

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR APRIL 2021



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Notes of Interest;

Did you know last year, two veterans groups published a white paper citing research to support that "as likely as not," veterans who served on Guam from 1962 to 1975 met the legal standard for exposure to Agent Orange and other "dioxin-containing herbicides." Now, the groups National Veterans Legal Services Program and Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law have released updated research expanding that timeline to include veterans who served on Guam from 1958 to 1980.

Did you know veterans facing economic hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic will soon see extended debt relief options from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)? By extending debt relief through September 30, 2021, VA reaffirms its commitment to helping veterans getting through these hard times.

Did you know veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan have two to four times the incidence of migraine headaches as compared to the general population? Many of these veterans have experienced some level of traumatic brain injury, including concussions, during their tours. The National Headache Foundation has been committed to providing valuable information and resources to the men and women who have served our country.

Anticipating a surge in veterans seeking medical care after the pandemic ends, Department of Veterans Affairs officials said Wednesday that \$17 billion marked for the VA in the Biden administration's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill is needed so that it can continue providing all eligible veterans treatment. Acting VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Richard Stone said the department expects a "bow wave" of veterans seeking care that was delayed or deferred during the pandemic, and anticipates as many as 300,000 additional veterans enrolling in VA care, having lost their health insurance as a result of pandemic unemployment. Stone said the VA is "down by 12,000 surgeries a month" -- such as knee replacements and other types of non-emergency treatment -- that were not done elsewhere, and it expects a surge in appointments in late 2021 and early 2022.

Did you know U.S. Representative Mike Bost (Illinois-12), the Ranking Member on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee introduced the Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act? This new Bill would ensure that no veteran loses their Second Amendment right to bear arms simply because VA appoints someone to help them manage their VA benefits.

All veterans who were exposed to mustard gas and lewisite experimentations during World War II may finally be able to claim Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and compensation for injuries or disabilities caused by exposure. A provision in the GI Bill expansion revamped VA policy regarding benefits awarded for mustard gas exposure. Mustard gas experiments were conducted on U.S. servicemen and remained classified until 1975. The military lifted an oath of secrecy for servicemen in the 1990s.

A section of the fiscal 2021 national defense bill passed by Congress on Jan. 1 requires the VA to expedite disability claims and benefits for Vietnam veterans suffering from one or more of the three illnesses. VA officials said earlier this year that it may take up to two years for new rules to be implemented that would

provide veterans access to these benefits. McDonough said, however, that lawmakers have pressed him on the issue. "There is a strong bipartisan coalition and bipartisan ethos in Congress on VA, so we're going to continue to be under the gun on that," he said. A panel of researchers with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine determined in 2016 that there was evidence demonstrating that bladder cancer and hypothyroidism are linked to exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used during the Vietnam War. They added that Parkinson's-like symptoms should be included on the list, which already contains Parkinson's disease.

Not many veterans, Veterans Service Officers (VSO) or veteran agents know about the Dental Lifeline Network. The Dental Lifeline Network is a nonprofit organization that operates in all 50 states. With the help of donated dental services, the mission of this nonprofit is to help provide free dental services to those who can't afford it *and* have a disability, or are over the age of 65, or are medically fragile. If you are in need of free dental service contact the Dental Lifeline Network at 303-534-5360.

Did you know the Green Alert Act, a new bipartisan Bill, will help find missing veterans? The Bill would help states implement a "Green Alert" system to locate veterans when they go missing so that they can receive appropriate care, similar to the Silver Alert system for older Americans and AMBER Alert system for children.

The House recently passed a \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill that includes a long-sought provision to disincentivize for-profit schools from targeting GI Bill recipients with deceptive marketing or outright scams. The provision closes the so-called 90/10 loophole. Currently, for-profit schools must collect at least 10% of their revenue from non-federal sources. The 90/10 rule doesn't count the GI Bill as federal revenue, despite it being earned on duty and paid out by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This gives for-profit colleges an incentive to recruit veterans to stay in business, veterans advocates have argued.



Please Remember..... That all gave some, *but many gave all!*