

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 31 Issue 01

Veteran's News that needs to be Read

SPRING 2021



It's GONE!



To all,

Because the COVID is still hindering our lives and the restrictions still in place we are cancelling our April meeting. We are not comfortable having a meeting but hope to have one come October. It has been way too long but we will eventually be back in business. Stay tuned!

IN MEMORIAM

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

VVA #20

Norris DeFisher
Roger Burkhart
Dain L. Davidow
Ron DiNatale

Andrew Place
Russell Chimera
Ronald C. Huber
Louis C. Jezsik

Donald Allen Young

VVA #72
Steven Neftleberg

Keith Jones

VVA #103
Gordie Lane USMC

VVA #333
Gene Sullivan
Bob Taylor

VVA #704
Melvin Spurling



**VVA-NYSC Meeting Dates 2021**~~January 16, 2021~~ **CANCELLED**

All State Council meetings cancelled until further notice.

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

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Queensbury, NY 12804

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



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President's Report

Ned D. Foote

I thought I would write about how well our April State Council meeting went after our long layoff because of the Pandemic. Not so. This virus is not only hanging around it has another new life with some variants of a bigger and better strain to keep us down.

There is some good news on this topic and that is we now have a vaccine. The bad news it depends on where you live to receive a shot. I hear from many Veterans from across the county and they are receiving shots and from the VA. I also know New York City area they are getting the vaccine. The VA's down there have called their Vets to make appointments. I know one who called back and received shot the next day. I called my VA here in upstate Albany and yes, they are giving shots to 75 and up even though the rule is 65 and up. They just do not have enough vaccine to do that.

I have been on computer every day and need to fill out the same form just to find out no appointments anywhere. Grant who lives also upstate has same issue. I did get lucky and was able to make an appointment in Plattsburg for March 23rd. And drive 2 hours and do all over again in 3 weeks. Fortunately for me and my wife we knew someone, and our neighboring county held a clinic for those older folks. We got on a standby list meaning at end of day if they have some vaccine left because of no shows or open vaccine that they do not want to throw away we received our shots.

So, for me I lucked out but too many of us still trying and is very frustrating. The Governor just added more eligible to receive but we cannot get enough vaccines to take care of the B group.

Allow me to continue this vaccine issue as not much to report VVA issues. As you know my grandson who is a Firemen and belongs to Air Guard was to deploy for 6 months in Niger Africa. He went for deployment training early December in Texas. He was to come home day before Christmas and leave that Monday for Germany to quarantine for two weeks. His plane was delayed, and he did not get home until late Christmas Day. That Saturday someone in his group tested positive even though they did not test anyone, and this individual went on his own to be tested. Trip is postponed, and all had to stay home for 2 weeks quarantine. Makes sense, right? Infect the rest of your family. Anyways he is still home waiting to deploy, and this is February 6th I am writing this. He cannot go back to work at the Firehouse as he is on orders. He is getting paid by state for his job and is getting military pay and housing. Rather good but bored to death.

Ok finally received orders to leave the 23rd. Will fly to Georgia and quarantine for 20 days. Meaning stay in room alone and cannot leave room except for 1 hour a day. Now he flies on a plane, first day there they can go shopping and such with the others and then start his 20 days. Then he flies again with people to Niger. Now no virus test and he never had one. He also does not get the vaccine . . He could have as a first responder at his volunteer firehouse but not knowing when he would leave, , he might miss second shot. Military has not changed all that much has it?

So, you want to hear VVA stuff? We have not met since last January. We could not have our April meeting so we cannot have elections yet. Maybe come September. Rules as of now BOD stays until duly replaced. Several of our chapters have held their elections by meeting outdoors and such but not all of them, so they have not been doing much.

Francisco has sent out our directory of deceased members and we hope all will take a few minutes to remember them in your own way.

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New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation

We provide grants to Vietnam Veterans of America-New York State Council, (VVA-NYSC) a veteran's service organization that advocates for legislation at the State and Federal level of government to provide housing, education, health and mental care services to veterans and their families.

We provide funding for VVA-NYSC Veteran's Service Officer program that assist veterans with their military disability compensation and pension claims from the Veterans Administration.

We advocate for better Federal and State veteran's benefits and veteran preferences in government employment. VVA Chapters within New York State, assist widows, widowers, and orphans of our veterans. The organization organizes programs that enrich the lives of Vietnam veterans, as well as veterans from past, current wars, and their families.

We have an active Agent Orange committee that helps Vietnam veterans receive up to date information on prostate cancer, diabetes, and other chemically-related diseases.

We have an updated database of agencies that provide:

- Listings of Veteran Job Fairs offered by county or veteran service organizations;
- Counseling for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- Outreach programs that support returning veterans' reentry into civilian life;

For disabled veterans, this can be even more difficult than a tour of duty.

We do this all year long, but without your gift and the gifts of other supporters, nothing can be done to help those that are so deserving of it. However, we have much more to accomplish.

We, the New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, have a mission to keep advocating for and helping these veterans. We ask you to join us in our mission to provide assistance, guidance, training, and education to all veterans of past, present, and future military conflicts.

So let us continue to work together to ensure our national heroes receive everything that they are entitled to receive for their sacrifice and service to our nation.

President Francisco Muñiz III

Vice President Ned D. Foote

Treasurer Grant T. Coates

Secretary Nick Valenti

Directors Sam Hall

Stan May

You can send your tax deductible donation, to the extent allowed by law, directly to the Foundation at NY Vietnam Veterans Foundation, 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590-6302.

NOTE: The Foundation has lost its fundraising contract and is in need of funds to support our Service Officer's Program. Please send donation to the above address.

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Nationally, the January meeting canceled and now April and October meetings. The hotel in Silver Spring where we meet is closed until 2022 and no other hotels available at this time. The National Convention to be held in August is still on but they are looking into doing a virtual convention. So, we will see how that works out as I do not see a face-to-face convention in August. I have been to every National convention and have no plans on attending this one. I will not put myself and family in danger. But we will see what develops so let us just keep moving on and stay safe.

It is not over until it is over!

VVA NATIONAL NEWS: John Rowan, President/CEO

A New Year, Finally

I was never so happy to see a year end. 2020 was the year from hell. 2021 begins with some hope for relief from the COVID pandemic and new benefits for all veterans affected by Agent Orange.

The introduction of various vaccines gives us some ability to save everyone from the ravages of COVID. The United States has lost more than 400,000 people to this insidious virus, equivalent to the U.S. death toll from World War II. The VA is beginning to provide vaccinations to veterans over 65, which includes all Vietnam veterans. I received my first shot on January 13 at the St. Albans clinic in New York City. My second shot is scheduled for February 3. I heartily encourage everyone to take the vaccine when offered.

Every time I hear about the susceptibility of people with pre-existing conditions, all I can think about is Vietnam veterans. I tried to get the VA to include our spouses, but they declined. However, caregivers are included. My wife Mariann is scheduled to get her shot from the state, if they don't run out of vaccine first.

After being held up by the VA throughout the Trump administration, legislation authorizing the addition of three new illnesses to the Agent Orange presumptive list passed at the end of the year as part of the National Defense Authorization Act after Congress overrode the President's veto. We will be distributing a pamphlet explaining everything about the three new illnesses (bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson-like symptoms) and how to file a claim, as soon as the VA clarifies the regulations.

PRESIDENT BIDEN AND A DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have been sworn in. The election of Democratic senators from Georgia has given the Democrats control of the Senate. They have retained control over the House of Representatives, although with a smaller margin. We have been working for the past two years with the Chair of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), and look forward to working with Rep. Mike Bost (R-Ill.), the new Ranking Member. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Phillip Roe (R-Tenn.), who retired last year after having served as the committee's Ranking Member and Chair, for his many years of service to veterans. We wish Dr. Roe, a Vietnam-era veteran, and his family well in his retirement.

The new chair of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.). He had been the Ranking Member, and we have a great relationship with him. The new Ranking Member will be Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Ky.), the previous Chair.

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VVA & COVID-19

Last year was made difficult by the restrictions surrounding the pandemic and our need to stay safe. While the vaccines may help in the long run, we will still face many restrictions until a significant percentage of the population is inoculated. This means our ability to travel and hold meetings will be limited for quite a while. For example, the hotel next to headquarters announced it will be closed until at least 2022. We also know that airline flights have been cut back severely and many jurisdictions limit the number of people at gatherings.

Therefore, we have determined that we will be unable to hold Board of Directors meetings in April and October. As for the August Convention, we are investigating the feasibility of holding it virtually. We had been under the impression that VVA's Constitution limited our ability to hold online meetings with voting. However, thanks to the dogged persistence of Constitution Committee Chair Leslie DeLong, we have learned that on March 7 New York Governor Mario Cuomo issued Executive Order #202 that modifies "Section 603(b) of the Not-for-Profit Corporations Law to the extent necessary to permit annual meetings of members to be held remotely or by electronic means." Because VVA is incorporated in New York, we fall under this executive order.

The various Convention Committee Chairs, Vice President Tom Burke, and I will meet soon to outline virtual Convention needs—including registration, passwords, and voting—in order to prepare a proposal for contractors to determine if they can provide the technical assistance to enable us to gather delegates who would be able to vote on resolutions, constitutional amendments, officers, and both regional and at-large directors. We have been using RingCentral/Zoom to have Board discussions. Under our contract they may be able to provide all the services necessary to hold a virtual Convention. We will keep everyone informed as we proceed.

Ironically, by going to a virtual Convention we may get greater participation. We are allowed 1,800-2,000 delegates based on our membership numbers, but the highest number of delegates we ever had was 818 at the 2017 New Orleans Convention. Given the reduced cost to support a delegate, more delegates might get involved. We will miss the comradery of an in-person meeting, but safety comes first.

THE NEW YEAR

Several issues were included in the omnibus veterans bill passed at the end of the year. Dealing with these issues, clarifying the regulations regarding the three new AO diseases, as well as maintaining our veterans' benefits program, keeping up our advocacy efforts, as well as our usual office operations, all with a reduced staff, will keep us busy this year. However, our first priority is to stay safe. So, as Dr. Artie Shelton always reminds us: Wear your mask, wash your hands, and stay at a safe distance even after you get the vaccine.

Meanwhile, let us mourn those veterans and family members lost last year to this terrible disease and for any other reason.

VVA NATIONAL NEWS —THE FUTURE OF VVA**A New Beginning****Tom Burke—VVA National Vice President**

We are aware that VVA members are still experiencing difficulties continuing operations, maintaining contact, having effective meetings, and the like. We get it. Believe me, you are not alone. The Officers have been in contact with chapters and state councils to learn firsthand what their situations are. If you need to speak to me or any of the other Officers, we are available. We're no more than a phone call away.

Virtual "special meetings" of the Board of Directors will continue through January and into April. During the Board meetings, State Council Presidents or their representatives will be able to listen in to what is being discussed. At some point I am sure President Rowan will allow SCPs and state representatives to address the Board with their concerns. Much depends upon the progression of the pandemic.

The VVA Convention Planning Committee continues its work. Hotel managers have been contacted, speakers are being considered, and entertainment is being looked at. Because of the pandemic, the final go/no-go decision has not been made. At the January 16 "special meeting" of the Board of Directors, the possibility of virtual Convention was discussed. Despite some obvious drawbacks, in many ways it's a sensible and safe alternative.

As reported earlier, VVA's Household Goods Program has restarted in most parts of the country. Some stores have restarted pickups on the street, while others are working on existing inventory. Different restrictions in different states dictate how the individual operations are progressing. We are still attempting to get back to where we were pre-pandemic, and it is encouraging to see that we are gaining some traction. We are fortunate in having Quentin Butcher at the helm of this program. He reports that we have not lost any stores or contracts with our buyers. The buyers are operating at about 25 percent capacity.

Another good sign is that donations to VVA are up across the board. We hope this trend will continue to help us return our programs to the levels that they enjoyed pre-pandemic. Your Officers are grateful to those who donated to the organization over these past several months. Thank you.

Also: VVA's Service Officer Grant Program has moved forward as scheduled with VVA funding. The Veterans Support Foundation leadership has experienced several setbacks and has not yet approved a new contract. We remain in contact with VSF President Keith King and Treasurer Alan Cook, and we are confident that we will work out an agreement in the near future. Stay tuned.

A Slow Path to a New Normal**Jack McManus – VVA National Treasurer**

It's been just over a year since we first started hearing about some type of virus or flu epidemic coming out of Asia. That was an odd bit of news that ultimately became as life changing to the whole world as our most tragic global wars.

For most of us the extremely remote possibility of scaly anteater steak or bat-meat stew becoming part of our diet sort of lulled us into complacency for a short period of time. But we soon became aware that this was a human-to-human contagion and not some bizarre distant malady that would have little effect on how we went about our daily lives. We realized we were going to have to deal with a global epidemic—a pandemic—unlike anything we'd seen or prepared for in our lifetimes.

Now, with more American lives lost than killed in action in World War II—and with millions of our fellow country women and men already infected and rates increasing daily—it has become apparent that we and future generations are changed forever.

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So, too, has VVA changed. We are so different today: Many of our comfortable daily conveniences and routines have been restricted or eliminated. We are at a point that technology and innovation provide the means for us to pursue the important things we used to do, but our people-to-people interchanges suffer.

Prime examples of this phenomenon are VVA meeting and communication methods. Today, we are getting very comfortable with virtual meetings at all levels of our lives. How many of us used Zoom or Skype during the holidays as our primary means for family get-togethers?

In VVA, because of remote work, travel restrictions, and social distancing, our virtual meetings have become routine. Most staff interactions and functions, all committee activities and meetings, and Board of Directors meetings are now being held virtually.

From some perspectives, we might now be even more efficient and productive by replacing physical communication with newer technological solutions. On the legislative front, this last year has been one of our most successful. There is a lot to be said for having virtual town halls and hearings that open discussions to the masses, versus the grandstanding and political posturing that marked the old process. Human social interaction is a casualty of our newer communication technologies. So we need to be sensitive to this loss and seek ways to minimize it, particularly because working closely together is a primary reason for our existence—especially on the chapter level.

The BOD recently learned from our Constitution Committee Chair, Leslie DeLong, about an executive waiver for nonprofits issued by the governor of New York that will allow us to hold a virtual National Convention, complete with elections. That could radically change the level of participation in the 2021 Convention, and we would no longer have to be concerned about the still-unknown travel and social distancing restrictions that might be in effect in August.

President John Rowan is forming a new working group to assess the methods of replacing the planned 2021 physical National Convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, with a virtual one that will still be held in this odd-numbered year as required by the VVA Constitution.

The Officers and the staff of The VVA Veteran recommended—and the Finance Committee also recommended for BOD approval—that a printed and mailed version of the magazine be reinstated starting with the March/April issue. The new printed version would be more compact (36 pages versus the former 52-page edition) and have a significantly lower cost than the pre-COVID version. The BOD will make a final decision soon, but we are proceeding on the assumption of budget approval.

There is an old Kris Kristofferson tune, “Why Me?” that I so often asked of myself after surviving Vietnam when some close buddies didn’t make it home. This frickin’ coronavirus brings the same question: “Lord, why me? Why us?”

If we have been blessed to survive yet again, then there must be a reason. Let us pray that it is to continue to serve with each other and to continue to serve our nation in its time of need. Thanks, Lord.

The VVA Veteran is now available online only at www.vvaveteran.org

.Have your friends and fellow veterans sign up to be notified when every new issue goes live by clicking on the red box on the right side of the home page.

REGION 2 | Delaware, New Jersey,
New York, Pennsylvania**Ted Wilkinson**

VVA Officers will no longer pursue any name change for the organization, and will continue to allow membership only to those who served in the military during the Vietnam War. VVA remains busy on Capitol Hill addressing veterans' issues with Congress. With passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, three presumptives were added to the list of diseases acknowledged to be caused by Agent Orange exposure.

Region 2 membership has held up quite well during the pandemic. For the past eight years Region 2 has averaged an increase of 239 members per year. In 2020 membership increased by 162 members. Delaware, which averaged an increase of 21 members per year, in 2020 had 8 new members. New Jersey, which has averaged an increase of 39 members per year, in 2020 added 15 members. New York has averaged an increase of 94 members per year, and in 2020 the membership increased by 99 members. And Pennsylvania, with an average annual increase of 84 members, increased by 40 members last year.

POW/MIA Affairs

Grant T. Coates, Chair

Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced last September that U.S. Air Force Maj. Paul A. Avolese of East Meadow, New York, killed during the Vietnam War, had been accounted for.

According to DPAA, as of the end of last year 1,585 remain missing from the Vietnam War. The countries and number of missing are North Vietnam-442, South Vietnam-803, Laos-285, Cambodia-48, and the Peoples Republic of China-7.

A total of 998 Americans have been accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War. Recoveries were made in the following countries: Vietnam-673, Laos-280, Cambodia-42, and China-3. In addition, 63 U.S. personnel were accounted for between 1973 and 1975 and recovered in Laos-9, Vietnam-53, and Cambodia-1, for a grand total of 1,061.

The pandemic continues to affect DPAA activities. Procedures to collaborate remotely are being implemented. A second virtual meeting connecting more than 350 DPAA members worldwide was recently held. DPAA reported that one military member and two contractors tested positive for COVID-19 and that all have recovered.

In September DPAA and the Defense Intelligence Agency signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will increase the capabilities of DIA's Stony Beach analysts in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and improve joint intelligence research efforts in Vietnam War cases. Established in 1986, the Stony Beach Program has provided language specialists trained to conduct interviews, leverage relationships, and pursue case leads in Southeast Asia.

With restrictions in place since late March due to Hawaii COVID-19 policies, disinterment operations finally resumed in October at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific with the exhumation of 12 World War II veterans' remains.

The Veterans Initiative Program needs your help. Objects taken from the battlefields of Vietnam are more than souvenirs or war trophies. Maps, stories, after-action reports, pictures, and other military items could help locate missing war dead.

Membership Affairs Committee

Ted Wilkinson, Chair

Chapter Members Deceased members last 90 days

AT LARGE	0000	962	1	Vietnam Veterans of America New York State membership has started to plateau. With much research I have worked up a theory on the cause.
ALBANY	0008	65		
SUFFOLK	0011	521		
ROCHESTER	0020	624	7	In order: Vietnam veterans are aging.
QUEENS	0032	239		Vietnam veterans are dying.
WESTCHESTER	0049	361		We are in the middle of a pandemic.
BROOKLYN	0072	193	3	We have had a nasty winter.
BUFFALO	0077	681	4	We are not remembering to ask Vietnam veterans to join.
GLEN FALLS	0079	72		We are burned out and to rest and regroup.
NASSAU	0082	316	1	Getting lazy.
ONEONTA	0085	41		We have some "new" Vietnam veterans that we can ask to join Vietnam Veterans of America.
SYRACUSE	0103	198	3	
MANHATTAN	0126	109	2	Congress has added veterans Vietnam service from <u>November 1, 1955 to February 28, 1961</u> as being eligible to become members of Vietnam Veterans of America.
ORANGE COUNTY	0140	126	1	
WARSAW	0193	159	1	
NIAGARA COUNTY	0268	117	1	I believe there are around 8,000 veterans from that time period who are now eligible to be members. Ask them to join.
ROCKLAND	0333	208		
FINGER LAKES	0377	94	1	
STATEN ISLAND	0421	266		
DUNKIRK	0459	42	2	
OWEGO	0480	81		
PUTNUM/DUTCHESS	0541	36		
AUBURN	0704	47		
ELMIRA	0803	243	1	
HERKIMER	0827	22		
JAMESTOWN	0865	153		
DUTCHESS/COLUMBIA	0869	32		
ENDICOTT	0896	43		
UTICA	0944	154		
FREWSBURG	0978	37		
TOTAL	6242	28		

Central District Report**Nick Valenti****VVA Chapters #85, #103, #377, #480, #704, #708, #803, #827, #896, #944**

VVA Chapter #704 in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Cayuga County Legislature, Mary and Lila Nila, (two Auburn High School students) and County legislators have designated August 7th as a perpetual day of recognition for Cayuga County's Purple Heart recipients. The proclamation was effective 28 October 2020 followed by the City of Auburn proclamation signed on the 12 November 2020. These Proclamations became the 13th (for counties) and 43rd (for Cities, Towns and Villages) in New York State.

By way of background these two students discovered that each of our fallen warriors had been awarded a Purple Heart for their valor. It is America's oldest military decoration. In 2002 U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton introduced a resolution to support efforts to create a National Purple Heart Hall of Honor. New York State committed \$4.1 million toward the planning, design and construction of the Hall of Honor. Other financing was obtained from the Military Order of the Purple Heart, federal HUD/VA funds and donations from veterans and their families. The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor was established under the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, and was built in New York's Hudson River Valley in New Windsor. The Hall was dedicated in November 2006. It was the first of its kind in the nation dedicated to commemorating the sacrifices of our veterans.

The mission of the Hall of Honor is to collect the personal history and preserve the stories of Purple Heart recipients throughout our nation's history from all branches of the military. The recipients' stories are preserved and shared through exhibits, and live and videotaped interviews with veterans. As there is no comprehensive list of Purple Heart recipients in existence, the Hall of Honor is seeking to develop one.

I am encouraging all Purple Heart recipients or their surviving family members to enroll. In order to enroll a Purple Heart recipient, please call (877) 284-6667 or visit www.thepurpleheart.com. See attached supporting documents.

VVA Chapter #944 under Tom Buono works closely with local Utica veteran service organizations as Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH); Disabled American Veterans (DAV); American Legion; Masonic War Veterans; VFW; Marine Corps League, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and Gold Star Families working tirelessly to support veteran activities and interests in their Community. Supporting a Veterans Outreach Center Food Bank, holiday donations to needy Veteran families, working with students at a local Middle School as the students study the Vietnam War, placing wreaths on Veteran Monuments in Utica, providing color guard duties at the wakes of their deceased members, attend funeral services of their deceased members and placing wreaths at a number of Cemeteries where America's warriors are interred.

Despite the setbacks to their scheduled activities for calendar year 2020, Tom Buono is leading Chapter #944 to complete their goal of honoring our Veterans with the "Wreaths Across America" Program. His Chapter laid wreaths on Veterans graves at St. Mary's cemetery in Utica, NY. Their Color Guard then participated in a wreath laying ceremony with the Daughters of the American Revolution Oneida Chapter at Forest Hill cemetery. They then placed a large wreath at the Gold Star Mothers Monument at the Captain George A. Wood Post Office in Utica.

The Chapter has also developed an end game. As a memorial tribute to their members a log book and a bottle of Jim Beam were purchased for recording their members as a "Last Man Standing" organization.

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Under Tom's leadership we have noticed an uptick in membership with the increased activities of the Chapter in community affairs.

As a Chapter showing growth over the past few years Tom provides his membership with relevant information on Veteran affairs. He is a consistent source of important developments as they affect the lives of our veterans. On November 21, 2020 he forwarded to me an important email that dealt with DoD Expanding Access to its facilities. The email went on to say how the military services are working out the bugs and refining communications to continue to welcome newly eligible categories of Veterans and caregivers to commissary, exchange and other authorized facilities. Topics covered include Installation Access-firearms, vehicle operation, varying access procedures between installations and differing identification versions. Special attention needs to be given to accompanying visitors (because "guest" means something specific in military security speak). The information included such circumstances as credentials when individuals have both an authorized VA and DoD affiliation. On-line access is addressed along with the what Privileged Access means. The information comes from Samuel B. Cottes, Jr. BA, Veterans Outreach Program Specialist Staten Island Vet Center. Email address Samuel.cottes@va.gov. or you can visit the web site at www.vetcenter.va.gov.

This year Central District Director I became acquainted with a radio station offering Holiday Greetings to and from our troops. The window for participation was from November 23 – December 31. It was brought to us by the American Ex-Prisoners of War. They have made it possible to share our love and support for those deployed or stationed away from home during the holidays. A person simply records a short shout out by calling 833-369-1351 and leaves a message. Wreaths Radio will play that message on air during the holidays. Be sure to listen to Wreaths Radio as the radio station will play messages from our troops to loved ones back home. I look forward to participating in 2021.

VVA Chapter #377 has seen a growth in membership under the direction of Chapter President

Gary Napieracz. Success in membership growth depends as much on a Chapter's being active in their community as it does harnessing the energy of new members and encouraging other veteran service agencies to work together for the common good of everyone. Welcoming someone to the Chapter, encouraging their involvement, and building a strong support network are the foundation for increasing membership. Chapter #377 and their President Napieracz appear up for the challenge. They join an ever-increasing number of Chapters in Central District growing through hard work.

When organizing veteran event(s) we have the advantage of being covered by our National organization's "Liability Insurance." This gives us the advantage of being able to show Evidence of Insurance when an individual Chapter wishes to sponsor an event that requires Liability Insurance coverage. We need to recognize that there are limitations to what we can and can do. It should be noted that Certificates of Insurance for community events are not automatically covered. The National umbrella does apply to bodily injury, property damage, and personal and advertising injury arising out of a specific event. However, there are exceptions. Just as a reminder here are some of the uncovered exceptions; Parades sponsored by the insured; Shooting activities; Fireworks; Carnivals and fairs with mechanical rides sponsored by the insured; Hip-Hop or Rap concerts; Events including contact sports; Rodeos sponsored by the insured; Political rallies; any event with greater than 2,500 people at any one time (including otherwise acceptable events); and any event with liquor provided by the insured if a license is required for such activity.

Help its readers take an active role in **registering** Purple Heart Recipients in the **National Purple Heart Hall of Honor**, located in **New Windsor, New York**. Send for application at: www.thepurpleheart.com or National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, PO box 207, Vails Gate, NY 12584

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Veterans Incarcerated and In the Justice System Committee Report

Nick Valenti - Chair

New York State no longer has any chartered Vietnam Veteran Chapters. The last one to be decertified was the Auburn Correctional facility Chapter located in Auburn, New York. The Chapter was referred to as VVA Chapter #205. Despite their dissolution, the Chapter had reinvented itself as the Veterans Group of Auburn (VGoA). In doing so they were able to leave a legacy that continues to this day- the crochet squad. These men volunteer their time and crocheting skills to make hats, scarves, gloves and infant items for distribution to human service organizations in the surrounding communities. Though they are constrained by allowable color schemes they continue to flourish. Currently the acceptable colors for use in a correctional facility in New York State are: Shades of White, Green, Brown, Pink and Tan.

The yarn crafters in any New York State Correctional Facility would greatly appreciate keeping these color restrictions in mind when interacting with them.

Referencing New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Directive 4911 will give you the guidelines for the yarn program. Restrictions on crafting tools are among some of the inmate organization limitations.

Long before my time as Chair for New York State Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System Committee there was a long-standing regulation that affects incarcerated veterans. The regulation in question denies incarcerated veterans with service-connected disabilities full compensation. VA disability compensation payments are reduced if a veteran is convicted of a felony and imprisoned for more than 60 days. Veterans rated 20% or more are limited to the 10% disability rate. For a veteran whose disability rating is 10%, the payment is reduced by one-half.

An incarcerated veteran has the right to apply for VA disability benefits while incarcerated. Any benefits awarded while in jail will be reduced or terminated as described above, but will be fully available upon release.

If you are in jail for a misdemeanor or a felony and have a VA Pension, on your 61st day in jail, your pension will be terminated for the duration of your prison sentence. You will need to notify the VA upon your release to get your pension reinstated.

If after 60 days or less in jail, you have completed your sentence, been paroled, or sent to a halfway house or work release program, your disability benefits will not be reduced or terminated.

Although your VA pension will be terminated or reduced while you are in jail, your family can apply to have the benefits paid to them instead. The VA calls this apportionment.

By applying for apportionment, your family can receive your pension while you are ineligible to receive it due to incarceration. Likewise, your family can receive any amount of your disability compensation that you are ineligible to receive while in jail. For example, if you are rated at 70% before going to jail, your monthly benefit will be reduced to 10%. But your family can apply for apportionment to receive the remaining 60%. Once you are released, you can again receive the full amount of your benefits directly.

Your spouse, children and parents can apply for apportionment of your benefits while you are in prison. The VA will award apportioned benefits on the basis of financial need.

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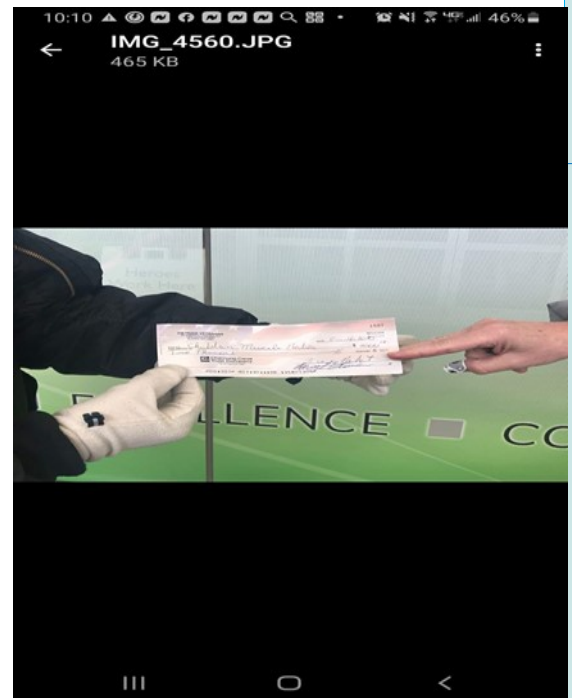
To apply, your family must use VA Form 21-0788, "Information Regarding Apportionment of Beneficiary's Award." They will be required to provide information about their assets and expenses. The VA will divide up the apportioned amount among your dependents according to their financial need.

Like all VA claims, apportionment cases take a long time. You should plan for the apportionment claim to take at least a year and possibly as long as eighteen months.

VA Disability Benefits are NOT considered an asset in a divorce. The Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act exempts VA disability benefits from being divided during a divorce. Simply put, VA disability compensation is not an asset that a judge can divide as marital or community property. However, VA disability benefits can count when a court calculates a veteran's income for child support. In this case, a veteran's disability benefits replace that income.

VVA Chapter #803 Report Elmira, NY

Chapter 803 donation. President Larry Sherman, First Vice President Joe Kopacz and Secretary Bruce Newkirk presenting \$2000 donation to Children's Miracle Network to Lisa Ventura, Senior Director of Foundations for Arnot Ogden Hospital. Donation are. used for equipment and family support for the NICU unit at Arnot Ogden Hospital, Elmira Heights and associated facilities.

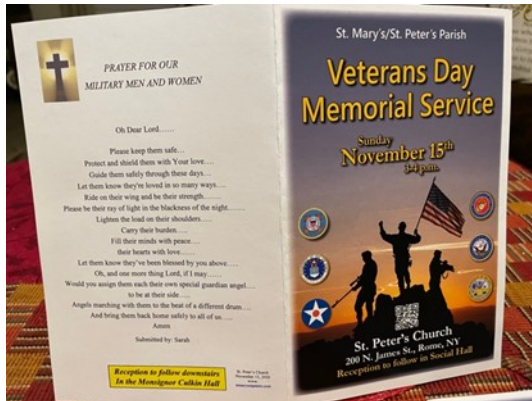


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VVA Chapter #944 Report Utica, NY

Veterans Day Memorial Service at St Peter's Church, Rome, NY with Father Sean O'Brien, Donna Mucks, Gold Star Families, and VVA Chapter 944 Color Guard



CDD, NYSC, VVA

Nick Valenti

I am not trying to overburden you but here are pictures of Me as Central District Director meeting with VVA Chapter #377 out of Dryden, NY.

In the first picture - the 1st person is me, the 2nd person is the VVA #704 Chaplain Jerry Fulmer, and the 3rd person is former VVA Chapter #704 President Lou Patti. We are all visiting VVA Chapter #377 and their President Gary Napieracz.

Can you guess what I am holding in my hand in the second picture? A 500 Dong currency item from Vietnam.

In the third picture I am addressing the #377 members prior to an appreciation ceremony to long time Chapter member Fran Moore.

#3



#2



#1



IN MEMORY

Nick Valenti

For the past year we have been promoting interest in the **"In Memory"** project. This program seeks to honor those Vietnam Veterans who returned home and later died as a result of their service but whose deaths do not fit the Department of Defense parameters for inclusion on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

These men and women can have their **memory and service** memorialized and honored at "The Wall" but not added to The Wall.

I am trying to help get the word out to more veterans and their families and would like to see it as part of our on-line **Interchange**.

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Southern District Report

Joe Ingino

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

As the Southern District Director, all I have been doing is Zoom meetings. One was with VVA Chapter 72 Brooklyn, and Chapter 32 Queens. I always have had VSO meetings at Northport Hospital letting us know what stages we are in. As most of you know or may not know and I am recovering. Thank you for all your prayers. Stay safe and wear your masks.

VVA Chapter #11 Report

Clarence F. Simpson

- Chapter 11 has been continuing Veterans Court with only 3 veterans virtually, due to court COVID 19 / CDC rules.
- Chapter 11 just celebrated its 10th year with the VVA/Suffolk County Veterans Court.
- VVA and the PFC Garfield M. Langhorn MOH committee along with Rep. Lee Zeldin, will be presenting a bill to have a USPS stamp in PFC Langhorn's honor.

VVA Chapter #72 Report of Thomas P. Coughlin Memorial Chapter 72, Brooklyn, NY

Danny Friedman

We have been conducting monthly Chapter and Board meetings via Zoom. Up to 19 members have joined in on any given month. We continue to show our support for the Brooklyn VA Hospital, its patients and health providers. We participate with the VAVS Committee there, as well as a "Veterans Round Table" hosted by newly elected Congresswoman Nicole Malliotakis whose district includes the Brooklyn VA. One of our more notable accomplishments was to manage to hold a Veterans Day Parade/Caravan complete with the laying of wreaths and playing of Taps at the Brooklyn VA. COVID or not we were going to have our day.

Once the VAMC reopened their rehab ward (15-West) we did our best to make sure those veterans knew they weren't abandoned. Even though we could not visit them for the holidays we sent them all the fixings for a great party, gifts and all. We also provided clothing to them and 48 veterans at a local homeless veterans' shelter.

Between the pandemic and the brutal weather, 2020 really sucked. Many Chapter members lost loved ones, and we lost some Chapter members. 2021 hasn't started out too well either. We lost a beloved Chapter member, Sal Popolo, who was one of our go-to guys. Without a second thought our members dug into their pockets to help his widow get through this difficult period. Chapter members also dug into their pockets to assist our brothers and sisters in Florida, Louisiana and Puerto Rico who got wacked by hurricanes, tornados and earth quakes.

We lobbied the VAMC Director to come up with a plan to provide COVID-19 Vaccinations to Vietnam and other veterans. She got back to us with an offer to set aside a Saturday for Vietnam Veterans. We did a lot of outreach and now many of us have already received the second shot as well. It is our hope that once we are all fully vaccinated we can resume in-person meetings. (Continue on pg.. 18)

VVA Chapter #126 Report

Mike Moreno—Vice President

VVA 126 (Manhattan) have been having our Board of Directors and Chapter General Meetings both in person and via Zoom each month on the 3rd Tuesday. We prepare and email minutes of these meetings to all members.

At our November general meeting, we honored Joe Graham (both in-person and Zoom) for his leadership over 20 years.

Our December General Meeting was our annual holiday party.

We opened the virtual party with The Star Spangled Banner was led by Michelle DellaFave.

Introduction of VIPs – NYC DVS Commissioner James Hendon who told us, “We need to mentor returning vets”. Terry Holliday and Don Bak wished au all a happy holiday season. Michelle DellaFave sang Winter Wonderland, Let It Snow, Merry Christmas to You, and Santa Baby. We had Christmas/Chanukah Trivia contests. Dave Woodrow won the Christmas Trivia; Molly Levi won the Chanukah Trivia. They each will be getting a bottle of wine. More holiday songs by Marty Edelman that included Tzena Tzena, Hava Nagila, and Silent Night. Followed by a holiday chant by KAVVA members. We had a “Last Man Standing” raffle, which Michelle DellaFave was the lucky winner of a great bottle of scotch. Dave Woodrow recited.”Twas the Night Before Christmas in Sheepshead Bay” - a good laugh was had. Finally, we had the appearance by Santa - None other than chapter member Benny Marrero. All had a great time.

The Chapter mailed custom holiday cards to every member asking them to reply in a self-addressed and stamped envelope with updated vital data, and received 79 responses

We are continuing our email and website Vietnam Poppy Drive that has collected over \$3,400.

We established a 501c3 “VVA126 NYC Foundation Inc.” with initial funding by our Chapter

We update our award-winning website vva126.org weekly with up to date veteran information.

We prepared and sent to VVA National a resolution supporting House Resolution HR 5590 that would provide VA health benefits to Korean American Vietnam military veterans.

We honored the passing of SSMCGA Executive Director Hazel Cathers and are sorry to hear of the closing of the 100-year old Soldiers’, Sailors’, Marines’, Coast Guard & Airmen’s Club in Manhattan that served as our Chapter meeting place for many years.

We thanked House Rep. Carolyn Maloney, in writing, for her efforts in renaming the Manhattan VA Hospital to The Margaret Cochran Corbin Campus of the New York Harbor Health Care System.

We plan to participate in the Vietnam Veterans Day event scheduled by the UWVC for March 27, 2021
Joe Graham



Western District Report**Mike Walker****VVA Chapters #20, #77, #193, #268, #459, #865, #978****VVA Chapter #77 Report****Paul P Paul Pietrowski**

With the Covid-19 pandemic still going on we at chapter 77 are trying to keep busy. We did have a meeting in November but have suspended future meetings until at least April. On the bright side our food pantry was able to stay open. Our pantry is open on Wednesday and Saturday from 9am to 1pm. Right now, we are assisting 65 veterans and their families every month. Most of our members have received the first vaccine shot at the Buffalo VA and we all agree that the system they have set up is top notch.

The Wall That Heals will be on display July 22-25 at our Helicopter monument in Tonawanda Veterans Park. The VVMF believes that we can hold this event as long as we follow the rules of the pandemic. Our members and the community are looking forward to this event.

We are still planning our fund raisers for the year and hope we can hold them. Fund raisers are, Fill the Helmet, two chicken barbeques and our car show Labor Day weekend.

Stay safe and let's hope we can get back to helping our fellow veterans and serving the communities we live in.

Tonawanda Lions Club donated 25 hams to our food pantry. Bryan Leavy from the Tonawanda Police Dept. donating \$750.00 to our food pantry.



Hogs and Hero's donating food items to our pantry



Our Pantry



Eastern District Report

Sam Hall

VVA Chapters #8, #49, #79, #140, #333, #541, #869

VVA Chapter #49 Report

Robert Kalfus

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 49 Executive Director Dan Griffin and many veterans and their families honored the sacrifice and memory of Westchester's 217 soldiers and 8 nurses who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, losing their lives and never returning home alive from the Vietnam conflict.

More than 700 lit candles in paper bags lining the Trail of Honor were arranged and lit by members of Boy Scouts Troop 73, White Plains, leading to the American flag flying atop the hill in Lasdon Park in Katonah/Somers, for the 33rd annual Candlelight Vigil of Vietnam Veterans remembering their fallen comrades. The lighting occurred at dusk, and the names of all 217 Westchester men and 8 nurses who died in the Vietnam War were solemnly read and remembered.

"It is said that a person dies twice. Once when you stop breathing, and the second time, when your name is no longer mentioned," declared VVoA Director Dan Griffin. "We are here to make sure that never happens. We will always be here, every year, to make sure that our fallen heroes are remembered."

The Veterans Memorial Trail of Honor at Lasdon Park was dedicated on October 19, 1997, featuring memorials and monuments honoring the Veterans of Westchester County and our Nation from the American Revolution through the present day. A special memorial also recognizes and pays tribute to Gold Star Mothers for their own sacrifice. Beginning with the flags of the Merchant Marine, Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Air Force, the trail soon brings the visitor past a cannon from the Spanish-American War, and then to a memorial dedicated to the memory of the men of the Merchant Marine who have been lost during America's military conflicts.

As the trail continues on into the forest, one next passes a series of bronze busts on stone cairns. Each cairn features 44 stones on the front face, representing the 44 cities and towns in Westchester County. The busts are copies of original works created by artist and Veteran Niels Anderson originally displayed at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Veterans Hospital in Montrose, NY, where Anderson himself had been a patient. The busts depict servicemen of the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War. An additional bust honors female nurses. A bust featuring a soldier from the War of 1812 was crafted by sculptor Barbara Lepak.

The trail then leads uphill to the Vietnam War Memorial and Vietnam War Nurses Memorial, located on

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high ground with a spectacular view of the Muscoot Reservoir valley. A cobblestone walkway encircles a granite obelisk featuring the names of 217 Westchester County residents who were killed in action during the Vietnam War. A flagpole with the American and POW flags stands sentinel over the site. The Nurses Memorial depicts a soldier carrying a wounded comrade with a nurse reaching out to assist. A granite stone nearby lists the names of eight nurses killed in Vietnam. Continuing along the trail, one next approaches the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the largest in the park, dedicated to all those who served during the Korean War, particularly the men of Westchester County who gave their lives during this conflict and now have their names engraved on the face of this ten foot high black obelisk. The opposite side of the stone is etched with a map of Korea. Opposite is a flagpole flanked by two stone benches and two plaques. There is also another, smaller, stone monument and rows of memorial bricks with inscriptions.

As the loop trail heads back towards the parking lot, the final two monuments are reached. The first honors the men and women of the infantry or Special Forces soldiers who have served in ground combat under hostile fire since December 6, 1941 and thereby earned the Combat Infantry Badge. The last monument honors our Nation's Gold Star Mothers – those who have made the greatest sacrifice a mother can make for her Country.

The Trail of Honor is open year-round and tours are provided upon request from Chapter 49 VVoA. Services are held at the Vietnam Memorial on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. A Candlelight Vigil is held there on the last Sunday before Christmas every year. Please contact Chapter 49 for information at www.LasdonTrailOfHonor.com or call (914) 682-4949.

Chapter 49 donated \$2,000.00 to the FDR VA Hospital food pantry. We are excepting applications for our Scholarship program.

VVA Chapter #333

Roy Tschudy

As per your request for the spring addition State Chapters updates, please find the below information with regard to Chapter 333.

Chapter 333 located here in Rockland County, continues to hold monthly meetings on the first Thursday of each month, due to the Covid restrictions we hold said meetings according to protocols set. Each member in attendance wears a proper face mask, we social distance with a sanitizing of each personal area at the conclusion of our meeting. Unfortunately, until further notice we will not provide food or beverage until we are able to do so.

In addition, our monthly Board meeting has now been moved to the same date as our monthly meeting one hour prior to the regular membership meeting, this to provide the utmost safety for board members as opposed to having a separate meeting on another date. Chapter 333 has introduced to our members a Zoom account, we are currently in the process of purchasing a Chapter 333 Laptop which will enable members who have either moved a great distance away and/or those who cannot physically attend meetings the opportunity to remain an integral part of Chapter events.

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Our Chapter is moving forward with the hope that 2021 will once again allow us to celebrate our annual WATCHFIRES set up in different locales in the County. Please visit Chapter 333 website (www.vva333.com) for you to observe and appreciate the history along with significance of WATCHFIRES.

Chapter 333 has been extremely fortunate to find a new Website manager in Debby Frank, Debby has graciously accepted this role after the sad passing of Chapter member Bob Taylor this past fall. Debby has re-constructed our Website in both a colorful and unique style that I am sure will match any others!

Our fundraising abilities for our wonderful Hand Cyle Program has been stalled as has many other objectives due to the ongoing issue of Covid, however, our Chapter owns a healthy account in the event one, two or even three disabled veterans makes contact with us and who wish to own this or another sports adaptive piece of equipment the V.A. does not or will not provide.

Chapter 333 led by former presidents Howard Goldin and Ed Frank has over many, many years conducted a teaching program at Middle schools along with High Schools on the Vietnam experience. Sadly, this also has been stalled both last year and seemingly this year also, however, we remain vigilant in providing our lessons to any students who are willing to contact us.

Chapter 333 is now accepting applications from prospective students on a few of the scholarship programs we offer, in the past we have been and still remain benevolent to young students who meet the requirements set forth. Again, information on this will be found on our chapter website www.vva333.com

I encourage you take a few moments and check out our updated website for VVA Chapter 333. Our new Webmaster Debbie Frank has been updating the site to make it more uniform and colorful. In the picture section there are a few of us from back in our military days, I am sure that Debbie is continuing to add the photos sent to her. If you did send me and/ or Debbie a photo and it is not yet posted, please give Deb a little time to do so. I have no doubt based on her other managed Websites that when completed/updated, it will be first class! Link to VVA #333 website here: <https://www.vva333.com>.

The VVA website also includes links to the current edition of the VVA National Magazine as well as our RockVets newsletter.

Debby has;

Updated "Our Members Page Then" with all submitted individual photos.

RCVCC Veterans of the Year Photos - 2 current photos of individuals and group photos of previous honorees.

Gene Sullivan Service award application information page constructed.

Annual 2021 VVA 333 Scholarship application page which can be downloaded by applicants with June 1, 2021 deadline.

Rock Vets Page with link to recent issues.

"FALLEN HERO'S" page - 46 Rockland servicemen lost during the Vietnam War are identified with individual photo and personal information.

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Lastly, I would be remiss if I fail to mention our recent losses, we take a moment to honor the memory of our recent members and or spouse;

Gene Sullivan

Bob Taylor

Jackie McClintock spouse of Chapter member Bruce McClintock

Susan Pizzimonte spouse of Chapter member Pat Pizzimonte

God Bless and keep them safe in his loving hands.

Continued good wishes to all our Vietnam "brothers" all thru our Country, stay well and stay safe!

VVA Applauds Confirmation of Denis McDonough as VA Secretary

(Washington, D.C.) — "Vietnam Veterans of America applauds the successful 87-7 vote to confirm Denis McDonough as Secretary of Veterans Affairs," said VVA National President John Rowan. "We have full confidence that Denis McDonough will work with the Veterans Service Organizations and Military Service Organizations to improve veterans' healthcare and other services. We are compiling a list for his attention, including the long-overdue implementation of [Pub.L. 114-315](#), the *Toxic Exposure Research Act*; the immediate implementation of the three additions to the list of diseases presumed service-connected to Agent Orange (Pub.L. 116-283), and more.

"Denis McDonough has the knowledge and experience needed to be an effective leader of the Department of Veterans Affairs," noted Rowan. "We expect the Secretary to hit the ground running, and we look forward to working with him," noted Rowan.

"Though not a veteran, he's deeply familiar with the complex Veterans Health Administration," said Rowan. "As White House chief of staff under President Barack Obama, McDonough worked closely with former VA secretaries Robert Shinseki and Bob McDonald, as well as Congress to address the wait-time scandal, formulating Veterans Choice, thus opening the door to the private sector to augment veterans' healthcare services from the VA. We believe he will lead the VA to fill all the vacancies currently impeding VA's capacity to serve veterans."

A native of Stillwater, Minnesota, Mr. McDonough graduated from Saint John's University in 1992 and Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service with an MSFS degree in 1996.

Prior to serving as White House chief of staff, McDonough served as deputy national security adviser (2010-2013) and as Chief of Staff of the National Security Council (2009-2010). Following his time with

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the Obama administration, McDonough has worked for the Markle Foundation, focusing on employment and job training for Americans. His experience on Capitol Hill includes senior foreign policy advisor to Sen. Tom Daschle and legislative director for Sen. Ken Salazar.

Please note, once proposed legislation has been signed into law, the Executive Branch is responsible for implementing it. VVA will work with Congress and the Department of Veteran Affairs to ensure that these new bills are fully implemented.

On January 1, 2021, H.R. 6395--the *FY 2021 NDAA*, containing the Tester/Harder Amendment—was passed into law. At long last, Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange who have been diagnosed with Parkinsonism, Bladder cancer, and/or Hypothyroidism will be deemed service-connected and be eligible for healthcare and compensation:

Title XCI—Veterans Affairs Matters, Section 9109 reads as follows: *Additional Diseases Associated with Exposure to Certain Herbicide Agents for Which There is a Presumption of Service Connection for Veterans Who Served in the Republic of Vietnam.* Section 1116(a) (2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraphs: (I) Parkinsonism. (J) Bladder cancer. (K) Hypothyroidism.

Highlights of H.R. 6395 - Title XCI—Veterans Affairs Matters

- Modification of licensure requirements for Department of Veterans Affairs health care professionals providing treatment via telemedicine.
- Additional care for newborn children of veterans.
- Expansion of eligibility for HUD–VASH.
- Study on unemployment rate of women veterans who served on active duty in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001.
- Access of veterans to Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record.
- Department of Veterans Affairs report on undisbursed funds.
- Transfer of Mare Island Naval Cemetery to Secretary of Veterans Affairs for maintenance by National Cemetery Administration.
- Comptroller General report on Department of Veterans Affairs handling of disability compensation claims by certain veterans.

Additional diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents for which there is a presumption of service connection for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam.

View bill conference report at: <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20201207/CRPT-116hrpt617.pdf>

On Jan. 5, 2021, President Trump signed into law H.R. 7105, *The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvements Act of 2020*. “This is the culmination of two years of bipartisan work,” noted Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.). “There is something in this bill for just about every one of our nation’s veterans and their loved ones.”

View bill conference report at: https://republicans-veterans.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hr_7105_vets_division_section_summaries_final.pdf

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Highlights of H.R. 7105 H.R. 7105 - the *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvements Act of 2020* Benefits

- Requires VA to return Disability Based Questionnaires to their public-facing website and requires the VA to accept Disability Based Questionnaires as evidence in disability compensation claims, even when completed by non-VA medical providers.
- Increases the timeframe of the Vietnam War Era of military service, stating that the Vietnam Era began on November 1, 1955, instead of February 28, 1961, which will extend benefits to the more than 3,200 U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) who served in the Vietnam War during November 1, 1955 – February 27, 1961.
- Eliminates the 12-year time limit governing applications for Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) benefits for veterans who separated from military service after January 1, 2013 (i.e., making VR&E the same as the “Forever G.I. Bill”).
- Sets new limits on when the VA’s Debt Management Center may initiate debt collection proceedings against veterans.
- Lowers the age to 55 at which a remarried surviving spouse of a Veteran may still receive Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC).
- Agent Orange Exposure Fairness Act S. 332 and H.R. 566; requires a GAO briefing and report on repealing the manifestation period for presumptions of service connection for certain diseases associated with exposure to herbicide agents.
- Increases the federal government’s special pensions for the surviving spouses of Medal of Honor recipients.

Requires the Veterans Benefits Administration to establish specialized teams for processing Military Sexual Trauma claims.

- Allows veterans filing a claim for a physical or mental health condition resulting from sexual trauma to choose the gender of their Compensation & Pension Exam provider.
- Allows National Guard and Reserve service under Title 32 orders to count for VA Home Loan eligibility.
- Requires the VA to allow veterans to update dependent information via the eBenefits website.
- Requires the VA to study cancer, diseases, or illness experienced by those who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan between October 1, 2001, and September 30, 2005, and expands VA’s open burn pit registry to include burn pits located in Uzbekistan.
- Specifies circumstances under which a Service Member, including members of the National Guard and Reserves, is considered service-connected for a disability or death from COVID-19.

Orders the VA’s Under Secretary for Benefits to ensure every paper or electronic document relating to the receipt of non-service-connected pension include a notice that the Department does not charge any fee in connection with the filing of an initial claim for benefits.

Services for Women Veterans

Devotes \$20 million for retrofitting healthcare facilities “to make it safer and easier for women veterans to get care” and requires the Veterans Health Administration to submit plans for approval regarding h

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- Now they will designate these funds.
- Mandates that every VA facility have at least one women's health primary-care provider.
- Creates a permanent Office of Women's Health within the Veterans Health Administration, tasked with providing oversight over all Women's Health Programs within the VA
- Requires VA leaders to create "an anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault policy" and designate officials to take responsibility for any related complaints.
- Requires VA to create a training module for community healthcare providers that is specific to women veterans.
- Expands the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans' mandate to include examining the effect of intimate partner violence on women veterans, and creates a VA pilot program to care for survivors of intimate partner violence.
- Ensures that servicemembers and veterans seeking access to care and counseling related to Military Sexual Trauma can seek this care at any VA healthcare facility, not limited to Vet Centers.
- Requires VA to enter into agreements with public or private entities, to provide free legal services to Women veterans to meet the following unmet needs: Child Support, Eviction & Foreclosure Prevention, Discharge Upgrade Appeals, Financial Guardianship, Credit Counseling, and Family Reconciliation Assistance.

Improves access to prosthetic items made specifically for women at VA medical facilities.

Enhanced Healthcare Services

- Waives VA requirements for receipt of per diem payments for domiciliary care at State Veterans Homes and modification of eligibility for payments.

Prohibits the Veterans Health Administration from collecting co-payments from veterans who are members of a Native American tribal nation.

- Makes permanent a pilot program to provide childcare to veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system and gives the Veterans Health Administration five years to implement the provision of childcare at every VA medical center.
- Requires State Veterans Homes to report on COVID-19 cases within these facilities to the VA.
- Requires the VA to pay for emergency transportation of newborns.
- Requires VA medical facilities to have drop-off locations for controlled substances medications.

Mandates an annual audit of facility-level appointment scheduling, which the Veterans Health Administration must share with Congress.

Services for Homeless Veterans & Veterans at Risk of Homelessness

- Expands the HUD-VASH voucher program to veterans with Other Than Honorable characterizations of discharge.
- Increases the amount of grant funds awarded to organizations providing services to homeless veterans to 115 percent of the State Veterans Home domiciliary rate, and allows for additional increases of grant funds in higher cost-of-living areas.
- Allows the VA to award grants to legal services organizations assisting veterans who are homeless and veterans at imminent risk of homelessness.

Requires the VA to study existing programs that provide assistance

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- to Women veterans who are homeless, with a goal of identifying continued areas of need.
- Extends contracts for VA Homeless Veteran Case Managers to prevent gaps in services for homeless veterans during COVID-19.

VVA thanks you for answering the call to action, and we look forward to working together in 2021 to achieve more legislative victories for our nation's veterans.

The Mental Health Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic in New York State

As of February 2021, more than 1.4 million New Yorkers have been infected by the coronavirus and more than 43,000 have died from COVID-19.

A wide body of research shows that people commonly experience fear, anxiety, and stress during and after a disaster, so it is not surprising that the coronavirus pandemic is taking a toll on the mental health of New Yorkers.

In addition to anxiety about the coronavirus itself, many New Yorkers are struggling with the societal changes resulting from the pandemic, such as isolation from community, uncertainty about the future, or new childcare responsibilities. The financial strain caused by widespread job loss decreases New Yorkers' ability to afford mental health care and increases other risk factors for poor mental health.

Using survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau, a new NYStateHealth report analyzes mental health in New York State during the pandemic. The report examines mental health by race and ethnicity, age, and household income, and compares symptoms among New Yorkers who did and did not experience a loss in household employment income during the pandemic. It also outlines current efforts underway as well as additional solutions to address the unmet need for mental health services in New York State.

Video to watch on YouTube!

Welcome Home - In Their Own Words

Lodi by John Fogerty Creedence Clearwater Revival (173rd Airborne Brigade

<https://youtu.be/-cNdv8PIWo>

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A New Era for the VA

David Sandman

The U.S. Senate confirmed Denis McDonough, [in an 87–7 vote](#), as the new Secretary for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Secretary McDonough is an unusual choice for the position. He is not himself a military veteran (he’s only the second non-veteran to serve as VA Secretary). He also lacks health care experience, which could be a challenge for the person charged with overseeing the single largest health care system in the United States.

So what makes him the right person for this job? He’s an experienced leader with a solid track record of delivering results, and he has good relationships in Washington. Former VA Secretary Bob McDonald [praised McDonough](#) as “a crisis-tested leader of character with great knowledge, skills, and experience in using the levers of government.”

Four years ago, I shared [advice for Dr. David Shulkin](#) when he was appointed as President Trump’s first VA Secretary; I did the same when [Robert Wilkie](#) took over the position. Much of that advice still holds; Secretary McDonough will face many of the same persistent challenges his predecessors did. But new challenges have also emerged.

Here are some top priorities for Secretary McDonough to tackle:

1. Manage the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on veterans — and beyond. The VA provides care at more than 1,200 health care facilities, serving more than 9 million enrolled veterans. During the past year, VA facilities have seen more than [200,000 COVID-19 cases and more than 9,000 deaths](#) among patients and staff — a higher death toll for American veterans than the [Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined](#). Those numbers account only for those seeking care at the VA; there are no reliable estimates of the number of veterans nationally who have contracted and/or died from the coronavirus. The VA has an urgent task to administer the COVID-19 vaccine to patients and staff, and to continue screening, testing, providing care, expanding telehealth, and protecting its frontline workers.

Ideally, the VA can reach beyond its own patients to spearhead the nation’s vaccination campaign. Part of its [vision](#) is to “...contribute to the nation’s well-being through education, research and service in national emergencies.” The VA has facilities in every part of the country and hundreds of thousands of trained personnel. It can step up and lead the way in the national pandemic response.

2. Curb the epidemic of veteran suicide. Veteran suicide was an urgent issue even before the pandemic. While making up 7.9% of the U.S. adult population, [veterans accounted for 13.5% of all deaths by suicide](#) among the adult population in 2017. Increases in the suicide rate are also growing faster among veterans than among the general population. COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem. In April of last year, VA researchers warned that our nation’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic could create a “perfect storm” of conditions that increase the risk of veteran suicide. Factors include the toll of growing economic

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stress and social isolation, barriers to mental health, and an increase in firearms sales. A recent [survey](#) of post-9/11 veterans who experienced illness or injury while serving found that 52% of respondents said their mental health has worsened during the pandemic; 30% reported having suicidal thoughts in the past two weeks. And mental health services were lacking for veterans; during the pandemic, 51% of veterans surveyed reported having a mental health appointment canceled or postponed, and 48% of those said they did not receive needed information from the VA on how to continue their mental health care.

I'm encouraged that Secretary McDonough said in his [confirmation hearing](#), "The first and most important thing I will do if confirmed is underscore that comprehensive health for our veterans includes mental health." Improving the availability and quality of mental health services should go hand in hand with addressing issues of access to firearms and other lethal means. Every VA Secretary has named suicide prevention as a top priority, but we have yet to turn the tide.

3. Restore trust. The VA has experienced scandals and cover-ups, from manipulating data about wait times at VA facilities to smearing the reputation of [Andrea Goldstein](#), who reported being sexually assaulted at a VA hospital. These are egregious examples, and it will be a challenge to recover from these breaches of trust. But more mundane lapses, like a widespread lack of transparency, have also eroded trust. For example, we don't have a clear idea of the outcomes of the MISSION Act, which expanded access to community-based services for veterans. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, so Secretary McDonough should be open and honest about all of the department's activities, its successes, and its shortcomings.

4. Adapt to an increasingly diverse modern military. It can't be your grandfather's VA; today's veterans are different from yesterday's in numerous ways. The share of veterans in the U.S. today is shrinking; today, only about 7% of Americans are military veterans. [Women](#) are the fastest-growing segment of the veteran population. Upon his nomination for the position, Secretary McDonough [pledged](#) to "make our VA even more welcoming to all veterans — including our women veterans, veterans of color, and LGBTQ veterans." That's an important promise to keep because the newest generation of veterans is both more diverse and has been engaged in different types of warfare than those who came before. Drones may have different psychological effects on veterans than we have seen in past conflicts. Burn pits present a new and not fully understood risk to the health of veterans.

5. Listen to veterans themselves. This is perhaps the most important principle for anyone, but especially so because Secretary McDonough is not himself a veteran. What are their priorities, needs, and preferences? VA leadership should be in regular conversation with veterans and ensure their voices are represented and responded to.

Secretary McDonough has a tough task ahead of him. The VA is a large and sprawling organization with many complexities even in usual times; the pandemic adds another layer of challenges. At his confirmation hearing, Secretary McDonough noted that with every decision he and his team make, he will ask, "Are the decisions we're taking increasing access for veterans and are they improving outcomes for veterans?" That's the right question to ask, and I am confident that our nation's veterans will be well served when he follows through.

Veterans Treatment Courts:

A Second Chance for New York Veterans in Need

For military veterans who encounter the criminal justice system, Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) can offer a lifeline. VTCs are a type of problem-solving court that provide an alternative to incarceration for eligible justice-involved veterans who have mental health or substance use disorders.

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The very first VTC was established in Buffalo more than a decade ago; today, New York is poised to ensure that every veteran who needs one has access to a VTC. Governor Cuomo's proposed Executive Budget includes a straightforward policy that would enable veterans charged in counties without a Veterans Treatment Court to be transferred to a VTC in an adjacent county.

Last week, NYSHHealth President and CEO David Sandman testified before a joint budget hearing of the New York State legislature in support of universal access to VTCs.

Read and watch his testimony.

Thank you to Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, and members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means and Committees for the opportunity to testify today. I am pleased to provide testimony on behalf of the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHHealth), a private, independent, statewide foundation dedicated to improving the health of all New Yorkers.

I am here today to speak on behalf of creating universal access to Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) for every New York veteran who needs one. Despite their proven merits, not every veteran has access to a VTC. A simple transfer policy that is proposed in the executive budget will fix that.

New York's Veterans

New York is home to more than 700,000 veterans, the fifth-largest veteran population of any state in the nation. Most veterans return from deployments and transition to civilian life relatively smoothly; they're healthy, ready to work or go to school, and eager to settle back into life at home. But for some, the adjustment isn't so easy. They struggle with the invisible wounds of war: PTSD, traumatic brain injury, depression, substance use, and more. A survey of New York State's veterans by the RAND Corporation revealed that 22% of returning post-9/11 veterans have a probable mental health diagnosis.^[1] The number of veterans being treated for mental illness and substance use has increased 38% since 2004.^[2]

Mental health and substance use issues are associated with various related problems such as homelessness, unemployment, and strained relationships. Sometimes these challenges lead to involvement with the criminal justice system. Nationally, about 8% of those incarcerated in jails or prisons are military veterans.^[3]

Veterans Treatment Courts: A New York Innovation

For those veterans who encounter the criminal justice system, Veterans Treatment Courts can offer a lifeline. VTCs are a type of problem-solving court that provide an alternative to incarceration for eligible justice-involved veterans who have mental health or substance use disorders.

It is a point of pride that the very first VTC in the nation was established in Buffalo, in 2008, by the Honorable Judge Robert Russell. New York State is the national leader for this type of social justice reform; its model is the national standard and blueprint for VTCs.

Veterans who participate in VTCs are offered mental health and/or substance use services and can be linked to veteran-specific community-based services and agencies. VTCs maintain the traditional partnerships and practices of highly successful drug courts. Rather than focusing on punishment, VTCs present a non-adversarial approach in which the judge, prosecutor, defense, probation, law enforcement and case manager work together with representatives from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as the state's department or commission of veterans' affairs, Vet Centers, community mental health and substance use treatment providers,

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veterans service organizations, and volunteer veteran mentors. This multi-disciplinary team ensures every veteran receives an individualized treatment plan and is connected to the service benefits he or she earned.

The evidence is clear: VTCs work. Participating in VTCs is associated with reduced recidivism, lower alcohol and drug use, more stable housing, increased opportunities for employment, stabilized relationships with friends and family, and improved mental

health. To date, more than 4,500 New York veterans have been helped by the State's Veterans Treatment Courts.

By addressing the underlying cause of criminal behavior in a highly structured and closely supervised environment, VTCs strike the proper balance between accountability and compassion. The restoration of veterans' sense of honor allows them to re-engage with their communities as productive, law-abiding citizens.

The Problem: Inequities in Access

Only about half of New York's counties have a VTC. For justice-involved veterans in counties that lack VTCs, the men and women who swore to protect our country are languishing in a justice system not equipped to deal with their unique challenges—challenges that may well be a byproduct of their patriotism. Veterans should not be deprived of the opportunity to get their lives back on track simply because of where they live.

The Solution: A Transfer Policy

Albany has the power to fix this. The FY 2022 Executive Budget will solve the problem and create universal access to VTCs statewide. It proposes a straightforward policy that would enable veterans charged in counties without a VTC to be transferred to a VTC in an adjacent county. Enacting such a proposal would ensure that all New York veterans across the State have access to these lifesaving specialized courts.

The budget proposal enjoys broad support and mirrors a plan developed by a diverse set of stakeholders. The New York State Health Foundation joined forces with the national organization Justice For Vets to convene a working group to develop a consensus plan to ensure that every veteran in New York has access to a high-quality VTC. The working group included representatives of the New York State Unified Court System, district attorneys, State officials, law enforcement, veterans, and other key stakeholders. In an unprecedented effort, they agreed that a transfer policy was the right solution.

New York State can enact this transfer policy without incurring start-up costs. Existing VTCs have the capacity and infrastructure to absorb transfer cases. The transfer policy itself requires no funding. The FY 2022 proposal includes appropriation authority for this program, which will allow for the establishment of any additional Veterans Treatment Courts, peer-to-peer programs, and peer mentoring programs in the VTCs.

Learn more about how VTCs help New York State veterans.

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[2] Henderson K and Stewart K. "Veterans Treatment Courts," American University, 2016. <https://www.american.edu/spa/jpo/initiatives/drug-court/upload/fact-sheet-on-veterans-treatment-courts.pdf>.

[3] Bronson J, Carson EA, Noonan M, and Berzofsky M, "Veterans in Prison and Jail, 2011–12," The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vpjl1112.pdf>.

[4] Wounded Warrior Project and Westat, "2020 Annual Warrior Survey," 2020, <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/zojlv53/2020-annual-warrior-survey.pdf>

VVA Chapter #268 Report

Gordie Bellinger

As of the end of January 2021 54% of the membership has had the first Pfizer vaccine shot and some received the second shot.

Hopefully we can reach 85% with the first Pfizer shot by the end of February 2021.

All these Pfizer vaccine shots are taken place at Buffalo, New York V.A.

This is very good news.

Still Wear Your Mask, Stay Your Distance And Wash Your Hands

REFLECTION:

Lord, you are my Victor and the Great Warrior who fights my battles. Though I don't understand what's happening around me, I place my trust in your goodness.

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COVID-19 & Veterans' Mental Health Fact Sheet

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, military veterans in New York State were 8 times more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder and 2–4 times more likely to experience major depression than their civilian counterparts. The pandemic may further increase the risk of poor mental health and substance use among New York's 700,000 veterans—conditions that too often bring veterans in contact with the criminal justice system.

Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) offer mental health and substance use services as an alternative to incarceration for justice-involved veterans. In his proposed 2022 Executive Budget, Governor Cuomo included a plan for universal access to VTCs for all New York veterans who need one.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges for veterans, including exacerbating mental health and substance use issues that too often bring veterans in contact with the criminal justice system. Before the pandemic, veterans in New York State were 8 times more likely to experience (PTSD) and 2–4 times more likely to experience major depression than their civilian counterparts.¹ In a recent national survey, a majority of veterans said their mental health worsened since socially distancing, and more than half reported having a mental health appointment canceled or postponed during the pandemic. The trauma caused by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), addiction, depression, and substance use can lead to trouble with the law. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, more than half of all justice-involved veterans have either mental health or substance use disorders, but the criminal justice system is ill-equipped to meet their needs.² Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) serve as an alternative to incarceration, giving justice-involved veterans charged with low-level offenses a second chance by providing access to treatment and mental health services. For many veterans, VTCs are a critical path to receiving the help they need, but one-third of New York State's 700,000 military veterans lack access to a VTC. Ensuring universal access to VTCs is imperative to helping veterans during the pandemic. Below is a snapshot of veterans' mental health during the pandemic, based on available national and New York State data

COVID-19 IMPACT ON VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

The Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) annually surveys post-9/11 veterans and service members who incurred a physical or mental injury or illness while serving. The 2020 survey, conducted during the pandemic, found that:³

54% currently suffer from PTSD

34% currently suffer from severe or moderately severe depression

52% reported that their mental health has worsened since socially distancing themselves

30% reported having suicidal thoughts in the past two weeks

The survey also found that the pandemic has made mental health care less accessible.

51% had a mental health appointment cancelled or postponed

48% with a cancelled mental health appointment did not receive needed information from the VA on how to continue their mental health care

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COVID-19 IMPACT ON VETERANS' RISK FACTORS FOR POOR MENTAL HEALTH Social isolation, unemployment, food insecurity, and other factors are associated with poor mental health outcomes.⁴ Nationally, unemployment among veterans increased from 3.4% in November 2019 to 6.3% in November 2020.⁵

Nationally, every 5 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate is associated with more than 550 veteran suicide deaths & more than 20,000 additional veterans having substance use disorders.⁶

61% of respondents to the annual WWP survey conducted during the pandemic reported feeling more disconnected from their family, friends, or community.⁷

Prior to the pandemic, 59,000 New York veterans relied on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.⁸

Aging veterans are at a particularly high risk of social isolation during the pandemic.⁹ More than 70% of New York's veterans are age 55 or older.¹⁰

New York State is home to more than 700,000 military veterans. Prior to the pandemic, veterans in New York State were 8 times more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder and 2–4 times more likely to experience major depression than their civilian counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate mental health and substance use issues that too often bring veterans in contact with the criminal justice system.

See a [fact sheet](#) on how COVID-19 has impacted the mental health of New York State's veterans.

Full list of references

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Mike Richman, "Veterans and the criminal justice system," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, September 8, 2018, <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0918-VA-researcher-examines-Vets-who-collide-with-criminal-justice-system.cfm>.

Wounded Warrior Project and Westat, "2020 Annual Warrior Survey," 2020, <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/zojlv53/2020-annual-warrior-survey.pdf>.

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Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "SNAP Helps 1.3 Million Low-Income Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State," January 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-13-million-low-income-veterans-including-thousands-in-every>

New York State Division of Veterans' Services, "2019 Annual Report," <https://veterans.ny.gov/sites/default/files/annual-report-2019.pdf>.

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS (JROTC) MEDAL AND RIBBON PROGRAM PURPOSE:

- 1) To honor and recognize students enrolled in high school Junior Reserve Officer Corp (JROTC) programs for their exceptional leadership, community service, academic achievements and successes in the thousands of JROTC units throughout the united states.
- 2) To strengthen the legacy of the Vietnam Veterans of America.
- 3) To bring attention to the honorable service to both country and community by veterans of the Vietnam war.
- 4) To provide an additional avenue into our schools to support our veterans in classrooms programs.

Award criteria

- 1) The Cadet exemplifies the Core Values of the Vietnam Veterans of America
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) Meaningful Achievement
- 4) Integrity
- 5) Compassion
- 6) Camaraderie
- 7) The Cadet must have completed their second year of JROTC at the end of the current school year.
- 8) Cadet academically is in the upper 25 percent of his class academically.
- 9) Top 25 percent of his unit in JROTC achievements – Classes emphasizing JROTC course of study.
- 10) Each top State Cadet forwarded for National Competition is required to submit an essay of not less than 500 words, the subject selected by the National Public Affairs Committee for the current school year is: Essay theme “What my training and participation in JROTC has meant to me.” INVOLVEMENT Chapter Involvement in Area JROTC Units VVA Chapters will be responsible for contacting their local educational institutes that have JROTC Units to explain the award to the school and the cadets, offer selection assistance, and be available to present the award to the Top Cadet at a ceremony of the school’s choosing. A narrative of the Cadet’s accomplishments and reason for selection would be provided by the school to the Chapter.

Chapters are responsible to purchase the medals and ribbons for their schools. Approximate cost \$15 per medal/ribbon. Medals and ribbons purchased from National VVA – Mokie Porter at mporter@vva.org or by calling 301-585-4000. For information also contact Dennis Howland Public Affairs Committee Chair dennishowland@msn.com or 801=389-1893.

On the VVA website www.vva.org info for members, awards

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The Top Cadet to receive the medal and ribbon will be selected by the faculty and advisors to each school's JROTC Units. The recipient information of the Unit Top Cadet award from each school will then be sent to the respective State Council, by the Chapter, with a nomination narrative. The Cadet will compete with each of the schools' Top Cadets for the State Council Top Cadet designation. State Councils will create a selection committee made up of members of the State Council. This committee will be responsible for selecting their individual State Top Cadet. Any rewards for this selection would be strictly the decision and responsibility of the State Council. Only one selection, sent forward for national competition, will be made per State Council. Once the State Council makes their Top Cadet selection that one State Council Top Cadet narrative, Cadet's essay and information will be forwarded to the National VVA Communications Director (Mokie Porter – mporter@vva.org) for judging by the VVA National Awards Committee.

Cadets will be selected to receive (1st Place), \$2500, (2nd Place) \$1500, and (3rd Place) \$1000).

Deadline for the submission for National Competition will be NLT 1 April of the current school year – emailed to mporter@vva.org

As of February 2021, more than 1.4 million New Yorkers have been infected by the coronavirus and more than 43,000 have died from COVID-19.

A wide body of research shows that people commonly experience fear, anxiety, and stress during and after a disaster, so it is not surprising that the coronavirus pandemic is taking a toll on the mental health of New Yorkers.

In addition to anxiety about the coronavirus itself, many New Yorkers are struggling with the societal changes resulting from the pandemic, such as isolation from community, uncertainty about the future, or new childcare responsibilities. The financial strain caused by widespread job loss decreases New Yorkers' ability to afford mental health care and increases other risk factors for poor mental health.

Using survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau, a new NYSHealth report analyzes mental health in New York State during the pandemic. The report examines mental health by race and ethnicity, age, and household income, and compares symptoms among New Yorkers who did and did not experience a loss in household employment income during the pandemic. It also outlines current efforts underway as well as additional solutions to address the unmet need for mental health services in New York State.

Key Findings

In May 2020, more than one-third of adult New Yorkers reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression in the prior week. That rate is more than triple what was self-reported nationally using similar measures during recent pre-pandemic periods.

The proportion of New Yorkers reporting poor mental health has remained high throughout the pandemic, reaching 37% of adult New Yorkers in October 2020.

Compared with all racial and ethnic groups, New Yorkers of color generally reported the highest rates of poor mental health throughout the survey period. In October 2020, 42% of Hispanic and 39% of Black New Yorkers reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression in the prior week.

Although all age groups were affected, young adult New Yorkers (ages 18–34 years) reported the highest rates (49%) of poor mental health in October 2020.

Low-income New Yorkers experienced the highest rates of poor mental health across the survey period, compared with all other income groups. Reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression increased across all income brackets from May to October 2020.

In October 2020, nearly half of New Yorkers (47%) in households that lost employment income since the start of the pandemic reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression in the prior week. This rate is 1.7x higher than among households that did not experience income loss.

New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc.

Francisco Muñiz III—President

As you are aware that New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc.(NYVVF) no longer has a telemarketer to raise funds for the Foundation within New York State. There has been no fundraising since the last two years.

We have received approximately \$425 in donations from members of VVA and from previous donors. I can count on one hand on how many VVA members that have sent in donations this year. We have over 6,000 VVA members in New York State. If each one would donate, once a year, a dollar donation (\$1.00) it will increase our funds to support VVA-NYSC with partial funding of our two Service Officers working from Buffalo, NY Regional Office.

Donations to human charities dwarf those to animal charities. But the money we get could be used more effectively if people weren't so sentimental about pets. Are animals worth more than the betterment of the life of a Veteran and his family?

ASPCA spent a whopping \$52 million on fundraising in 2012 and the Salvation Army received \$187 million in donation in 2017. The CEO of an animal shelter got nearly \$600,000 in compensation when the individual retired!

Total giving to charitable organizations was \$410.02 billion in 2017 (2.1% of GDP). This is an increase of 5.2% in current dollars and 3.0% in inflation-adjusted dollars from 2016.

Every year, we hear more and more stories about different scams and fraudulent practices that take advantage of the generosity of Americans, especially in times of dire need.

The first step to take to protect yourself from being taken advantage of when a potential scammer or fake charity asks you to donate.

First things first: Are they a registered public 501(c)(3) organization?

Second: What's in a name?*

Third: What are the organization's mission, goals, and history of success?

Fourth: Google it!

Fifth: Use Charity Navigator

New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation Incorporated is headquartered in **Westbury, NY**, and is a 501 (c)(3) organization. EIN: **11-3173156**. Donations are **tax-deductible**. The IRS NTEE classification code is P20, **Human Service Organizations - Multipurpose** within the Human Services - Multipurpose and Other category

So do you think you can spare a dollar to help funding New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc.?

Send donation, by check, to:

New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc., 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590



New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc.

Francisco Muñiz III—President

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Are animals welfare worth more than the welfare of the life of a Veteran and his family?

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So do you think you can spare a dollar to help fund New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc.? At this time think of helping a veteran with your contribution. Thanks for your donation!

Send donation, by check, to:

New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, Inc., 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590

Secretary's Report

Francisco Muñiz III

I would like to thank all the individuals that sent in their reports in a timely manner. As you see I had to increase the number of pages to this issue because someone, that I will not mention the name, sent in 35 pages of reports. Guess he must be doing a lot in his District! Hope he is taking precautions!

Many Chapters are actively staying in touch with their membership through Zoom meetings. This pandemic has force many older vets to learn new technique. I had no problem because I am only 39!

Some of the articles will be in the next issue. That is if Ned will give me a raise and fund the Interchange Newspaper.

I need a favor from our contributors to the Interchange. Please place the District that your Chapter is located so that I can easily place the report within your District Director's report. In this issue I had to place a Chapter Report by itself and not within their group.

I am working on placing the names that you sent into the Memorial Book. It has taken some time due to that I need to increase the slides and add photos into the new area.

Covid vaccines are available at your VA, County distributions sites, local hospitals and pharmacies. Get protected from this pandemic disease.

Remember get your Covid Shot, Wear a mask, Wash your hands, Stay socially distanced!



COMMITTEES	CHAIRPERSON	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Agent Orange/Dioxin & Other Toxic Exposure	Bill Patton	bllpaton36@gmail.com
Constitution	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
Finance	Charles Tipton	ctipton237@yahoo.com
Government Affairs	Joe Ingino	biggjoe77@verizon.net
Membership	Ted Wilkinson	Twilkinson.vva.org
POW/MIA & Veterans Initiative (VI)	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
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Veterans Health Care & Aging Veterans	Tom Harris Jerry McDermott	bkrdad@aol.com jmcdermott@murphynolan.com,
Veterans Incarcerated Committee & In Justice System	Nick Valenti	nickvalenti46@yahoo.com