

SOUND OFF!



VOL. I, NO 15 THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 FEBRUARY 2006

FIRST CALL - THEME OF THE ISSUE AND/OR CLIPS & QUOTES

I can't seem to get away from the continuing argument about sacrifice. No one wants to talk about it except in the occasional speech carried on some obscure weekend C-Span program which is never picked up by any of the mainstream media. No one of any political or social stripe seems to want to deal with the subject at all. There are those who support-the-war-and-support-the-troops, support-the-president-and-support-the-troops, just-support-the-troops, support-the-troops-and-oppose-the-president, or support-the-troops-and-oppose-the-war: but not one seems to have a single word to say about sacrifice.

Maybe it's because they would have to pony up something themselves? Do you think?

Do you remember the bumper sticker that read something like **"Fund Teachers and Schools and have Bake Sales to Buy B-52s"**? Well that is apparently what it has come to in Illinois.

NEW LOTTERY TO RAISE MONEY FOR VETERANS PROGRAMS

Feb. 10, 2006 - Associated Press

CHICAGO - The Illinois Lottery unveiled a new game Friday to raise money for veterans programs, the second game in the state where money is earmarked for a specific cause.

The lottery last month unveiled "Ticket for the Cure," a scratch-off game to raise money for breast cancer research and treatment.

About \$3 million a year - or 27 percent - of the revenue generated by the new scratch-off game "Veterans Cash" will help the state pay for new services and programs to help veterans, officials said.

The focus will include treating post traumatic stress disorder and dealing with homelessness, Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn said. The money could be used to start new state programs or help fund others that already exist in communities.

Tickets for the new game cost \$2 and the top prize is \$20,000. About 63 percent of the money generated by the game will be used to pay out prizes.

The ticket says "100% of Proceeds Benefit Illinois Veterans," which lottery spokesman Courtney Hill said means the money that is left over after the costs associated with the game are covered, including prizes, retailer commissions and administrative costs.

"Any person who buys a ticket knows there is allocation for prizes and two-thirds of it is going to prizes," Quinn said.

The game is modeled after West Virginia's "Veterans Cash 5" game.

www.belleville.com/mld/belleville/news/politics/13843351.htm

Well all I can say is at least they are doing **SOMETHING** about it, but it's a far cry from universal sacrifice.

Massachusetts is giving a bonus - \$1,000 for service in the war, \$500 for service anywhere else, but that doesn't begin to address the problems that returning troops are having. www.dailynewstranscript.com/localRegional/view.bg?articleid=72277

So, some folks and some agencies are doing some things. When will the federal government deal with the fact that the system - DoD medical/VA/DoL job protection - is failing?

When will the American public step up?

Any one for a scrap drive? Anyone want to plant a Victory Garden? How about gas rationing - need an "A" stamp for your windshield? How about sugar rationing? How about shoe rationing - 1 pair a year? How about meat rationing? Anybody into putting their car up on blocks for the "duration"? How about restricting travel? How about using 10% of your pay to buy War Bonds?

I really don't want to make you tired of this subject - I want to piss you off! Has it worked yet?

Write your Congressperson! Write your Editor! Tell your friends! Get mad! Don't just stand there - do something!

MAKE THE SACRIFICE! [Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN, FREE, AND VERY WORTHWHILE! GET YOUR FELLOW VETERANS, AND VETERANS' FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN VUFT! WE ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD, AND WE NEED YOU TO HELP US GET THE MESSAGE OUT.

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT [WWW.VUFT.ORG](http://www.vuft.org). CHECK OUT THE NEW "CANDIDATES" PAGE, WHICH IS OUR EFFORT TO LIST ALL VETERANS RUNNING FOR STATE-WIDE AND FEDERAL OFFICE IN THE U.S.; IT IS BEING UPDATED DAILY. PLEASE HELP US MAKE THIS AS COMPLETE A LIST AS POSSIBLE BY SENDING CANDIDATE INFO TO SANDY.COOK@VUFT.ORG.

If you would like to give some telephone time to those serving in Iran and Afghanistan, the VFW has a donation site at

https://secure2.convio.net/vfw/site/Donation/941705061?ACTION=SHOW_DONATION_OPTIONS&CAMPAIGN_ID=1381&=&=

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

NEW MEMBERS are joining us every week. If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to our website at www.vuft.org/membership.html and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have with legislators. It shouldn't be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures.

OUTREACH: If you are interested in starting a chapter of **VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.** in your state, please contact the chair bhandy@vuft.org.

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE

If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Join" page. Every little bit helps. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method.

VUFT, INC. BOARD MEETING

There will be a meeting of the Board of Veterans United For Truth, Inc. in Santa Barbara on 25 February 2006. The main purpose of the meeting is to discuss the status of our Legislative Proposal to the California Legislature. Report to follow.

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

Subject: The US Department of Veterans Affairs concedes that about 200 GW children are totally disabled

Sent: Saturday, February 11, 2006 8:20 PM

The US Department of Veterans Affairs concedes that about 200 people are totally disabled as a result of a parent's exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnam war. These 200 persons are called "Level III" Spina Bifida children. They receive monthly monetary compensation from the VA. And tightly limited not full medical care from the VA's Spina Bifida Program. This differs from a totally disabled military veteran who receives full medical compensation if his/her disability is a result of military service. As the VA concedes is the case with the 200 A/O Kids.

Among these 200 A/O children is my profoundly handicapped 34 year old stepdaughter Honey Sue. Her biological father was exposed to A/O while serving three tours of duty (13 months each) as an Infantryman in a Marine Rifle Company in Vietnam. Honey Sue was born with spina bifida and other major birth defects. She receives the small monthly VA monetary compensation. And the limited medical compensation from the VA Spina Bifida Program.

But Honey Sue's medical needs are extensive. And most are not covered by the VA Spina Bifida Program. She does not qualify for private insurance plans. So we must rely on public welfare and private charities for her medical needs. In the welfare programs we fight with the bureaucrats like angry dogs over scraps of food for each bit of medical care Honey Sue gets.

Honey Sue has gotten life changing medical aid from the Elks and Shriners. Only because of them, she walks and speaks and can see to move about. For this we are grateful. Her Mother, Suzanne, and I provide around the clock attendance for Honey Sue. Most of this load is lovingly carried by Suzanne. She marks the time between "days off" from her duties in years rather than weeks. Such attendance is specifically excluded in from the VA's Spina Bifida Program.

Honey Sue is 34. Suzanne and I are quickly becoming elderly. We ask, "Who will provide care and advocacy for Honey Sue when we are too old to continue?" The answer should be; "A grateful US Government, for whose benefit Honey Sue so cheerfully endures her sacrifices." But the US Congress doesn't act. The A/O Kids are too few and too powerless to be heard.

Please join my family in urging the US Congress to make amends with these 200 victims of friendly fire from the Vietnam war. Their total disability is conceded to be a direct result of their parents' service in Vietnam. They are clearly owed full high quality medical compensation.

Please call, write, Fax or Email your representatives in the US Congress. Perhaps send them a copy of this letter. Tell them you support legislation providing full, safe and dignified medical compensation for these 200 helpless A/O children. Tell them Honey Sue is waiting.

Ron and Suzanne Nesler : RonaldEANesler@aol.com

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Phone 505-382- 8269

Subject: World Service Corps benefits soldiers, vets, candidates, and nation

In late November, CBS nightly news showed an American Admiral in front of his helicopter and troops, who were helping rebuild an earthquake devastated Pakistani village, saying, "This is a strategic moment in time in which we show what Americans are made of."

Veteran and Congressman John Murtha believes our 1.4 million superbly trained but overburdened warriors, stationed in over 150 nations, "...can not do nation building."

To answer both needs in today's global village, we must win "hearts and minds." To do that our military needs another Corps, who are trusted and experienced in building peaceful, productive, healthy nations. We can build that volunteer corps of comrades-without- arms to help our military by introducing and passing People's Lobby, citizen-initiated, World Service Corps (WSC) congressional proposals.

Enacting the WSC proposed congressional legislation creates the alternative peaceful, productive army that makes life better for soldiers and nations. If enacted this year, each year for the next seven years approximately 140,000 Americans would voluntarily choose to serve in their choice of the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Habitat for Humanity, Head Start, Doctors Without Borders, Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, OxFam, Mercy Corps, State Conservation Corps, etc. By the seventh year one million WSC members, or .one sixth of 1% of Americans aged 20-60, would be annually serving at home or abroad for at least the ensuing 20 years, whereupon Congress could consider sun-setting the WSC legislation.

For more details, to read the Congressional proposals, to sign the on-line Petition, go to www.WorldServiceCorps.us. The WSC proposals need Veterans running for Congress pushing the proposals as a major part of their campaigns.

For further information, contact Dwayne Hunn, Executive Director, People's Lobby Inc., 415-383-7880.

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

We are going to let this one rest this issue. I hope to have much to report on the California legislative initiative in the next issue, after our board meeting on Feb 25th. [Ed.]

"Suppose you were an idiot and suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself."

Mark Twain

RETREAT – NEWS

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT UPDATES EQUIPMENT REIMBURSEMENT POLICY

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14, 2006 – The Defense Department announced today the revision of a memorandum on the policy and procedures for the reimbursement of privately purchased protective equipment for Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. <More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2006/20060214_4201.html>

STRUGGLING FOR RECRUITS, ARMY RELAXES ITS RULES

Douglas Belkin, Globe Staff | February 20, 2006

Fitness, education, age criteria change

CHICOPEE -- Generation XL is having a hard time squeezing into its military fatigues. Just ask Kyle Kimball. The 18-year-old dreamed of following in his father's footsteps and serving with the Marines. But between his sophomore and senior years at Haverhill High School, Kimball packed on 80 pounds, ballooning up to 250. The cutoff for a 5-foot-10 Marine recruit: 215. "There was just no way I was ever going to see that again," said Kimball, who works for his father's scrap-metal business.

But Kimball has another option. Earlier this month, he drove to Westover Joint Air Reserve Base in Chicopee and became one of New England's first would-be soldiers to take a fitness test for overweight recruits. His goal is to gain entrance into his second choice, the US Army.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2006/02/20/struggling_for_recruits_army_relaxes_its_rules>

EXPERTS SAY U.S. IN IRAQ FOR LONG HAUL

Robert H. Reid - NewsDay/AP - Feb 09, 2006

All signs point to a major drawdown of U.S. troops in Iraq in 2006 -- perhaps to fewer than 100,000 by year's end. But it is far from certain when there will be further reductions, or a total pullout, after that. In fact, it now looks as if the United States may have a long-term and substantial military presence in Iraq, military experts say.

Generals have been reluctant to set specific public timetables, but Gen. George W. Casey Jr., the top U.S. commander, noted this week that insurgencies in the 20th century lasted on average nine years. The Iraq war is coming up on year three.

"Because of the nature of counterinsurgency, it's often hard for people to define what victory is," Casey said. "It's not D-Day. There's not a big battle and it's all over. It's about people making choices so it evolves over time. And that's exactly what you see here."

The number of American troops here now is 136,000 -- down from a December high of 160,000 troops, whose ranks were bolstered to protect against attacks during the Dec. 15 voting. Casey is expected to recommend more cuts this spring. There's speculation that by the end of this year, fewer than 100,000 U.S. troops will be in Iraq.

<More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?Page=Article&ID=6505>

STILL SHORTCHANGING THE TROOPS

Editorial - February 10, 2006

It's amazing how Donald Rumsfeld's Defense Department can produce a \$439 billion spending plan and still skimp on the one thing the American military desperately needs: expanded ground forces so the weakened and cannibalized Army can meet the requirements of Iraq without hurting its ability to respond to other threats.

While the Pentagon intends to increase pay and recruitment bonuses, no part of its nearly 7 percent budget increase is aimed at raising overall troop strength. Instead, a large chunk of this nearly \$30 billion bonanza goes to buying more new weapons and postponing overdue cuts in wasteful Air Force and Navy projects unrelated to fighting terrorism.

...Instead of reallocating resources toward the real threats America faces, the military services continue to pour their money into fighting fictive superpowers in the wild blue yonder and on and below the seven seas. Pentagon budgeters showed themselves so pathetically unable to restrain spending on expensive ships and planes that they actually cut back, rather than increased, the overall size of the Army over the next few years to pay for it. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2006/02/10/opinion/10fri1.html>

WAR COSTS IRK CONGRESS

Gail Russell Chaddock - Christian Science Monitor - Feb 21, 2006

WASHINGTON - More than four years into the war on terror, Congress is chafing - but not yet balking - at a tab nearing \$400 billion. President Bush's latest emergency spending request, sent to Capitol Hill last week, includes \$72.4 billion for the global war on terror. He also asked for another \$19.8 billion for hurricane relief at home.

Few lawmakers care to risk not supporting US troops or first responders, making these must-pass bills. As such, they're attracting add-ons that lawmakers deem "emergencies." But unlike the previous five defense supplemental bills, No. 6 comes at the start of what lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are calling a make-or-break year for US engagement in Iraq.

"Until the United States succeeds in helping the Iraqis build strong, new political and military institutions, a massive commitment of external military forces and economic assistance will continue to be necessary to forestall a civil war," writes Kenneth Pollack and the Iraq Policy Working Group at the Brookings Institution, in a paper widely circulating on Capitol Hill.

<More at: www.csmonitor.com/2006/0221/p01s03-usfp.html>

AS IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TO DO ALREADY! AND THE POSSE COMITATUS ACT IS JUST A LEGAL IMPEDIMENT?

MILITARY TO HEAD DISASTER RELIEF

Agence France-Presse | February 24, 2006

The U.S. military will plan to assume a larger role in domestic disaster relief, including taking the lead in major catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, a Pentagon spokesman said Thursday. A White House report on the lessons of Katrina said the military and the Coast Guard proved to be the only federal entities capable of turning the president's orders into prompt action on the ground.

A key recommendation of the report was for the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security to plan for "those extraordinary circumstances when it is appropriate for the Defense Department to lead the federal response." Giving the military the lead in domestic operations is a sensitive issue because U.S. laws and traditions have barred it from engaging in domestic law enforcement. The legal impediments contributed to the delayed deployment of U.S. active duty troops in response to Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the U.S. Gulf coast last August.

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
3/14 – 19/06		Mobile AL to New Orleans LA*	Veterans & Survivors March for Peace & Justice	Various Groups	Support survivors; oppose Iraq war
4/20 – 23/06		Pleasanton/Camp Parks, CA	AUSA Spring Symposium	AUSA 6 th Region	Periodic Meeting
4/25-26/06		Washington DC	Veterans March	Various Groups	VA funding

Let us know about meetings and gatherings and we will advertise them

Note: We are a non-partisan organization that does not take a position, as an organization, on this war. We will, however, advertise all veterans' events, regardless of purpose.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VA SHELL GAMES

Waco Tribune-Herald - February 08, 2006

The Bush administration wants to pump up spending on defense and homeland security, but has a deficit to confront. So, it turns once again to the slice of pie in the federal budget that is discretionary domestic spending.

One of the elements in that slice that is always vulnerable to the political elements is the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We may think of veterans benefits as entitlements, and rightfully so. But that's not the case. These benefits are at the mercy of each Congress and each budget coming from the White House. President Bush's new budget for the VA looks to be generous, with a 10.4 percent increase over fiscal 2005, according to the Office of Management and Budget. But built into the budget are new costs for veterans using the VA health care system. Under the proposals, some veterans would pay a new \$250 enrollment fee and prescription drug co-payments would go up from from \$8 to \$15. Some veterans organizations call this a health-care tax on veterans at the same time the president proposes extending tax cuts that have benefited America's wealthiest.

A question raised by watchdog groups for veterans services is whether these numbers are to be trusted. Last year, to justify cuts in health care services to veterans, the administration claimed it had made \$1.3 billion in savings that would benefit the VA in other ways. Actually, the administration was simply short-changing day-to-day operations, causing Congress to authorize an emergency funding measure to make up the difference. Recently, a report by the Government Accountability Office came out saying that those \$1.3 billion in savings were illusory. The VA could prove nothing to back up the claim of efficiency.

<More at: www.wacotrib.com/opin/content/news/opinion/stories/2006/02/08/20060208waceditorial8.html>

ARMY OF IRAQ WAR VETERANS 'SUFFERING BRAIN DAMAGE'

Jonathan Rugman in Palo Alto, California - Times Online, UK - Feb 12, 2006

The hardest part of Jason Poole's day is his early morning confrontation with the face staring back at him from his bathroom mirror. In the past 18 months, plastic surgeons have rebuilt it five times.

"I used to be handsome, you know," says the 23-year-old US Marine, who was on foot patrol in western Iraq in June 2004 when he suffered terrible injuries in a roadside bomb blast. He adds: "But hey, c'est la vie."

He has earned a Purple Heart medal for valour, but the twist to this Marine's story is that when he fought in Iraq he wasn't American at all, but British. Born in Bristol, he moved to California with his parents at the age of 12, and signed on the dotted line aged 17 in exchange for help from the Marines with college tuition fees and his application for US citizenship.

Corporal Poole cannot remember the explosion itself. He was in a coma for two months and is permanently brain-damaged. Two Iraqi soldiers and an interpreter were killed, but the Marine's body armour saved him. He is now deaf in one ear and blind in one eye, and his face is a maze of skin and bone grafts held together with metal plates. Shrapnel was embedded in his skull and his brain injuries were so severe that he has had to learn to walk and talk again.

"We are talking about a brain-injury epidemic," says Nurse Jill Gandolfi, who cares for Corporal Poole in a rehabilitation unit run by the US Department of Veterans Affairs in Palo Alto. The official number of brain-injured Iraq veterans is more than 1,700, but Harriet Zeiner, Palo Alto's leading neuropsychologist, believes that well over 6,000 such injuries is a far more realistic estimate.

Pentagon figures indicate that, of more than 16,000 US troops wounded in combat in Iraq, 11,852 were injured by bombs, mortars and grenades. <More at: www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,11069-2037633.00.html>

THE TRAUMA-OF-WAR EXPERTS FEAR CASES OF VETERANS WITH PTSD COULD SKYROCKET

Chris Killian and Ben Lando - Kalamazoo Gazette - February 19, 2006

In World War I it was called shell shock; in World War II, battle fatigue. During the Korean War it was defined as combat neurosis; after the Vietnam War it was named post-Vietnam syndrome.

But since 1980, the often severe psychological symptoms experienced by soldiers returning from war -- including nightmares, intense anxiety and flashbacks -- have been labeled post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

The names have changed, but the symptoms have not. Much like those who served in past wars, thousands of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have dealt with a psychological disorder that can leave them feeling detached, irritable and depressed to the point of debilitation.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that between 2002 and 2005, about 19,000 soldiers who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan were treated for symptoms of PTSD.

The actual number of those who suffer from PTSD almost certainly is higher...

<More at: <http://www.mlive.com/news/kzgazette/index.ssf?/base/news-16/1140348296311500.xml&coll=7>>

PTSD/SUBSTANCE ABUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

Tom Berger, Chair November/December 2005

The Downhill Spiral Continues

With the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq having topped 2,000, those fortunate enough to return face the task of putting the war behind them and resuming their lives. Some are getting reacquainted with wives and children they left behind a year or more ago. Many face the task of catching up on bills or fixing homes that have gone in need of repair. Some lost jobs or had their businesses falter while they were gone. More than a few have found they have returned home with their war anxieties.

"They are witnessing far more traumatic experiences than they did in the first Gulf war," said Terri Tanielian, a senior military health policy analyst for the Rand Corporation. Longer deployments, fiercer engagements, and more casualties have left Iraq war veterans more vulnerable to psychological trauma than Gulf War veterans, Tanielian said. She said many veterans may be shunning counseling services offered by the military out of a misplaced sense of honor. "Their training is to go on with the mission and put on the brave face," Tanielian said.

A recent article in USA Today noted that more than one in four American troops have come home from Iraq with health problems that require medical or mental health treatment. According to the Pentagon's first detailed screening of service members leaving the war zone, almost 1,700 returning this year said they harbored thoughts of hurting themselves or that they would be better off dead. More than 250 said they had such thoughts "a lot." Nearly 20,000 reported nightmares or unwanted war recollections; more than 3,700 said they had concerns that they might "hurt or lose control" with someone else.

<More at: www.vva.org/TheVeteran/2005_11/ptsd.htm>

VETERANS' COMMITTEE DEMOCRATS CALL FOR ADDITIONAL \$4.5 BILLION FOR HEALTH CARE, OTHER SERVICES

Washington, D.C. – Democrats on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee today unanimously recommended a \$4.5 billion increase over the Bush Administration's fiscal year 2007 budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs, including an additional \$3.6 billion in appropriated dollars over the Administration's request for VA medical care. Committee Democrats also called for \$2.3 billion in new veterans' benefits initiatives.

"Providing for veterans and their families is a cost of war and a continuing cost of our national defense," said Rep. Lane Evans, the Committee's Ranking Democratic Member. "The Administration has failed to recognize this in its budget submissions, including its latest emergency war supplemental request."

<See Press Release at: <http://veterans.house.gov/democratic/press/109th/2-23-05budget.htm>>

LITTLE-KNOWN VA PROGRAM CAN HELP VETS WITH OUT-OF-POCKET MEDICAL COSTS

Diane C. Lade - Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel, FL - Feb 16, 2006

More veterans were denied federal health care benefits in Florida last year than in any other state, with more than 27,000 being turned away, a new survey shows. Veterans organizations worry that those numbers will grow as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs tries to curb rising health care costs.

Yet one program that could open the door to the VA health care system, as well as provide money for assisted living and home health care, isn't being explored by many vets who might benefit.

The reason: Most veterans just don't know about it, VA officials say.

It's called Aid and Attendance. For years, the VA program has provided monthly payments to veterans and their spouses who have high out-of-pocket medical costs, and who are disabled or homebound, to help them offset health care expenses. The eligibility formula balances income against medical bills, so middle-class vets could qualify for payments as high as \$1,744 a month.

But VA officials think more veterans might be eligible than are tapping into the program. They consider Aid and Attendance one of the department's most underutilized offerings.

A recent study commissioned by the VA suggested only about one-fourth of eligible veterans nationwide, and about 17 percent of eligible widows, are participating.

<More at: www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/southflorida/sfl-veterans16feb16_0_3791122.story?coll=sfla-home-headlines>

MANY SERVICEMEMBERS DON'T KNOW ABOUT GI BILL'S JOB-TRAINING BENEFITS

Leo Shane III - Stars and Stripes - Feb 10, 2006

Troops who don't use their GI bill benefits for college tuition can receive nearly \$15,000 as a paycheck supplement at their first job, under a rarely used program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But there is a catch: The money is contingent upon the employer offering a VA-approved job training program, which many businesses know little about.

Dennis Douglass, acting director of the VA education office, said the job training money has been an option for separated servicemembers since the 1970s, but makes up less than 5 percent of the payouts made by his department.

<More at: www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=34961>

EMPLOYERS UNREADY FOR WOUNDED VETS' RETURN

Reuters - Feb 16, 2006

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Most employers are "unprepared" for the return of wounded veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and will have difficulty meeting their needs, according to a study released on Wednesday by the Insurance Information Institute (III).

At least 16,600 U.S. soldiers have been wounded, and many more of the 2 million who may serve in those arenas before the conflicts end could be traumatized, according to Robert Hartwig, chief economist for the III and author of the study.

Nearly a third of those troops are reservists and National Guard, who will be going back to their previous jobs. Hartwig said his survey shows that most employers don't understand their needs or the special benefits they're entitled to.

"These soldiers put their lives on the line and deserve the utmost respect," said Hartwig. "But even big companies haven't thought about their obligations to these people." <More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?page=article&id=6612>

DOD WIDOW'S TAX TAKES ITS BITE

February 13, 2006 - Op-Ed Contributor – Dan Shea

Left Behind

SEATTLE My brother Lt. Col. Kevin Shea was killed by a rocket attack in Falluja on Sept. 14, 2004. He knew the risks when he joined the Marine Corps in 1989. But he also thought that if anything ever happened to him, the United States government would take care of his wife, Amy, and his two children. Sadly, that's not the case.

Since Kevin died, Amy has had to deal with not only the grief of losing her husband and her best friend, but also with the difficulties of financially coping with life without him. Like most military spouses, during her time with Kevin, Amy endured multiple moves across the country and long deployments that forced her to put her career on hold. There are federal programs to assist her, but she and other widows of service members have found that these programs do not provide nearly enough.

... under the current law, the payment from the Defense Department to a surviving spouse is reduced dollar for dollar by the Veterans Administration's payment. So while you would think my sister-in-law, as the wife of a lieutenant colonel whose basic monthly salary is \$4,431.60, would receive about \$2,850 a month (41 percent of \$4,431.60, or \$1,817, plus \$1,033), in fact, all she's getting is \$1,817, that is, \$784 from the Pentagon and \$1033 from Veterans Affairs. Moreover, if Amy, who is 41 years old, remarries before the age of 55, she gets nothing.

The wife of a low-ranking enlisted soldier, say, a Marine lance corporal, is even worse off. All she gets is the dependent's payment of \$1,033, because there is nothing left of her husband's salary after this so-called widow's tax takes its bite.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2006/02/13/opinion/13shea.html>

GI BILL BACKLOG DELAYS AID TO VETERANS

Alison Young - Knight Ridder News Service

More claims, new benefits blamed for VA slowdown

Army veteran Ross Holtan, now a student, waited five months for VA tuition checks and was almost denied spring enrollment.

WASHINGTON — A surge in veterans using the GI Bill to pay for college is increasing delays for students in getting their money from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For students attending colleges in the central United States, it's been taking almost eight weeks on average for a first-time applicant to start receiving VA college funds. That's more than twice as long as it's supposed to take, according to the VA's standards.

... Nationwide, more than 118,000 VA education claims were waiting to be processed as of Feb. 4.

<More at: www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/news/13920812.htm>

WAIT FOR GI BILL BENEFITS INCREASES

Rick Maze - February 14, 2006 - Times staff writer

Service members and veterans filing claims for GI Bill education benefits can expect to wait an average of 39 days for their claims to be processed, three days longer than last year, Bush administration officials told Congress.

Testifying Tuesday before the House Veterans' Affairs economic opportunity subcommittee, administration officials blamed the current 100,000-plus backlog of education benefits claims on a combination of increased GI Bill usage and a logjam of 12,000 claims by reservists on extended mobilizations who were waiting for the Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs to agree on a special benefits plan. <More at: www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1534348.php>

EARLY INDICATORS WARN OF POSSIBLE SHORTFALLS AT VA ... AGAIN

Washington, DC – Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL), ranking Democrat on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, warned that the problem of chronic underfunding of veterans' health care is again causing budget shortfalls at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals and clinics across the nation. Evans and Rep. Michael Michaud (D-ME), ranking Democrat on the Health Subcommittee, have called upon the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, in a joint-letter sent today, to provide a full and accurate accounting of current shortfalls.

"I am distressed by reports of \$500,000 to \$18 million shortfalls we are hearing from VA medical facilities across the nation from Seattle, Washington to West Palm Beach, Florida, from White River Junction, Vermont to San Diego, California," said Evans.

<More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/housecvademsnews/housecvademsnews02-15-06.htm>>

WITH ONE NEW ADVISOR PER STATE, THEY OUGHT TO RIP RIGHT THROUGH THAT BACKLOG. THAT'S REALLY GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM!

**VA TEAMS WITH NATIONAL GUARD TO TRAIN NEW STATE BENEFITS ADVISORS
FEBRUARY 23, 2006**

WASHINGTON - - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Guard Bureau have teamed up to improve the coordination of veterans benefits at the state level by training newly created State Benefits Advisors (SBAs) to help ensure a smooth and seamless transition for Guard members returning from active-duty deployments.

The 54 new National Guard SBAs, being hired in each of the states and territories, are recently returned veterans who will be available to assist their fellow combat veterans.

<More at: [www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/docs/NG%20and%20VA%20Benefits%20Tng%20\(3\).doc](http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/docs/NG%20and%20VA%20Benefits%20Tng%20(3).doc)>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

**NATIONAL GUARD (IN FEDERAL STATUS) AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF
FEBRUARY 22, 2006**

This week, the Navy announced an increase in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization, while the Marine Corps had a decrease. The Army, Air Force and Marine Corps numbers decreased. The Coast Guard remained unchanged. The net collective result is 635 fewer reservists mobilized than last week.

At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 106,378; Navy Reserve, 5,353; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,330; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,021; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 412. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 126,494, including both units and individual augmentees.

A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2006/d20060222ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2006

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,319
WOUNDED US [No DoD UPDATE SINCE 7 FEB] ≥	16,824
KILLED UK	101
KILLED OTHER COALITION	103
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	600
KILLED CONTRACTORS	311
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY ≥	34,167
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS ≥	32,119
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS ≥	139,262

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	276
WOUNDED/INJURED US	685
KILLED COALITION	65
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	393
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY ≥	8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS ≥	3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS	32,034

NOTE: SOME NUMBERS DO NOT CHANGE BETWEEN ISSUES BECAUSE UPDATED FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME.

TO SEE THE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON THE CASUALTIES GO TO WWW.MILITARYCITY.COM/2000CASUALTIES/

AFTERTHOUGHT

Internet Short Film - 30 good seconds

This is not a plug for Budweiser, but they have one hell of a great ad that any veteran or family member should appreciate. The ad is at www.herosalute.com/states/big_game_ad_Wmmid.html. Bring a hanky.

And, If You Didn't Do It Before --

Go to www.army.dnd.ca/chief_land_staff/remembrance/English/video.asp and watch the video "Two Minutes of Silence - A Pittance of Time" – the Canadians really know how to remember their own. Bring two hankies.

PTSD Timeline

For those who are interested in following the progress (?) of the PTSD story there is a timeline with 73 articles at <http://timelines.epluribusmedia.org/timeline/index.php?&mjre=PTSD&func=epmtl&ord=date&ordtyp=ASC>

NOTICE

If at any time you cannot open a link in this newsletter to an article or web page that interests you, please let me know at scook@vuft; I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have been asked what guides my selection of articles. In general, I try to stick with articles that deal exclusively with our target group: serving military, veterans, retirees, and their families. I also favor articles that deal with the effect of Legislative or Executive inaction or bad actions that adversely affect our target group. I try not to pick those articles that have already been beaten to death in the regular press, but rather try to bring the reader articles that he or she might not run across in another medium. While we are non-partisan, I do not believe articles critical of government actions to be partisan as long as they are accurate and fair. Criticism, like dissent, is fair. Finally, I screen hundreds of articles for inclusions and for every article I include, I throw five or six away – good articles, but not as important as the ones selected.

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. [Sandy Cook](#), Editor