



Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®

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VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

Chairman's Remarks

Another busy month is behind us. My wife says I work longer now than when I was in the Navy. While this job does not let me enjoy sunsets at sea, it has its own benefits. Shepherding this organization through the pandemic has left me with a lot of personal satisfaction.

We say good-bye to Susie Belanger but not quite yet. For personal reasons Jackie Bloom decided to remain as Deputy Legislative Director but to turn down the top spot. Jackie has done a fantastic job as Susie's Deputy, and we know she will continue to do so. Ernest Dillard, of Indiana, has volunteered to take on the role of Legislative Director. Ernest served in both the Marines and Army and retired as a senior NCO. He has been involved with several Veterans Service Organizations and we are confident that he will be able to fill Susie's very big shoes. I have assured him that high heels are not required on trips to Capitol Hill.

I also want to introduce Chandra Klein who was hired as the MVA™ Administrative Assistant. Chandra has extensive experience as a legal secretary and is quickly coming up to speed. She will take some of the pressure off Super-Woman Robin who has been doing the work of 3-4 people while keeping me under control. The latter is a full-time job in itself.

I am currently in Washington, DC for meetings with our allies from the Association of the United States Navy and the staff directors for the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. On the top of the list will be support for the new burn pit bills. HR 3368 the Guam/American Samoa/Johnston Island bill, HR 2269 the Thailand bill, and HR 5026 the Panama bill. You can help me make the case by using the pre-written e-mails available on our Bill of the Week section of our web site. <https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/bill-of-the-week.html>. If you have not done it scroll down and check out all of our Bills of the Week.

You can send an email at any time. Many folks complain that when they send an email, they get a canned response or no response at all. That's really ok. The staffs keep track of all of these, and a summary is presented to the Member or Senator. Most staffs have only one person to answer the mail so canned responses are necessary for survival. But the important thing is that the summary gets to the boss. Numbers matter. Please help us keep our bills on the front burner.

Another place that numbers matter is in the membership. We have probably 20,000 followers on our various Facebook pages but only about 1600 paid members. To qualify as a Veteran Service Organization, we need to have more than 2000 sustained members. This gives us a more reliable seat at the table.

Looks like we will be turned down on our request to testify at the VSO briefings before the joint House-Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Why? Well, we are not a VSO. I am trying to fight that decision, but numbers do matter.

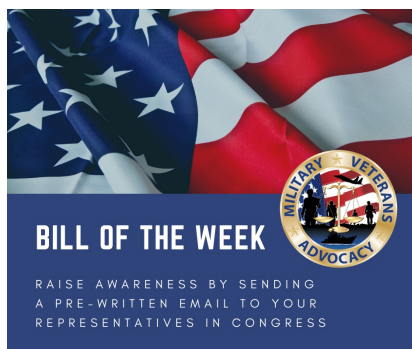
Membership is only \$25.00 per year and life memberships are available https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/store/c2/yearly_dues. If you really cannot afford the \$25.00 contact robin.barr@madvocacy.org and ask for a gift membership. If you are a widow or widower of a veteran who dies from a service-connected illness, please apply for a free life membership.

Also, if you want to support us financially at no cost to you, please join Amazon Smile. Bookmark <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/38-3890520> and you can designate MVA™ to receive ½% of everything you spend. This is no cost to you! It is a donation from Amazon.

Chief of Staff Mike Kvintus and I will be in Alexandria, VA the week of Feb 21 to set up a booth at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. This gives us significant visibility and we hope to increase our membership and the support of the State Directors.

Until next month, stay steady on course.

John B. Wells
Commander, USN (ret)
Chairman



BILL OF THE WEEK

Last week the MVA™ Bill of the Week, HR 5944, called for an Inspector General inquiry into the VA claims backlog. We set a record with 175 new advocates joining 167 repeat advocates to send 1361 emails to Congress. This number of contacts sent a shock wave through the halls of Congress. Last week was a success but it was our first success of this magnitude. The Bill of the Week takes minutes the first time you use it and seconds every time thereafter. MVA™ has supported many bills that will benefit veterans. Some have passed. We need your help to continue to press Congress. Please go to our website at <https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/bill-of-the-week.html> and check out all of our Bills of the Week. They do not expire. You may support

these bills at any time.

Your MVA™ Board has put in over 500 hours so far in 2022

LEGISLATION

We are working on a replacement for my position. Jackie and I are working on the 3 major bills that we are pushing, HR5026, HR3368, and HR 2269. We are contacting all congressman.

Below is a press release from Sen Tester on the burn pit issue.

MISSOULA - While christening the new VA outpatient clinic in Missoula last week, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) said he'll now turn his focus back to toxic exposure and a bill that would grant greater access to care to millions of exposed troops.

Tester, chair of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced the Compensation and Overdue Support for Troops, or COST of War Act, last summer. While the bill enjoys bipartisan support, it hasn't yet passed.

"The bill we're working on - I was hoping it would have been passed by now - would give the VA the ability to make the diagnosis when somebody was impacted by toxic exposure," Tester said. "That bill is going to cost some money. But in the end, it was an exposure they wouldn't have been exposed to if they hadn't gone".



No veterans related bills passed Congress in January. Two MVA™ supported bills, HR 4673, the EVEST Act and HR 1836, the Guard and Reserve Parity Act passed the House of Representatives.

Senator Jon Tester has introduced S 3541 which will:

- Expand the period of health care eligibility for combat veterans who served after September 11, 2001, from five years following discharge to ten years;
- Provide a one-year open enrollment period for any post-9/11 combat veteran who is more than 10 years from separation;
- Establish an outreach plan to contact veterans who did not enroll during their initial period of enhanced eligibility;
- Direct the VA to incorporate a clinical screening regarding a veteran's potential exposures and symptoms commonly associated with toxic substances;
- Mandate toxic exposure-related education and training for health care and benefits personnel at VA; and
- Strengthen federal research on toxic exposures.

Does this bill provide adequate coverage? No, it does not. But it is a strong step forward and may reflect the best we can do in 2022 in this economy. It will not solve the problem, but it will make it better. Accordantly MVA™ supports this bill.

New Native American VA Advisory Committee Holds First Meeting

The newly created committee is one of 27 VA advisory committees that advises VA Secretary Denis McDonough. Called the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs, the new committee, consisting of 15 Native American tribal members, will advise the secretary on everything from COVID-19 efforts to homelessness.

“My commitment to you was and is clear, that VA will not make decisions about you without you,” said McDonough.

“The work of this committee will be essential in helping us to find and to develop better and more innovative ways to serve native veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors,” he said.

VA provides health care services to over 140,000 Native American veterans. But many of these veterans have experienced difficulty receiving care during the pandemic.

“There are many hard truths that need to be addressed, and I will be here for my people addressing those truths on their behalf,” said committee member Reyn Kaupiko, a Navy veteran and Native Hawaiian.

Native American veterans have faced decades of challenges after exiting military service from the federal government.

The agency’s new reliance on technology to deliver benefits and health care services may seem great to millennials, but it risks alienating older veterans living on reservations if the agency does not enhance its outreach.

While VA administrators still struggle to apprehend cultural differences, the new Tribal and Indian Affairs committee has an important role to play.

How It Was Created

The new committee was created by Congress in 2020 after decades of advocates complaining that VA was not doing enough to reach Native American veterans living on tribal lands.

Senators Comment on New Committee

Senator Krysten Sinema co-sponsored S 524, Department of Veterans Affairs Tribal Advisory Committee Act, the Bill for the committee’s creation.

“Native Americans serve our military at a higher rate than any other ethnic group,” said Sinema.

“Native Americans serve our nation in uniform at the highest rates, and it’s critical these veterans are well represented at VA and empowered to shape department policy to meet the needs of all Native veterans,” said Sen. Jon Tester, chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee and former chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee.

Sen. Jerry Moran, the top Republican on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, called the committee “an enduring forum to learn more from these veterans and tribal leaders on how VA and Congress can best serve this veteran population.”



Military-Veterans Advocacy® Goals and Objectives 2022

The MVA™ Board of Directors has adopted the following goals and objectives for 2022:

- Herbicide relief for Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Island
- Herbicide relief for Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia
- Expand herbicide relief for Blue Water Navy to the entire Theater of Combat
- Herbicide relief for Airspace over Vietnam
- Herbicide relief for Panama
- Herbicide relief for Okinawa
- Fix locations for submarines during the Vietnam War
- Require informed consent for addictive and potentially hazardous or dangerous medical health medication drugs administered by the VA
- Conduct one or more online seminars/CLE on veterans law
- Qualify as a Veterans Service Organization
- Relief for Atomic Cleanup Veterans
- Relief for Burn Pit Victims
- Tribal/Native American Outreach

112 Reps Request Briefing on NPRC's Plan to Reduce Vets Request Backlog

Rep. Mike Bost (Ill.), the Ranking Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Rep. Cliff Bentz (Or.), and Rep. Fred Keller (Pa.), released a statement after joining over one hundred of their colleagues in sending a letter to the Director of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) calling for the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) to report to Congress on their plan to reduce the backlog of veterans' record requests.

"Repeatedly I have been calling for the White House to develop a plan to fully staff the NPRC to chip away at the backlog of veterans' record requests," said Ranking Member Bost. "While I am encouraged that the NPRC has made strides since this time last year for records requests originating from VA, veterans are still waiting weeks to months on end for their own records requests."

The NPRC has not maintained full capacity, in-person, employment (only 25 percent) since March 2020. Since then, many veterans have not received records they need to demonstrate their military service and verify their service-connected conditions. As a result, these individuals cannot receive the medical care, disability compensation, and retirement pay they have earned. In some instances, the NPRC is the only agency that can provide veterans with these records.

The most glaring discrepancy is the neglect of the NPRC in processing critical request for copies of DD-214 forms, which are essential for an abundance of critical services. For example, some veterans have been unable to obtain VA home loans due to long delays in receiving their DD-214s. More significantly, veterans have been denied their appropriate retirement pay levels due to not being able to

demonstrate their military service for federal retirement consideration.

The letter requests that the NPRC go back to full capacity and inform Congress on plans to operate in a timely manner. The NPRC is responsible for an array of veteran services. For some veterans, there may not be an alternative service for accessing military records required by various federal and civilian agencies. Additionally, veterans and their families often request replacements for military service medals when they bury a loved one and find that the medal has become tarnished, or the medal was destroyed or lost. Normally, this simple request is filled within a reasonable timeframe. Now, veterans may wait up to 18 months. Also, veterans have reported difficulty in receiving documents needed to obtain VA medical care or disability compensation. As the NPRC continues to cite health precautions for not being fully staffed, many veterans suffer from health issues that need immediate attention.



VA Pensions are available for qualified Surviving Spouses of Veterans. To apply for a VA Pension or to review qualifying war time periods, rates, or income and net worth information, see the links below.

<https://www.va.gov/pension/>



Ever hear of GuideStar? GuideStar maintains information on millions of non-profits and rates their transparency at levels such as bronze, silver, etc.

Members and donors are encouraged to review non-profit profiles to ascertain compliance with laws including IRS regulations, director and officer compensation, and the organizational mission/goals. Military-Veterans Advocacy® has obtained the gold seal of transparency. You can check it out MVA™ at <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/38-3890520>.



Princess Susie Belanger has agreed to delay her retirement as we fill the Legislative Director position. Unfortunately, Jackie Bloom found that due to outside issues she was unable to accept the position, although she will remain as the Deputy Legislative Director. Ernest Dillard has agreed to step forward and Princess Susie has started the training regimen. So please welcome Ernest as he comes up to speed and remind Susie that she has to keep her Ernies straight.

Princess Susie Coins Update

The Princess Susie challenge coins are here and will be shipped out to our Early Bird renewals and Life Members shortly. Watch for them in your mailbox. Sorry about the delay. We faced a problem with the first shipment and then supply chain problems.

Gulf War Illness Update

The Department of Veterans Affairs has amended its adjudication regulations regarding compensation for disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses suffered by veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War. This amendment is necessary to extend the presumptive period for qualifying chronic disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses that must become manifest to a compensable degree in order for entitlement for disability compensation to be established. The intended effect of this amendment is to provide consistency in VA adjudication policy and preserve certain rights afforded to Persian Gulf War veterans and to ensure fairness for current and future Persian Gulf War veterans. Without this amendment the Presumptives period would have expired on December 31, 2021. Under the amendment, the presumptive period is expended by five years to December 31, 2026. See Federal Register Vol. 87, No. 23 6038-39. (Thursday, February 3, 2022).

VA Pensions

Did you know VA's Veterans Pension program provides monthly payments to wartime Veterans over the age of 65 with a limited income and net worth? Service connection is not required but if you are under 65 and have a permanent and total disability, you may also be eligible. Learn how to apply for a VA pension <https://www.va.gov/pension/how-to-apply/>



BLUE WATER NAVY ASSOCIATION™

I need to bring up Membership. Here we are in the Second month of the Year and we only have about 1/3 of last year's Members renewing. I have to ask, aren't we doing enough for you? Don't you want to help your fellow Blue Water Navy Veterans? I hope it's not because you have already received yours so there is no reason to stay a Member, if that is the case, that is sad. There is so much more to do to help your fellow Veterans.

I want to remind everyone that we have the Bill of the Week. We pick these because of how important they are to helping Veterans. It only takes a minute for you to fill it out and send it, you don't even have to think about the email, it is already written BUT you can always modify it. I was sad to see the amount of people that filled out the form for the HR 5944 Bill. Here is a bill that will direct the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the backlog of disability compensation claims submitted to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The VA backlog has always been a source of angst within the veterans' community. How many times have you seen "delay, deny until they die" written on these Facebook Pages or other pages? Gee here is something that may make the VA justify why that is happening and not many people want to lift a figure to do something about it or just give their opinion. Being a BWN Veteran you have to know that sitting back and letting everyone else do the work does nothing. We have proved that with HR299. So let's start filling out those BOW forms and letting them know our feelings.

Mike Yates
Director, Blue Water Navy
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®



VETERANS OF PANAMA CANAL ZONE

In the news...We have just recently sent a follow-up letter to the VA Secretary concerning our Rulemaking Request. We await a reply. Please see the latest under Projects/Vets of Panama.

<https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/vets-of-panama.html>

We now have 8 cosponsors for H.R. 5026, Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act of 2021. We still have a lot of work to do! If you google H.R. 5026 (117) you can see if your representative has signed on to our Panama bill.

Claims...If you have a disease on the VA list and don't have a claim submitted, reach out to me to see how to proceed. Some are winning individually. It is a difficult road, but not impossible.

Membership...Thank you to all who continue to support our push to get Panama recognized as a place where dioxin was used.

Those who have chosen to not support us for 2022, I am sorry to see you go. We need member support to continue our work. Perhaps you will choose to come back in future years.

I urge all current members to invite a friend and continue to support the Military-Veterans Advocacy™ and I thank you for doing so. Together we are changing lives.

Donna Tornoe
Director, Veterans of Panama Canal Zone
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc. ®

MVA Marketplace

As the pandemic lingers, masks are still required in many venues throughout the United States. Promote Military-Veterans Advocacy® while conforming with State and local mandates. MVA™ now offers designer masks for sale at the Marketplace. Please check out all of our products.

<https://military-veterans-advocacy.square.site/>

MVA Website

Thanks to our Marketing Intern, Quentin Winstine, our website has had a new facelift. Please check us out at <https://www.militaryveteransadvocacy.org/>

If you have questions about membership, contact Robin Barr
<mailto:Robin.Barr@madvocacy.org>