



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



**Volume 34 Number 5** **MAY 2019**



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

**Greetings**

First, I want to thank everyone for your support of our local chapter. I thank those that are faithful attendees at the luncheon/meetings and those that have continued their membership even though they can no longer attend the functions. It takes all of us to keep our chapter strong.

Second, I thank all of you that signed up to be a flag bearer or usher for the upcoming Memorial Day ceremony to be held at the King's Point Veterans Theater on May 27, 2019 at 10:00 am. This is an impressive ceremony and one that you should really attend if possible.

At the April luncheon I reported that MOAA National would "Storm the Hill" on April 10th. This was a very important event as they were lobbying for 3 items in congress this year: (1) the FY 2020 military pay raise that affects active duty and retired personnel. (2) ending the "widows" tax imposed on military survivors who have SBP and the spouse died from service related causes. (SBP-DIC Offset) and (3) stabilizing TRICARE fees and co-payments.

In the April issue of the MOAA magazine there were post cards for you to send to your congressmen. It is very important that you tear those out, sign them, and mail them to the congressmen. When they start receiving thousands of our cards it really makes a difference. Remember, MOAA is the largest and most visible advocacy group for the military in Washington.

In closing, I want to remind you once more about the MOAA Florida Annual Convention to be held June 20-23, at the Safety Harbor Resort & Spa in Tampa. If you want to attend you can register online at the Council's website; moaaf.org and click on the convention. I believe the deadline for registration is May 1, 2019. I would love to see you at the convention.

**May SPEAKER**

**Dr. Susan MacManus**



Dr. Susan MacManus will be the featured speaker at the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) monthly meeting on May 1st, at 11:00. MacManus received her master's degree from the University of Michigan (1969) and her undergraduate (1968) and Ph.D. (1975) degrees

from Florida State University. Born in Tampa, she is a native of Pasco County.

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.

She has also served as the political analyst for WFLA News Channel 8, the Florida News Channel, and WFLA News Radio. Currently, 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 co-authored, with mentor Thomas R. Dye, Politics in States and Communities, 11th ed. (Prentice-Hall, 2003), which is the nation's leading textbook on state and local politics. She has just recently released a new book entitled "Florida Minority Trail Blazer," that took her ten years to complete.

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## APRIL 2019 LUNCHEON

### Tina Patch addresses MOAA on CBD products

Tina Patch, creator of a company called MJ Natural Resources, was the featured speaker at the April 3rd Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) luncheon held in the Florida Room at the North Side Atrium.

Tina has a background in Accounting, HR, IT, Energy and Business Management. She has a BAS degree in Management & Organizational Leadership. Tina is currently in an MBA program at ENMU. She is also a registered tax preparer and Quick Books trainer. Originally from New York, Tina resides in the Tampa Bay area - which she loves!

During her time at her corporate job, it became clear that a beloved family member was abusing Opioid pills-which subsequently led to Heroin use. Having struggled through the anger, disappointment and then fear - Tina went on a mission to find the help that this family member needed. After it became apparent that there were few resources for optimal treatment, Tina wanted to tackle that issue head on! Then The CATE Foundation was created.

Tina is dedicated to the mission of - better treatment can mean a better outcome! She is also a champion to those who truly want to overcome this horrible epidemic. She is known as a problem solver in her career and she anticipates the challenge that lies ahead. MJ Natural Resources which educates and sells THC free medicinal hemp derived CBD products. "Our mission is to keep our price to consumers low but our quality high! We believe in EDUCATING our consumers NOT just selling a product.

Her presentation was very educational regarding CBD products, their derivation and what to look for from the manufacturers when anticipating purchasing them. She stressed that their products are totally free of THS, the ingredient that provides the marijuana "high."



Tina Patch



Tina Patch—Benny Blackshire

### MOAA ACTION SITE

I have created this box to direct members to the online MOAA 'Take Action' site in order to assist MOAA in achieving their legislative goals.

[Click here](#) and select the issue(s) you would like to have MOAA discuss with your representatives. Fill in the form and click submit. MOAA will send it to your representatives. You can add your own comments if you wish.

### 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.

- 193 Chapter members
- 129 LIFE members
- 27 PREMIUM members
- 15 BASIC members
- 22 non-MOAA members

New Chapter member(s) last month:  
CPT Lloyd Grable, USA (Fr)  
Mrs. Harriet Jordan (Auxillary)  
COL Eunice Patxot, USA (Ret)

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

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- **Scholarships and Leadership Programs** for students from military families
- **Operation Helping Hand:** monthly support for military families of wounded servicemen and women at the James A. Haley VA Hospital in Tampa

**For more information, call  
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## Here's why the Union Jack is back



The resurgent “great power competition” at sea now officially trumps the Global War on Terror — at least on U.S. Navy ships.

Starting with morning colors on June 4, the Navy will return to flying the “Union Jack,” a small blue flag emblazoned with the stars of the 50 states — identical to the top left corner of the national ensign — from their jackstaves, small flagpoles mounted on the bows of all Navy vessels when in port or at anchor.

Announced in NavAdmin message 039/19 and a Navy press release, the policy change returns the “First Navy Jack” — and its “Don’t Tread on Me” rattlesnake slithering across thirteen red and white stripes — to its former role of signifying the oldest commissioned warship in the operational fleet. It currently flies from all Navy jackstaves.

“The Union Jack is deeply connected to our heritage and our rise as a global nation with a global Navy,” said Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson in his released statement. “The Navy is a symbol that projects American values to the world. Just as the Navy embodies the values and principles that we hold dear, our very appearance in port and at anchor communicates important messages.”

The U.S. Navy’s Union Jack shouldn’t be confused with the United Kingdom’s national flag of the same name.

## A Seabee on Iwo Jima: The men who drove cranes and cats also served

By: Jack Cornwell, World War II Magazine



I found this article [Seabees on Iwo Jima](#) very interesting reading.

## Bill would expand American Legion membership eligibility to more veterans



Sen. Kyrsten Sinema has filed a bill that could expand eligibility for American Legion membership to all veterans who served since World War II.

The Legion Act, co-sponsored by Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina and filed last Friday, would expand Legion membership to include honorably discharged veterans who served during unrecognized times of war since World War II.

Laird says Enewetak veterans also have trouble accessing treatment.

“We’ve been battling (Veterans Affairs) for recognition and compensation for our health issues and cancers due to our service cleaning up after 43 nuclear bomb blasts — to no avail so far,” Laird said.

John Raughter, deputy director of the national American Legion headquarters, said the veterans organization has identified 1,600 service members killed or wounded since World War II during times not officially recognized as periods of war.

*Editor’s note: This would seem to be a ‘no brainer.’*

## CDC reports high flu vaccine efficacy, low flu severity this season

The flu vaccine yielded 47% overall efficacy among all age groups this season and 61% overall efficacy among youths ages 6 months to 17 years, as well as 46% efficacy against the dominant strain, compared with 25% efficacy of last year’s vaccine against the dominant strain of the season, CDC researchers have reported.

### Sun City Center MOAA Website

**Don’t forget to visit our new website. The link to the website is: <http://moafl.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:

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

**New VA health care rules: Trump overreach or more choice for vets**

By: Leo Shane III



The fight over privatizing Veterans Affairs health care is about to escalate.

Department officials released their first public draft of new rules regarding which veterans will be eligible for private-sector medical appointments covered by taxpayer funds. The rules

amount to a massive expansion of those outside care options, potentially adding more than 1 million more patients to community care programs.

Almost immediately, critics attacked the plan as an overreach by President Donald Trump's administration to shift patients and funding from the federal veterans medical system to the private sector, in an attempt to undermine government backed health care. House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano, D-Calif., has promised a public hearing on the issue in coming weeks.

"Rather than working to find an equilibrium within the system by building up VA's ability to deliver high quality care, ... today's announcement places VA on a pathway to privatization and leads Congress to assume the worst," he said in a statement after the rules release.

But VA officials are calling those reactions nothing more than hyperbolic partisanship, and they said the new rules are designed to give veterans more options, not undermine the existing system.

They also insist that the changes won't significantly alter how the majority of veterans in America get their care, since many are satisfied with their current care plans. The small percentage who aren't will now enjoy more choices, with the government picking up the bill.

For primary care and mental health medical appointments, the department is proposing a 30-minute average drive time standard and a wait-time standard at closer VA facilities of 20 days. For specialty care, the drive-time standard would increase to 60 minutes and the wait-time standard would increase to 28 days.

"My concern is if (the standards) are too broad, it's going to hollow out the VA, and we're not going to be able to foot the bill," said Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member Jon Tester, D-Mont. [Read full article](#)

*Editor's Note: There will be a major battle over this — ahem—rather robust plan. I have created a link to the details of the plan above.*

**Vets groups recommend VA budget increase to handle expansion of private care**

As the Department of Veterans Affairs works toward expanding its use of private-sector doctors, three veterans groups proposed that the White House and Congress ap-

prove a budget for private care in 2020 that's nearly double what was appropriated for 2019.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America suggested a community care budget of more than \$18 billion – up from the \$9.4 billion appropriated for fiscal year 2019, which ends Sept. 30. Without an increase in funding, the groups are concerned money for private care could be stripped from the VA health care system.

The VA Mission Act, a law that expands veterans' access to private doctors, is set to go into effect in June. The veterans groups warned that the Mission Act "has created a financial obligation that, absent sufficient resources to fully and faithfully enact this legislation, could erode efforts to reform and modernize the VA health care system."

*Editor's note: I admit to beating this subject to death, but privatizing the VA seems to be the current administration's inclination. All of the recommendations being proposed by the politicians, if established, are going to increase privatization and place the VA in a financially untenable position. See previous article and next article.*

**VA Now Has Shorter Wait Times Than Private Clinics, AMA Study Claims**



Wait times at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics have gone down significantly from recent years and are now shorter on average than those in private-sector health care, at least in big cities, according to a new study

from the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

In a statement, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said the JAMA report published Jan. 18 showed that the VA "has made a concerted, transparent effort to improve access to care" since 2014, when wait-times scandals and doctored records led to the resignation of former VA Secretary and retired Army Gen. Eric Shinseki.

"This study affirms that VA has made notable progress in improving access in primary care, and other key specialty care areas," Wilkie said.

The cross-sectional JAMA study of wait-time data from VA facilities and private-sector hospitals focused on primary care, dermatology, cardiology, and orthopedics in 15 major metropolitan areas.

The findings were that "there was no statistically significant difference between private sector and VA mean wait times in 2014" and, in 2017, "mean wait times were statistically significantly shorter for the VA," the JAMA report said.

"In 2014 the average wait time in V.A. hospitals was 22.5 days, compared with 18.7 in the private sector," the study said, but in 2017, "mean wait time at V.A. hospitals had gone down to 17.7 days, while rising to 29.8 for private practitioners."

The overall conclusion of the report was that "access to care within VA facilities appears to have improved between 2014 and 2017 and appears to have surpassed access in the private sector for 3 of the 4 specialties evaluated," with the exception of orthopedics.

*Editor's note: So why the rush to privatization? Makes one wonder about possible personal agendas.*

## New VA rules on access to outside care leave many unknowns



The number of veterans eligible for health care services in their communities, using networks of private-sector providers contracted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, is expected to jump this summer when regulations setting new access standards for community care become final.

Veteran service organizations and congressional committees with oversight responsibilities for VA contend that the barebone details released last week raise many more questions than they answer.

Top among them are whether VA will have the budget dollars, the complex procedures and the enhanced administrative tools in place to avoid the kind of calamitous launch that scarred the Choice program from its inception in late 2014.

On Jan. 31, VA published proposed rules on what is sure to be one the most popular new benefits authorized by the Mission Act: veterans' access to designated civilian-run urgent care clinics without prior approval from VA.

Veterans enrolled in VA health care and needing treatment for a sore throat, a sprained ankle or some other episodic or temporary health need will be able to walk into participating urgent-care clinics rather than visit VA emergency care clinics or hospitals or schedule an appointment with their primary-care provider.

The first three urgent-care visits in a calendar year will be free to veterans with disabilities or other circumstances that place them in Priority Groups 1 through 5 for accessing VA health care. Certain enrolled veterans in Group 6 and all veterans falling into Groups 7 and 8 will be charged a copay of \$30 for each visit.

To discourage overuse of urgent care, the \$30 copayment will be charged any veteran after their third walk-in visit, to include those with service-connected disabilities. That detail will be challenged by some veteran service organizations.

The urgent-care regulation emphasizes that the new benefit is not to be used by veterans needing treatment for chronic conditions, which should continue to be managed through their primary-care providers.

Key questions to which DAV needs answers, said Reese, are whether the access rules are fully funded, are realistic and feasible to implement. One great unknown, he said, is whether VA-funded community provider networks will be sufficiently staffed to deliver faster, more convenient and quality care to veterans.

## The VA Is Paying for a Top Official's Cross-Country Commute



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs paid \$13,000 over a three-month period for a senior official's biweekly commute to Washington from his home in California, according to expense reports obtained by ProPublica.

The official, Darin Selnick, is a senior adviser to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and has played a key role in develop-

ing the administration's controversial new rules on referring veterans to private doctors. The proposal, announced last month, has drawn opposition from some lawmakers and veterans groups.

Selnick has had extensive contact with the Mar-a-Lago trio: Marvel Entertainment chairman Ike Perlmutter, West Palm Beach physician Bruce Moskowitz, and lawyer Marc Sherman. In emails obtained by ProPublica last year, Selnick said he valued Moskowitz's input more than the views of VA experts.

Selnick is a prominent critic of the VA's government-run health system. In between his time in government, he has worked for Concerned Veterans for America, a political group funded by conservative billionaires Charles and David Koch that has advocated for expanding private care for veterans. In 2016, Selnick signed onto a report that called the VA "seriously broken" with "no efficient path to repair it" and proposed shifting all veterans to the private sector.

"Darin Selnick should not be diverting money from the VA to fund his bicoastal crusade to privatize and destroy the VA," J. David Cox Sr., national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, the union representing VA staff, said in a statement. "It's time for Mr. Selnick to come clean about his shadowy ties to unelected Trump advisers who are trying to dismantle the VA."

Last year, while working in the White House, Selnick negotiated with lawmakers on legislation to overhaul the VA's programs for referring veterans to private doctors. Selnick pushed for the VA to establish rules, known as access standards, that would automatically make some veterans eligible for private care.

The access standards (see previous article) that the VA proposed last month are poised to dramatically expand the pool of veterans who could obtain private medical care at government expense.

Key lawmakers from both parties scolded the VA for its secrecy and asked for more information about the plan development and impact.

*Editor's note: From the first day I reported on the Mar-a-Lago trio, I have been convinced we have not heard the last of the group and their goal to privatize the VA. Stand by. It is on the way.*

## Nearly half of new flu cases caused by more severe strain, CDC says



CDC officials warned that flu continues to spread across the US and a more severe strain, influenza A H3N2, now accounts for almost half of all new cases. Officials reported widespread flu activity in 48 states, and flu-related pediatric deaths for the season increased to 41 during the week ending Feb. 16.

*Editor's note: Contrast this article with the one on page 5. Bottom line—get the shot!*

### JOIN TODAY

**Not a member of MOAA? When you join MOAA, you become part of the strongest advocate for our military's personnel and their families. The stronger our membership is, the stronger our voice becomes. Consider joining today because every voice counts.**

## Federal watchdog initiates investigation into VA dog testing



The controversy surrounding the continued use of dogs in medical experiments at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities heated up again this week when the agency's inspector general announced it would initiate an investigation into the practice.

Five House members urged the VA Inspector General in December to find how many VA studies continued to use dogs following the approval of a new law last year that sought to prevent them.

Congress passed legislation in March 2018 to prohibit the use of dogs in VA research unless the objectives of a medical study could be met only by using them. Even in that instance, the new law states the study must be directly approved by the VA secretary.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie has claimed former Secretary David Shulkin approved nine ongoing studies using dogs before he was fired last year. Shulkin, though, has asserted he didn't.

The ongoing studies using dogs are located in Cleveland, Milwaukee and Richmond, among other locations, according to information provided by Titus' office.

USA Today previously reported the medical study in Cleveland involves severing dogs' spinal cords and testing their cough reflexes.

*Editor's Note: Good grief! I thought we had moved past this practice. You do not have to sever a dog's spinal cord to figure out it will inhibit their cough reflex.*

## Air Force general apologizes for wearing upside down ribbon rack at State of the Union



Four-star Air Force Gen. Joseph Lengyel took to social media to apologize for a uniform gaffe committed while attending President Donald Trump's annual address before Congress on Tuesday night.

"A not-so-funny thing happened on the way to the State of the Union last night," Lengyel, who serves as chief of the National Guard Bureau, wrote Wednesday on his official Facebook page. "If you look closely, you'll see that the ribbons on my uniform jacket are upside down."

The mistake, in which Lengyel wore his highest precedence awards on the bottom row instead of the top, had already been spotted by eagle-eyed viewers after he was briefly shown during the televised address.

## Lead investigator in Green Beret murder case faces charges of stolen valor

The Army special agent who led the investigation of a Green Beret charged with the murder of an alleged Afghan bomb-maker now faces charges of stolen valor.

And both the Green Beret's attorney and others in military legal circles say the charge could have a serious impact on the Army's case against Maj. Mathew Golsteyn.

On Jan. 31, Sgt. 1st Class Mark A. Delacruz, a special agent with Army Criminal Investigation Command, was

charged with falsifying promotion files and other records by listing on at least three occasions a Purple Heart award that he never received and the "unauthorized wear" on other occasions of that ribbon, the Air Assault Badge, Pathfinder Badge and Combat Action Badge, none of which he rated.

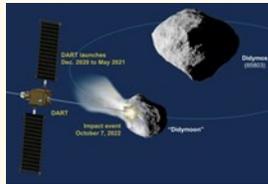
Phillip Stackhouse, Golsteyn's attorney, told Army Times that Delacruz was the investigator who interviewed key witnesses that led to the murder charge and was expected to be a main witness for the prosecution.

Colby Vokey, a former Marine Corps Judge Advocate General officer and now a civilian attorney practicing military law, told Army Times that the revelations that the lead investigator in Golsteyn's case has alleged integrity issues were "shocking."

"It is incredibly damaging to the case," Vokey said. "That goes to the core of the integrity of CID. To me, it calls into question all of this new evidence they've brought against Matt Golsteyn."

*Editor's note: Hard to believe that an active duty service member would think they could get away with stolen valor acts.*

## To save Earth someday, team builds spacecraft to crash into asteroid to shove it off course



A team of scientists, astronomers and engineers meets weekly in a conference room on a Howard County, Md., research campus and plans to save the world. "Keep calm and carry DART," reads a poster on the wall. DART – the Double Asteroid Redirection Test – is their plan to avert catastrophe.

In February 2013, a fiery meteor cut across the Siberian sky. It came streaking down as fast as 40,000 mph. Then came a mid-air explosion, a flash and boom.

The shock wave blew out windows across the Russian city of Chelyabinsk. A factory roof collapsed. More than 1,000 people were hurt, mostly from shattered glass. Scientists estimate the meteor unleashed a force stronger than the atomic bomb detonated in Hiroshima.

They believe a meteor 8 to 10 kilometers in diameter crashed into the Gulf of Mexico 65 million years ago and killed off the dinosaurs.

The team at the Hopkins laboratory in Laurel has begun the final design and construction of the DART spacecraft. About the size of a Honda Civic, it's scheduled for launch in summer 2021.

## House committee schedules hearing on measles outbreaks



A hearing on measles outbreaks affecting Washington, New York and Texas is being planned by the House Energy and Commerce Committee later this month. According to the CDC, there have been 101 confirmed measles cases in the US so far this year, and over 50% of those cases were recorded in one Washington county.

New York, Texas and Washington have all seen outbreaks this year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## Students design \$1.25 piece to help prevent B-2 stealth bomber emergencies



One of the world's most advanced bombers is flying with a plastic switch cover, designed by Missouri high school students, in its cockpit to prevent possible in-flight emergencies, the Air Force says.

The Stealth Panthers robotics team at Knob Noster High School near Whiteman Air Force Base worked with pilots and engineers last fall to create and test the 3D-printed prototype in a B-2 Spirit training simulator.

The covers, which cost about \$1.25 to produce, are now installed in each operational B-2 at Whiteman and the simulator cockpits, said Capt. Keenan Kunst, a base spokesman.

"The B-2 Spirit cockpit is equipped with state-of-the-art, cutting-edge technology, but is a very cramped space, so something was needed to keep the pilots or other items from bumping into the switches," Kunst said. "The students were able to help us find a solution that was quick, affordable and effective."

## Air Force's F-16 Viper Demonstration Team commander is the real Captain Marvel



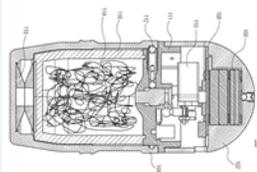
The Air Force recently made Capt. Zoe "SiS" Kotnik the first female pilot to command the F-16 Viper Demo Team.

"I can't believe I have this opportunity," Kotnik said in a Jan. 29 interview with Live Airshow TV.

A 2011 graduate of the Air Force Academy, Kotnik earned her wings in 2013 and became an F-16C pilot. She's been assigned to the 35th Fighter Squadron at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea, and the 55th Fighter Squadron at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, where she flew missions in support of Operation Noble Eagle, the air defense effort designed to prevent a recurrence of 9-11-type attacks in America, according to her official biography. During her eight year career, she's amassed more than 1,000 flight hours.

Kotnik's mom was a private pilot and her uncle, Aviation Hall of Fame pilot Charlie Hillard, was the first American to win the World Aerobatics Championships.

## Soldiers are firing off Spider-Man-like nets from grenades to down enemy drones



It's likely that whoever US troops fight in the next war, these enemies will be armed with drones. That's why Army researchers have invented a smart and cost-effective way to bring them down.

The US Army has invented a new grenade in the 40 mm configuration that is packed with a net and specifically designed to take out enemy drones.

The weapon, which was developed by Army engineers at the Armament Research, Development, and Engineering Center (ARDEC) in New Jersey, can be launched from

the standard grenade launchers regularly used by the US military and law enforcement.

The weapon can be launched from the standard grenade launchers regularly used by the US military and law enforcement.

Furthermore, the new net-packed grenade is a lot cheaper than surface-to-air weapons, such as surface to air missiles, to take out an adversary's drones. A US ally once used a \$3 million Patriot missile to shoot down a quadcopter drone that probably cost no more than \$200, US Army Gen. David Perkins last year, calling attention to the need for affordable counter-drone capabilities.

*Editor's note: Kind of makes one think of David slaying Goliath with a slingshot.*

## Senate Committee Grills Navy Official Over 2017 Collisions, Seeking Data to Prove Conditions Have Changed



During an Armed Services Committee hearing on the Navy ship collisions Adm. Philip Davidson, the top military commander in the Pacific, was questioned by senator, Angus King of Maine.

Davidson said, "there are 280 other ships that have not had collisions," which he apparently feels demonstrates the readiness of the 7th fleet.

King replied "Airplanes are landing all over America, and just because they aren't all crashing doesn't mean they don't need a high level of maintenance," he said. "To tell me that isn't very convincing." "Are you saying that there were no failures that led to these collisions because there were 280 ships that didn't have collisions? Is that the standard? No collisions?"

King did admit that Congress was also responsible for the problem in that the continuing resolutions and sequestration have, in no small measure, contributed to the problem.

The Navy has said it has completed 80 percent of more than 100 reforms developed in the aftermath of the tragedies. "I've been quite pleased with the progress the Navy's made," Davidson said.

King has called on Navy officials to provide hard data showing they have improved conditions on their ships in the months since the two destroyers were involved in back-to-back collisions that left 17 sailors dead.

*Editor's note: If the reports do not discuss plans to address the under-staffing, lack of readiness training, reasonable workloads, increased ship maintenance, as well as meaningful, relevant mission selections, they will not be well received by the committee — nor should they be.*

## Shanahan: Space Force Won't Take Over Navy, Army Space Assets

The Navy and Army will retain control of their space assets as the Pentagon moves forward with establishing a new Space Force under the Air Force, acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said on Wednesday.

The Navy has about 127 active duty personnel and 81 reservists assigned to its space cadre, which staff the Naval Satellite Operations Center and serve with various joint and inter-agency commands, according to the service.

## Russian Navy has new weapon that makes targets hallucinate, vomit



The Russian Navy reportedly has a new weapon that can disrupt the eyesight of targets as well as make them hallucinate and vomit.

State news agency RIA Novosti reported that a Russian military contractor has installed the weapon on two

Russian warships.

The weapon fires a beam similar to a strobe light that affects the target's eyesight, making it more difficult for them to aim at night. During testing, volunteers reportedly used rifles and guns to shoot targets that were protected by the weapon. The volunteers reported having trouble aiming because they couldn't see.

Additionally, about half of the volunteers said they felt dizzy, nauseous and disoriented. About 20 percent of the volunteers reported experiencing hallucinations.

## The Navy admits that its secretive new \$760 million aircraft carrier defense system is a total failure



The U.S. Navy has shed light on a previously highly classified project meant to protect aircraft carriers from the grave and widespread threat of torpedos, and it's been a massive failure.

Virtually every navy the U.S. might find itself at war against can field torpedos, or underwater self-propelled bombs that have been sinking warships for more than 100 years.

U.S. Navy aircraft carriers represent technological marvels as they're floating airports driven by nuclear reactions, but after years of secretive tests, the U.S. has given up on a program to meet the threat.

The U.S. Navy has cancelled its Anti-Torpedo Defensive System project and will remove the systems from five aircraft carriers that actually have them installed, the Pentagon's Office of the Director of Test and Evaluation revealed in a report on Tuesday.

"In September 2018, the Navy suspended its efforts to develop the [surface ship torpedo defense] system. The Navy plans to restore all carriers to their normal configurations during maintenance availabilities" over the next four years, the report reads.

This leaves the U.S. Navy's surface ships with almost no defense against a submarine's primary anti-surface weapon at a time when the service warns that Russia and China's submarine fleet have rapidly grown to pose a major threat to US ships.

At the end of the Cold War, the U.S. turned away from anti-submarine warfare towards a fight against surface ships. But now, Russia, China, and Iran reportedly have super-cavitating torpedoes, or torpedoes that form a bubble of air around themselves as they jet through the water at hundreds of miles an hour.

The new class of speedy torpedoes can't be guided, but can fire straight towards U.S. Navy carriers that have little chance of detecting them.

Torpedoes don't collide directly into a ship, but rather use

an explosion to create an air bubble under the ship and potentially bend or break the bow, sinking the ship.

Other Russian torpedos have a range of 12 miles and can zig zag to beat countermeasures when closing in on a ship.

The U.S. has spent \$760 million on the failed system, The War Zone reported.

*Editor's Note: Gadzooks!!! This is a real eyebrow raiser.*

## The Navy's top officer admitted the much-hyped electromagnetic railgun is a big mess



Less than a year after declaring the U.S. Navy "fully invested" in the service's much-hyped electromagnetic railgun, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson is apparently experiencing some

buyer's remorse over the \$500 million supergun's troubled development.

Appearing before an audience at the Atlantic Council Richardson characterized the decade-old weapons system — capable of accelerating a projectile to hypersonic speeds but stuck in research and development limbo without a ship-board tactical demonstrator — as "the case study that would say, 'This is how innovation maybe shouldn't happen.'"

"We've learned a lot [from the project] and the engineering of building something like that that can handle that much electromagnetic energy and not just explode is challenging," Richardson said, per Business Insider. "So, we're going to continue after this — we're going to install this thing, we're going to continue to develop it, test it."

A year ago, Richardson attempted to assure lawmakers that, as Military.com put it, "death of the program was greatly exaggerated."

China's Electromagnetic Railgun is apparently already roaming the high seas.

When taken with the additional \$20 million allocated in the 2019 NDAA for the Army's distinct railgun efforts, this suggests that the Pentagon hasn't totally given up hope of fielding the supergun despite existing obstacles.

*Editor's Note: Hmm. No defense against torpedoes and no railgun to match China's. Kinda worrisome.*

### LUNCHEON

Wednesday May 1st, 2019

◆Call 642-0497◆

Florida Room, Atrium  
North Campus SCC

*Reservations no later than 6 p.m.  
Sunday, Apr 28th, 2019*

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

## Veterans pose challenges to civilian primary care providers



With fewer than half of U.S. military veterans receiving care in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system, primary care physicians outside the VA may have "great uncertainty" about how best to address veterans' needs.

A study in Family Practice found that primary care providers in the civilian sector may be unsure about how to care for veterans, have limited or inconsistent knowledge of support services and military culture and do not always understand veterans' unique health care needs. Continuity of care problems may also arise because some veterans receive care from both civilian and VA facilities, researchers said.

It's no small culture. As of 2015, some 20 million veterans lived in the United States, "comprising approximately 6 percent of the total population," the authors wrote.

Yet many service members are not eligible for benefits from the VA or Department of Defense, they added, "which necessitates these individuals be seen in civilian health care settings." And veterans living in rural areas distant from VA facilities also frequently use non-VA health care providers.

Ultimately, the authors wrote, further research is needed "to understand how screening and follow-up care for veteran patients is best implemented into primary care settings."

## How 3D printers are cutting down surgery times and helping vets get mobility back at VA hospitals



Some doctors use printers to produce patient records or referrals. Others use them to replicate human organs.

That's what Dr. Beth Ripley is doing at the VA Puget Sound

Health Care System in Washington.

Granted, replicas are more plastic than tissue and don't function like the real thing — at least not yet. But in a growing number of VA hospitals using 3D printing technology, life-size replicas of human anatomy are helping surgeons cut down on operating times by as much as two hours, lowering costs and potentially helping patients heal faster.

"One of the magical things about 3D printing ... is that you can create these really complex structures that you could never make using traditional manufacturing," said Ripley, who chairs the VA's Veterans Health Administration 3D Printing Advisory Committee.

Radiologists like her can take a CT scan of a veteran's heart, for example, then print a nearly exact copy of its faulty valve in anywhere from 30 minutes to 30 hours for the surgeons to study. The same goes for tumorous kidneys or pelvises.

"[Surgeons] can look at it and figure out exactly what their plan is before they ever go into the surgery," said Ripley. 3D printing capability started in three of the VA's 172 hospitals in 2017 and has since grown to 20, with 10 more health care facilities working on implementation, according to the VA.

## 'Diet drugs' suppress mosquitoes' thirst for blood



A hungry mosquito is at best a nuisance; at worst, it is a transmitter of deadly diseases.

Now, researchers have discovered a way to stop mosquitoes biting — by using human 'diet' drugs to trick them into feeling full. The scientists suggest

that the drugs could one day be used to control the spread of diseases.

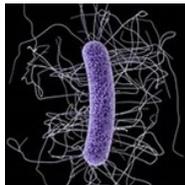
"It's an excellent study," says Clare Strode, a mosquito biologist at Edge Hill University in Ormskirk, UK. There's a long way to go before the method can be used in the wild, she says, but "as a proof of principle, it's very promising".

Some human appetite-suppressant drugs already target the NPY receptors, so Vosshall decided to take a "completely zany" approach: feed these drugs to mosquitoes and see what happens.

The method worked: mosquitoes that fed on a solution containing NPY-activating drugs were much less likely to approach a human-scented 'lure' than were the control group, and their appetites remained suppressed for two days.

However, the most potent compound the team identified needs to be administered at a very high concentration to affect the mosquitoes' behavior, which would make it prohibitively expensive to deploy in the field. Vosshall hopes to partner with medicinal chemists to tweak the chemistry and create a more powerful molecule.

## Microbots that detect C. difficile toxins developed in Hong Kong



Researchers from the Chinese University of Hong Kong have created fluorescent microbots that react to the presence of Clostridium difficile toxins in stool samples. The technique allows accurate detection of the toxins within 15 minutes and may also have applications in detecting other bacterial diseases, the researchers said.

*Editor's note: This is significant news as Clostridium difficile is an opportunistic pathogen, infecting the colon of patients following antibiotic treatment. C. difficile produces two toxins, which damage intestinal cells and cause inflammation in the gut. Clostridium difficile, or C. diff for short, is a very common bacteria found in water, air, soil, and many other environments. However, it is becoming notorious as a cause of infections contracted in healthcare settings such as hospitals and nursing-homes. It can cause severe diarrhea and cramping, as well as inflammation of the colon — and in some instances it can be life-threatening.*

*Older adults in health care facilities are most at risk, especially if they're taking antibiotics. That's because the human body contains thousands of different types of bacteria -- some good, some bad. If the antibiotics kill enough healthy bacteria, the ones that cause C. diff can grow unchecked and make you sick. This test will allow for immediate identification and treatment of the C. diff toxins. Probiotics may be prescribed orally in an attempt to restore any imbalance in the normal.*

## The US Air Force Has Won Control of the Space Force



Detailed planning for the proposed Space Force is expected to be handed over soon to the U.S. Air Force, a sign that Pentagon leaders — many of whom opposed the notion of consolidating military space operations in a new organization — have found a version that they can support.

In coming weeks, Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan is expected to sign a memo asking Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson to stand up a team that will figure out the bureaucratic nuts and bolts of the new space organization, according to a draft of the memo being circulated by top administration and military officials.

## SECNAV to the Navy: You got the money so fix yourselves. Fast.



After years of being overworked and underfunded, Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer says Congress gave the service enough cash to remedy its readiness woes and

now it's time to "increase the velocity of change."

"The two-year budget has enabled us to set the environment for change," Spencer told a packed auditorium at the Surface Navy Association's annual convention on Wednesday. "We have the money, ladies and gentlemen, but one thing that money can't buy is time and we don't have time to do business as usual."

Spencer called on the surface sailors and their officers gathered in Arlington, Virginia, to "deliver the Navy the nation needs with a true sense of urgency. And I mean that."

Although he didn't utter the names of the guided-missile destroyers Fitzgerald and John S. McCain and the 17 sailors killed in a pair of 2017 collisions with commercial vessels in the 7th Fleet's area of operations, Spencer alluded to his somber speech at last year's confab, when he reminded the Navy about the times it had "fallen short" in an era punctuated by a high tempo of operations and "diminishing resources."

"Our people were not receiving the training, leadership and opportunities they needed to be effective," Spencer said. "The civilian leaders of the military should be the circuit breakers when we are being asked to do more with less and up-tempo increased... Something has to give and there was no circuit breaker. That's all I'm going to say."

"This study is already being used to improve the manning on our ships, including the addition of personnel to our (guided-missile destroyers), and we're planning on introducing staffing changes on all other classes of ships in the near future," Spencer said.

*Editor's note: It only took 17 dead sailors to get the attention of SECNAV and the Navy leaders.*

## Supreme Court: Military retirees can be court-martialed for crimes committed after service

The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the Defense Department's authority to prosecute retired service members for crimes they commit, even after retirement.



The court on Tuesday chose not to hear the case of a retired Marine who was court-martialed for a sexual assault he committed three months after leaving the service in August 2015. By not accepting the case, *Larrabee v. the United States*, the court upheld the

status quo: that military retirees are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The denial of Larrabee's petition marks the high court's second rebuff in a year of a case involving a military retiree accused of non-military crimes in retirement.

The reasoning, the government argues, is that retirement is simply a change of military status and retired personnel are subject to recall should the need arise.

Retired Maj. Gen. Charles Dunlap, former deputy judge advocate general of the Air Force, added that the very act of receiving retired pay means that retired personnel are choosing to keep a relationship with the military and accept all that goes with the choice not to terminate their commission or request a discharge.

*Editor's note: This one is probably going to be appealed.*

## Navy Promised Changes After Deadly Accidents, but Many Within Doubt It's Delivering on Them



Adm. Philip Davidson, responsible for making sure that the Navy's ships were fully staffed, recently embarked on a speaking tour. He was responsible to make sure that sailors were adequately trained and equipped and ready for

combat. He had recently authored a public report laying out dozens of specific weaknesses that the Navy had begun fixing.

One of Davidson's stops in November 2017 was in San Diego, and inside the base's movie theater, he addressed hundreds of concerned commanders and officers. He was met with a series of tough questions, including a particularly sensitive one: If the commanders believed their ships were not ready, could they, as the Navy had promised, actually push back on orders to sail?

Davidson, according to an admiral inside the theater, responded with anger.

"If you can't take your ships to sea and accomplish the mission with the resources you have," he said, "then we'll find someone who will."

The response roiled the audience, and word of it quickly spread among Navy officers across the globe.

*Editor's note: And therein lies the underlying problem. That was a horrible, clueless response.*

## After Court Ruling, Here's What's Next for Women and the Draft

A federal judge's decision Friday that the law requiring men -- but not women -- to register for a U.S. military draft is unconstitutional has no immediate impact on women or the U.S. Selective Service System.

But it does revive debate about whether the country needs a military draft system and, if so, whether all 18-year-olds, regardless of gender, should be required to register.

## Sunken aircraft carrier Hornet — best known for Doolittle Raid — located miles below the waves



The research vessel Petrel crew members are no strangers to historic underwater archaeological discoveries, having located sunken World War II aircraft carriers, destroyers and cruisers scattered across the floor of

the vast Pacific Ocean.

Originally championed by deceased Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen — a philanthropist who also owned the Seattle Seahawks — the Petrel crew found a new wreck about 3.3 miles below the South Pacific's surface, the Yorktown-class flattop Hornet (CV-8).

Finding the carrier famous for launching the harrowing April 18, 1942, Doolittle bombing raid on Tokyo — the first American air raid on the Japanese homeland since entering the war — was the Petrel's first mission of 2019, one that was documented and can be viewed as part of a two-part series on CBS.

Months after launching the Doolittle Raid and subsequently joining in a decisive naval victory at Midway, the Hornet sailed toward the hotly contested Solomon Islands — notably Guadalcanal — to provide air cover for U.S. ground forces mired in a seesaw campaign.

Learning that a large force of Imperial Japanese Navy ships were approaching, the Hornet and the aircraft carrier Enterprise maneuvered to attack.

On Oct. 26, 1942, the Battle of Santa Cruz Island began. Aircraft from both navies pounded opposing ships.

The Hornet came under a coordinated attack by Japanese dive bombers and torpedo planes. Within 10 minutes, the carrier was dead in the water, all power and communications disrupted.

Two bombers damaged by anti-aircraft fire then slammed into the flattop, one into the carrier's island and the other into the its port side.

Thirty-two minutes after the last bomb detonated on the carrier's flight deck, Capt. Charles P. Mason gave the "abandon ship" order.

[Click here](#) for full details, including photos, of the sinking of this historical ship.

## Museum officials: Vandals try to burn a Confederate statue, but it was the wrong General Lee



CHARLOTTE, N.C. (Tribune News Service) — A marble statue memorializing the founder of the U.S. Army Airborne was set on fire Thursday in North Carolina, and museum officials believe it happened because vandals mistook it for a Confederate memorial, according to the Dunn Daily

Record and other media outlets.

Airborne founder Maj. Gen. William C. Lee shares the last name of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, but they are unrelated men who served different armies in different wars during different centuries.

Still, officials at the William C. Lee Airborne Museum in Dunn believe someone mistook the two for the same person, according to TV station WNCN.

"This is not a Civil War museum," curator Mark Johnson told WNCN. "This is General William C. Lee from United States Army Airborne from World War II, so I was hurt and surprised that some-

body would actually do this."

The museum posted a terse note about the vandalism on Facebook page Feb. 15, referring to the culprit as "some jerk punk."

"Someone poured a flammable liquid over the white marble statue of Lee and set it on fire. The local fire department put out the flames, but the damage is done," said the post.

*Editor's note: Does the statue really resemble a confederate soldier? That idiot really has studied history.*

## He was one of the first. Now, the last: A Navajo code talker remembers Iwo Jima

By CARL PRINE | *The San Diego Union-Tribune*



Thomas Begay stared at the wreath commemorating the scores of dead from that World War II battle 73 years ago, but his mind wasn't fully on the spectacle.

He was thinking about fellow Navajo code talker Teddy Draper Sr., who died Dec. 14 at 96. His death came nine days after fellow Arizonan George B. Willie Sr. passed. He was 92.

"There were 33 of us assigned as Navajo code talkers but now there are no more. They've died," said Begay, 92, who is believed to be the last surviving member of the 5th Marine Division's famed bilingual radio unit on Iwo Jima.

*Editor's note: To read Thomas Begay's Iwo Jima story click [Navajo Code](#) story. Another interesting WWII story.*

## Purple Heart vets will get disability claims moved quicker



Veterans who earned a Purple Heart during their military service will now have their veterans disability claims moved ahead of other requests, Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie announced.

"Those who hold the Purple Heart, the recognition of wounds taken in battle, will now receive priority consideration when it comes to claims," he told members of the House Appropriations Committee. The new policy will go into effect on April 1.

The move follows existing department rules which give priority classification to Purple Heart veterans who request medical appointments at VA hospitals. Those veterans are also exempt from all co-payments for their medical care.

But the move raised concerns among some advocates who noted that many serious wounds of war like post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury aren't often recognized with the military medal.

## Florida Council of Chapters Communiqué

### February 2019 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/communiqué](http://www.moaafi.org/communiqué)

Editor—Polly Parks. Send articles and photos to:

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

## US doctors overprescribed deadly drug fentanyl to patients



An investigation, carried out by experts from Johns Hopkins University, said that of the thousands of patients who had been prescribed fentanyl, between a third and half of them should never have received the drug.

One doctor in five did not know that fentanyl was only supposed to be used in certain types of cancer cases, the researchers found.

As a result, it has been wrongly prescribed for far less serious conditions like back pain or chronic headaches.

"The drug can kill you," said one of the authors of the report Caleb Alexander, co-director at the Center for Drug Safety and Effectiveness at Johns Hopkins.

"There's no question that individuals have died from inappropriate prescribing of these products," he said.

"The whole point of this program was to prevent exactly the use that commonly occurs," he said of fentanyl, which has become the deadliest drug in an epidemic that killed 70,000 people in the United States in 2017.

*Editor's note: Fentanyl should only be used by anesthesiologists when administering a general anesthesia. It is a powerful respiratory depressant and when used for general anesthesia, the patients are intubated and hooked up to an anesthesia machine that mechanically breathes for them. Turn the machine off and the patient ceases to breath.*

*Although it is used for certain outpatient cancer patients under strict controls, it should not be used as a substitute for opioids. It is 100 times stronger than morphine. I spent a year's rotation on general anesthesia as part of my surgery training and I cannot believe physicians are using it on an outpatient basis. If a doctor prescribes fentanyl for you, you should immediately leave their office and seek care elsewhere.*

## Coast Guard finally gets new polar icebreaker



FAIRBANKS, Alaska—A spending bill approved by Congress that kept the federal government open included a project dear to the Alaska congressional

delegation: a new polar icebreaker.

The spending bill includes \$655 million for designing and building the icebreaker for the Coast Guard, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported.

The bill includes \$20 million for materials to eventually build a second icebreaker and \$740 million for new cutters, including six to be based in Alaska.

The measure also provides \$53 million for cutter support facilities in the state, with \$22 million for Kodiak and \$31 million to Seward.

U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, an Alaska Republican, called the bill a significant step in the right direction toward an icebreaker fleet

Congress passed the bill on Feb. 14 and Presi-

dent Trump signed it into law, securing government funding through Sept. 30.

## House, Senate Democrats unveil Medicare buy-in proposal



A group of House and Senate Democrats introduced a bill that would permit people ages 50 and older to buy Medicare plans and obtain the same cost-sharing subsidies and tax credits offered

through Affordable Care Act exchanges. Supporters of the measure said the legislation is a more acceptable and less disruptive alternative to proposals that would open Medicare to everyone.

It would be an incremental step to expand health coverage beyond Obamacare's gains that offers an alternative to the ambitious restructuring progressives envision in their push for Medicare for All.

The sponsors said the plan will pay for itself with premiums from the new enrollees. And more of the money collected would pay for patient care because of the relative lack of overhead and profit requirements in Medicare compared to the private insurance market.

## A soldier was reunited with his battered helmet 6 months after it saved his life during an insider attack



Staff Sgt. Steven McQueen still can't believe how quickly he got to his feet after a bullet from an enemy rifle struck him in the back of his helmet during an insider attack in Afghanistan last year.

Two gunmen opened fire on McQueen and fellow soldiers from the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade from a distance of 20 feet during the Sept. 3 shooting.

The bullet tore a large hole in the ballistic material, but the Enhanced Combat Helmet (ECH) stopped the round as it was designed to do.

  
**IN MEMORIAM**

Monthly Member and Board Meetings

**Luncheon: Wednesday May. 1st, 2019 11:00 am**  
**Florida Room**

**Board Meeting: Wednesday May 8th 2019**  
**10:00 am—Trinity Baptist Church**

**Membership Committee Mtg. Club Renaissance**  
**3rd Wednesday May 15th, 2019**



Chapter 5–Star  
Level of Excellence Award



Newsletters 5-Star  
Communications Award

## 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  
P.O. Box 5693  
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Place Stamp  
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## Or Current Resident

### **Vets groups vow to pressure Congress into following through on hard-won legislation**

Veterans groups have earned significant legislative wins for their causes over the last few years.

With the major battles over, they plan to dedicate themselves in 2019 to implementing these hard-fought bills and finding solutions for problems that have arisen with some of their provisions.

These 2019 legislative priorities include taking care of “blue water” veterans, ensuring that Congress implements the VA Mission Act, improving the Department of Veterans Affairs’ ability to accommodate the conditions of the Forever GI Bill, restarting the conversation about the toxic effects of burn pits and other organization-specific goals.

Then there’s the VA Mission Act, which Congress passed in summer 2018. It promised expanded health care options for veterans, though it did draw the ire of those who believed President Donald Trump was overreaching his authority in an effort to privatize VA health care.

Carlos Fuentes, Veterans of Foreign Wars’ national legislative service director, said the VFW will be monitoring how well that legislation is enacted and enforced.

“We all worked very closely with Congress and the VA to craft the VA Mission Act,” he said. “Congress will have to keep a close eye on implementation. We will do the same.”

Another issue that Fuentes said has the VFW’s attention is the plight of “blue water” Navy veterans. In early 2018, the House passed a bill giving disability benefits to Vietnam veterans exposed to toxic Agent Orange chemicals that has yet to be ratified into law due to roadblocks in the Senate.

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**3rd Friday of Each Month**  
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