

Inside This Issue

Chapter/State News

POW/MIA News

On The Hill

Veterans Affairs News

From the Service Rep's Desk:

What is the PACT Act?

Studies show VA health care is better than or equal to non-VA health care



The Journal of General Internal Medicine and the Journal of the American College of Surgeons published articles based on a systematic review of studies about VA health care, concluding VA health care is consistently as good as — or better than — non-VA health care.

The findings come from a national review of peer-reviewed studies that evaluated VA on quality, safety, access, patient experience, and comparative cost/efficiency. Of the 26 studies that looked at non-surgical care, 15 reported VA care was better than non-VA care and seven reported equal or mixed clinical quality outcomes. Of the 13 studies that looked at quality and safety in surgical care, 11 reported VA surgical care is comparable or better than non-VA care.

VA is currently delivering more care to more Veterans than ever before in the nation's history. Among the Veterans who receive their care from VA, approximately 90% trust VA to deliver their care.

"These studies demonstrate that VA care is consistently as good as or better than non-VA care, both in surgical and non-surgical settings," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough.

"VA's public servants are here for Veterans anytime, anyplace — even in the midst of a pandemic. Our goal at VA is to deliver world-class care to every Veteran, every time, and we will never settle for anything less."

This year's systematic review included studies published between 2015 and 2021. This is the third systematic review of studies comparing VA care to non-VA care, the most recent of which was published in 2017. Each of these systematic reviews has come to the same overarching conclusion: on average, VA care is better than or comparable to non-VA care in the domains of clinical quality and safety.

This review was conducted by researchers at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System in California and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Meetings

Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, June 1, 2023 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford. *State and East Hartford COVID-19 guidelines apply.*

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, June 29 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 Newsletter Editor at (860) 282-7470, or e-mail the Newsletter Editor at ctchapter120@aol.com.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: In accordance with Title 17 of U. S. C. Section 107, any copyrighted work in this newsletter is distributed under fair use without profit or payment to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for nonprofit research and educational purposes only.

CHAPTER 120 OFFICE	568-9212
Board of Directors	
Paul Barry	569-3530
Patricia Dumin	620-4131
Peter Galgano	828-1999
Ken Lewis	416-5276
Leigh Lovering	528-8312
Executive Officers	
Bob Burgess, President	646-0205
Frank Zizzamia, Vice President	569-0705
Roger Anderson, Treasurer	528-4338
Peter Lund, Secretary	644-9770
VVA Service Representatives	
John Cutler	282-7470
E-Mail: VVA.Service.Rep@att.net	
Gerald Fabry, MD	884-7271
E-Mail : gerfab@comcast.net	
Gary Waterhouse	656-0430
E-Mail : gwaterhouse@cox.net	
Membership	
Frank J. Mello, Jr.	604-3879
E-Mail: Fmello336@yahoo.com	
Women Vietnam Veterans	
Patricia Dumin	620-4131
Product Sales	
Leigh Lovering	528-8312
lhlovering@gmail.com	
Newsletter/Website	
John Cutler	282-7470
E-Mail: ctchapter120@aol.com	
Notary Public	
Gary Gazdzicki, Sr.	812-5703
Vet Centers	
Hartford (Area Code 860)	563-8800
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

Moe Collin; acting state Veteran’s Commissioner, Chapter 120 Life Member



It is with profound sadness but many wonderful memories that we share the passing of Moe Collin. Born in Frenchville, ME on March 22, 1948, he was the son of Lucien Collin and Therese (Pelletier) Collin. He spent most of his childhood making mischief in Lewiston, ME, New Britain, CT and Frog Hollow in Hartford.

At 17 he joined the Marine Corps, a decision that would profoundly change the course of his life. He had many adventures in Iceland and Cuba before being wounded in 1968 at Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, for which he received a Purple Heart. After a year in the hospital and disability retirement from the military, he was employed as an auto body mechanic and postman to support his family before making the service of disabled veterans his life’s work. Through the Disabled American Veterans and the CT Dept. of Veterans Affairs he devoted his life to making sure other veterans received the benefits they deserved. He retired from the position of Acting Commissioner of Veterans Affairs for the State of CT and was inducted into the CT Veterans Hall of Fame, an honor of which he was most proud. He continued helping vets through the DAV of CT, the Rocky Hill Vet’s Center, the Newington VA Veteran’s Clothing Room, Veterans Base Camp and The Eastern CT Veterans Community Center. He was a life member of the Disabled American Veterans and the Vietnam Veterans of America, and a member of the American Legion and Marine Corp League.

Moe enjoyed traveling to new places, especially those of natural beauty, and loved going to all types of live performances with his wife and friends. He loved his family dearly and tried to be the best father, brother, Pepere and husband possible. He lived his life with the philosophy of “every day is a gift” and said it often. He loved classic cars and listening to the Oldies, especially his beloved Beatles. He enjoyed a big bowl of chocolate anything. Most of all, he loved just sitting by the lake with a beer, chatting with his family and friends and enjoying the peace it brought to him.

He is survived by his wife of 30 years, Leila (Beman) Collin, his brother Ronald Collin and his wife Kathryn of Manchester, CT, his son Marc Collin of Vernon, CT and his partner Karen Rock, his son Bryan Collin of Colchester, CT, grandchildren Alex Collin, Renee Collin, Francis Collin, and Gabriel Collin. He leaves his sister-in-law Janet Beman, his close friend Lula Oakley and many other dear friends and relatives whom he loved and cherished.

Graveside service was held Monday, May 15, 2023 with full military honors in the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown, CT. Moe’s family would like to thank Dr. Timothy Hong, Dr. Oscar Serrano and the incredible staff of Hartford Healthcare for their wise and compassionate care. In lieu of flowers, donations to the Disabled American Veterans or St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital are gratefully appreciated.

And please, the next time you see a vet, take the time to tell them “thank you”. It means much more than you know.

Birthday Wishes

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

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Moe Armstrong</i> | <i>Dorothy Barry</i> |
| <i>Bo J. De Alba</i> | <i>Robert Dowding</i> |
| <i>Gary M. Gazdzicki Sr.</i> | <i>Joseph S. Hachey</i> |
| <i>Donald Kelly</i> | <i>Harry Kiernan</i> |
| <i>Leland E. Moulton</i> | <i>Jeff Nielsen</i> |
| <i>James M. Parent</i> | <i>Ronald Pariseau</i> |
| <i>Arthur N. Steben, Jr.</i> | <i>Robert Stepanian</i> |
| <i>George W. Washington</i> | |

Happy Birthday!

Connecticut Veterans Affairs Leadership Changes

On Wednesday May 3rd, then Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Commissioner Thomas Saadi swore in longtime DVA Director of Operations Joseph Danao as Deputy Commissioner of the DVA. The following day Commissioner Saadi was sworn in as a Judge of the Superior Court. Deputy Commissioner Danao is now DVA Acting Commissioner and will serve in that position until a new Commissioner is appointed.



DVA Acting Commissioner Danao (Left) is sworn in

Governor Lamont Nominates Retired U.S. Army Brigadier

Governor Ned Lamont announced on May 5 that he is nominating retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Ronald "Ron" P. Welch of Waterford to serve as commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs.



Brigadier General Welch

General Welch has nearly 40 years of military service. Since his retirement from the military in 2017, he has been working for a local nonprofit organization that connects Connecticut veterans, active-duty service members, National Guard, Reserve, and their families with the programs and services they need to assist with daily life

challenges, especially for those who are transitioning away from military service.

"With nearly 40 years of military experience, General Welch knows firsthand what it means to serve our nation in numerous capacities, what it's like being away from family and loved ones for an extended period while on deployment during an armed

conflict in a foreign country, and what it's like returning to civilian life and handling the challenges that come with stepping away from service," Governor Lamont said. "He has an extensive amount of experience with Connecticut's military community, spending many years in leadership roles with the Connecticut National Guard and then upon retirement choosing to continue his sense of giving by working with a local nonprofit organization that provides assistance to veterans, service members, and their families. He is immensely qualified to lead the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, and I am grateful that he has agreed to continue his many years of public service by accepting this position. I thank Tom Saadi for his many years of service with the state. His leadership has provided an invaluable service to the veterans of Connecticut, and we appreciate everything he has done to ensure veterans have the support services they have earned."

"I am humbled and honored to be selected by Governor Lamont to serve as the next Commissioner of Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs," General Welch said. "I look forward to continuing to serve Connecticut's military, veterans, and their families that have given so much for the freedoms we enjoy each day in our great state and nation."

General Welch enlisted in the U.S. Army on April 22, 1978, and served on active duty with the 2nd Ranger Battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment at Fort Lewis Washington. During his active-duty service, he attained the rank of sergeant and completed Basic Airborne School, Ranger School, Jungle Warfare Course, USMC Amphibious Recon Scout Swimmer Course, Jumpmaster Course, Primary Non-Commission Officer Course, USMC Scout Sniper Course, Emergency Medical Technician Course, Special Operations and Tactics Course, and the Pathfinder School. On May 4, 1981, he sustained serious injuries during a line of duty parachute accident. He left active service on October 2, 1982.

After leaving active service, General Welch joined the Connecticut National Guard, where he attended Officer Candidate School in 1983. On August 11, 1984, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry. He then served in numerous positions in the Connecticut National Guard's Infantry units as a rifle platoon leader, company commander, and various staff positions. He also served as an operations officer in a Combat Engineer battalion. He was the Battalion Commander of Officer Candidate School for Region 1. As member of the National Guard, he graduated from the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Master Fitness Trainer Course, Air Assault Course, Infantry Officers Advanced Courses, NBC Officer/NCO Defense Course, Rappel Master Course, Combined Arms Service Staff School, Command and General Staff College, the U.S. Army War College, Army Combat Lifesaver Course, Joint Task Force Commander Training Course, Dual Status Commander Orientation Course, Leadership in Homeland Security Course, Advanced Joint Professional Military Education, and the General and Flag Officer Homeland Security Executive Seminar.

General Welch was promoted to Colonel on October 1, 2004, and deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from 2005 to 2006 as a senior American advisor to an

Afghan National Army, Infantry Brigade located in Eastern Afghanistan, providing training, advice, and conducting combat operations. While in Afghanistan, he continued to advise units of the Connecticut National Guard in preparing them for their deployments to Afghanistan. His main advice was to learn the culture, language, and customs, while continuing professional military professional development, and pre-mobilization training, such as troop leading procedures, battle drills, convoy operations, land navigation, physical fitness, and marksmanship.

In 2008, he was appointed Chief of Staff of the Connecticut National Guard, and in 2012 he became the 85th Troop Command Commander. In 2014 he was selected as the Director of the Joint Staff and promoted to Brigadier General of the Line in 2015. He retired from military service in 2017.

Following his retirement, General Welch sought opportunities to provide support for veterans and active-duty service members and families, and he accepted a position as Vice President of Military and Family Services for Veterans Rally Point with Easterseals Capital Region and Eastern Connecticut, a nonprofit organization that provides expanded access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for those with disabilities and the veteran population.

General Welch is a graduate of Eastern Connecticut State University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1992 and a Master of Science degree in organizational management in 2007. He also earned a Master of Strategic Studies in 2011 from the U.S. Army War College.

In accepting the position of commissioner, General Welch will succeed Thomas J. Saadi, who resigned earlier this week following his nomination to become a judge of the Connecticut Superior Court.

The Office of the Governor is forwarding General Welch's nomination to the Connecticut General Assembly for its advice and consent.

CT DVA PACT Act Outreach Event

Save the Date: June 24, 2023

Location: CTDVA Rocky Hill Campus

The VBA in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs will hold an outreach event related to all things PACT Act. This will be for all Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors and advocates. More info will be forthcoming regarding the time and place as we move closer to the date.



POW/MIA News



From The San Diego Union-Tribune

Opinion: This group of military wives made the U.S. be accountable for missing and captive troops

Family members call it unbelievable when a set of remains is retrieved

decades later from the murky waters off the coast of Vietnam, or from the jungles of Laos, or from a remote sandbar on the island of Tarawa in the Pacific Ocean, or from an unidentified grave in Lithuania. And it can be hard to believe.

When a single rib bone or a single tooth is recovered, identified and returned home to the United States 50, 60, 70 or 80 years later, families are dumbfounded. But this is America, and we have a sacred promise to "Leave no man behind."

Yet that has not always been the case.

It was government policy to unilaterally declare all missing men service members dead after the cessation of hostilities until the Vietnam War, when the fate of our missing and captive men became a priority for the president and the nation. This fundamental shift in policy can be traced back to the work a handful of military wives set in motion during that war.

One of those women was Coronado resident Pat Mearns, wife of Air Force Maj. Art Mearns, a pilot who was shot down over the skies of North Vietnam on Veterans Day 1966. He was never heard from again. Pat joined forces with a small group of military wives who did what few women in that era could. Bucking tradition, they became accidental activists during one of the most tumultuous times in American history.

They traveled around the world and to meet with world leaders. They pounded the pavement and their fists in the halls of Congress and at the United Nations, the State Department, the Pentagon and the Oval Office. They did what military family members had never before done: They became the face of international diplomacy. Consequently, their husbands became what prisoners of war had never before been: strategic pawns.

When our nation's prisoners of war were released from North Vietnam 50 years ago, then-President Richard Nixon appeared on live television and smiled triumphantly as he announced: "For the first time in 12 years, no American military forces are in Vietnam. All of our American POWs are on their way home."

This was not a coincidence. The safe return of these men had become a central negotiating point at the Paris Peace Talks, which ended the Vietnam War after more than a decade of American involvement in the conflict. A Harris poll taken in June 1972 had found that 93 percent of Americans thought the nation should stay in Vietnam until all the men were released. President Nixon assured the American people that year that he

agreed: “Can [the president] withdraw all of our forces as long as the enemy holds one American as a prisoner of war? The answer is no.”

The fate of these 591 men, a tiny fraction of the more than 58,000 service members who lost their lives and the 2.7 million Americans who served in the Vietnam War, became a national obsession. More than 5 million iconic POW and MIA bracelets were worn by Americans and the stark black and white POW-MIA flag became ubiquitous — all to show national solidarity and support for these men, the longest-held group of POWs in our nation’s history.

American prisoners of war now have enormous value to those who hold them. When there has been just one American captive, like Bowe Bergdahl, or Jessica Lynch, or Scott O’Grady, or Brittney Griner, the United States government has dispatched special forces for daring rescues, or traded terrorists or an arms dealer in exchange for release. The value we place on just one captive is a quintessentially American one.

It was no accident that the United States ended its longest conflict in 2021, in Afghanistan, without a single POW or MIA. Our nation can still tolerate those killed in action, but not POWs or MIAs. But that has not always been true. Every other war in our nation’s history has produced thousands of unrecovered missing men: more than 72,000 from World War II and more than 7,500 from the Korean War. Only since the Vietnam War have we truly upheld the promise to “Leave no man behind” — made to a handful of military spouses more than 50 years ago.

Taylor Baldwin Kiland, the author of this opinion, is also the co-author of “Unwavering: The Wives Who Fought to Ensure No Man is Left Behind.” She lives in Coronado.

On The Hill



At Budget Hearing, Tester Rings Alarm on Defaulting on Veterans

Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester held a hearing on May 17 with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to discuss how the agency’s proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2024 budget aims to better serve veterans and their families—including millions of newly eligible toxic-exposed veterans receiving critical support under the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act.

In his opening remarks, Tester expressed concerns with recent budget proposals floated by the U.S. House of Representatives, and implored Congress to avoid a default that would delay the

delivery of critical benefits for more than seven million veterans and their families.

VA Secretary McDonough highlighted in his written testimony that these cuts would come at a time of unprecedented demand at VA.

“Over the last two years, [VA has] delivered more care and more benefits to more Veterans than at any other time in our Nation’s history.”

McDonough further highlighted that the Veterans Benefits Administration set a new record in the last fiscal year— completing more than 1.7 million disability compensation and pension claims, and over that same period, the Veterans Health Administration provided more than 115 million appointments for veterans across the country. He underscored that reducing funding for VA would directly result in fewer outpatient appointments for veterans and fewer claims processors at the Veterans Benefits Administration.

In the second panel, the Committee also heard from leaders from Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars—authors of this year’s Independent Budget—who weighed in on the agency’s resourcing needs. The VSOs voiced their concerns with the House debt ceiling plan and its potential harm for veterans, and also stressed the importance of bolstering funding for VA infrastructure and the need for swift passage of the Elizabeth Dole Veterans Programs Improvement Act of 2023.

The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act is comprehensive legislation championed by Senator Tester to deliver all generations of toxic-exposed veterans their earned health care and benefits from the VA for the first time in the nation’s history. Among its many priorities, this legislation expands health care for Post-9/11 combat veterans, creates a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure, expands VA’s list of service presumptions, and improves resources to support VA’s claims processing.

As of May 16th, VA has received more than 546,000 PACT Act claims—including more than 2,200 from Montana veterans. Nearly 252,000 claims have been completed, with a nearly 80 percent approval rate.

NOTICE

Notifying Chapter 120 of your mailing address and e-mail address changes is very important if you wish to continue receiving the Chapter newsletter. Over the past few months, several members’ newsletters have been returned to us as undeliverable. This means that we will not mail/e-mail future newsletters until a correct address is received.

Please notify the Newsletter Editor of any change of mailing address or e-mail address at ctchapter120@aol.com or leave a voicemail message at 860-282-7470



As COVID-19 emergency money ends, VA prepares for funding reduction

The official end of the national COVID-19 health emergency Thursday means the end of a slew

of programs that benefit veterans, ranging from cash assistance to stave off homelessness to remote doctor visits.

The cutbacks come as the federal Public Health Emergency over COVID-19 declared in March 2020, comes to an end. With it will go the authorization and funding for about a dozen stop-gap programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“VA has been preparing for this moment for months, working to make this transition as seamless as possible for veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors,” the VA said in a statement on the cutbacks. “VA is also working with our partners in the administration and in Congress to extend or reinstate many of these authorities when possible.”

The cuts include some programs aimed at reducing veteran homelessness, which has dropped during the pandemic by 11%.

According to annual counts made by the VA in conjunction with other federal agencies, there were 33,136 veterans “experiencing homelessness” on a single night in January 2022 — a drop of more than 4,000 from the same study in January 2020.

In a release, the VA called the reduction the “biggest drop in more than five years.”

Veteran homelessness has been falling for over a decade, with the VA reporting a 55% drop since 2010.

Since March 2020, the VA has used emergency powers and funding to expand access to cash and services under the Supportive Housing Program, a joint program between the VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD.

The programs aimed at reducing homelessness cut or pared back on Thursday include:

- Direct payments as rental assistance or per diem payments, along with provisions of food, shelter, clothing, blankets, and hygiene through local partners.
- Transportation services to appointments with service providers, housing searches, and food.
- Smartphones, tablets, and other electronic equipment and service plans needed to arrange benefits and look for work.

President Donald Trump declared a Public Health Emergency in March 2020 as COVID cases exploded nationally. The

declaration freed agencies of legal red tape to enact emergency policies and led to trillions of dollars of funding across the federal government.

The medical rules rolled back Thursday May 11 include:

- Remote video for required visits and check-in under the Veteran Family Caregivers program (the required visits must now be in person).
- The use of non-HIPPA-approved video services for telehealth (telehealth visits remain available to VA healthcare patients, but must now go through the VA’s approved telehealth portal).
- The VA will no longer pay for Covid vaccinations for spouses or caregivers not enrolled in VA healthcare.

One policy that will remain is allowing VA clinicians to prescribe controlled medications through a telehealth examination without an initial in-person exam. Though the rule allowing that flexibility expires May 11, the DEA announced a temporary rule that will allow VA clinicians to continue to prescribe controlled medications remotely through at least November 2024.

VA renews EHR contract, sets higher penalties for performance metrics missed by vendor



The Department of Veterans Affairs is renewing its multibillion-dollar contract for a new Electronic Health Record, with new terms meant to hold the vendor accountable for persistent outages.

The VA announced Tuesday May 16 that it reached an agreement on a renegotiated contract with EHR contractor Oracle-Cerner.

Tuesday marked the deadline for VA and Oracle-Cerner to renew the five-year base period contract signed in 2018.

The VA announced last month it is indefinitely putting all future deployments of the Oracle-Cerner EHR on hold, until it addresses problems at the five VA sites already using the system.

The VA has obligated about \$9.4 billion on the EHR modernization program since fiscal 2018.

The renegotiated contract includes larger fines Oracle Cerner will need to pay VA, if the EHR doesn't meet performance targets.

Instead of renewing EHR contract for another five years, as the original contract outlined, the VA renegotiated with Oracle-Cerner to extend the contract for five one-year terms.

Neil Evans, acting program executive director of VA's EHR Modernization Integration Office, said that change gives VA the opportunity "to review our progress and renegotiate again in a year if need be."

"Ultimately, we believe that this new contract gives VA the tools we need to hold Oracle Cerner accountable to deliver an EHR that will meaningfully improve Veterans' health outcomes and benefits," Evans said. "The system has not delivered for Veterans or VA clinicians to date, but we are stopping at nothing to get this right."

The new contract includes 28 performance metrics for Oracle-Cerner to meet or exceed, and includes a higher standard for reliability and uptime.

Those standards include minimizing outages, or periods when the EHR completely crashes — as well as moments when one EHR component isn't working or when the EHR is operating slowly.

The VA experienced a system wide outage of the Oracle-Cerner EHR for 224 minutes on April 25. The outage also impacted the Defense Department and Coast Guard, which are much further ahead with the deployment of the system.

The Oracle-Cerner EHR also experienced a five-hour outage across the VA, DoD and Coast Guard on April 17. The outage stemmed from a significant upgrade added to the EHR over the weekend, meant to improve database capability and failover capability.

Oracle-Cerner so far has refunded VA about \$325,000 of the \$4.4 billion paid through the contract so far. Those payments are meant to compensate VA for EHR system crashes.

If the new contract terms had been in place since the original contract was signed in 2018, the VA said it would have recovered 30 times as much money back from Oracle-Cerner for EHR system outages.

Mike Sicilia, executive vice president of Oracle Global Industries said the new agreement "reflects Oracle's commitment to veterans' health care as well as complete confidence in our technology and our partnership with the VA to deliver an EHR that far exceeds the expectations of users."

The new contract also set a higher bar for the vendor to resolve help tickets and VA clinician requests with the system.

The VA said the new contract additionally includes language to ensure the VA can quickly access patient health records from private-sector hospitals, when needed.

The VA said the new contract takes steps to ensure the new EHR is interoperable with its website, mobile app and other critical applications related to veteran health care.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough told House appropriators in March that the Oracle-Cerner EHR rollout to date has been "no question a disservice" to veterans.

"Obviously, inherent in the idea that there's a five-year review is that you're not just reviewing it to continue it," McDonough told members of the House Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on military construction, VA and related agencies on March 29, when asked about the possibility of the agency switching vendors. "We'd be in a position to sustain what we have, and then see if there's another technology."

But House and Senate lawmakers say a renegotiated contract is only the start of what the VA needs to do to get the troubled Oracle-Cerner EHR contract back on track.

Senate VA Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-Mont.) said the committee will "keep holding VA and Oracle Cerner's feet to the fire in implementing these changes," and called on Congress to pass his bill setting a higher bar for the VA to resume its EHR rollout.

"I've said from day one that the EHRM system has to deliver for veterans, VA medical professionals and the American taxpayer — and this new contract is a step in that direction," Tester said. "But this is just the start of what's needed to get this program working in a way deserving of our veterans and taxpayers."

Top Democrats and Republicans on the House VA Committee are backing Tester's EHR Program RESET Act.

The bill would prevent the VA from proceeding with EHR go-lives at additional facilities, until performance data from the five current sites already using the system shows improvement.

House VA Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-Ill.) and Technology Modernization Subcommittee Chairman Matt Rosendale (R-Mont.) said their biggest questions about how a new contract will change VA's EHR rollout "remain unanswered."

"We need to see how the division of labor between Oracle, VA and other companies is going to change and translate into better outcomes for veterans and savings for taxpayers," Bost and Rosendale said. "This shorter-term contract is an encouraging first step, but veterans and taxpayers need more than a wink and a nod that the project will improve."

From the Service Rep's Desk



What is the PACT Act?

The Sgt. First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act), was passed on August 10, 2022. The PACT Act expands VA healthcare and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, toxic

exposure, toxic exposure risk activity, and other toxic substances.

Radiation Exposure

Presumptive Locations & Dates

Veterans who were called to respond to the clean-up and response missions below may be eligible for radiation exposure presumptives under the PACT Act:

Clean-up of Enewetak Atoll
Jan. 1, 1977 - Dec. 31, 1980

Clean-up of the Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons off the coast of Palomares, Spain
Jan. 17, 1966 - Mar. 31, 1967

Response to the fire on board an Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons near Thule Air Force Base in Greenland
Jan. 21, 1968 - Sep. 25, 1968

Agent Orange (AO) Presumptives:

New Locations & Conditions

AO exposure is now presumed for service during the Vietnam era in the following places:

THAILAND, at any US or Royal Thai Air base, regardless of MOS or location on the base
Jan. 9, 1962 - Jun. 30, 1976

LAOS
Dec. 1, 1965 – Sep. 30, 1969

CAMBODIA, at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province
Apr. 16 – 30, 1969

GUAM or AMERICAN SAMOA, or their territorial waters
Jan. 9, 1962 – Jul. 31, 1980

JOHNSTON ATOLL, or aboard a ship that called there
Jan. 1, 1972 – Sep. 30, 1977

The new AO presumptive conditions are:

Hypertension (high blood pressure)
Monoclonal Gammopathy of Undetermined Significance (MGUS)

The earliest effective date for these conditions is Aug. 10, 2022, if a veteran files before Aug. 10, 2023. Otherwise, it is the date VA received the claim.

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 July/August 2023 newsletter is 28 July. Due to space availability, the editor reserves the right to include or not include photos for a given month.

This newsletter printed by



**97B Pierson Lane
Windsor, CT
print@printhubct.com
www.printhubct.com
860-580-7907**

Hartford Vet Center



25 Elm Street, Suite A
Rocky Hill, CT 06067

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



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