

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 27 Issue 01

Veteran's News that needs to be Read **SPRING 2017**



Inside this issue:

President's Message	3
Nat'l Pres. Rowan	4
Secretary's Report	5
Gov't Affairs	5
Central District Rep	8
Southern District Rep	11

Thank you - The Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 becomes law

VVA National President and the Board of Directors would like to thank you for all of your grassroots advocacy support over the past year in helping the organization in getting The Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 become law.

On December 16, 2016, the President of the United States provides VVA with a tremendous victory when he signed into law H.R. 6416, the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016.

The new law in Subtitle C-Toxic Exposure, includes S.901 the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 an issue that VVA has been working on for the past eight years. Go to Congress.gov and type in H.R. 6416 to view the new law.

The bill would not have passed into law without our grassroots support and VVA's Government Affairs Director Rick Weidman and his dedicated staff.

VVA looks forward to working with you in the upcoming 115th Congress on legislative issues that will enhance the

IN MEMORIAM

May Their Souls Rest in Peace



John LaManna
2016

Conrad 'Connie' Steers
08/26/1949—12/27/2016

Anthony A. DeVincenzo
1939 - 2017

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

VVA-NYSC Meeting Dates 2017

January 21 April 22

June 17 September 16

On-Line INTERCHANGE is the Bi-monthly publication of the VVA-NYSC. Comments and contributions are encouraged and can be sent to:

VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of this organization. Individuals with different viewpoints and opinions are invited to submit them to the Chapter by the **deadline** of the **Third Friday of each month**. Editor reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and reject any libelous or obscene material.

NEWSPAPER STAFF

EDITOR: Francisco Muñiz III

E-MAIL: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM



VVA-NYSC ON-LINE INTERCHANGE EMAIL ADDRESS: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM Phone: 516.712.4914

OFFICERS	NAME	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
President	Ned D. Foote	518.338.8147	Nedvva@roadrunner.com
I st Vice President	Grant T. Coates		gcoates@stny.rr.com
Secretary	Francisco Muñiz III	516.712.4914	secretary@nyvietnamvets.org
Treasurer	Nicholas DeLeo		ndeleo52@yahoo.com

DISTRICT DIRECTORS	NAME	EMAIL ADDRESS
CENTRAL DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Nicholas Valenti	npvalent64@yahoo.com
EASTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Sam Hall	Sammyjh49@yahoo.com
SOUTHERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Joe Ingino	biggie77@verizon.net
WESTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Mike Walker	mw12345@verizon.net

Liaisons	NAME	E-MAIL
Region II Director	Ted Wilkinson	Yankeeted@aol.com
Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA)	Kathleen Penfield	Kathysitka@yahoo.com
VA Volunteer Services (VAVS)	Cherie Steers	
Legislative Director	Bing Markee	bmarkee@nyvietnamvets.org
Sergeant of Arms	Bob Joyce	JBobF4/44@aol.com

SERVICE OFFICER PROGRAM	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Dolores Garcia—Chief SO		Dolores.Garcia1@va.gov

President's Report

Ned D. Foote

I would like to start this message by saying we lost another good guy. Connie Steers. I met Connie back in 1983 at our first National Convention. Over the years he has been a mainstay in VVA. Connie and I along with Jerry Klein are the last 5 who have been to every National Convention. Now there is 4.

We had our January meeting and when I came in I did not see Connie. As our meeting started I looked over to where he sits and chair was empty. The meeting now starts and when I get to reading of the minutes I waited for Connie to make the motion to accept as written but did not hear his voice. I will miss him.

Again our January meeting once again proved that January is our best attended meetings. Although no National Officer was there (perhaps first time) we moved on. President Rowan was hob knobbing with the Trumps at the inauguration and Ted could not make it. I thought we would get the meeting over too quick.

So I called on Reverend Lewis to give us an update on the Panels that will be addressing VVA's future. I had forgotten he is a Reverend and to give him the floor I soon realized we would not get the meeting over too soon.

If you are not familiar of what I just said on panels here is short version. We know we are getting old and our organization will not last forever we need to make some kind of plan on where we are going. Reverend Lewis was asked by National to give us some direction as he has experience on this type of project from the military. He came to National BOD and presented an outline on what we could do. That is where the panel idea came in to play. Panel A would work on finding the way to close the organization down as many say we are the last man organization. Panel B will be tasked as to maybe turning over to another organization that shares our values and goals or maybe helping to start a new organization. Both panels will have 9 members, 2 alternates and two National Officers on each. President Rowan has named our own Francisco Muñiz III to chair panel B. Our Nick DeLeo will serve on panel A.

As of now there are no answers only questions. We will get reports when progress is made and can be another year before that is done. Bottom line: National Officers or BOD or State Presidents nor Chapter President can make the decision as to where we will go. Only the delegates at the National Convention can approve our demise. So if you care you will start preparing to attend a Convention (August in New Orleans is up next) and have your voice be heard or let whatever happens happen.

We are looking at legislative ideas for NY but do not see many things we are in the need of. I think we have done a tremendous job in NY on Veteran bills but if you have ideas of what we still need let us know. We will be working on the Veteran Courts bills that might be introduced.

Our next meeting in April we will bring back the folks from Stoney Point Veterans Home to speak on State Cemeteries. Take it from Connie. We need to be ready and have our affairs in order.

(Cont. from pg. 5)

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

VA to provide disability benefits for related diseases

“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.

his 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

Testimony *Of* Legislative Priorities & Policy Initiatives

Presented by

John Rowan National President

Before the

House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees

March 9, 2017

Good morning Chairman Isakson and Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Senator Tester, Ranking Member Walz, and members of these two most distinguished committees. I am pleased to appear before you today to present the legislative agenda and policy initiatives of Vietnam Veterans of America on behalf of our members and our families for the 115th Congress. As you know, although VVA is the only Vietnam veterans service organization chartered by Congress, we advocate on behalf of veterans of all eras, those who served before us and those who have served most recently in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

THE FULLEST POSSIBLE ACCOUNTING of America's POW/MIAs has long been VVA's top priority. On May 7, 1975, the end of the Vietnam era, the Department of Defense listed 2,636 Americans as missing in Southeast Asia. VVA has continued to press for answers regarding the 1,600 Americans still listed as killed in action, body not recovered, in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. We will assist however we can the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) to ensure they receive the necessary funding to investigate potential crash and burial sites. And we will continue our Veterans Initiative, which has encouraged continued cooperation by Vietnamese authorities with DOD search teams.

As you know, for several years VVA's top legislative goal was enacting a statute that would foster the peer-reviewed research necessary to determine if a parent's exposure to toxic agents might be responsible for certain birth defects, cancers, and learning disabilities that have afflicted far too many of the progeny of warriors.

In one of the final acts of the 114th Congress passed a “minibus” that incorporated much of the focus of S. 901 and

(Cont. on pg.)

Secretary's Report

Francisco Muñiz III

Thanks for all of your support. I need to have your membership send their E-mail address to President Ned Foote at NEDVVA@ROADRUNNER.COM so that he can input their address into the system so that they can receive this fantastic INTERCHANGE newspaper.

Please forward your reports for publication to; VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM

Copy and distribute VVA's **Legislative Priorities & Policy Initiatives** listed in this publication.

Government Affairs

Joe Ingino—Chair

The House Committee on Veterans Affairs, held hearing regarding the VA Choice Program <https://veterans.house.gov/hearings/shaping-future-consolidating-and-improving-va-community-care>

VVA Applauds President-elect Trump: Dr. Shulkin is a Terrific Choice as Next VA Secretary**VVA Urges President to Make Exception for Iraqi and Afghan Interpreters**

"We're disturbed to hear that Iraqi and Afghan interpreters who worked alongside our troops through our nation's longest wars are being prevented from entering the United States," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. "As a generation, Vietnam veterans have lived with decades of regret from having seen this happen before. We cannot remain silent and allow history to repeat itself."

VVA Applauds Secretary Shulkin for Announcing Intentions to Provide Care to Veterans with Bad-Paper Discharges

"Secretary Shulkin announced last night that the Department of Veterans Affairs is finally going to start helping our nation's most vulnerable veterans," said John Rowan, National President and CEO of Vietnam Veterans of America. "For far too long the VA had forgotten the intent of the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, which was to make sure that every veteran who set foot in combat was provided the care that they needed to recover from war. With new leadership, Secretary Shulkin is righting the ship, and helping the Department fulfil its sacred promise."

Last year, VVA was joined by nearly fifty organizations dedicated to serving the military, veterans and their families in promoting the "Fairness for Veterans Movement." The Fairness for Veterans Act, which ensures that veterans who have experienced PTSD, TBI or MST have a more fair process in appealing unfair discharges, was passed as part of last year's massive Defense Bill. Despite the passage of the bill, the discharge appeal process remains a long and stressful process, and without access to VA care, veterans face extreme difficulty building evidence to support their claims.

"President Donald Trump selected a doctor to be the leader at VA, and Secretary Shulkin takes the hipocratic oath seriously," Rowan continued. "Providing mental healthcare is the most urgent step in helping veterans who were unfairly issued bad-paper discharges -- but questions remain about if the VA will treat physical injuries and illnesses, and chronic pain, which can drastically impact mental health. Furthermore, we're still hoping for our Commander-in-Chief to pardon veterans with PTSD who were denied the right to due process."

(Cont. on pg. 6)

(Cont. From pg. 4)

and H.R. 1769, the Toxic Exposure Research Act. This legislation will lay the groundwork for the research we need on the health of our children and grandchildren whom we believe have been impacted by exposures during our military service. This legislation will ensure that our newer veterans will not have to wait 50 years for answers.

Let me note now VVA's top priorities for the next two years.

The Legacy of Toxic Exposures

Vietnam veterans' experience with exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange is hardly atypical. During the first Gulf war in 1991, 110,000 troops were exposed to fallout from a toxic plume after the Khamisiyah ammo dump was blown. Over the next several years, thousands of these men and women reported a variety of ills now known collectively as "Gulf War Illness." In the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, thousands more veterans have come down with respiratory and dermatological ills from exposure to the foul-smelling burn pits, and harmful side effects from the anti-malarial mefloquine and other drugs.

We now are focusing on finding champions from both sides of the aisle in both houses of Congress to introduce, and pass, what we are calling the **Toxic Wounds Registries Act of 2017**. It would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a master registry to incorporate registries for:

- Exposure to Agent Orange during and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War;
- Exposure to toxins relating to deployment during the 1990 Persian Gulf War;
- Exposure to toxins from a deployment during Operations Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn, and Enduring Freedom, and the Global War on Terror;
- Exposure to toxins during a deployment to Bosnia, Somalia, or the Philippines; and
- Exposure to toxins while stationed at a military installation contaminated by toxic substances overseas and here in CONUS.

This legislation would authorize the VA Secretary to enter into an agreement with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to review published scientific information and studies, and make recommendations for future research, on **the health effects of the toxic exposures** covered in those registries; and it would require those reviews to inform the Secretary's selection of research to be conducted or funded by the VA.

It also would establish a **presumption of service connection** for the purpose of veterans' disability and survivor benefits, for an illness that the Secretary determines warrants such presumption because of a positive association with exposure to a toxic substance covered in the master registry; and becomes manifest, within a time period determined by the Secretary, in a veteran who experienced such exposure while serving in the Armed Forces.

It is our intent to identify "champions" from both parties to introduce this legislation in both houses of Congress, and to enlist a coalition of VSOs and MSOs to work in concert, buttressed by a coordinated grassroots campaign, to enact this legislation into black-letter law.

Extending and Expanding the Relationship with the NAM

The Agent Orange Act of 1991 mandated that the Department of Veterans Affairs engage the National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine) of the also renamed National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to convene panels of experts every two years to review the scientific literature, hold public hearings, produce their findings on health conditions that may have an association with exposure to dioxin, and publish these findings in biennial editions of *Veterans and Agent Orange*. Currently, there is one final *Veterans and Agent Orange* update.

But there is a real need for you in Congress to not only authorize the funding so that the update can be continued for at least another decade, but also to expand its scope to embrace **the potential effects of toxic exposures on veterans of all eras**, including service in places known for the presence of toxic substances – places like Fort McClellan, Arkansas, Fort Detrick, Maryland, and the Marine air base at El Toro, California.

(Cont. on pg. 7)

(Cont. from pg. 6)

Fixing the VA

“We are dealing with veterans, not procedures; with their problems, not ours.”

General Omar N. Bradley, Administrator of Veterans Affairs, 1946

The so-called wait-time scandal of 2014 has had lasting repercussions. The VA has become fodder for congressional criticism, often for cause. Yet under then VA Secretary Bob McDonald and with the skillful guidance of Under Secretary for Health Dr. David Shulkin, now the SecVA, the Veterans Health Administration has made major strides **to integrate community care into the VA healthcare system**, a system which 92% of its users acknowledge the service they receive to be good to excellent.

The major reason behind the business-as-usual scandal was not poor care or uncaring VA employees or a wasteful bureaucracy but rather a scandalous shortage of qualified health care professionals able and willing to work for the VA.

Congress enacted the Choice Act in the autumn of 2014, initiating a fevered effort by VA leadership to comply with its goals, many of them, quite frankly, unrealistic. The Choice Act also created a Commission on Care, which last July came out with 18 major recommendations. Among its conclusions was that **the VA's health operations should *not* be privatized** but should integrate more community care to provide what the VA can't in a local area; and that veterans should not have unfettered choice in selecting clinicians. The commission did recommend that veterans ought to be able to choose a primary care clinician from the community, a recommendation that we do not endorse because it distorts **the central and necessary role the VA plays in coordinating care and prescription medications** for the more than six million veterans who receive much if not most of their health care at VA facilities.

There are, of course, certain areas which VVA believes require significant improvement. Among them are: **Oversight and Accountability**

The formula for estimating the funding to be needed in future years by the VA healthcare system has been incorrect since it was initially implemented in 2003. A civilian formula, it failed to take into account that veterans have more things wrong with them as they age than their civilian counterparts. It failed to estimate the increasingly complex needs of combat-wounded warriors. It failed to take into account the greater medical and mental health needs of the average VA patient. It did not anticipate dramatically increased enrollment. The bottom line: the VHA does not have enough clinicians to accommodate the veterans who use its facilities.

Adequate funding is not the overwhelming issue in shrinking the backlog of claims and appeals encountered by long-suffering veterans through the beleaguered Veterans Benefits Administration. VVA will continue to work with the VBA to introduce and **integrate pilot IT projects** that have shown promise in streamlining the compensation and pension system, including the bloat of claims currently before the Board of Veterans Appeals. There also must be: competency-based testing of service representatives and VA adjudicators; “challenge training” for *all* staff; expansion of the “lane” model to reduce the scandalous number of overpayment cases.

On a parallel track, there needs to be real accountability in the management of the VHA. One key to achieving this is to **overhaul the system of bonuses** for the Senior Executive Service. Bonuses should reward only those who have done stellar work *over and above* their normal responsibilities, and those who *innovate and improve* the systems and projects under their auspices. Conversely, any manager or supervisor who lies to a veteran, to their supervisor, or to a Member of Congress should be dismissed for cause.

(Cont. on pg. 9)

Central District Report

Nick Valenti

VVA Chapters #85, #103, #205, #296, #377, #480, #704, #708, #803, #827, #896, #944

At the most recent National Board of Directors meeting our New York State President **Ned Foote** was presented with the VVA's highest award, **VVA Commendation Medal**. In Ned's words "very humbling" and true to his character it is back to business reminding us that on Saturday, **January 21, 2017** we will be having our **Annual Remembrance** where we honor all our members who passed away. We began this program as a way of remembering all the men and women who stood with us and worked with us to make us who and what we are. The program has evolved into a way of bringing to light not only our mortality but also deepest respect for one another in a brotherhood that very few people would understand. If you haven't let Francisco know those members of your Chapter who have passed away in the past year and want their name(s) included in the **Annual Remembrance** simply pass it on to me and I will submit them on behalf of your Chapter.

The ten Chapters I have the privilege of representing in Central District is buzzing with activity. We can start with **Incarcerated Veterans Chapter #205 Auburn Correctional** and their annual **Christmas Giveaway Program**. Five local community food pantries benefited with donations of cash and crocheted clothing. This year additional hand-made winter items were donated to a local hospital and an American Heart Association promotion will be the beneficiary of hand-made items in a community awareness February 2017 program.

Another **Chapter #704 (Auburn)** had a very successful **annual dinner** involving the American Legion Post #1776, Quilters of the Finger Lakes, the Auburn WalMart store and area elected officials. Currently they are preparing for their **annual poppy drive**. The poppies are made by Chapter members with the help of our Associates. To get through the Memorial Day weekend they will need approximately 5,000 poppies. Each poppy carries the name of one of the 27 Cayuga County service men killed in Vietnam. They have also teamed up with a local School District (Port Byron Central) to bring the Wall That Heal to Cayuga County. The dates the **Wall That Heals** will be on display are **June 1st through June 4th**.

In this quarterly report I have the pleasure to inform everyone on the activities of **Chapter #944** out of Utica, New York. Their community involvement includes the formation of a **rifle squad** for their color guard, and the formation of a Central New York **Cemetery Committee** whose **mission statement** is - to provide all United States Military Veterans of Central New York a final resting place, befitting their sacrifice to their country, their separation from their families and continued service to their community upon their return from duty. The honor to rest in this historical setting will provide our veterans and their families of Central New York a personal connection of birth of our country and the men and women that continue to define it. In the month of December #944 placed wreaths on Veterans graves at Rome Cemetery and assisted a needy Veterans family donating food purchased from the local WalMart store. Future community activities include: annual Washington, DC trip; and an annual Patriot Run/Walk event.

Just a reminder to everyone that if you pass on what your Chapter is doing I would be willing to pass it on to the best of my ability.

I would like to give a shout out to all Central New York Chapters asking if **each Chapter** would please take the time to **update their email and telephone listings**. This would make my job so much easier and would ensure good communications. Also, it is my intent to continue to visit each Chapter again. To date I have revisited four of the ten in the District. I will wait for better weather but really want to see everyone again.

(Cont. from pg. 7)

Organizational Capacity for Substance Abuse Treatment

VVA remains concerned that substance abuse disorders among our nation's veterans are not being adequately addressed. The relatively high rate of drug and alcohol abuse among veterans (much of which is self-medication to deal with untreated PTSD and TBI) is causing significant suffering for veterans and their families.

Hence, we urge Congress to direct the SecVA to provide quarterly reports, beginning with a baseline report by each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) and each VA Medical Center (VAMC), on the number and type of mental health clinicians, especially those who treat veterans for PTSD and substance abuse.

We also urge that you direct the Secretary to **update the VHA Strategic Plan for Mental Health Services**. At minimum, quarterly reports should be required, to include the ranking of networks on their substance abuse treatment capacity along with plans developed by the lowest quartile to bring their operation up to the national average; the locations of VA facilities that provide five or more days of inpatient/residential detoxification services; and the locations of VA healthcare facilities without specialized substance use disorder providers on staff, with a statement of intention by each such facility director of plans to employ such providers or take other steps to provide this care.

The VHA must continue to **restore and enhance capacity to deal with mental health disorders**, particularly with PTSD and the often attendant co-morbidity of substance abuse. Substance abuse treatment needs to be expanded and become more reliant on evidence-based medicine and practices. New and current treatment modalities that have shown promise in restoring veterans of working age so that they can obtain and sustain meaningful employment at a living wage should be initiated.

National Center for PTSD

Additional resources must be directed to the National Center for PTSD to add to their organizational capacity. The Center leads the country in research focused **solely** on war-induced PTSD and related mental health illnesses and provides a wealth of much-needed on-line resources for not only mental health professionals, but for affected families and the general public.

Separate Funding Line for the Vet Centers

Funding for the Vet Centers - the Readjustment Counseling Service - one of the most successful and cost-efficient of VA programs, should be directed to develop or augment permanent staff. These dollars should be used to facilitate better coordination with the PTSD teams and substance use disorder programs at VAMCs and community-based outreach clinics (CBOCs).

The Secretary should be required to work more closely with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, municipalities and the states to provide counseling to the families of those returning from combat deployments by utilizing community mental health centers.

Resources for Blind and Low Vision Veterans

With the number of blind and very low vision veterans from the nation's latest wars in dire need of services, VVA recommends that Congress explicitly direct funding to increase staffing and programming at the VA's Blind and Visually Impaired Service Centers, and to designate at least one additional center.

We also believe that Congress must direct the Secretary to implement an employment and independent living project modeled on the highly successful

Project Amer-I-Can, which placed blind and visually impaired veterans into work and other situations that resulted in them becoming more autonomous and independent.

(Cont. on pg. 10)

(Cont. from pg. 9)

Medical and Prosthetic Research

For this research, VVA recommends a significantly increased appropriation. Such an increase should, however, direct the VA to fund peer-reviewed research on toxins that have impacted members of the military and/or their families, particularly their progeny.

VA's research program is distinct from that of the National Institutes of Health in that it was created to respond to **the unique medical needs of veterans**. In this regard, it should seek to fund veterans' pressing needs for breakthroughs in addressing hazardous environmental exposures, post-deployment mental health issues, TBI, long-term care service delivery, and prosthetics to meet the multiple needs of the latest generation of combat-wounded veterans.

National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study

The NVVLS was completed in the fall of 2015. It has since languished at the VA Central Office because VA's General Counsel cites some "legal problem" with transmitting this report to Congress and the public. The real problem is that the VA wants to destroy all data from the original National Vietnam Veteran Readjustment Study (NVVRS) from the mid-1980s. The General Counsel first wanted to destroy that data right after that original study was completed; had they done so, this follow-up study could never have been attempted.

Hence, VVA urges that Congress designate the Medical Follow Up Agency (MFUA) as the repository of the data from NVVRS, NVVLS, and all other such studies. VVA urges that Congress appropriate funding to **preserve and properly automate a searchable database** from all such large-scale studies. VVA further urges a specific line item for MFUA that directs the VA to immediately turn over this data to MFUA.

We also urge Congress to **mandate and fund other such similar longitudinal studies** to begin as soon as possible, using the same methodology as the NVVRS, for the veterans of the 1991 Gulf War, Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn, and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Outreach

Most of the 21-1/2 million veterans in the United States are ignorant of the benefits they have earned. Even those who do access the VA's healthcare system and/or its benefits apparatus are not familiar with much of what is available to them, their families, and their survivors. The VA has the ethical obligation, as well as a legal responsibility, to **inform veterans and their families** not only of the benefits to which they are entitled, but also about **possible long-term health issues** that might derive from when and where they served.

It is only in the past few years that the VA has begun to take seriously its responsibility to do outreach. Still, these efforts seem scattershot and limited. We have yet to see a unified strategic communications plan that integrates TV and radio ads, billboards, ads and feature stories in selected popular publications, and the vibrant use of social media. These can have a dramatic effect not only in informing veterans - and, perhaps more strategically, their families - about issues and benefits, but also in reassuring the community of veterans that the VA really is living up to its founding principle: *To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.*

Extending the Caregivers Act

VVA supported the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 to assist family caregivers of warriors catastrophically wounded or injured after 9/11. The VA Secretary was to report to Congress on how this program was working, and the efficacy of extending it to caregivers of veterans of Vietnam and Somalia and the first fight with Saddam Hussein. That report was two years late.

How many caregivers of Vietnam veterans might potentially be eligible for the caregiver program? This is hard to say. VVA will work with legislators to enact a bill that encompasses qualified caregivers of veterans

(Cont. on pg. 14)

Southern District Report
Joe Ingino

VVA Chapters #11, #32, #72, #82, #118, #126, #421, #807

We loss a good VietNam Veteran, this past week, Conrad Steers. He was an Original member of Chapter 11, {82}. Connie was also a past President of Chapter 82, and the current treasurer of 82. My Sympathies go out to his wife Cherie Steers, and his family. Also was a past Southern District Director, for New York State Council of Vietnam Veterans of America.

In October I was invited to a ceremony honoring past police Commissioner, Ray Kelley, a former Marine Officer who served in Vietnam also honored was Tom DeNapoli New York State Controller.

I had the honor on Veterans Day, in New York City, to escort the Gold Star Mothers, in the New York City Veterans Day Parade.

I was asked to help had out turkeys to Veterans for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I was also invited to Lindenhurst School with other Veterans to speak on our service in VietNam and the Army.

I would like to say I am happy that the toxic exposure research act 2015 became law.

I been involved with the Long Island Community Veterans Engagement Board, this is through the VA. It was started at Northport VA Hospital, with others members of other Veterans groups.

I will be going into Chapter 72, for their Chapter meeting, to do a power point with Stony Brook Veterans Home.

2016 VVA CHAPTER 421 Activities and Events

VVA Chapter 421 takes pride in all its events including the formation of a dedicated and focused administrative staff, activities that honor and respect all veterans, numerous and extensive community service activities. Our Chapter's activities that focus on helping, honoring, and respecting veterans reinforces the Vietnam Veterans of America's motto, "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another".

JANUARY

State approved Phase II revitalization and beautification of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park at Manor Road & Martling Ave. This phase included the removal of diseased tree around the perimeter of the memorial.

FEBRUARY

Chapter members attend the Four Chaplains Breakfast honoring the four Army Chaplains who gave their lives to save other civilian and military personnel as the troop ship SS Dorchester sank on February 3, 1943 during World War II. Nominations for the Board of Directors and the Executive Board commence.

MARCH

Sponsored the PS 57 Special Needs Children Super Kids Soap Box Derby. The Chapter start building the Soap Box Car that will be used in the event. Chapter members attend Vietnam Veterans Day at Tottenville H.S. The Chapter's Color Guard participate the event posting the Colors. Nominations for the Board of Directors and the Executive Board continue.

APRIL

Continue construction of Soap Box Car for Super Kid Soap Box Derby. Chapter President speaks to

(Cont. on pg. 12)

(Cont. from pg. 12)

All students at Wagner College about Vietnam Experiences. This program was organized 20 years ago and is presented to all schools on Staten Island when requested. Board of Directors annual recognition dinner. Officer elections take place.

MAY

Chapter members attend an Ice Cream Social honoring veterans at St. Adalbert Elementary School. Construction of Soap Box Car for Super Kid Soap Box Derby is complete.

JUNE

The annual "Day of Remembrance" honoring the 85 from Staten Island who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Vietnam War. The Chapter's Honor Guard and Color Guard participate in this event which 200 family members, friends, veterans, and dignitaries attend annually.

JULY

Chapter members and Color Guard march in Staten Island's annual Independence Day Parade. The Chapter sponsors PS 57 children to attend the annual Super Kids soapbox derby in Dayton, Ohio. Chapter members attend the Rolling Thunder Event for wounded warriors.

AUGUST

Chapter members attend the annual Father Vincent Capodanno (Medal of Honor Recipient) memorial service at the Father Vincent Capodanno chaplain Ft. Wadsworth, Staten Island. Father Capodanno was killed by sniper fire on Sept. 4, 1967, as he ministered last rites to a dying Marine on a Vietnam battlefield. The Chapter's participation includes the laying of the Chapter's wreath. Chapter members attend a meeting to introduce the Veterans Court on Staten Island. Speakers at the meeting included DA Michael McMahon, and Judge Michael Brennan.

SEPTEMBER

The Chapter president and Vice president attend an interview with the presidential candidates aboard the intrepid. The event is sponsored by NBC and the IAVA. The Chapter its birthday with refreshments at its annual birthday meeting.

OCTOBER

The Chapter sponsors and participates in the 8th annual Golf Outing. The outing is now known as the Jay O'Donovan Memorial Golf Outing honoring councilman Jerome 'Jay' O'Donovan. Chapter members appear on CTV's "In Honor of" program discussing the Chapter's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park, the Chapter's Website, and other Vietnam Veteran issues.

NOVEMBER

State approved Phase II revitalization and beautification of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park at Manor Road & Martling Ave continues. Chapter members attend St. Adalbert's Veterans Day at St. Adalbert Elementary School. Chapter members and members of the Chapter's Color Guard marched in the Vietnam Veterans Day Parade in New York City. Chapter members attended a brainstorming session on patriotism presented by Boro President James Oddo Chapter members once again appear on CTV's "In Honor of" program to continue discussing the Chapter's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park, the Chapter's Website, and other Vietnam Veteran issues.

DECEMBER

State approved Phase II revitalization and beautification of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park at Manor Road & Martling Ave continues. Chapter's annual holiday party for all members and family. The Chapter also takes pride in its Website www.vva421.org that provides up to date information that includes the Chapter's activities, president's messages, calendar events, historical information, photos and video galleries. In addition to an up to date email distribution list, the website serves as the Chapter's main communication vehicle for its members. Maintenance of the website is an on-going activity for the Chapter. Regular Meetings occurs every 4th Monday of each month Board of Director Meetings Occur every 3rd Thursday of each month.

(Cont. on pg. 13)

(Cont. from pg. 10)

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 72

Accomplishments since September 2016

12/16 Toy drive and delivery to Guardian Angel Orphanage for abused children.

12/ 15 Monthly care packages sent to troops overseas.

12/14 Holiday party and gifts for patients at VAMC Brooklyn to include a Santa delivery.

12/13 Holiday gifts of warm clothing (hats, gloves and socks) for 48 formerly homeless veterans living in Supportive Housing by SUS (Services for Under Served).

11/16 Veterans Day Pizza party for rehab ward of VAMC Brooklyn.

11/16 Cold weather clothing purchased for needy veterans through Brooklyn VAMC.

10/6 Donations to Team Rubicon for Disaster relief programs.

10/10 Donation of \$200 to USO of New York.

10/11 Donation of \$200 to the 436 Family Readiness Group for a dinner and food for the soldiers and families of that unit.

1/17 Donation of \$1000 to Fisher House in Bethesda, MD.

1/17 Donation of \$300 and member buying eye-hand coordination games for disabled veterans.

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter #32

Chapter 32 Marched in The National Veterans Day Parade "Americas parade" up Fifth Avenue; We Also marched in The County of Queens Official Veterans Day Parade.



The Chapter served a complete Thanksgiving Dinner To The Residents of the Domiciliary at St. Albans.

We also sponsored a Holiday/Party/ Meeting for our resident life members at the New York State Nursing Home at St. Albans.

The Chapter also hosted With VFW Post 4787, a Holiday Party for our members and their families (Over 100 Attended) at Chapter Headquarters in Whitestone NY.

We continue to work with the New York City Parks Department working to get the Queens Vietnam Veterans Memorial Built in Elmhurst Park. The Parks Department Recently gave us an estimated completion date of 2019.

Chapter 32 has buried their 110th and 111th indigent veteran at Calverton National Cemetery in a program began in 2008 By Late President Pat Toro. Working with Local Funeral Home Hess-Miller and the proprietors, The Martino Family, VVA Chapter 32 continues to lead the way in this pro-

gram in Queens NYC

We participated in the "Toy Run" In support of St. Mary's Hospital For Children.

The Chapter raised \$2,120. 00 in support of St. Mary's.

The Annual "Presidents Award was Given To Chapter Member Douglas Williams.

The Chapter continues to recover from the loss last year, of our long time treasurer Tom Corbin. When Tom Passed unexpectedly in May he left behind no passwords for the treasurers computers, or any indication of where anything was filed.

Take a lesson from this; make certain your board of directors knows the passwords and where documents are filed. Tom had things squirreled all over the office.

Also be certain that all passwords are written down and stored in a location known to the board members.

Chapter 32 also incurred a loss, by theft, of all the goods we stock to sell at street Fairs through out the Borough of Queens. The Thieves broke into our storage van in what we thought was a secure location. Steps have been taken to assure this doesn't happen again...

(Cont. from pg. 10)

who served before 9/11; we will work with leadership to make enactment of such legislation a priority despite any budgetary misgivings.

Clearing Up the 'Backlog'

The VBA has made significant progress in shrinking the backlog of claims while adjudicating a steadily increasing number of new claims. Still, it must move forward with force and focus.

The VBA should **triage all new claims** in its enhanced "lane" system. There is no reason why a relatively simple claim cannot be resolved in a few months. Claims for the obvious, e.g., the traumatic amputation of a limb, or blindness, or paralysis, also could receive an initial adjudication for the major wound, with associated or secondary conditions rated later.

The manner in which VBA managers grade their raters needs to be re-examined, inasmuch as the current system puts a premium on volume and speed at the cost of getting it right the first time. The result is an unacceptably high number of remands when veterans and their advocates appeal their denials or the amount of their awards. Part of the answer is a **revamped training regimen** not only for new raters – and veterans benefits representatives – but for *all* VBA employees involved on the benefits side of the VA, and a revised standard for adjudication of claims that does not credit raters for speed and volume but rather on the efficacy of their adjudications.

In the era of the National Work Queue (NWQ), where claims are being adjudicated in jurisdictions other than the state in which the claimant resides, it is crucial to prioritize the VSO's recommended requirement updates to VBMS and other VA programs so that VSOs can continue to adequately represent veterans and their family members. VVA has and continues to advocate for certain updates to VBMS that would simply permit service officers to provide continual representation to claimants. As of now, due to the NWQ, it is nearly impossible for a service officer to adequately track all of her claims. VVA encourages VA to truly partner with VSOs as the work our service officers do contributes to obtaining a final and just decision at the lowest appeal level possible.

Organizational Reform

The VA must embrace a corporate culture that measures its vocational rehabilitation programs and educational initiatives as to whether and how much it assist veterans obtain and sustain gainful employment at a living wage.

The VA moved in the right direction by creating an Office of Economic Opportunity. This administrative change, however, does not go far enough. VVA, therefore, will advocate for legislation to **create** a fourth entity within the VA: **the Veterans Economic Opportunities Administration**, to be headed by an Under Secretary nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

The VEOA would house under one roof within the VA the Vocational Rehabilitation Service, the Veterans Education Service, and the Center for Verification and Evaluation; and grant functional control, if not the outright transfer, of VETS, the Veterans Employment and Training Service, from the Department of Labor, as well as newly federalized DVOP (Disabled Veterans Outreach Program) and LVER (Local Veterans Employment Representative) positions, which currently reside in state departments of labor.

Veterans' Civil, Constitutional, & Legal Rights

When service members leave the military, they encounter a legal system that denies them many of the same basic civil rights they served to protect. They are faced with barriers preventing them from asserting their constitutional and legal rights, barriers that all too often result in compromised health care and benefits, and inexcusable delays at every level of their experience with the VA.

VVA has been working with some of the country's top veterans' legal advocates to develop the largest and potentially the most significant legislation ever proposed on behalf of veterans: **the Veterans Civil Rights Act**. The VCRA encompasses:

(Cont. on pg. 15)

(Cont. from pg. 14)

1. **Due Process Rights** - Codifies existing 5th Amendment protections for veterans' benefits into statute.
2. **Evidentiary Rights** - Ensures that every veteran has access to all documents in their claim for disability compensation and other legal matters.
3. **Access to District Courts** - Enables veterans to challenge agency procedures and patterns of practice violations in district court, on their own behalf and on behalf of a class.
4. **Substitution of Survivors** - Automatically substitutes a veteran's surviving spouse as claimant upon the death of the veteran.
5. **Tort Reform** - Revises the Federal Torts Claims Act to clarify that veterans can bring an action seeking compensation if they are injured by government action in non-combat or combat training-related situations.
6. **Procedural Rights** - Requires the VA to produce all relevant documents and witnesses requested by veterans to support their claims for benefits, and to investigate claims of misconduct.
7. **Fiduciary Rights** - Requires the VA to recognize fiduciaries designated by veterans, and provides stronger protections for veterans and their families from VA abuses.
8. **Interruption of Medical Care** - Disincentivizes the VA from unnecessarily severing, reducing, or interrupting a veteran's medical treatment.
9. **Elimination of Excess Inventory** - Requires the VA to use an independent consultant to create a plan to eliminate excess inventory within three years.
10. **Timely Hearings** - Sets timelines for veteran-requested hearings and for various steps in the appeals process.
11. **Creation of Three-Judge Panels** - Requires appeals to be decided by three judges rather than one, and provides that decisions by such panels will set legal precedent so that veterans who raise the same issues do not need to re-litigate these issues but instead can rely on prior decisions issued by three-judge panels.
12. **Reduction of Medical Delays** - Provides a medically trained ombudsman at each VISN authorized to refer veterans to private care when VA treatment deadlines are missed.

Access to district courts is at the heart of the VCRA, which clarifies statutory language so that veterans can bring actions in U.S. District Court to challenge agency actions that violate their rights. VVA believes that the VCRA represents the best way to attack all manner of delays currently plaguing veterans. Hence, we will seek "champions" for this legislation in both houses of Congress from both sides of the aisle and work with them to ultimately enact this legislation.

Additional Priorities & Initiatives

We would also like to offer for congressional consideration a number of priorities and initiatives which, we believe, are potentially achievable in a veteran-friendly Congress:

POW/MIA

VVA will continue to seek **the fullest possible accounting** of the status of any American service member who had been a Prisoner of War or had been Missing in Action by working with the responsible agencies of government and by continuing our Veterans Initiative, building bridges with our counterparts in Southeast Asia and around the world and exchanging information about the locations in which remains of American service members might be found; and in this realm we will endeavor to ensure that the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIA Affairs remain a separate and independent entity with a reasonable budget.

- Inasmuch as **the POW/MIA flag** has become a universal symbol for service members taken prisoner in every war in which American troops have been deployed into harm's way, VVA urges **its year-round display** on all government buildings, federal and state, county and municipality.

(Cont. on pg. 16)

(Cont. from pg. 15)

- VVA will press to have all U.S. **government documents** pertaining to POW/MIAs **declassified and released** for public inspection, and will encourage Congress to pass a resolution urging the governments of Vietnam, the former Soviet Union, and China to provide all relevant wartime records as well.
- We will work with DoD to initiate a public awareness program to ensure that all families of those still listed as POW/MIA understand the need to provide DNA samples for potential **identification of recovered remains**.
- We also will endeavor to press the appropriate authorities to authorize a new POW/MIA **“Forever Stamp”** to add awareness about an issue that resonates across the community of veterans.

Agent Orange/Dioxin & Other Toxic Substances

Now that Congress has enacted the essence of the **Toxic Exposure Research Act**, VVA will work with the relevant federal departments to fashion the rules that will establish a board of advisors and seek to define those maladies in the descendants of all veterans exposed to toxic agents that might be associated with a parent's exposure.

- VVA continues to support legislative efforts and other initiatives to achieve **justice for “Blue Water” naval personnel** who served aboard ships in Yankee and Dixie Stations in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea, and for veterans who served at **Fort McClellan, Fort Detrick**, and other bases in CO-NUS, and in **Guam, Okinawa, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, and Johnston Atoll** where Agent Orange and other toxic agents were stored by working to convince the VA that they deserve the same health care and other benefits as “boots-on-the-ground” veterans.
- We urge Congress to investigate why the VA has ceased providing custodial care and/or non-medical case management services for Agent Orange **children afflicted with spina bifida**, and then push the VA to provide these vitally needed services to these now adult children, innocent victims of a parent's military service.
- VVA calls on Congress and the President to take measures to **declassify all documents** pertaining to **herbicides and other defoliants and toxins** employed in the Vietnam War, including memos between agencies, and make them public **now**, as the nation commemorates 50 years since our government first sent troops to Southeast Asia – and sprayed some 20 million gallons of these toxic compounds over 2-1/2 million acres of the former South Vietnam, only G*d knows how much pesticide and other toxic chemicals there..

PTSD and Substance Abuse

VVA will continue our efforts to ensure that the Department of Defense **corrects all wrongful diagnoses** of “personality disorder,” “adjustment disorder,” “readjustment disorder,” other euphemisms for bad discharges of its men and women, so that all veterans found to have been inappropriately diagnosed and discharged are correctly diagnosed and accorded access to the benefits and care that they deserve and to which they are entitled.

- We will work with Congress to ensure that DoD and VA **develop, fund, and implement evidence-based**, integrated psychosocial mental health **programs**, substance abuse recovery treatment programs, and suicide-risk assessment programs for all veterans, including active-duty troops, Reservists and members of the National Guard who have been deployed to a combat zone, and their families.
- VVA will work with Congress to take whatever measures are deemed necessary to ensure accountability for the **organizational capacity and funding for accurate diagnoses and treatments** through the application of evidence-based instruments to the neuro-psychiatric wounds of war, particularly for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and suicide risk.

(Cont. on pg. 17)

(Cont. from pg. 16)

Veterans Health Care

VVA will insist that VA researchers focus on studies that delve into **the wounds, maladies, injuries, and traumas of war**, with specific research into the health issues unique to all U.S. military operations and troop deployments.

- VVA will encourage Congress to mandate that the VA change its overly restrictive and secretive process for adding, or not adding, pharmaceutical treatments and drugs to its **prescription drug formulary** and to bring it into line with the more transparent and expansive formulary process used by DoD.
- We will continue to press the VA to research and implement **long-term care and wellness options** for our country's aging veteran cohort, a need that is only going to increase over the next decade.
- VVA will continue to demand that the VA become a signatory to the **Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008**.

Economic Opportunity

VVA will seek legislation to **protect veterans** (including incarcerated veterans), active-duty service members, Reservists and members of the National Guard **from discrimination in the provision of housing and employment**.

- VVA will seek the **renaming of the Vietnam-Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRA) to the Wartime and Disabled Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act (WADVRA)**, expanding this legislation to embrace veterans of all wars and actively enforcing its provisions and posting its reports on the Internet.
- We will seek to **amend the Post-9/11 GI Bill** to enable veterans who choose not to utilize these benefits for educational purposes to convert a reasonable amount to a low-interest **business loan**, provided they have a business plan that has been reviewed and approved by the Small Business Administration.

Homeless Veterans

- VVA will seek legislative action to extend authority for five years and to revise the **VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem funding** from a reimbursement for expenses to a payment, a change that is vitally needed if community-based organizations that deliver the majority of these services are to operate effectively.
- Because per diem dollars received by service centers are not enough to meet the special needs of homeless veterans who seek assistance, and because service centers for veterans are vital in that most local social services agencies have neither the knowledge nor the capacity to provide appropriate supportive services that directly involve the treatment, care, and entitlements of veterans, VVA seeks legislation to establish **Supportive Services Assistance Grants** for VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Service Center Grant awardees.
- Many times Veteran families find themselves in desperate situations, unable to pay rent, or seek employment, or other financial hardship situations. The VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grants established in 2011 provide much needed assistance to these Veterans, allowing them to remain housed, thus fulfilling, in part, the Department of Veterans Affairs prevention of Veteran Homelessness initiative. Under the SSVF program, VA awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that can provide supportive services to very low-income Veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing. The VA has awarded over \$600 million in funds supporting the SSVF program from FY2012 to the present. Vietnam Veterans of America fully supports the continuation of the VA's SSVF grant program. Additionally, in order to insure full compliance with the regulations set forth for this most valuable program, VVA strongly urges the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs monitor, and hold accountable, those entities receiving and distributing these funds to the most vulnerable Veteran families..

Incarcerated Veterans

- VVA will work with Congress and the Department of Justice to ensure that incarcerated veterans as well as veterans in Veterans Treatment Courts are identified, assessed for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and/or Traumatic Brain Injury trauma, and, where appropriate, support **alternative diversionary** (Cont. on pg. 18)

(Cont. from pg. 17)

treatment services, specifically veterans treatment courts, that have proven effective in increasing numbers of jurisdictions across the country.

- We will endeavor to take measures to ensure the provision of **reentry and support services** for incarcerated veterans.
- VVA will work with Congress to ensure that the VA provides **benefits for veterans** who are **temporarily confined** in jail or incarcerated in prison.

Women Veterans

- VVA will press for joint hearings in the Veterans' Affairs and Armed Services Committees in both the House and Senate to directly address the **occurrence of military sexual trauma**, calling for accountability at all levels of leadership in DoD in meeting its responsibility.
- We will seek an evaluation of all sexual trauma **intensive treatment residential programs** to determine if **wait-time** for admission is appropriate and geographically accessible.
- VVA will request a Government Accountability Office report on the **administration of women veterans' health programs** in the VA, identifying barriers to and root causes of any disparities in the provision of comprehensive medical and mental health care, including Compensation and Pension examinations, to meet the needs of these veterans.

Minority Veterans

- VVA will support legislation that will ensure that veterans receive **culturally and linguistically appropriate health care** as defined in guidelines issued in 2002 by the VA's under secretary for health.

Compensation & Pension

- VVA will seek enactment of legislation to secure a **pension for Gold Star parents**, and will continue to seek the permanent **prohibition of offsets** of Survivors' Benefit Plan (SBP) and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for the survivors of service members who die while still in the military.
- To promote uniformity in claims decisions, VVA seeks a change in current policy to mandate that VA staff, VSO and county veteran's service representatives, and other stakeholders **collaborate on developing** uniform training **materials, programs**, and competency-based **re-certification exams** every three years for service officers.
- We will continue to "encourage" the VBA to direct raters to follow the "**best practices**" manual in **determining** the degree of disability and percentage of **compensation** for veterans with PTSD and other mental health conditions.
- VVA will advocate permitting veterans with a 50% or greater disability rating to be eligible to receive/purchase the same level of government life insurance as veterans rated at 100%.

Economic Opportunity

VVA will ramp up our efforts to ensure that veterans returning from deployments are accorded **Veterans' Preference** when applying for government jobs and are given every advantage when seeking employment in private industry or in setting up their own business; and will encourage the VA and the Office of Personnel Management to **recruit veterans** before they separate from service, especially from in-demand occupations such as IT and the healing arts.

- VVA will work to achieve **real due process** for veterans under the Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Act (VEVRA).
- In a related matter, **VEVRA and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance** must either be **reformed** wholesale or eliminated, inasmuch as OFCCP is not helping veterans secure positions with contractors and is so far askew from its original purpose that it is doing far more damage than good, angering employers by imposing arbitrary and capricious "assessments" on them that are nothing more than unwarranted fines.

(Cont. on pg. 19)

(Cont. from pg. 18)

- Inasmuch as the Supreme Court ruled in the Kingdomware case that the VA must continue to **apply the “rule of two” for veteran-owned small businesses** even if the agency surpassed its annual prime contracting goals, VVA will monitor the implementation that the rule must apply to task and delivery orders under all multiple award contracts.

The Newest Veterans

- VVA will continue to press DoD and VA to ensure that they have adequate mental health personnel and services to meet the needs of this generation of veterans, inasmuch as we cannot emphasize too strongly the urgent and ongoing need for **adequate PTSD care** for every generation in rural or remote areas of the country as well as in urban or suburban settings.
- VVA will continue to demand that the President and Congress work to support veterans who have been denied proper diagnostic services and care to treat wounds and injuries related to their service, including the many **veterans** who have been **inappropriately branded with less-than-honorable discharges**.
- We will continue to promulgate and support new public and private initiatives to create **jobs for returning veterans**, especially for members of the Reserves and National Guard, and to ensure that supportive services, e.g., mentoring programs, are integral elements in these initiatives.
- We also will continue to work with Congress, the Administration, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Veterans Educational Success and other entities that will help **expose** the excesses, greed, and shame of any institution of higher learning guilty of **fraudulent practices** that deceive and rip off the veterans they are supposed to prepare for a career.
- VVA will continue to work to improve educational and vocational programs such as the **Post-9/11 G.I. Bill** and **Vocational Rehabilitation** so that student veterans are able to achieve their maximum potential without drowning in debt.

On behalf of our membership, I ask that you enter our full statement for the record and we thank you for the opportunity to present VVA’s legislative agenda and policy initiatives for the 115th Congress, and I will be honored to answer any questions the committee may have regarding our testimony presented before you today.

VVA NATIONAL CONVENTION—2017 August 8 - 12, 2017, New Orleans, Louisiana

Elections for VVA Officers and Board of Directors

Proposals for Constitutional Amendments and Convention Resolutions

Nominations for VVA National Awards

room Rates - \$99 + 13% tax + \$3 per day occupancy tax at either -
NEW ORLEANS MARRIOTT, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
 555 Canal Street • New Orleans, LA 70130 • 504-581-1000

Marriott Reservations: 800-266-9432 (Marriott Group Code: “Vietnam Veterans ”)

or online: <https://aws.passkey.com/go/VVA2017>

SHERATON NEW ORLEANS HOTEL, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

500 Canal Street • New Orleans, LA 70130 • 504-525-2500

Sheraton Reservations: 888-627-7033 (Sheraton Group Code: “VH06AA ”)

or online: <https://www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/vietnamveteransofamerica>

COMMITTEES	CHAIRPERSON	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Agent Orange/Dioxin & Other Toxic Exposure		
Constitution	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
Finance	Charles Tipton	ctipton237@yahoo.com
Homeless Veterans	Tom Kelly	dsdba53@yahoo.com
Membership	Ted Wilkinson	yankeeted@aol.com
POW/MIA & Veterans Initiative (VI)	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
PTSD & Substance Abuse	Tom Harris	bkrdad@aol.com
Veterans Affairs	Sam Hall	Sammyjh49@yahoo.com
Veterans Health Care & Aging Veterans	Tom Harris Jerry McDermott	bkrdad@aol.com jmcdermott@murphynolan.com ,
Veterans Incarcerated Committee	Nick Valenti	npvalen64@yahoo.com