISIONS TO STATUTES CONCERNING MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS.
- **HB07176** AN ACT CREATING A MILITARY RECRUITMENT RIBBON.
- **HB07177** AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES.
- **HB07178** AN ACT CONCERNING WINDSHIELD PLACARDS FOR CERTAIN VETERANS WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER.
- **HB07179** AN ACT CONCERNING MATTERS AFFECTING CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD.

- **HB07180** AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A MUNICIPAL OPTION PROPERTY TAX FREEZE FOR QUALIFIED DISABLED VETERANS.
- **HB07181** AN ACT HONORING DECEASED VETERANS.
- **HB07182** AN ACT WAIVING CERTAIN FEES FOR VETERANS WHO ARE QUALIFYING PATIENTS FOR THE PALLIATIVE USE OF MARIJUANA.
- **SB00136** AN ACT CONCERNING VEHICLE NUMBER PLATES FOR CERTAIN VETERANS.
- **SB00342** AN ACT EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF "VETERAN".
- **SB00503** AN ACT PROVIDING FOR DISCOUNTED HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING LICENSES FOR CERTAIN VETERANS.
- **SB00854** AN ACT CONCERNING TUITION AND FEE WAIVERS FOR VETERANS AND MEMBERS OF THE CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.
- **SB00857** AN ACT DESIGNATING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ROCKY HILL CAMPUS AS THE CONNECTICUT VETERANS CENTER.
- **SB00858** AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY DEPARTMENT VOLUNTEERS.
- **SB00865** AN ACT CONCERNING INCREASED ACCESS TO CERTAIN CLUBS UNDER THE LIQUOR CONTROL ACT.
- **SB00914** AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFINITION OF A VETERAN FOR A CERTAIN HONOR AND CERTAIN BENEFIT.
- **SB00916** AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS.
- **SB00917** AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS' AFFAIRS.
- **SB00918** AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL OPTION PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR GOLD STAR PARENTS.
- **SB00919** AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS' SERVICES AT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.
- **SJ00025** RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING CONGRESS TO RECOGNIZE WOMEN IN THE CADET NURSE CORPS DURING WORLD WAR II AS VETERANS.



Chapter 120 members show support for veterans' legislation at the State capitol. *Photo by Bob Venti*

## On The Hill



## Several VA bills marked up and sent on to be voted on by the full House

The full House VA Committee marked up several bills on March 8, passed them out of committee and sent them on to the full House of Representatives for its consideration. All the bills considered, H.R. 369, H.R. 1181, H.R. 1259, H.R. 1367 and H.R. 1379, passed.

H.R. 369 would eliminate the sunset provision of the Veterans Choice Program and therefore the VA could continue to use what was left of the originally appropriated \$1 billion for contracted healthcare for veterans in

the community. H.R. 1181 changes the federal law to require that a veteran receiving mental health treatment from the VA will not be disqualified from processing a firearm unless a Judge from the proper jurisdiction and authority rules the veteran “is a danger to himself or herself or others.” H.R. 1259 would create and expedited process for the VA to fire, demote, or suspend incompetent employees, while H.R. 1367 would direct the VA to expand its efforts to “recruit, hire, train promote” and thus retain good employees. And H.R. 1379 would make recipients of the Purple Heart qualified to receive educational benefits through the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

## Legislation Introduced to Improve the Veterans Choice Program

U.S. Senator Brian Schatz (D-Hawai‘i), Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, along with Senators Jon Tester (D-Mont.), John McCain (R-Ariz), Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), and Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) introduced legislation on March 7 to improve the VA Choice Program and extend access to timely care for more of America’s veterans in their own communities.

The Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act allows the VA to access all of the funding initially appropriated for the program, and ensures that veterans’ access to care isn’t disrupted by the looming sunset of the program. The Choice Program is scheduled to sunset on August 7, 2017, and currently veterans aren’t able to schedule appointments that fall after that expiration date.

In doing so, the legislation also authorizes the VA to be the primary payer under the Choice Program, reducing veterans’ out-of-pocket costs and aligning the Choice Program with the VA’s other community care programs.

The current requirement that the VA act as a secondary payer for non-service connected care through the Choice Program has

created unnecessary administrative hurdles that often increase costs for veterans, delay access to care, and slow down reimbursements for providers. Further, the bill would improve the sharing of medical records between the VA and community providers in Choice to better coordinate care for veterans and connect them to care in a more timely manner.

“Distance or delays should not keep veterans from getting the health care they need—that’s something we can all agree on,” said Senator Schatz. “Our bill strengthens the Veterans Choice Program and makes it easier for thousands of veterans and their families to get the care they deserve, when and where they need it.”

“This commonsense measure will help provide veterans access to the quality, timely care they deserve,” said Senator Blumenthal. “By eliminating unnecessary hurdles, our bill will help ensure that no veteran is left with increased costs and delayed access to care. I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to continue improving care at VA facilities.”

The VA expects to have approximately \$950 million remaining in the Veterans Choice Program when the program expires on August 7, 2017. This legislation allows the VA to use the remaining funds for veterans’ health care authorized under the Veterans Choice Program until it is fully expended.

## VVA’s Rick Weidman Receives HillVets Lifetime Achievement Award



On March 15, at a gala on Capitol Hill, former Sen. Chuck Hagel presented Rick Weidman, VVA Executive Director for Policy and Government Affairs, with the HillVets 100: Lifetime of Achievement award. The award was chosen by HillVets to honor those individuals who have made it their lives’ work to give back to the military and veterans community. Also recognized with the Lifetime Achievement Award are Sen. Max Cleland, Sen. Bob Dole, Sen. John Warner, and former

Secretary of State John Kerry.

Rick Weidman was born in Texas and enlisted to the Army in 1968. He served as a medic with Charlie Company, 23rd Medical Company, 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade in the American Division. Currently, Rick is the Executive Director of Government Affairs with Vietnam Veterans of America, which was previously named the Council of Vietnam Veterans (VVA) – an organization that Weidman began volunteering for in 1978. He has been a vocal and visual presence on Capitol Hill ever since.

## Veterans Affairs News



## VA Secretary backs expanding caregiver program to older vets

Veterans Affairs Secretary

David Shulkin supports expanding his department's caregiver benefits to families of veterans of all eras, and thinks the move may be far less costly than most critics expect.

In testimony before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Shulkin said he believes the current restrictions on the caregiver program — which limit many benefits solely to families of post-9/11 veterans — need to be updated.

"I do believe it needs to be for all veterans," he said, "particularly our older veterans who want to stay at home, and then maybe they wouldn't have to leave their home and into an institution."

He said department officials have begun a review of the costs and procedures for expanding the program, and will formally approach lawmakers with a plan in the months to come.

Currently, VA caregiver programs provide a monthly stipend, travel expenses, access to health insurance, mental health services, training and respite care for designated caregivers of injured or infirm veterans.

But when Congress authorized those services in 2010, they made the majority them only available to caregivers of post-9/11 veterans. Researchers estimate that covers only about one-fifth of the 5.5 million family members providing home care for veterans.

Senate lawmakers included the caregiver expansion in legislation last year that passed out of committee but stalled before the full chamber. That failure was due in large part to concerns from critics and House lawmakers who called the plan too costly, with an estimated expense topping \$10 billion in the next five years.

Shulkin estimated the anticipated cost at closer to \$4 billion, but also said that doesn't take into account other savings the expanded benefit could have.

"I believe that's not an accurate reflection on the true cost because I believe we are going to save money by not institutionalizing people," he said.

Even a lower cost may not be enough to push the expansion through Congress. While President Trump has promised an increase in the fiscal 2018 VA budget, members of Congress in recent months have warned that the department's budget — which has nearly quadrupled since 2001 — has grown at a concerning rate.

Shulkin did not give a timeline for when VA officials will present a new legislative proposal to Congress on the issue.

## VA Establishes Commission to Recommend Under Secretary for Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the establishment of a search commission to help identify candidates for the position of Under Secretary for Benefits.

The Under Secretary for Benefits is the senior official within the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), which oversees a variety of benefits and services to service members, Veterans and their families.

Search commission candidates will be selected based on criteria governed by law, along with appropriate skills, knowledge and attributes as leaders, managers and educators. The commission is a prerequisite to the president's appointment of a successful candidate, subject to Senate confirmation.

By law, the appointment is made without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability, both in fiscal management and in the administration of programs of VBA or of similar content and scope.

VBA includes a network of 56 regional offices and more than 21,800 employees. Nearly 4 million Veterans currently receive compensation for disabilities incurred in service or pensions for wartime Veterans, who become totally disabled in civilian life. In addition, more than a half million widows, children and parents of deceased Veterans are paid survivor compensation or death pensions.

Other programs administered by the Under Secretary for Benefits include: education benefits, vocational rehabilitation and employment for Veterans, and life insurance; as well as VA-guaranteed home loans for both active-duty personnel and Veterans.

The commission, once named, is expected to complete its work by April 20.

*From The Fiscal Times*

## The \$92 Billion VA Still Doesn't Have Its Act Together

Nearly three years after the scandal first broke that hundreds of veterans had died waiting for medical treatment at VA medical centers, the VA continues to operate under a cloud of doubt.

Despite numerous reforms and improvements and tens of billions of dollars in new funding to upgrade medical treatment and eliminate long waiting lists, the VA remains on the Government Accountability Office's notorious "High Risk List" of agencies prone to mismanagement, waste and even fraud.

The VA — one of only a handful of federal departments that received a funding increase under President Trump's fiscal 2018 budget plan released on Thursday, will be undergoing yet

another round of reforms and improvements under the new administration.

“We’re going to straighten out the VA for our veterans,” Trump said in January, in announcing his choice of Dr. David Shulkin as the new VA secretary. “I’ve promised that for a long time, and it’s something I feel very, very strongly.

The VA operates one of the largest health care delivery systems in the country, including 168 medical centers and more than 1,000 outpatient facilities organized in regional networks. The number of people who have enrolled in the VA health care system has mushroomed from 7.9 million in fiscal year 2006 to nearly nine million last year.

Throughout that same period, VA’s Veterans Health Administration’s total budget increased substantially, from \$37.8 billion in FY 2006 to \$91.2 billion in FY 2016. In response to the many serious and long-festering problems with access to VA health care, a \$10 billion “Veterans Access” law was enacted in 2014 to provide temporary authority for veterans to obtain health care services from non-VA providers if they have to wait too long.

But despite these and some other notable improvements during the final years of the Obama administration and the leadership of former secretary Robert A. McDonald, the GAO added the troubled agency to its high-risk list in 2015 out of concern about the VA’s inability to ensure the “timeliness, cost-effectiveness, quality and safety” of veterans’ health care.

Debra A. Draper, GAO’s director of health care, told the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee that VA officials had met only two of five crucial criteria for successful operation – including demonstrating leadership ability through the creation of task forces and other positive action and properly developing an action plan to address continued inadequacies in the agency’s health care system.

However, the VA has fallen well short of meeting three other criteria for escaping the list: demonstrating the capacity to address the major areas of concern, closely monitoring implementation of corrective actions, and demonstrating that progress is being made.

Since the VA was added to the list in 2015, the GAO has conducted two follow-up reports examining mental health and primary care access at VA medical facilities. Both studies found “wide variation in the time that veterans waited for primary and mental health care,” Draper said.

She said those problems partly stemmed from “a lack of clear, updated policies for appointment scheduling,” which led to “inconsistent and unreliable wait-time data.” In short, for all its efforts and reforms, VA health care facilities continue to leave patients waiting too long to receive needed treatment.

Indeed, last year there were reports that the wait time at VA facilities had gotten worse. Compared to the situation in 2015 levels, there were 70,000 more appointments that took veterans at least a month to be seen. The VA blamed the problem on a

huge surge in demand for care, but it was apparent the problem had more to do with the confusing and complicated way Veterans Choice was set up.

VA has implemented about 50 percent of the recommendations GAO has made to the agency. However, there continue to be more than 100 open recommendations related to VA health care. Nearly a quarter of those recommendations have remained open for three or more years.

The GAO’s high risk list dates to the early 1990s, and more than 60 different agencies and areas of government have been on the list at one time or another. Trump no doubt would like to see the VA come off the list as a sign of improved service and management. But Draper said that on average it has taken agencies nine years to get off the black list.

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## 50 Years Ago

- **April 8** - DON LESLIE MICHAEL, MEDAL OF HONOR.
- **April 10** - B-52S ARRIVE IN THAILAND. The first contingent of B-52 aircraft arrives at U-Tapao, Thailand.
- **April 12** - U.S. ARMY'S TASK FORCE OREGON ESTABLISHED AS MARINES SHIFT. The U.S. Army’s Task Force OREGON is established in southern I Corps, replacing marines who were shifted farther north to counter the growing enemy threat below the Demilitarized Zone.
- **April 16** - GEORGE ALAN INGALLS, MEDAL OF HONOR.
- **April 19** - LEO K. THORSNESS, MEDAL OF HONOR.
- **April 20** - MICHAEL J. ESTOCIN, MEDAL OF HONOR.
- **April 21** - GARY W. MARTINI, MEDAL OF HONOR.
- **April 24** - FIRST BATTLE OF KHE SANH TAKES PLACE. From 24 April to 11 May 1967, the First Battle of Khe Sanh or Hill Fights takes place. In extremely bitter fighting with North Vietnamese troops, units of the 3rd Marine Division clear Hills 881S, 881N and 861 overlooking the Khe Sanh combat base. From this point Khe Sanh begins to take on more importance as a Marine outpost. The American command insists it be held, and the North Vietnamese continue to probe and isolate the garrison.
- **April 25** - KENNETH E. STUMPF, MEDAL OF HONOR.

### Receive “The Connection” by E-Mail

The monthly Chapter 120 newsletter, *The Connection*, is available by e-mail. Currently, 96 members receive the newsletter by e-mail, saving the Chapter over \$600 in postal fees annually. The newsletter is available in Adobe format (.pdf), attached to your e-mail. If you wish to receive the newsletter via e-mail, please e-mail the newsletter editor at [jrcvva120@aol.com](mailto:jrcvva120@aol.com)

## Helping Hands for Our Fellow Veterans



### ***Won't You Please Give a Helping Hand to a Brother or Sister Veteran?***

Several veterans have contacted Chapter 120 asking for help in paying the most basic of needs for themselves and their families. These veterans are those who do not qualify for regular federal, state or local assistance – they fall into that financial category where they make too much to qualify for assistance, but not enough to afford basic needs for their families, like food, fuel for heat, or clothing for their children.

Chapter 120 has decided to ask you – our members – to lend a helping hand to your fellow veterans and their families. Won't you please consider donating for this worthy cause? Even a small amount of \$5 can make a difference – or more if you can afford to help a fellow veteran and his or her family.

Please send your generous gift, made out to Connecticut Chapter 120, to:

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.  
 Connecticut Chapter 120  
 Attention: Helping Hands for Veterans  
 P.O. Box 4136  
 Hartford, CT 06145

Chapter 120 has established a separate line item in the budget to collect donations to assist these fellow veterans and their families in need. *And don't forget, your donations are tax deductible.*

## Hartford Vet Center



25 Elm Street, Suite A  
 Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Phone: (860)-563-8800  
 Fax: (860)-563-8805

We are the people in VA who welcome home war veterans with honor by providing quality readjustment counseling in a caring manner. Vet Centers understand and appreciate Veterans' war experiences while assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their community.

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**Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.  
 Greater Hartford Chapter 120  
 P.O. Box 4136  
 Hartford, CT 06145**