



**MILITARY OFFICERS CALL**  
**Sun City Center Chapter**  
**Military Officers Association of America**  
 P. O. Box 5693, Sun City Center, FL. 33571



**Volume 33 Number 6** **JUNE 2018**



**President's Message**  
**Benny Blackshire, LTC USA (Ret)**

My message this month is for the Birthday of the U.S. Army, June 14. When the American Revolution broke out, the rebellious colonies did not possess an army in the modern sense. Rather, the revolutionaries fielded an amateur force of colonial troops, cobbled together from various New England militia companies. They had no unified chain of command, and although Artemas Ward of Massachusetts exercised authority by informal agreement, officers from other colonies were not obligated to obey his orders. The American volunteers were led, equipped, armed, paid for, and supported by the colonies from which they were raised.

In the spring of 1775, this "army" was about to confront British troops near Boston, Massachusetts. The revolutionaries had to re-organize their forces quickly if they were to stand a chance against Britain's seasoned professionals. Recognizing the need to enlist the support of all of the American seaboard colonies, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress appealed to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia to assume authority for the New England army. Reportedly, at John Adams' request, Congress voted to "adopt" the Boston troops on June 14, although there is no written record of this decision.

Also on this day, Congress resolved to form a committee "to bring in a draft of rules and regulations for the government of the Army," and voted \$2,000,000 to support the forces around Boston, and those at New York City. Moreover, Congress authorized the formation of ten companies of expert riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, which were directed to march to Boston to support the New England militia.

George Washington received his appointment as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army the next day, and formally took command at Boston on July 3, 1775.

*Written by John R. Maass, Historian, US Army Center of Military History*

**JUNE SPEAKER**

(Last meeting until September)

**Pierre Jolly CWO4, USA (Ret)**



Served 20 years in US Army Intelligence and served a follow on 18 years as a Defense Intelligence civilian in support of national security, and the conduct of human and other intelligence disciplines. Retired as Defense Intelligence Senior Executive Service Officer (DISES-04)

Formulated global security, foreign and defense strategy and plans with extensive Middle East Experience. Retired from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) as a Defense Intelligence Senior Executive Service Officer in 2006. Overseas operational assignments over the 38 years of service included Vietnam (70-71), Germany 74-77, 80-84, 86-87, Tunisia 87-89, Czech Republic (92-93) Bosnia and Kosovo 2000-2001 and Iraq (2003-2004).

While at DIA, managed and oversaw the operations of the Defense Attaché System (DAS) as well DIA overt and controlled global HUMINT operations. Served as the Chief of HUMINT operations in Baghdad with the Iraq Survey Group from 2003-2004.

Education: M.A. Near-Eastern Studies and M.A. Near-Eastern History, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (1986). M.S. National Security Strategy, NWC, NDU, (1998). Graduate of the Intelligence Community Senior Leadership Program, Washington DC (1999); CIA Intelligence Fellows Program, Wye River (2000). National Security Decision Making Fellow (2003); National Security Leadership Fellow, Maxwell School, Syracuse University (2004); Kellogg School of Management Executive Leadership Program, Northwestern University, Chicago (2005). Intelligence Community Senior Leadership Program Mentor (2007).

Varying levels of fluency in foreign languages (French-Native; German, Arabic, Czech and Vietnamese).

Awards: Military: LOM, BSM, VN Cross of Gallantry w/ Palm device; DMSM, MSM, ARCOM w/4 O/C; AAM.

Awards: Civilian: DIA Meritorious Civilian Service Awards (1991); DCI Collector of the Year Award (1992); NATO Balkans Service Medal (2001); Armed Forces Civilian Service Medal (2001); DIA Director's DIA Director's Award (2002&2006); DIA Civilian Expeditionary Medal (Iraq) 2005. CIA Seal and Medallion for Career Exceptional Service (2006).

He will discuss his experiences while serving with he Defense Intelligence Agency.

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## May Luncheon



Dr. Susan MacManus

WFLA News Channel 8, the Florida News Channel, and WFLA News Radio. At present, she is the political analyst for ABC Action News in Tampa FL. Dr. MacManus is a Fulbright research scholar and has written numerous books.

She discussed the current political climate in Florida and the nation and discussed the numerous factors that will be in play during the impending elections. Given that the upcoming primary and general elections will feature an abundance of Florida candidates, Dr. MacManus said she is looking forward to analyzing what she thinks will be an interesting and conceivably volatile campaign. Because of the overwhelming partisan attitudes of today's politicians, she emphasized the overall disgust the voting public holds for Washington politics and the likelihood that voting turnout will be negatively impacted as a result. She also commented on the current lack of civility being displayed by today's politicians. As always, her presentation was very well received, and she was given a well-deserved standing ovation.

Dr. MacManus is an Honorary Member of MOAA, and speaks to the group annually.



Dr. Susan MacManus and Benny Blackshire

Dr. Susan MacManus was the featured speaker at the Military Officers of America Association (MOAA) monthly meeting, which was held at the Sun City Center, North Side Atrium Building on May 2nd, 2018.

Dr. MacManus is a Distinguished University Professor of Public Administration and Political Science in the Department of Government and International Affairs at the University of South Florida. She is nationally renowned for her expert and incisive commentary on public opinion and intergenerational politics and has appeared on ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, CNN, Fox News Channel, MSNBC, PBS, BBC, NHK (Tokyo), Australian Television, C-SPAN, National Public Radio, and in various print media. During the 2000 and 2004 election season, she has also served as the political analyst for



From left, Elizabeth Ward and Doris Johnson received their Auxiliary pins from Jane Foppe, the Auxiliary Liaison, at the luncheon.

## MEMBERSHIP CORNER

The Membership Committee Chair is providing the following to update the Chapter membership regarding our Chapter LOE & MOAA rewards. Also, this article will list new Chapter members.

- 187 Chapter members
- 127 LIFE members
- 27 PREMIUM members
- 15 BASIC members
- 18 non-MOAA members

New Chapter member(s) last month:  
Major Charles Brown, USMCR (Fmr)

REMINDER: The Chapter reimburses \$100 to members upgrading to LIFE when LIFE certificate is presented to the Treasurer.

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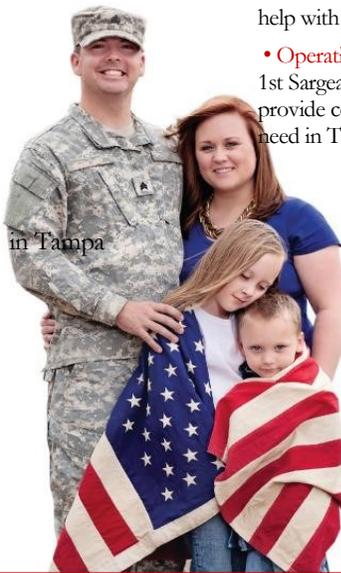


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## Former Fitzgerald XO: Navy crew members battling PTSD after fatal collision



Many crew members of the destroyer Fitzgerald who survived the warship's catastrophic collision with a merchant vessel last summer are experiencing post-traumatic stress after returning to sea, according to

the ship's former second-in-command. Writing on the U.S. Naval Institute's blog this week, former executive officer, Cdr. Sean Babbitt spoke of the lingering trauma the Fitz's crew now face after fighting for survival and losing seven shipmates in June.

"I personally know of a number of sailors who served on board the USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) who have held their hands up and said I need more help, and some of those sailors may never see a ship again."

Navy spokesman Cmdr. William Speaks said about 85 percent of the Fitz's crew was reassigned when the ship went stateside for repairs and upgrades.

"For many of our sailors, getting back on the horse will not be enough to pull them back where they were mentally when they went to sleep on 16 June 2017," Babbitt wrote.

Babbitt was relieved of his executive officer position along with commanding officer Cdr. Bryce Benson and Command Master Chief Brice Baldwin after the June 17 collision with a merchant vessel off Japan.

Babbitt and Baldwin received nonjudicial punishment earlier this year for a dereliction in the performance of duty charge and received punitive letters of reprimand.

The Navy is seeking several charges, including negligent homicide, against Benson.

## Lawsuit calls acting VA Secretary Wilkie's appointment illegal, demands immediate removal

Advocacy groups sued the White House on Monday to remove acting Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie from that role, arguing his appointment violated federal law.

Wilkie, who also serves as the Defense Department's under secretary for personnel and readiness, was named the acting head of VA last month when President Trump dismissed then Secretary David Shulkin over Twitter.

But Wilkie's appointment has raised concerns among multiple veterans groups, who have complained the role should have gone to Deputy Secretary Thomas Bowman, the next leader in line at the department.

At issue is whether Shulkin was officially fired or resigned last month. Under federal rules, the president can only go outside the normal chain of command to appoint a new acting secretary if the prior office holder "dies, resigns, or is otherwise unable to perform the functions and duties of the office."

White House officials have said that Shulkin offered his resignation, opening the door to Wilkie's appointment. Shulkin has insisted that he did not resign.

If successful, the lawsuit would not only remove Wilkie from office (replacing him with Bowman) but also invalidate any decisions or contracts he has authorized in his month at the post.

## No 'atheist' chaplains, lawmakers tell Navy



Lawmakers are applauding a decision by Navy officials to reject the application of a secular humanist — called an atheist by many — to be a Navy chaplain.

It's the second time the sea service has declined to accept Jason Heap, who calls himself a "humanist" and a "non-theist," into the chaplain corps.

A "humanist" is one who doesn't believe in a god, but in the natural ability of humans to "lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity," according to the Humanist Society.

The latest denial of Heap's application is at the center of a debate on whether or not one who doesn't believe in a deity can serve as a military chaplain.

A total of 67 lawmakers — 22 senators and 45 congressmen — signed one of two letters to Navy leadership demanding the Navy reject Heap's application.

The senators sent their letter to Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson on March 12.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said that he and the rest of the letter's signatories are sensitive to the needs of service members who don't believe in a deity, but because they don't believe in a traditional religion, Wicker says they shouldn't serve as chaplains.

"I hope our Navy leaders recognize that it is well within their authority to create programs outside of the Chaplain Corps to serve humanist or atheist service members," Wicker wrote in a March 15 press release. "However, allowing a non-religious worldview to be represented among the Chaplain Corps would set a dangerous precedent for the military."

### Sun City Center MOAA Website

Don't forget to visit our new website. The link to the website is: <http://moaaf.org/chapters/SunCity/> You will find much membership information, photos, calendar of events, past newsletters and more. If you would like to suggest topics for inclusion contact Jim Haney at [jghaney1@gmail.com](mailto:jghaney1@gmail.com)

### Publisher/Editor

### CAPT Frank Kepley, USN (Ret)

We need your input about member activities associated with MOAA and articles of interest to the military community. Contact Frank at:

[dkepley@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:dkepley@tampabay.rr.com) 813-642-0801



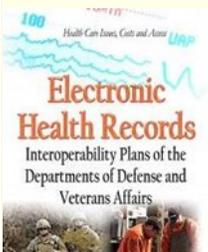
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## LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

**Frank Kepley, CAPT USN (Ret)**

### VA promises EHR to be interoperable with DoD, providers



The Cerner electronic health record system that the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to implement will achieve interoperability with the Department of Defense and community healthcare providers, according to former VA Secretary David Shulkin, MD.

Shulkin told lawmakers during a House hearing that the commercial-off-the-shelf EHR system will create a “single accurate lifetime electronic health record” for veterans. At the same time, he acknowledged that it is a “very risky and complex” implementation and “a lot of things could go wrong.”

To keep the project on track, the VA plans to align the deployment and implementation of its new Cerner EHR with the rollout of DoD’s own Cerner system, which has so far been installed at four military sites in the Pacific Northwest.

“Congress has been asking us for now 18 years to find a way to get our systems to work together with the Department of Defense—and, so, that will certainly be achieved with this,” testified Shulkin.

*Editor’s note: Having worked as a provider in both VA and DoD hospitals, I can attest to the significant problems that exist for the doctors and patients due to the lack of EHR compatibility.*

### Expand Agent Orange-related health care? Shulkin says he would have if he could



Former VA Secretary David Shulkin suggests he favors expansion of Agent Orange-related health care and disability compensation to new categories of ailing veterans but that factors like cost, medical science and politics still stand in the way.

Shulkin told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee that he made recommendations to White House budget officials last year on whether to add up to four more conditions — bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, Parkinson-like tremors and hypertension (high blood pressure) — to the VA list of 14 illnesses presumed caused by exposure to herbicides used during the Vietnam War.

At the same hearing, the VA chief was asked his position on Blue Water Navy veterans of the Vietnam War who also suffer from illnesses on the VA presumptive list but aren’t eligible to use it to facilitate claims for care and compensation.

“We have waited too long for this,” Shulkin agreed, but then suggested the solution for these veterans is blocked by medical evidence or swings on the will of the Congress.

### Ronny Jackson drops bid to become VA secretary amid allegations of drinking, mismanagement



WASHINGTON — Veterans Affairs secretary nominee Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson withdrew his name from consideration for the job after a week of allegations which cast doubt on his leadership and professional demeanor.

Jackson, a 23-year naval officer who serves as the White House physician, was a surprise pick for the post following the firing of former VA Secretary David Shulkin last month. President Donald Trump had repeatedly backed Jackson in recent days, even as Senate Republicans and Democrats publicly questioned whether he could ever be confirmed.

Leaders with the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee postponed his scheduled confirmation hearing amid reports from whistleblowers that Jackson repeatedly drank on the job, improperly handled and hoarded pain medication, and was abusing staff at the White House Medical Office.

“The allegations against me are completely false and fabricated. If they had any merit, I would not have been selected, promoted and entrusted to serve in such a sensitive and important role as physician to three presidents over the past 12 years.”

But Jackson said the accusations have “become a distraction for this president” and the Department of Veterans Affairs, prompting him to end his bid for the Cabinet post. *Editor’s note: Bush, Obama and Trump gave him very high marks and no proof of above was provided. Mission accomplished — reputation trashed. Back to square one.*

### Trump says he’ll quickly sign veterans care bill if Congress passes



President Donald Trump says he’ll quickly sign legislation expanding veterans’ access to private medical care if Congress clears the plan by Memorial Day.

Trump noted in a tweet that it’s been four years since a scandal at a VA hospital in Phoenix, in which some veterans died while waiting for appointments.

“We won’t forget what happened to our GREAT VETS,” Trump said. “Choice is vital, but the program needs work & is running out of money. Congress must fix Choice Program by Memorial Day so VETS can get the care they deserve. I will sign immediately!”

Congress has been working on overhauling the existing “choice” program, which is running out of money. Proposals have stalled over disagreements about cost and how much access veterans should have to private doctors.

Congress has been working on overhauling the existing “choice” program, which is running out of money. Proposals have stalled over disagreements about cost and how much access veterans should have to private doctors. *See pg 16 for details on bill.*

VA News Release  
Office of Public Affairs

April 5, 2018

**Debunking the VA Privatization Myth**

There is no effort underway to privatize VA, and to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate on the real issues surrounding Veterans' health care.

**Facts Debunk the Privatization Myth: A Two-Decade Comparison**

- In 1998, VA's budget was \$42.38 billion.
- VA's 2018 enacted budget is more than four times that figure at \$188.65 billion.
- In 1998, VA had 240,846 employees.
- As of March 29, 2018, VA had 385,233 employees, a nearly 60 percent increase in 20 years.
- VA has increased its end strength by nearly 15,000 since the beginning of the Trump administration, from roughly 370,000 to 385,233 as of March 29, 2018.
- In 2000 VA had 1,110 medical facilities.
- Today, VA has 130 more medical facilities, for a total of 1,240.

**VA Community Care Has Existed for More Than 70 Years, and Has Nothing to Do with Privatization**

VA has been offering community care since the World War II era, starting with the then-Veterans Administration's Hometown Program that began in 1945.

As former Secretary Shulkin said, "No health care provider delivers every treatment under the sun. Referral programs for patients to get care through outside providers (known as Choice or Community Care at the VA) are as essential to the medical profession as stethoscopes and tongue depressors.

Currently, VA operates seven distinct community care programs. VA is working with Congress to merge all of VA's community care efforts into a single, streamlined program that's easy for Veterans and VA employees to use so the department can work with Veterans to coordinate their care with private providers when VA can't provide the care in a timely way or when it's in Veterans' best medical interest.

The fact is that demand for Veterans' health care is outpacing VA's ability to supply it wholly in-house. And with America facing a looming doctor shortage, VA has to be able to share health care resources with the private sector through an effective community care program. There is just no other option and, once again, VA has offered this solution since the World War II era.

**The Bottom Line on the Privatization Myth**

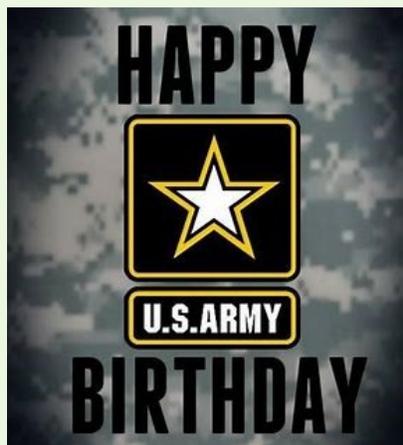
"If we're trying to privatize, we're not doing a very good job,"... "We've gone from 250,000 employees in the VA in 2009 to 370,000 employees, and we've gone from a \$93.5 billion budget to what the president's asked this year is \$198.

*Editor's note: This is certainly compelling as well as welcome information that makes a lot of sense. However, we all know that the winds of change can alter events rapidly, depending on which direction they are blowing in from. Politics does not always follow the most logical path and unfortunately, this is a blatantly political issue.*

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY US ARMY**

**June 14, 2018**

**1775—2018**



**243 years**



## VA's next big problem: Key health care program is running out of money again



WASHINGTON — As Veterans Affairs officials await news on the next possible pick to lead the department, they're also sounding the alarm on the next challenge facing their agency: running out of money for a controversial health care program in coming weeks.

In a letter to lawmakers, acting Department Secretary Robert Wilkie said the VA Choice program is expected to run out of funding "in approximately the first two weeks of June." Veterans participating in it will begin receiving letters early next month warning that the program could be shut down in early summer.

"America's veterans need Congress to come together to support this crucial program and pass legislation that will make it permanent," Wilkie said in a press statement. "There is simply no denying how vital community providers are to VA's mission."

The timetable for the funding expiration isn't a surprise, since VA officials have been predicting they would run out of money in May or June since late 2017. But, since the firing of VA Secretary David Shulkin last month, the urgency of that timeline has largely been overshadowed by leadership controversies at the department.

"We cannot wait any longer," Wilkie said in his statement. "Decisive action must be taken in order to deliver on our promise to our veterans."

## The fake Facebook pages targeting Vietnam veterans



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg promised lawmakers that his platform would crack down on fake accounts and foreign influence. But at least two Facebook pages linked to websites operating out of Bulgaria are still targeting U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War, according to a letter obtained by

The Atlantic that was sent to lawmakers by a nonprofit veteran's organization.

The U.S. military community is not a new or unusual target for foreign influence operations. A study published in October by the University of Oxford found that three websites linked to Russia—Veteranstoday.com, Veteransnewsnow.com and Southfront.org—engaged in "significant and persistent interactions" with veterans during the election, concluding in part that veterans are targeted because they tend to be "community leaders" trusted by the public.

Despite their exposure, however, these operations are ongoing—likely so that foreign actors can use them to spread divisive or fabricated news and other political content, especially in the run-up to the 2018 midterm elections.

## Oxygen device maker Inogen discloses customer data breach

Oxygen supply device maker Inogen Inc said on Friday it was notifying 30,000 existing and former customers follow-

ing a data breach that led to improper access of personal details of some rental clients.

The company, which makes portable devices that supply oxygen to patients with breathing difficulties and lung diseases, said some non-public financial information was also leaked after an employee's email account was compromised.

The unauthorized access appeared to have occurred between Jan. 2 and March 14 and involved rental customers' personal information such as names, contact details, Medicare identification numbers and insurance policy information.

However, the affected data did not include payment card information or medical records, the company said in a filing.

Inogen said it has hired a forensic firm to investigate and will provide credit monitoring and an insurance reimbursement policy to assist affected customers.

## Chemical weapons team kept from alleged attack site in Syria

Independent investigators were prevented by Syrian and Russian authorities from reaching the scene of an alleged chemical attack near the Syrian capital, an official said, days after the U.S., France and Britain bombarded sites they said were linked to Syria's chemical weapons program.

## New bill would push VA to conduct more research into medical marijuana



New legislation recently released would dump the Department of Veterans Affairs' excuse for not better researching the possible benefits of cannabis for suffering veterans, a move that could have wide-ranging ramifications for the nationwide legalization of medical marijuana.

The bill — dubbed the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2018 — has the support of the top Republican and Democrat on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and other key lawmakers. It would not only clarify that VA has the authority to research cannabis, but require regular reports from department leaders on how seriously they are taking that responsibility.

"While we know cannabis can have life-saving effects on veterans suffering from chronic pain or PTSD, there has been a severe lack of research studying the full effect of medicinal cannabis on these veterans," said Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn, the House committee's ranking member. *Editor's note: I think this research is long overdue.*

## Tricare prior-authorization waiver period ends; GAO issues report

April 15 marked the end of a temporary waiver period that eased rules for Tricare Prime enrollees in the West seeking specialty care, but waivers ordered before that date are valid through June 15. Separately, a Government Accountability Office report said the Defense Health Agency has not fully developed an implementation plan for the new Tricare Select system.

## Why Did TRICARE for Life Prescription Co-Pays Go Up?



Military members and retirees, including TRICARE for Life users, are used to slight drug price co-pay increases year over year.

But when fees for 90-day supplies for prescription drugs received through the system's mail-order pharmacy, Express Scripts, went from free to \$7 on Feb. 1, many TRICARE for Life users said they were blindsided. They had been told they would be largely exempt from a series of major TRICARE changes rolled out Jan. 1, including higher co-pays and enrollment fees.

So why were they now being billed for drugs that had been free? The answer is that the Feb. 1 drug price increases and the Jan. 1 TRICARE changes are entirely unrelated. But TRICARE for Life users still wondered where, exactly, these changes came from.

That history lies in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, and a section that makes permanent a protection for military survivors against a measure known as the "widows tax."

That measure required that any money received from the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) by a new widow or widower whose spouse died from a service-related cause be offset dollar-to-dollar by the money he or she could receive from the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program. Money paid when the death is service connected. So the widow would only receive the SBP and not the DIC. The fix, which had been set to expire this year, reduced the amount of that offset. Some members of Congress wanted to make that fix permanent. But to do so, they had to find a way to pay for it -- to the tune of about \$1 billion a year.

The funding solution? Raise pharmacy fees for everyone. That pharmacy cost increase, which impacts all TRICARE pharmacy users, was approved in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act.

As a result, the only places left for beneficiaries to receive medication for free are military treatment facility pharmacies.

*Editor's note: So, as you might expect, the politicians figured out a way to make the veterans pay for the so called 'Widows Tax'.*

## The opioid crisis



Deaths from opioids have quadrupled since 1999, killing more than 42,000 people in 2016, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The opioid epidemic is now considered to be the deadliest drug overdose crisis in American history, and it is the driving force behind drug overdoses now being the leading cause of death for Americans under 50.

It began in the late 1990s, when doctors and health care providers started facing pressure to treat chronic pain more aggressively.

Advocates began encouraging doctors to treat pain as a "fifth vital sign" and recommended the long-term use of opioids — such as OxyContin — for all chronic pain.

At the same time, pharmaceutical companies began marketing these drugs to medical providers as not addictive or

harmful.

As a result, doctors began prescribing them at greater rates. According to the CDC, by 2015, enough pills were being prescribed to medicate every American around the clock for three straight weeks.

But opioids are highly addictive, and studies show that patients given longer-lasting prescriptions, such as a week or a month, were most likely to become addicted.

*Editor's note: Interestingly enough, there have been recent studies that indicate the effectiveness of opioids in treating pain is about the same as over-the-counter analgesics.*

## Familiar with Telemedicine? Mayo Clinic is Taking Next Step with New Robotic 'Telestenting' Procedure



With growing shortages of cardiologists and other physicians expected in the coming years, health providers are turning to various forms of telemedicine to deal with the workforce gaps. One

of those methods is robot-performed coronary intervention procedures in which doctors working at a remote location can guide a robotic arm in the placing of heart stents.

Now the Mayo Clinic, which in recent years has emerged as a national leader in telemedicine, is tapping a \$3.3 million charitable grant to collaborate with a Massachusetts-based maker of such robotic equipment to carry out a pre-clinical study on use of "telestenting."

According to federal health officials, there's no question of a looming shortage of physicians of all stripes in the coming years as the U.S. population ages and more people have access to insurance. In December 2016, the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration released findings that by 2025, assuming there are no changes in how medicine is delivered, there will be significant workforce shortages of physicians in many specialties of internal medicine.

Mayo is taking the telemedicine concept to a new level — a technology enabling physicians to perform minimally-invasive "percutaneous coronary interventions," such as inserting stents, via remote control.

Corindus CEO Mark Toland said in a statement that percutaneous coronary interventions, or PCI, were only the beginning of what the company is envisioning for its remotely-operated robotic medical system.

*Editor's note: Stand by. Telemedicine robotic surgery is just getting started.*

## Researchers create phone case that can measure blood pressure



Someday soon, a simple touch of a finger to a smartphone case might be enough to provide instant, accurate blood pressure readings. Researchers used 3D printing technology to create a phone case with optical and force sensors that

can measure blood pressure with the touch of a finger and send the information to an app, according to a study in the journal *Science Translational Medicine*. The sensors use the pressure on an artery in the finger in the same way a blood pressure cuff puts pressure on an artery in the arm.

## 2 women commanding vets' groups say their historic roles haven't meant big challenges



For the first time ever, two women are testifying before Congress as the top officials at major veterans organizations, helping to set the national agenda on a host of care and program issues.

That's a big deal to many in the veterans community, but not to the two commanders.

Both women — Disabled American Veteran National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster and American Legion National Commander Denise Rohan — said they see historic significance in their roles, but also emphasized their gender really hasn't meant many differences than past leaders' work on veterans issues.

Metcalf-Foster said in her congressional testimony on Tuesday that she was "the first, but I'm confident not the last, woman commander of DAV." She is an Army Reserve veteran and the daughter of a 10th Cavalry Regiment "Buffalo soldier," and said that background is what catches her membership's attention, not the fact that she is a woman.

Rohan said one small difference she has seen is that her election has opened the door for more conversations about other women veterans.

"When I meet the World War II veterans and Korean War veterans, they are so proud," she said. "And what they want to do is tell me about their daughters' and their granddaughters' accomplishments."

## Pilots are flying 17 hours per month, but it's still not enough, Air Force secretary says



Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson on refuted reports that the service's pilots are only flying nine or 10 hours per month.

In fact, Wilson said at a panel discussion at the Heritage Foundation, pilots overall flew about 17.6 hours per month in fiscal

2017. Fighter pilots flew roughly 16.4 hours monthly, and mobility pilots flew 17.3 hours, she said. Bomber pilots, who typically fly longer sorties, typically flew 19.7 hours per month.

In a Feb. 14 Senate Armed Services readiness subcommittee hearing, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Oklahoma, said that Air Force pilots are getting about nine or ten hours of flying time per month — less than the Marines' reported 14 to 16 hours monthly.

Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Seve Wilson told Inhofe he thought the Air Force's monthly flight hours were "a little bit more than that," but did not say how much. He added that the Air Force hopes to increase flying hours by about an hour per month going forward.

At the discussion with Secretary Wilson, John Venable, a Heritage fellow and former F-16 pilot, said pilots used to require about three weekly flights, or 15 to 20 hours of flight time a month, just to stay sharp with their current skills. Learning new skills would require four weekly flights, he said.

"It's one thing to say we've got 17 hours of flying time, but if it's not really intense training, where you come back and you say, 'wow, I've really ratcheted up my game today,' it's still not enough," Wilson said.

## Combat medics train to keep the wounded alive beyond the 'golden hour'

For the past two decades, Army combat medics have been training to keep injured soldiers alive during firefights, but with the as-



sumption that help is just a radio call away.

That's a fair assessment in uncontested environments against enemies without comparable air or fire power, but as the service prepares for future battles against near-peer enemies, the medical

field is looking to train medics to handle injuries when it could be hours or even a day before a medevac can show up.

"I don't know if there's necessarily a comfortable way to fight a war, but if you have to fight a war knowing that there's an evacuation system available to pick you up within an hour, that's on par with civilian emergency response," Sgt. 1st Class Joey Hernandez, the lead instructor with the Army's new Expeditionary Combat Medic program, told Army Times in a Feb. 28 phone interview.

Those days might be over soon, so Army medicine is looking "beyond the golden hour," Hernandez said, to give medics the tools to navigate a care plan beyond the initial triage of combat casualty care.

The course's goal, Hernandez said, is to bridge the gap between a combat medic's basic knowledge and the care a wounded soldier would receive once they've been transported to a battalion aide station, where a licensed professional could get to work.

To do that, the course teaches medics to look beyond the procedure for treating injuries or illnesses, to understand why they're doing what they're doing and how they can make adjustments in prolonged care, when they know they're not going to be able to hand a sick or wounded soldier off to a medevac quickly.

## Expedition led by Microsoft co-founder locates lost WWII carrier



The aircraft carrier USS Lexington (CV-2) was struck by multiple Japanese torpedoes and bombs on May 8, 1942, during the Battle of the Coral Sea, but it wasn't until a secondary explosion crippled the vessel that the ship's commanding officer

gave the call to abandon ship.

More than 200 Lexington sailors were killed in the fight, which marked the first ever carrier vs. carrier battle — one that dealt the imperial forces of Emperor Hirohito their first major blow of World War II.

Nearby U.S. ships rescued 2,770 of the carrier's remaining sailors, to include the captain's dog, Wags.

Once evacuated, the Lexington, affectionately known as "Lady Lex," was torpedoed by the USS Phelps to prevent her capture, slipping below the water, lost to history — until just recently, on March 4, 2018.

That's when the expedition crew of Research Vessel (R/V) Petrel, led by Paul Allen, Microsoft co-founder and Seattle Seahawks owner, located the wreck 3,000 meters — or a bout two miles — beneath the surface.

The ship went down about 500 miles off the coast of Australia with 35 aircraft on board, one of which can be seen in video footage.

## James Mattis congratulates new 'secretary of defense'



Jim Mattis sent a handwritten note saluting U.S. women's hockey goaltender Maddie Rooney for her gold medal Olympic win — from "one Secretary of Defense to another!"

## Army mishandled bomb-sniffing dogs from Afghanistan, report says



A report finds that the Army failed to do right by some of the more than 200 bomb-sniffing dogs that served with U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, detecting roadside bombs and saving lives.

The Defense Department's inspector general has determined that, after the program ended in 2014, some soldiers struggled or were unable to adopt the dogs they had handled.

This included two dogs among 13 that were given to a private company to be used as service dogs for veterans but then abandoned at a Virginia kennel.

The report says Congress amended the law in 2015 to give handlers top priority in adopting their dogs.

*Editor's note: This is a no brainer!!.*

## Fewer planes are ready to fly: Air Force mission-capable rates decline amid pilot crisis



The readiness of the Air Force's aircraft fleet is continuing its slow, steady deterioration — and this could spell trouble for the service's effort to hold on to its pilots and its ability to respond to contingencies around the world.

According to data provided by the Air Force, about 71.3 percent of the Air Force's aircraft were flyable, or mission-capable, at any given time in fiscal 2017. That represents a drop from the 72.1 percent mission-capable rate in fiscal 2016, and a continuation of the decline in recent years.

Former Air Force pilots and leaders say that this continued trend is a gigantic red flag, and warn it could lead to serious problems down the road.

Multiple factors over the past few years have led the Air Force to this crisis point. The Air Force has been flying its aircraft exceptionally hard for years, fighting wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, as well as providing deterrence against North Korea, Russia, and China.

But no matter the cause, declining mission-capable rates present a problem the Air Force must fix. And if it doesn't, experts agreed, it could drive more pilots out and exacerbate an already alarming pilot shortage.

## Aviator vying to be Navy's first female CO of an aircraft carrier



A naval aviator is in the running to become the Navy's first female commanding officer of an aircraft carrier in the service's history. Capt. Amy Bauernschmidt is the executive officer of the carrier

Abraham Lincoln, one of 11 aircraft stationed around the world. She reported to the Lincoln in September 2016 and is the first woman in naval history to hold the title of executive officer aboard a nuclear warship.

Now Bauernschmidt is looking to make history again as the Navy's next aircraft carrier commanding officer, the first ever female to do so.

As part of the CO competition, Bauernschmidt is required to spend 15-18 months as the commanding officer of the San Diego-based amphibious transport dock Anchorage. Her performance there will help determine whether she gets selected to command an aircraft carrier.

Bauernschmidt is a Milwaukee native and 1994 U.S. Naval Academy graduate. She was designated a naval aviator in 1996 and has accumulated more than 3,000 flight hours. She earned the 2011 Admiral Jimmy Thach and Captain Arnold J. Isbell awards for tactical innovation and excellence.

## 'Kissing Sailor' in iconic photo turns 95



George Mendonsa survived some of the hardest fought naval battles of World War II. And when the war ended, he was captured in a photo that will survive forever.

The immortalized moment featuring Mendonsa on Victory over Japan Day is widely considered to be one of the iconic photos of the 20th century, a symbol of national relief and pure ecstasy.

Life Magazine's photographer, Alfred Eisenstadt, captured the image, while Navy photographer Lt. Victor Jorgensen also caught the moment in a widely published variation. But neither photographer stopped to get the names of the sailor or the woman in the image.

Mendonsa recently celebrated his 95th birthday.

## Trump issues order supporting ban on many transgender troops, defers to Pentagon on new restrictions



President Trump issued an order that supports a ban on many transgender troops, deferring to a new Pentagon plan that essentially cancels a policy adopted by the Obama administration.

"By its very nature, military service requires sacrifice," Mattis wrote in a memo to the president that was recently released. "The men and women who serve voluntarily accept limitations on their personal liberties — freedom of speech, political activity, freedom of movement — in order to provide the military lethality and readiness necessary to ensure American citizens enjoy their personal freedoms to the fullest extent."

Current transgender service members who have not undergone reassignment surgery should be allowed to stay, as long as they have been medically stable for 36 consecutive months in their biological sex before joining the military and are able to deploy across the world, Mattis recommended.

The Pentagon's new transgender policy, recently announced, is based on fact, versus political correctness. It allows transgender individuals who are not experiencing the mental anxiety or anguish of gender dysphoria to serve their country. At the same time, it correctly returns gender dysphoria—which impedes military readiness—to a disqualifying service criterion.

## Duke's 'Coach K,' an Army vet, has advice for transitioning service members



One of March Madness' central figures can trace his leadership roots, on and off the court, to his time in an Army uniform.

Mike Krzyzewski, who is pursuing his sixth national title as head coach of the Duke Blue Devils, played under Indiana legend Bobby Knight at the U.S. Military Academy, earning three letters and serving as a captain his senior season. He received his commission in 1969, left service in 1974 (as a different kind of captain) and returned to his alma mater as head coach for five seasons before taking the Duke job in 1980.

Along with his five NCAA basketball titles and more than 1,000 collegiate wins, he's led Team USA to three Olympic gold medals. Krzyzewski said some leadership advice he picked up in the military helped him in the pursuit of private-sector success.

"One of the best things I learned is, failure is not your destination," the coach said in response to questions from Military Times. "In other words, along the process of achievement of victory there will be setbacks, and you cannot allow a setback to stop you from achieving success.

"And, along with that, don't do it alone. Being on a team, try to get whatever number of people you have in your unit to play and to compete as one."

*Editor's note: This one is for all of you 'March Madness' fans.*

## Vets groups oppose new burial restrictions on Arlington Cemetery, but officials see few options



Veterans groups on Thursday opposed the idea of severely restricting eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery in coming years to ensure the viability of the iconic landmark for decades to come.

But military officials said they don't see another realistic choice.

"We are filling up every single day," said Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries. "Within the next few years, Section 60 — known for the recent wars — will be closed. This is on our mind every day."

More than 3 million visitors travel to the site annually, and more than 7,000 service members were interred at the cemetery in fiscal 2017 alone.

But Army officials said only about 100,000 burial sites are left at the site, tucked between the Potomac River and the ever growing northern Virginia suburbs. Expansion plans are expected to keep burials on pace into the 2040s, but not much beyond that.

That has prompted discussions of eligibility for burial at the site. Currently, most honorably discharged veterans can request Arlington Cemetery as their final resting place. Proposals under consideration by the service could restrict that to only troops killed in the line of duty and certain distinguished veterans, like Medal of Honor or Purple Heart recipients.

Veterans groups told lawmakers during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on the topic Thursday that they're not in favor of such moves.

"We should save a select number of spaces for those individuals, but not change the eligibility rules at the exclusion of those serving today," said retired Col. Keith Zuegel, senior director at the

Air Force Association.

But an Army survey conducted last year found wider support for more exclusive rules, with more than 60 percent in favor of restrictions that military planners say will keep the site viable well past 2100. A second survey on the issue will be conducted this spring.

## Maybe today's Navy is just not very good at driving ships



In the wake of two fatal collisions of Navy warships with commercial vessels, current and former senior surface warfare officers are speaking out, saying today's Navy suffers from a disturbing problem: The SWO community is just not very good at

driving ships.

The two collisions — and a total of 17 sailors lost at sea this summer — have raised concerns about whether this generation of surface fleet officers lack the basic core competency of their trade.

The problem is years in the making. Now, the current generation of officers rising into command-level billets lacks the skills, training, education and experience needed to operate effectively and safely at sea, according to current and former officers.

"There is a systemic cultural wasteland in the SWO community right now, especially at the department head level," said retired Navy Capt. Rick Hoffman, who commanded the cruiser Hue City and the frigate DeWert and who, after retirement, taught SWOs ship handling in Mayport.

"We do not put a premium on being good mariners," Hoffman said. "We put a premium on being good inspection takers and admin weenies."

*Editor's note: Wow! Pretty scary stuff.*

## Lessons learned on the battlefield inform response to school shootings



Military physicians, surgeons and medics have imparted knowledge gained in Iraq and Afghanistan to their civilian counterparts, and that knowledge may have helped save 16 people wounded when a teenager opened fire at a Parkland, Fla., school, writes Dr. Marc Siegel, a clinical professor of medicine at NYU Langone Health. Rehearsals, a rapid, coordinated response and surgical techniques developed by the military were employed by first responders, trauma surgeons and other medical personnel.

## Florida Council of Chapters Communiqué April 2018 Issue

See what the other Chapters are doing. The *Florida Council of Chapter's* newsletter, the "Communiqué" can be accessed by clicking on the link below. After you click the link and then click *Allow*, it may take a minute or so for the newsletter to pop up. It is worth the wait.

Apr2014.pdfhttp:[www.moaafi.org/communique](http://www.moaafi.org/communique)

Editor—Polly Parks. Send articles and photos to:

Polly Parks [pparks@igc.org](mailto:pparks@igc.org)

## Survey: Nearly 20% of health care workers would sell protected data



Approximately 18% of health care employees would agree to sell confidential data to unauthorized parties for as low as \$500 to \$1,000, and about 24% reported knowing an individual in their organization who sold access or credentials to an unauthorized person, an Accenture survey found.

Researchers surveyed 912 provider and payer organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada and found that 21% of respondents from provider organizations said they would sell confidential data, compared with 12% of those from payer organizations.

About 18 percent of respondents said they would be willing to sell confidential data — such as login credentials, installing tracking software and downloading data to a portable drive — to unauthorized parties for as little as \$500 to \$1,000.

"Health organizations are in the throes of a cyber war that is being undermined by their own workforce," said Accenture Managing Director John Schoew, who leads the Health and Public Service Security practice in North America. "With sensitive data a part of the job for millions of health workers, organizations must foster a cyber culture that addresses these deeply rooted issues so that employees become part of the fight, not a weak link."

*Editor's note: This is a shocker!! Apparently, we can't trust our physician's employees with our medical information.*

## VA to Conduct In-depth Internal Review of Existing Canine Research Projects



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the Office of Research and Development (ORD) of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) extended its commitment to reduce future research on canines by initiating a

rapid, in-depth internal review of existing canine research projects.

VA has always required medical relevance and justification for canine use, and in late 2017, VA instituted a policy that no new canine research would begin without approval of both, the Chief Research and Development Officer and the VA Secretary.

As a result, new canine studies have not been initiated, and two new studies were required to use alternative models instead of canines.

VA is now reviewing existing studies using canines to determine whether the use of canines in these studies should be phased out in advance of their original end dates.

In addition, when canines are the only viable models, VA is proactively contacting the principal investigators leading these studies, requesting they develop plans to establish alternative models. VA intends to fund development of canine alternatives, which will reduce the need for canine research within VA.

*Editor's note : The sooner they eliminate research on live animals the better. The tremendous advances in the simulation of live bodies should make this need unnecessary.*

## Women's health needs



Roles for women in uniform continue to evolve, said Cmdr. René Campos, USN (Ret), MOAA's senior director of Government Relations for veterans and wounded warrior care. VA and the Defense Department must prepare to

serve their health needs.

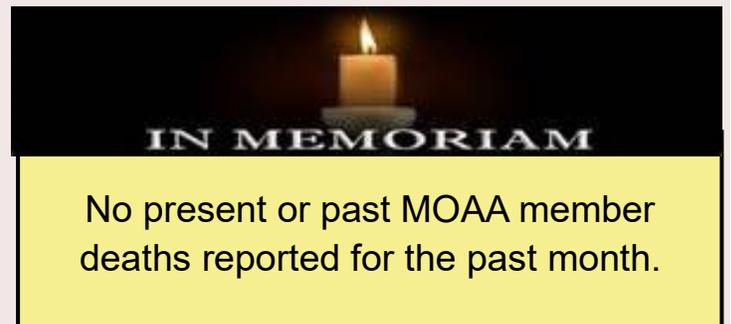
MOAA recently teamed with United Health Foundation to study some of the health challenges facing female veterans. They found that women who served in the military were more likely to suffer from mental illness, cardiovascular disease, and other problems compared to female civilians.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Republican physician representing Louisiana, said he agrees. "Women have the privilege, as men do, to serve in some of these roles that were once just for men," he said. "Our VA should respond to that."

As part of this effort, Campos said MOAA recommends Congress pass the Deborah Sampson Act, which calls on the VA to carry out a three-year pilot program to assess peer-to-peer assistance for women leaving the military — especially for those who suffered sexual trauma or are at risk of becoming homeless.

## Physician Burnout: The Hidden Health Care Crisis

Physician burnout is an under-recognized and under-reported problem. Characterized by a state of mental exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment, burnout may affect more than 60% of family practice providers and at least one third of gastroenterologists. Some studies have shown that younger physicians, physicians performing high-risk procedures, and physicians experiencing work-life conflicts are at greatest risk. If unrecognized, the costs to the physician and to the health care system can be enormous because physician burnout is associated with increased rates of depression, alcohol and drug abuse, divorce, suicide, medical errors, difficult relationships with coworkers, and patient dissatisfaction, as well as physician attrition.



### Monthly Member and Board Meetings

Luncheon: Wednesday Jun 3rd, 2018 11:00 am  
Florida Room

Board Meeting: Wednesday Jun 27th, 2018 10:00 am  
Trinity Baptist Church

Membership Committee Mtg. Club Renaissance  
3rd Wednesday Jun 13, 2018

## Virtual care visits up 7.3% this flu season: 3 things to know



Patients turned to virtual healthcare this flu season more than they did last year, according to data provided to Becker's Hospital Review from HealthTap, an online platform that connects people looking for health information to a network of physicians who can answer their

health questions.

This flu season has been one of the worst in the past decade, claiming nearly 97 lives and showing only a small chance of stopping anytime soon, according to the CDC's Feb. 23 Flu-View update.

To see how virtual healthcare has been affected by the 2017-18 flu season, HealthTap analyzed its data and drew comparisons to the 2016-17 flu season.

Here are three things to know:

1. The ratio of virtual consults for flu-like symptoms among HealthTap users (15 percent) was double that of in-person physician visits among the general population (7.7 percent).
2. HealthTap noted a 30 percent increase in the ratio of virtual consults among its users for flu-like symptoms this year (14.8 percent) compared to last year (11.4 percent).
3. The ratio of flu-related virtual consults resulting in an antiviral prescription for flu treatment increased from 0.3 percent in 2016-17 to 1.8 percent in 2017-18.

*Editor's note: I am personally for virtual health care or any other kind of care that will keep me out of the Dr's office.*

## Never Too Late? Surgery Near End of Life Is Common, Costly



"We have a culture that believes in very aggressive care," said Dr. Rita Redberg, who at the University of California-San Francisco specializes in heart disease in women. "We are often not considering the chance of benefit and chance of harm, and how that changes when

you get older. We also fail to have conversations about what patients value most."

While surgery is typically lifesaving for younger people, operating on frail, older patients rarely helps them live longer or returns the quality of life they once enjoyed, according to a 2016 paper in *Annals of Surgery*.

Nearly 1 in 3 Medicare patients undergo an operation in the year before they die, even though the evidence shows that many are more likely to be harmed than to benefit from it.

Example — when an ER doctor saw a defibrillator protruding from a DNR patient's thin chest he explained that the device would not allow her to slip away painlessly and that the jolt would be "so strong that it will knock her across the room." The device was immediately deactivated.

The practice is driven by financial incentives that reward doctors for doing procedures, as well as a medical culture in which patients and doctors are reluctant to talk about how surgical interventions should be prescribed more judiciously, said Dr. Redberg.

*Editor's note: So, so true. Unethical, but true! One thing about VA care, surgeons are not paid commensurate with the number of costly surgeries they perform.*

## Merck Turns to Tumor-Killing Viruses in Immune Cancer Treatment



Scientists have tried to muster viruses to hunt and kill tumors for almost 70 years, with limited success. That may be changing.

Now, microbes are playing an important role in an emerging branch of cancer immunotherapy that's attracting some of the world's biggest drug makers. Merck announced plans to buy Australia's Viralytics Ltd. last week to gain an experimental cold virus-

based treatment that may bolster the utility of Keytruda, its blockbuster cancer medicine.

The \$502 million (\$390 million) deal underscores the importance of research into so-called oncolytic viruses, which work by infecting and destroying tumor cells as well as stimulating an immune response. The approach is garnering growing interest from pharmaceutical companies because of the possibility of coupling these viruses with a new generation of medicines, called checkpoint inhibitors, that counter a strategy cancer cells use to escape detection.

With the number of new cancer cases predicted to increase by about 70 percent globally over the next two decades, scientists are focusing on ways to improve treatments, especially for malignancies for which standard chemotherapy and radiation provide little benefit

## VA Announces Launch of Lighthouse Lab' at Health Information & Technology Conference



WASHINGTON - Shared at a key health information and technology conference in Las Vegas on March 5, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced the launch of a 'beta' version of its Lighthouse

Lab, a computer platform offering software developers access to tools for creating mobile and web applications that will help Veterans better manage their care, services and benefits.

Former VA Secretary Shulkin applauded the Center for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) commitment to putting patients first and the launch of Blue Button 2.0, a software developer-friendly API similar to VA's Lighthouse Lab, that enables Medicare beneficiaries to connect their claims data to applications, services and research programs.

**LUNCHEON**  
**Wednesday Jun 6th, 2018**

**◆Call 642-0497◆**

**Florida Room, Atrium**  
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**Sunday, Jun3rd, 2018**

Please give full names of members and guests, total number attending. Cost is \$15.00 payable at the door in cash or check. Social hour begins at 11:00 a.m. Business meeting at 11:15 followed by lunch and a speaker.

*Remember, if you make a reservation and do not attend, you are expected to pay. Bring payment to next meeting or send check to:*

Military Officers Association of America  
Post Office Box 5693  
Sun City Center, FL 33571-5693



## MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

**MOAA:** The SCC Chapter of The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) membership is granted to Army; Navy; Marines; Air Force; Coast Guard; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Public Health; the National; Guard or Reserve components both active or retired; and former officers and Warrant Officers who were separated under acceptable conditions.

**MISSION:** The mission of Sun City Center FL chapter shall be to promote the purposes and objectives of the Military Officers Association of America; foster fraternal relation among retired, active duty and former officers of active duty, retired and reserve components personnel of the uniformed services and their dependents and survivors; provide useful services for members and their dependents and survivors and serve the community and the nation.

**MEETINGS:** A meeting is held monthly (except July/August) in the Atrium building in the Florida room at 11:00 a.m. and includes lunch and a guest speaker.

**ACTIVITIES:** Coordinate and sponsor Annual Memorial Day ceremony; provide awards and honorariums to outstanding JROTC Cadets; contributed to Operation Warm Heart and Helping Hand; contribute to My Warriors Place; provide funds for MOAA scholarships and participate in numerous community activities.

Additional information can be obtained by calling 813-642-0801 or e-mailing [dkepley@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:dkepley@tampabay.rr.com). You can also contact us by mail at Frank Kepley, 815 Freedom Plaza Circle, Apt 104 Sun City Center FL. 33573.



Sun City Center Chapter  
Military Officers Association of America  
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## Or Current Resident

### Lawmakers revive massive VA reform plan, hope for quick passage

House lawmakers will try again to advance a massive veterans policy package which would overhaul private-sector care options for current Veterans Affairs patients, expand caregiver benefits to older veterans and create a base-closing style review to shutter obsolete department facilities.

The measure, scheduled for mark-up before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, closely follows a similar plan that was nearly passed as part of the federal budget package in March. Senate leaders and House Republicans agreed to that plan, but House Democrats raised last-minute objections over procedural issues with the deal.

The move comes less than a week after department officials warned that funding for their VA Choice program — which covers about 900,000 veterans medical appointments outside the VA system each month — will run out of money in early June.

Shulkin claimed political operatives within the White House were working to dramatically expand the number of veterans eligible to receive taxpayer-funded care outside the VA system, potentially undermining the existing VA health system.

Former Secretary Shulkin and White House officials — have publicly backed the outline of House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe's latest plans, which call for more relaxed eligibility standards for care outside VA while still requiring that department officials remain the central coordinator of veterans care.

Veterans who are enrolled in department health care would be entitled to two visits a year to any outside physician without any cost, and tens of thousands of others could be eligible for more private-sector specialists under new criteria determining whether VA offers equal or adequate health care services to those individuals.

The new proposal would also expand caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras, first starting with pre-1975 veterans and later phasing in the remaining group.

It also contains \$5.2 billion in new funding for the VA Choice program, to extend it for another year until it is consolidated into the revamped department community care offerings.

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**3rd Friday of Each Month**  
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