

March 15, 2022

## DoD Budget 2022

Update 05: Budget Compromise Deal to Fully Fund Defense Department

Congressional leaders on 9 MAR unveiled a compromise budget bill which includes Defense

Department funding for the rest of fiscal 2022 and \$13.6 billion extra in emergency assistance

for Ukraine and NATO allies. House and Senate appropriators worked late into the night on the

\$1.5 trillion measure, which includes \$728.5 billion in military spending for the year. That's a

5.6 percent boost over fiscal 2021 funding levels, and above what President Joe Biden had

requested in his federal spending plan. But Democratic leaders said the budget also includes an

even larger boost (6.7 percent) for non-defense spending and represents a needed balancing of

spending priorities for the government.

In a statement, House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said

the compromise plan "responsibly addresses our national security with funding for a robust mix

of diplomacy, defense, and global development." If lawmakers can finalize the deal in the next

few days, they'll both stave off a partial government shutdown (current agency funding is set to

run out on 11 MAR and provide budget stability for the rest of fiscal 2022, which runs through

Sept. 30. In recent months, Defense Department leaders have been forced to move money

between various accounts to offset funding shortfalls caused by short-term budget extensions

passed by Congress. The current fiscal year began on Oct. 1, meaning federal agencies have

been operating without a permanent budget deal for nearly six months.

The latest budget breakthrough will require lawmakers to pass one more short-term budget

extension — through March 15 — to give lawmakers time to finalize the larger, year-long deal.

Chamber leaders said they'll work on that over the next few days. The military spending totals

in the budget compromise bill include funding for the 2.7 percent military pay raise that went

into effect on January 1 and enough personnel support for an end strength of 1.34 million

troops, slightly below the fiscal 2021 total. Lawmakers also included \$278 million in housing

assistance for military families facing rental cost increases and other housing issues caused by

ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and \$686 million to deal with the continuing water

contamination issue linked to the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii.

About \$1.4

billion would be set aside for “Countering China and investing in the Indo-Pacific,”  
to include

new missile tracking efforts in the region and establishing new defense  
monitoring stations in

Hawaii and Guam.

For the Navy, lawmakers agreed to \$26.7 billion for 13 Naval vessels, including  
two

Virginia-Class submarines, two DDG- 51 Arleigh Burke Class destroyers, one  
Constellation-

Class frigate, one expeditionary sea base, two fast transports (including one  
medical variant),

two oilers, two tugs, and one surveillance ship. Navy and Marine aircraft  
procurement accounts

rose more than \$1 billion above Biden’s request, for 12 more F/A-18E/F Hornets,  
two more CH-

53K King Stallions, four added MV-22 Ospreys and two more MQ-4 Tritons. The  
Navy’s

Shipyards Infrastructure Optimization Plan won more than \$500 million above  
Biden’s request,

largely split between industrial equipment and facility renovations.

For the Air Force, appropriators highlighted \$1.8 billion to buy 16 C-130J aircraft  
to

modernize two Air National Guard operational wings. They added eight UH-1N1  
replacement

aircraft and four MQ-9s among other moves. For the Army, appropriators added  
about \$500

million for Army aircraft, chiefly to add more UH-60 Blackhawks, CH-47 Chinooks  
and Grey

Eagle drones. They also added more than \$300 million for Stryker and Abrams upgrades. The

bill's security assistance funding included a sought-after \$1 billion for Israel to replenish the

Iron Dome missile defense system, used earlier this year to counter rockets fired at the Jewish

State from Gaza.

In addition to the Ukraine aid of \$13.6 billion to the budget package, to provide additional

aid and assistance to Ukraine and NATO countries alarmed by Russia's aggression in eastern

Europe over the last few weeks, the new defense budget plan also contains more money for

other security cooperation programs, including \$165 million for coordination with African

nations, \$500 million to support Iraqi security forces, and \$300 million for work with Eastern

European partners "facing Russian aggression."

Under the compromise budget, the Department of Veterans Affairs would see nearly \$270

billion in available spending this fiscal year, the largest budget in agency history.

In fiscal 2001,

the VA budget totaled about \$45 billion. By fiscal 2011, it was about \$125 billion, almost triple

that total. Ten years later, in 2021, the department's budget was nearly double that again, at

\$245 billion. The new funding plan would invest more money in mental health care initiatives

(\$13.2 billion, up 28 percent from fiscal 2021), efforts to prevent veterans homelessness (\$2.2

billion, up 12 percent) and women's health care programs (\$840 million, up 14 percent).

The plan also calls for \$1.4 billion in spending for VA's caregiver support programs, up

about 14 percent from last year. The program is scheduled to undergo a major expansion this

fall, potentially adding tens of thousands more veterans. Lawmakers allotted more money for

major and minor construction projects (up 23 percent and 40 percent, respectively), but the

roughly \$2.1 billion in total spending for those accounts still falls short of what advocates say is

needed to update the department's aging infrastructure.

Both chambers were expected to begin debate on the budget plans on 9 MAR.

The White

House has already signaled support for getting the compromise finalized as soon as possible.

"The bipartisan funding bill is proof that both parties can come together to deliver for the

American people and advance critical national priorities," Shalanda Young, acting director of the

Office of Management and Budget, said in a statement. "It will mean historic levels of assistance

for the Ukrainian people ... I urge Congress to send this critical legislation to the president's

desk for signature without delay.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould | March 9, 2022 ++]

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### Burn Pit Toxic Exposure

#### Update 94: Biden Vows VA Will Do Better On Vet’ Related Illnesses

President Joe Biden on 1 MAR invoked his status as the father of a fallen soldier in a State of the

Union promise to improve veterans’ health care and benefits, specifically focused on individuals

suffering from the effects of toxic burn pit smoke from their time deployed overseas. “I’m

calling on Congress: pass a law to make sure veterans devastated by toxic exposures in Iraq and

Afghanistan finally get the benefits and comprehensive health care they deserve,” Biden said in

his national address, calling it part of “a sacred obligation to equip all those we send to war and

care for them and their families when they come home.”

Earlier in the day, the White House announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs will

recognize nine new respiratory illnesses as conditions presumed linked to veterans’ military

service, fast tracking them for payouts and medical care. VA officials said the move will likely

affect only about 100 veterans who were previously denied for claims linked to those rare cancers.

But Biden framed the move as “pioneering new ways of linking toxic exposures to diseases,

which is already helping more veterans get benefits.”

In recent months, VA officials have expanded the scientific and medical evidence used to

determine service-connected disabilities in an effort to ease the burden on veterans seeking

disability benefits. VA press secretary Terrence Hayes said in coming months, “VA will

continue to gather as much science and evidence as possible to move swiftly for veterans facing

serious illnesses due to military exposures.” For years, advocates have lamented the slow pace of

VA officials to recognize illnesses caused by toxic smoke from military burn pits in Iraq,

Afghanistan and other overseas bases.

Biden highlighted the issue in his national speech, saying that the government is long overdue

in responding to the issue. “Our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan faced many dangers,” he said.

“One was stationed at bases and breathing in toxic smoke from “burn pits” that incinerated

wastes of war. “When they came home, many of the world’s fittest and best trained warriors were never the same.” That group included Biden’s son Beau, who served in Iraq with the Delaware Army National Guard and died in 2015 from a rare brain cancer. “We don’t know for sure if a burn pit was the cause of his brain cancer, or the diseases of so many of our troops,”

Biden said. “But I’m committed to finding out everything we can.”

The inclusion of burn pits issues and other veterans policy in the State of the Union was unusual. In recent years, those topics have received just passing mentions alongside other domestic and national security priorities. This year, Biden devoted about five percent of his

speech to the topic, on par with issues like border security and voting rights. On 3 2 MAR,

House Democrats were scheduled to hold a rally on Capitol Hill to push for sweeping toxic exposure legislation, responding to Biden’s charge. The measure — dubbed the PACT Act — has received praise from veterans groups but concerns from conservatives over its price tag:

about \$207 billion over 10 years.

In attendance at the State of the Union speech as one of the first lady’s guests was Danielle Robinson, a veterans advocate and widow of Sgt. 1st Class Heath Robinson, who died from



cancer linked to burn pit exposure in 2020. Biden hailed him as a hero for his military service

and his medical fights afterwards. “They loved going to Ohio State football games,” he said. “He loved building Legos with his daughter. But cancer from prolonged exposure to burn pits ravaged Heath’s lungs and body.” “Danielle says Heath was a fighter to the very end. He didn’t know how to stop fighting, and neither did she. Through her pain she found purpose to demand we do better.

“We are going to do better.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 1, 2022 ++]

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### Burn Pit Toxic Exposure

Update 95: Biden Calls Caring For Burn Pit Illnesses a ‘Sacred Obligation’

President Joe Biden talks to veteran John Caruso as Joshua Geering, Lead Therapist of the Spinal Cord

Injury/Disabilities Center in Dallas

President Joe Biden on 8 MAR continued his push for improved benefits for veterans suffering

the ill-effects of toxic exposure from burn pit smoke, calling it part of the country's "sacred obligation" to care for individuals who served in the military. In a speech before veterans and Veterans Affairs staffers in Fort Worth, Texas, the commander-in-chief said for too long the serious health effects of military toxic exposure have been either partially addressed or ignored.

He acknowledged that research on the health effects of the waste pit smoke is still unsettled, but said that was no excuse for inaction. "When the scientific evidence doesn't give a clear answer one way or another, we should favor caring for our veterans while we continue to learn more, not waiting," he said. "Our troops came home [from Iraq and Afghanistan] and the fittest among them, the greatest fighting force in the history of the world, too many of them were not the same. Headaches, dizziness, numbness, cancer ... We're not waiting anymore."

The comments came one week after Biden discussed the issue of military toxic exposure in his State of the Union address, devoting several minutes of the hour-long national address to veterans care. In that speech, Biden implored Congress to pass new legislation providing more medical care and support services for veterans exposed to burn pit smoke. Two days later, the

House passed a comprehensive military toxic exposure bill (dubbed the PACT Act)  
over

significant opposition from Republican lawmakers worried about the scope and  
cost of the  
measure.

In Texas, Biden called that measure and a smaller bill approved by the Senate in  
February

“necessary care for veterans and their families” and asked lawmakers to “get  
those bills on my  
desk so I can sign them immediately.” But finding compromise on the legislation  
will likely take

several more months of negotiation between House and Senate lawmakers. In  
the meantime, VA

officials are proposing new action to recognize several rare respiratory illnesses  
and cancers as

presumed caused by burn pit exposure. That work is in addition to moves by the  
department last

August, where officials for the first time established presumptive status for  
individuals exposed

to burn pits who later contracted asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough said about 12,500 veterans have received care  
and benefits

for those conditions since last summer. “It’s our job to provide those vets with  
benefits and care

for those conditions,” he told the crowd before the president’s speech. “But for  
far too long,

those vets haven't gotten what they deserve. President Biden has made it clear that those days are over."

Before the event, Biden and McDonough toured the Fort Worth VA Clinic, meeting with staff and patients. Biden — whose son, Beau, served in the Delaware Army Delaware Army National Guard and died of brain cancer in 2015 — said that he sympathizes with the families struggling with the after-effects of war, and said the government needs to do a better job anticipating their needs instead of reacting to serious injuries and illnesses too late. "Every single, solitary veteran deserves to be treated with dignity," he said. "They shouldn't have to ask for a damn thing. It should be 'I've got a problem,' and we should say, "How can we help?" [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 8, 2022 ++]

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DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse  
Reported MAR 01 thru 15, 2022

Dozens of U.S. Navy officials have admitted to being bought off by the gregarious, rotund Malaysian defense contractor known as "Fat Leonard" who plied them with prostitutes, Cuban

cigars and free stays at the Philippines' Shangri-La hotel, among other things. Now  
as the last

five of 34 defendants stand trial in federal court in San Diego, what's more  
shocking is how little

the case has changed the Navy's way of doing business, according to former  
military officers and

government watchdog advocates. "You would expect that one of the largest  
corruption scandals

in the history of the United States Navy would provoke pretty dramatic changes  
to prevent

something like this from happening again in the future. But sadly, that's not really  
the case," said

Dan Grazier, a former Marine who now works as a military analyst at the Project  
on Government

Oversight in Washington.

The case has centered around Leonard Glenn Francis who admitted in 2015 to  
offering

\$500,000 in bribes to Navy officers. In exchange, the officers passed him classified  
information

and even went so far as redirecting military vessels to ports that were lucrative  
for his Singapore-

based ship servicing company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, or GDMA. Twenty-nine  
people,

mostly Navy officials, have pleaded guilty to helping Francis including providing  
classified ship

schedules in exchange for extravagant outings in South Asia with prostitutes and  
meals with tabs

totaling more than \$20,000. “While scores of Navy officials were partying with Leonard Francis,

a massive breach of national security was in full swing,” U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman said

recently.

Prosecutors say Francis and his company overcharged the U.S. military by more than \$35

million for its services between 2004 and 2013, which included providing food and water to the

ships at Pacific ports in Asia. Francis, who is scheduled to be sentenced in July, has been

cooperating with the U.S. Department of Justice since his arrest in 2013 in San Diego. Five

officers — Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless, Capts. David Newland, James Dolan and David

Lausman, and Cmdr. Mario Herrera — have maintained their innocence and have gone to trial.

It’s unclear whether Francis, who is in poor health and has been under house arrest, will testify at

the trial, which is expected to last months. Defense lawyers have been trying to prevent him from

taking the stand after he gave his version of events in a podcast last year.

Navy officials vowed to clean up their contracting processes in response to the scandal and

implemented more oversight. Sailors received more ethics training. Supply officers have less

independence. Goods and services now must be priced at current market rates as determined by

the Navy's Fleet Logistics Centers. But that's not enough for Grazier, who said the military

needs to move away from contracting out so much of its work. As bases have closed worldwide,

the Navy has increasingly turned to contractors to do what it once did in-house. "I think unless

the Navy really changes the way it does business, future Fat Leonards are just going to be more

cautious, but it's not going to change their practices," Grazier said.

Grazier fears the case's biggest impact has been on young people like his son who is an

enlisted sailor. "They think they're signing up for something really noble, and then they see all

these people that they're supposed to look up to behaving in such an unethical and often times

illegal fashion," Grazier said. "That's hugely crushing for these young idealists. I think that's one

of the biggest tragedies of all this."

Craig Hooper, a defense contractor, said the Navy needs to increase its auditing teams and

also adapt its rules so they fit the cultural norms of where it operates. In Asia, for instance, it's

common to go out for drinks or dinner to form business relationships yet many junior officers are

expected to pay out of their own pockets, though many can't afford it. Hooper said the Navy

should be footing those bills rather than creating situations that lend themselves to corruption.

Bryan Clark, a fellow at the Hudson Institute, said the Navy's brass has also long turned a

blind eye to contractors who might be unscrupulous but who could get things done. When he was

a sailor in the Pacific more than 20 years ago, it was known then Francis was "sleazy," but he

was also well-connected in the region, he said. He hopes the case will teach officers that those

things can no longer be ignored, though he said it's unfortunate that many high-ranking officers

who were investigated got off with early retirements while lower-ranking officers were charged.

"It's just a huge black eye for the Navy from a cultural perspective and a legal perspective,"

Clark said. "Because it wasn't just, you know, a couple of bad apples." [Source: The Associated

Press | Julie Watson | March 2, 2022 ++]

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Ukraine

Update 05: Troop Deaths Expose a Potential Weakness of Putin's Strategy

When Russia seized Crimea in 2014, President Vladimir V. Putin was so worried about Russian

casualty figures coming to light that authorities accosted journalists who tried to cover funerals



of some of the 400 troops killed during that one-month campaign. But Moscow may be losing that many soldiers daily in Mr. Putin's latest invasion of Ukraine, American and European officials said. The mounting toll for Russian troops exposes a potential weakness for the Russian president at a time when he is still claiming, publicly, that he is engaged only in a limited military operation in Ukraine's separatist east.

No one can say with certainty just how many Russian troops have died since 24 FEB, when they began what is turning into a long march to Kyiv, the capital. Some Russian units have put down their arms and refused to fight, the Pentagon said 1 MAR. Major Ukrainian cities have withstood the onslaught thus far. American officials had expected the northeastern city of Kharkiv to fall in a day, for example, but Ukrainian troops there have fought back and regained control despite furious rocket fire. The bodies of Russian soldiers have been left in areas surrounding Kharkiv. Videos and photos on social media show charred remains of tanks and armored vehicles, their crews dead or wounded.

The body of a Russian soldier left on the side of a road in Kharkiv, Ukraine, last week and a woman arguing with police

during an anti-war protest in Moscow in late FEB..

The Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, acknowledged on 27 FEB for the first time that “there are dead and wounded” Russian troops but offered no numbers. He insisted Ukrainian losses were “many times” higher. Ukraine has said its forces have killed more than 5,300 Russian troops. Neither side’s claims have been independently verified, and Biden administration officials have refused to discuss casualty figures publicly. But one American official put the Russian losses as of 28 FEB at 2,000, an estimate with which two European officials concurred.

Senior Pentagon officials told lawmakers in closed briefings on Monday that Russian and Ukrainian military deaths appeared to be the same, at around 1,500 on each side in the first five days, congressional officials said. But they cautioned that the figures — based on satellite imagery, communication intercepts, social media and on-the-ground media reports — were estimates. For a comparison, nearly 2,500 American troops were killed in Afghanistan over 20 years of war.

For Mr. Putin, the rising death toll could damage any remaining domestic support for his Ukrainian endeavors. Russian memories are long — and mothers of soldiers, in particular, American officials say, could easily hark back to the 15,000 troops killed when the Soviet Union invaded and occupied Afghanistan, or the thousands killed in Chechnya. Russia has deployed field hospitals near the front lines, say military analysts, who have also monitored ambulances driving back and forth from Russian units to hospitals in neighboring Belarus, Moscow's ally.

“Given the many reports of over 4,000 Russians killed in action, it is clear that something dramatic is happening,” said Adm. James G. Stavridis, who was NATO's supreme allied commander before his retirement. “If Russian losses are this significant, Vladimir Putin is going to have some difficult explaining to do on his home front.” Representative Adam B. Schiff, Democrat of California and the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, added, “There are going to be a lot of Russians going home in body bags and a lot of Russian families grieving the longer this goes on.”

In particular, Pentagon officials and military analysts said it was surprising that Russian

soldiers had left behind the bodies of their comrades. “It’s been shocking to see that they’re leaving their fallen brethren behind on the battlefield,” said Evelyn Farkas, the top Pentagon official for Russia and Ukraine during the Obama administration. “Eventually the moms will be like, ‘Where’s Yuri? Where’s Maksim?’” Already, the Ukrainian government has begun answering that question. On 27 FEB, authorities launched a website that they said was meant to help Russian families track down information about soldiers who may have been killed or captured. The site, which states it was created by Ukraine’s Ministry of Internal Affairs, says it is providing videos of captured Russian soldiers, some of them injured. The pictures and videos change throughout the day.

“If your relatives or friends are in Ukraine and participate in the war against our people — here you can get information about their fate,” the site says. The name of the site, 200rf.com, is a grim reference to Cargo 200, a military code word that was used by the Soviet Union to refer to the bodies of soldiers put in zinc-lined coffins for transport away from the battlefield; it is a euphemism for troops killed in war. The website is part of a campaign launched by Ukraine and the West to counter what American officials characterize as Russian disinformation, which

includes Russia's insistence before the invasion that the troops surrounding Ukraine were simply there for military exercises. Information and the battle for public opinion around the

world have come to play an outsize part in a war that has come to seem like a David vs. Goliath contest.

On 28 FEB, Ukraine's ambassador to the United Nations, Sergiy Kyslytsya, read out before

the General Assembly what he said were the final text messages from a Russian soldier to his

mother. They were obtained, he said, by Ukrainian forces after the soldier was killed. "We were

told that they would welcome us and they are falling under our armored vehicles, throwing

themselves under the wheels and not allowing us to pass," he wrote, according to Mr.

Kyslytsya. "They call us fascists. Mama, this is so hard."

The decision to read those texts, Russia experts and Pentagon officials said, was a not-so-

veiled reminder to Mr. Putin of the role Russian mothers have had in bringing attention to

military losses that the government tried to keep secret. In fact, a group now called the Union of

Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia played a pivotal part in opening up the military to

public scrutiny and in influencing perceptions of military service, Julie Elkner, a  
Russia  
historian, wrote in *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*.  
On 1 MAR, a senior Pentagon official said entire Russian units have laid down  
their arms  
without a fight after confronting surprisingly stiff Ukrainian defense. In some  
cases, Russian  
troops have punched holes in their vehicles' gas tanks, presumably to avoid  
combat, the official  
said. The Pentagon official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss  
the operational  
developments, declined to say how the military had made these assessments —  
presumably  
from a mosaic of intelligence including statements from captured Russian soldiers  
and  
communications intercepts — or how widespread these setbacks might be across  
the sprawling  
battlefield.

Images of body bags or coffins, or soldiers killed and left on the battlefield, a  
Biden  
administration official said, would prove the most damaging to Mr. Putin at home.  
Ukrainian  
officials are using the reports and images on social media of Russian casualties to  
try to  
undercut the morale of the invading Russian forces. On 28 FEB, Ukraine's defense  
minister,  
Oleksiy Reznikov, offered Russian soldiers cash and amnesty if they surrendered.  
"Russian

soldier! You were brought to our land to kill and die,” he said. “Do not follow criminal orders.

We guarantee you a full amnesty and 5 million rubles if you lay down your arms.

For those who

continue to behave like an occupier, there will be no mercy.” [Source: New York Times |

Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt | March 2, 2022 ++]

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### DoD Vaccination Program

#### Update 04: Separations, Lawsuits, and Exemptions

As of 10 March the U.S. Naval Institute reported 1,712 active duty service personnel have now

been separated due to refusal to get vaccinated against COVID-19. The breakdown by service

is:

☐ The Marine Corps separated 165 Marines over the past week. At 1,038, the Marine

Corps leads the military branches for the most separations.

☐ The Navy comes in second with a total of 469 separations, which includes 50 this past

week. Of the separations this week, 24 had served for more than six years, while 26

served for less than six years. The highest rank was chief petty officer, said Lt. Travis

Callaghan, spokesperson for chief of naval personnel, in an email.

☒ The Air Force has separated 205 active-duty airmen, according to its weekly update.

☒ The Army has not yet separated a soldier.

The Navy, as well as the other branches, potentially could have more sailors that it would

separate for refusal to get vaccinated against COVID-19, but there are currently lawsuits

preventing punitive action against a handful of service members who have refused to get

vaccinated due to religious objections.

☒ One lawsuit focuses on the Navy special warfare community and involves 26 Navy

SEALs. The attorneys are currently aiming to make it a class action, which would apply

to all members of the Navy. The case was heard by the Court of Appeals for the Fifth

Circuit, which upheld a preliminary injunction preventing the SEALs from being punished for not being vaccinated.

☒ Another lawsuit includes plaintiffs across the military branches, notably a Navy commanding officer of a guided-missile destroyer. The overseeing judge has also prevented the services from taking adverse action against the plaintiffs. Liberty Counsel,

the legal ministry representing the plaintiffs, is also seeking to turn the case into a class-

action lawsuit.

If the class-action lawsuit were to prevail, the Navy could have 4,000 sailors unvaccinated



against COVID-19, which naval leaders have said is a risk to force health. In a declaration

associated with the navy commander lawsuit, Adm. Derek Caudle, commander of Fleet Forces

Command, wrote that having 4,000 unvaccinated sailors “will create an unacceptable risk to

readiness and could result in unnecessary deaths.”

Currently, 4,593 active-duty sailors are not fully vaccinated, which could mean they are in

the process of getting vaccinated, have an exemption or are waiting for a waiver request to be

adjudicated. Sailors with an exemption are given non-operational billets. Another 3,241

members of the reserve are not fully vaccinated, according to the weekly COVID-19 updated.

The Marine Corps currently has 96 percent of its active-duty force fully vaccinated, with

another 2 percent partially vaccinated. Its reserve force is 89 percent fully vaccinated with

another 1 percent partially vaccinated. When compared to the size of the force, the number of

unvaccinated sailors and Marines is not a large percentage, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del

Toro told reporters 9 MAR.

The Marine Corps has separated about 0.56 percent of its force due to vaccine refusal. The

Navy about 0.13 percent. The percentage of the active-duty sailors currently undeployable due

to lack of vaccination is approximately 1.3 percent. “And it’s incredibly important for all our

sailors and our Marines to be properly vaccinated because this is an issue of combat readiness,”

Del Toro said. “We simply cannot put the lives of our other sailors who are vaccinated at risk.”

The Navy granted 12 permanent medical, 212 temporary medical and 28 administrative

exemptions for active-duty sailors. The sea service granted one permanent, 10 temporary and 31

administrative exemptions to reservists.

Although there have been 3,476 requests from active-duty sailors and 875 from reservists,

the Navy has not granted a religious exemption. It did grant one to a member of the individual

ready reserve on the condition that the sailor be vaccinated if called up to active-duty or reserve

status.

The Marines Corps does not break down exemptions, but it has granted 992 medical or

administrative exemptions. The Marine Corps received 3,653 requests for religious waivers,

with six approved. The Air Force approved 19 religious exemptions, with the Army approving

none. [Source: USNI News | Heather Mongilio | March 10, 2022 ++]

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VA Infrastructure

## Update 01: Proposed Closing & Restructuring

Veterans Affairs leaders will recommend closing three major medical centers and more than 170 other outpatient health facilities in coming years as part of an ongoing review of the department's footprint across America, according to documents obtained by Military Times. But VA officials will also push for construction of 255 new health care and community living facilities as part of the plan, a trade-off that they say will put almost 200,000 more veterans within a 30-minute drive of basic medical care and 370,000 more veterans within an hour's drive of specialty care. VA Secretary Denis McDonough is expected to detail the plan on 10 MAR during an event with the RAND Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute. In planning documents, VA officials cautioned that the closures and new facility construction are "several years away" at the earliest, if they are implemented at all. The work is part of the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission approved by Congress in 2018 but just getting underway this year. The process is similar to the base closing commissions stood up in the 1980s and 1990s to reassess the Defense Department's holdings in an effort to find waste and cost-

savings. The VA recommendations will be reviewed and approved — or amended — by an independent panel of experts from the veterans community and health care industry over the next year.

However, VA officials have spent months researching veterans medical care access and needs in local markets across the country, and their recommendations will carry significant weight with the still-to-be-named commission. In planning documents outlining the work to veterans advocates, VA officials pledged that “in the short run [the plans] will have no impact on VA employees or services.” But if the commission agrees with the proposals, it could mean shifting staff across communities or even state lines to better staff the new medical facilities infrastructure envisioned by officials. In recent weeks, McDonough has proposed major investments in the VA workforce in order to recruit and retain top talent, to include better pay and benefits. Officials have also briefed medical staff across the country on the changes, although the information released so far has been focused on local changes and not comprehensive for the entire department.

VA currently maintains 171 major VA Medical Centers across America. The new plan calls

for closing three of those, although officials have not yet specified which three. In recent weeks,

lawmakers in Ohio and South Dakota have indicated their VA hospitals may be on the short list

for closure, and have protested that the moves could hurt their local communities. In place of

those shuttered locations, dozens of other to-be-built inpatient facilities would assume their

workload. The department wants to establish 27 new stand-alone community living centers (VA

has two now), 48 new inpatient facilities partnering with private-sector offices (VA has seven

now) and 12 new residential rehabilitation treatment programs (VA has 10 now).

The VA

proposal also calls for closing 86 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (about 16 percent of the

department's total today) and 88 other outpatient offices. They would be replaced by 140 new

multi-specialty CBOCs, which officials say will provide a wider range of services to veterans.

The moves would represent a massive investment in the future of VA medical care,

particularly if lawmakers go along with the new construction plans. Republicans lawmakers in

recent years have pushed for more private-sector care options for veterans in need of medical

services, arguing that having VA duplicate that work is inefficient and often inconvenient for

veterans. But the VA recommendations argue the changes are needed to  
“maintain appropriate  
internal capacity and invest in modern infrastructure to meet the demand” of  
veteran patients. On  
the other side, federal worker unions said they have concerns that the looming  
closings will hurt  
both VA staff and patients.

“Closing VA facilities will force veterans to rely on uncoordinated, private, for-  
profit care,  
where they will suffer from long wait times and be without the unique expertise  
and integrated  
services that only the VA provides,” said American Federation of Government  
Employees  
National President Everett Kelley in a statement. “Every time the VA has tried to  
privatize  
veterans’ care, the private sector has charged veterans more money out of pocket  
for worse  
outcomes. The VA’s newest attempt at wholesale privatization will have the same  
effect.

Veterans will suffer as scammers and grifters eagerly take advantage of the VA’s  
open  
checkbook. The recommendations are expected to be formally submitted as part  
of the Federal  
Register on March 14. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 9, 2022 ++]

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VA EHR

## Update 32: Concerns Mount After another System Problem

Veterans Affairs officials are downplaying a technology problem that forced its new electronic medical records system offline at a Washington state medical center last week, but lawmakers say the event raises more concerns as the department prepares to deploy it to new sites. On 3 MAR, the director of the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center told employees in an email to stop using the new health record system because of emerging problems. "Assume all electronic patient data is corrupted/inaccurate," he wrote.

The action, first reported by the Washington Spokesman-Review, halted routine services such as filling prescriptions, conducting laboratory tests and even delaying some medical appointments. VA officials said the technical issues were corrected by Friday morning, about 20 hours after the problem began. In a statement, department press secretary Terrence Hayes said no patient safety issues were detected because of the outage. "Recognizing that system outages, though rare, can occur at facilities across the country, VA has worked with its vendor and established standard procedures for staff to follow that limit the impact on productivity and

patient care,” he said.

The department said only 205 patient records were affected by the problem, and all of the

issues were temporary. The department said there was no permanent loss or corruption of data,

despite the local director’s initial message. But the problem comes just a few weeks before the

controversial electronic health records system is scheduled to deploy to the VA medical center in

Walla Walla, Wash., followed a month later with a further expansion into Ohio. Last week, Rep.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) reiterated her request to delay the Walla Walla deployment

“until the VA can ensure the facility can maintain the highest levels of service for our veterans.”

Officials said the Mann-Grandstaff outage was caused by a database update performed

incorrectly. VA leaders said the department has “downtime procedures” for staff to follow when

the system is not accessible, though it appears local officials may have gone further to limit

operations when they occurred. McMorris Rodgers said she planned to meet with VA Secretary

Denis McDonough this week to “discuss the unresolved issues with the EHR and find out how

an outage of this magnitude could happen.”

Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) called the system failure “absolutely unacceptable,” “I have



pressed both Cerner and VA to get my office answers immediately on what went wrong and what steps they're taking to prevent it from happening again," she said in a statement. "This is about patient safety and it needs to get fixed." Several lawmakers have suggested halting or canceling the health records rollout in recent months as problems with the system have emerged.

In 2017, then-President Donald Trump announced the plan to put all veteran health care files on the Cerner Millennium software platform to bring VA and Defense Department records onto the same system for the first time. The 10-year, \$16-billion project immediately drew scrutiny because of the size and scope of the effort. Last summer, McDonough halted the system deployment after reports of significant problems at Mann-Grandstaff, The VA Inspector General criticized the initial rollout of the new software there as chaotic, with insufficient time for training and practice before staff began using it. After a four-month review, McDonough announced a modified deployment and training schedule for the new records system. He also defended the overall goals of the project, and said that his research into the work showed no reason to believe that the Cerner system was unsuitable or unadaptable to the VA network.

Hayes said following last week’s outage, patients have resumed “uninterrupted, high-quality

care” at the facility. During an American Legion event on 5 MAR, VA Assistant Under

Secretary for Health Dr. Carolyn Clancy described the incident as “not a stellar performance on

the part of the vendor” and said department officials would be meeting with the contractors this

week to avoid similar problems in the future. The Department of Veterans Affairs has no plans

to delay the schedule for adopting its new electronic health records program. According to a

schedule released by VA in December, 12 VA medical centers were to receive the system by the

end of this year and 21 more by the end of 2023, with a goal to have it operational at all sites in

2028. [Source: MilitaryTimes / Military.com | Leo Shane III/Patricia Kime | March 7 & 8, 2022 ++]

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VA Debt

Update 14: Major Change Made in Debt Reporting Rules

Good news for veterans who owe money to the VA: It's become much less likely those debts

will damage your credit rating. A new debt reporting rule announced 2 FEB means

“a 99%

reduction in unfavorable debt reported to consumer reporting agencies, thus reducing financial

distress for veterans,” VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in a press release announcing the

change. About 60,000 VA debts had been reported to credit reporting agencies each year, per

the release. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the new rule

allows the VA to report debts to such agencies only if:

☐ The debt is more than \$25.

☐ All other collection efforts are exhausted.

☐ The VA determines the debtor is not “catastrophically disabled” and is not entitled to

free medical care from the VA.

The head of the CFPB said he hoped the VA's decision would set “an important new standard”

for other providers. “I expect that many in the health care industry will seek to follow Secretary

McDonough's lead to end the practice of forcing patients to pay up through aggressive credit

report coercion,” CFPB Director Rohit Chopra said. The VA restarted its debt collection efforts

on Oct. 1, 2021, after pausing them in April 2020 as part of COVID-19 pandemic relief.

The new rules will not prevent the VA from reporting debts due to “fraud, misrepresentation, or bad faith,” according to the news release. Some veterans facing financial obligations may be eligible for relief programs, including payment plans or waivers; visit this VA website <https://www.va.gov/manage-va-deb> for details. Veterans with copayment debt questions can call the VA’s Health Resource Center at (866) 400-1238, and those with questions about debts stemming from benefit overpayments can call (800) 827-0648. [Source:

MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | March 10, 2022 ++]

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### Intent to File Notification

#### Why Do It & How to Do It

If you plan to file or refile a claim for disability, pension, or DIC benefits and you notify VA of your intent to file, it sets a potential start date (or effective date) for your benefits. When you do this, you may be able to get retroactive payments (compensation that starts at a point in the past). This is because your start date for benefits will be earlier than the date you file your claim. Note that if you start filling out a claim form online for disability benefits, this

will reserve a potential start date for your benefits and you don't need to separately call VA

or submit a separate intent to file form. Go to [https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-](https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction)

[claim-form-21-526ez/introduction](https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction) to start an online claim.

Note that automatic intent to file only applies to online disability applications. It doesn't

apply to online pension or DIC applications.

If you are not ready to file an online claim, but do plan to eventually file a claim within the

next year, it is to your benefit to notify VA of that intention. The notification procedure requires

you to either call the VA or submit a separate form. You can call them at 1- 800-827-1000

Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET. Or submit an Intent to File a Claim for

Compensation and/or Pension, or Survivors Pension and/or DIC (VA Form 21-0966) available

at <https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-0966-ARE.pdf>. It can be filled out online and

downloaded for mailing to Department of Veterans Affairs, Claims Intake Center, PO Box

4444, Janesville, WI 53547-4444. You can also turn in your form in one of these ways:

☐ Bring it to a VA regional office near you which can be located at

<https://www.va.gov/find-locations/?facilityType=benefits>

☐ Work with a trained professional called an accredited representative.

(<https://www.va.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim>)

[Source: <https://www.va.gov/resources/your-intent-to-file-a-va-claim> | March 2022 ++]

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## VA Presumptive Cancer Diseases

### Proposed Expansion

The Department of Veterans Affairs will propose adding certain rare respiratory cancers to the

list of presumed service-connected disabilities in relation to military environmental exposure to

particulate matter. When the proposal becomes final, dependents, survivors, and Veterans who

had claims previously denied for any of the below respiratory cancers would be encouraged to

file a supplemental claim for benefits.

☐ Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) of the larynx;

☐ SCC of the trachea;

☐ Adenocarcinoma of the trachea;

☐ Salivary gland-type tumors of the trachea;

☐ Adenosquamous carcinoma of the lung;

☐ Large cell carcinoma of the lung;

☐ Salivary gland-type tumors of the lung;

☐ Sarcomatoid carcinoma of the lung; and

☐ Typical and atypical carcinoid of the lung.

Any Veteran who had one of these cancers manifest to a degree of 0% or more at any time

during or after separation would become eligible for service-connection. VA intends to focus its

rule on the rare respiratory cancers above in Veterans who served any amount of time in the

Southwest Asia Theater of operations and other locations. VA will invite and consider public

comments as part of this process. The publication date of the federal register will occur in the

coming weeks.

Once rulemaking is complete, VA will conduct outreach to impacted veterans and survivors

to inform them about potential eligibility. The Southwest Asia Theater of operations refers to

Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the

United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian

Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations.

If you are a Veteran who has been diagnosed with one of these conditions, but have not filed a

claim, please notify VA of your intent to file a claim. [Source: VBA Message | March 1, 2022

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## POW/MIA Displays

### Update 06: Bible Lawsuit Dismissed | Separate Display Proposed

A judge on 23 FEB granted the dismissal of a lawsuit over a Bible displayed on a table at a New Hampshire veterans hospital after the plaintiffs' lawyer proposed a separate display. The Military Religious Freedom Foundation filed the federal lawsuit in May 2019 on behalf of an Air Force veteran against Alfred Montoya, the director of the Manchester VA Medical Center, seeking the removal of a Bible on display at a POW/MIA table within the hospital. The display violates the First Amendment's establishment of religion clause, according to the lawsuit. The table, usually set up near military dining facilities, is set for one person and features a white tablecloth, single rose, a lit candle and more. In some displays, a Bible is also displayed on the table. The lawsuit said the table should be a memorial to all missing or fallen veterans, not just Christians. The veterans had suggested replacing the Bible with a Book of Faith containing the writings and prayers from seven religious groups. Government lawyers argued the lawsuit should be dismissed, saying some of the allegations were vague and undefined, and



that the lead plaintiff acknowledged he wasn't offended by the display. The matter then went to mediation.

"One of the focuses was us putting up our own table," attorney Lawrence Vogelman, who represents the veterans, said at a hearing in requesting the dismissal. He said the VA has a specific procedure for requesting a table and would negotiate the details with the hospital's lawyers in an effort to avoid any more litigation. "I think that we're close enough, or hopefully we are, and in the event it doesn't work out, then you'll see us again, but I am very optimistic,"

Vogelman said to the judge.

Mikey Weinstein, president and founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, is also representing the Air Force veterans who filed the lawsuit. He said the table, which MRFF is sponsoring, would have the American flag draped on it and contain a published, generic Book of Faith. A granite stone would display the opening words of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." We want them to honor them all," he said. An attorney representing the hospital director did not object to the voluntary dismissal request and agreed it would be fine for the

veterans to use the hospital's procedure for the display of the additional table. U.S. District Judge Paul Barbadoro approved of the idea and noted that it doesn't involve any necessary change to the current missing man table. Barbadoro told Vogelmann that from the beginning, "I've had some confusion about exactly how to conceptualize your claim." He said he thought it would be better poised for resolution if it were a "restricted or limited public forum case, rather than a government speech case." Weinstein said MRFF is now waiting to see if the VA will approve and display its proposed table. If not, the group plans to swiftly refile its lawsuit, he said. [Source: MilitaryTimes & AP | Kathy McCormack & Kent Miller | February 23, 2022 ++]

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### ID.me Problem

Some Vets Locked Out of Payments/Assistance by VA's Verification Service  
ID.me, a company founded by a former Army officer, has been blocking hundreds of veterans from accessing benefits and getting other crucial help, according to an investigation by Insider.  
The startup offers an identity-verification service that promises to help agencies across the US

root out fraud. While ID.me and many of its customers say the company has successfully done

this, the technology has also hindered people's access to government support.

A public record request by Insider revealed more than 700 complaints about ID.me to the Department of Veterans Affairs from October 2021 to January 2022. Those four months featured sometimes-harrowing stories of aging former military members suffering in VA hospital beds while their spouses or children tried desperately to jump through inscrutable technical hoops to prove their identity. In recent years, states and government agencies have embraced new technology to help deal with a surge of applications for unemployment support and other benefits. ID.me has sold its identity verification tool to 27 state unemployment programs and several federal agencies, including the VA. The VA says more than 1 million people logged in via ID.me in roughly the past year.

The complaints highlight other problems with the service, especially for caregivers, family members and veterans with limited access to technology and who are elderly, poor, or live outside of the US. For these veterans and their families, ID.me represented a new technical

hurdle over an already complex and sprawling system of benefits and services.  
ID.me's

technology and approach have also raised privacy concerns and at least one  
agency, the Internal

Revenue Service, is considering alternatives now. "We are deeply  
committed to a good

customer experience," said Patrick Dorton, who runs a PR firm that  
represents ID.me. He said

that ID.me helped agencies remotely verify identities through the pandemic, a  
time when in-

person verification options were limited.

The VA started using ID.me in 2019 as part of a \$32 million contract. In October,  
the agency

set up a new helpline called Ask VA that requires veterans to authenticate  
themselves through

ID.me or two government-run verification options. Insider's public record  
request found 734

complaints about ID.me submitted to Ask VA from its launch to January 2022.

"Intrusive and undignified";

In January 2020, an 85-year-old veteran had a stroke that left him unable to see  
or speak. As he

lay in a VA hospital bed, his child tried to access his medical records. ID.me  
required the

patient to verify his identity. "He's laying in a hospital bed in a hospital  
gown, blind, unable to

talk, hooked up and drugged up," the child wrote to the VA's helpline.  
"This is far too

personally intrusive and undignified, to conduct a video conference with some unknown support

tech and ID.me." This person's mother had power of attorney over the veteran, but she was

struggling with the technology.

"I have to do this for them because my parents are not tech savvy at all," the child wrote.

"My father has never even sat down at a computer or used a keyboard. They're countryfolk."

After answering all necessary questions, uploading the required documents, and submitting a

selfie, this person said ID.me wouldn't validate their father's identity. "Now they want to do a

video conference call with my father from his hospital bed," the child said. This person went so

far as to contact the CEO of ID.me, Blake Hall. The executive said "the law prevents him from

validating identity with anyone but the individual," and that they needed to be registered as his

caregiver within the VA's system, according to the child's complaint to the VA.

The VA says ID.me doesn't require a selfie for validating VA accounts.

Dorton, ID.me's

outside spokesman, told Insider that it's an organization's responsibility (in this case, the VA's)

to approve someone as a caregiver and give them access to someone's documents. That

caregiver would have to make their own ID.me account, Dorton said. The episode, and similar

issues uncovered by Insider's public record request, are particularly concerning for a company

that got its start catering to former members of the military. Hall, the former Army officer,

founded the business as TroopSwap, a marketplace for veteran discounts, before shifting it to an

identity verification tool.

More than 19 million Americans and their families rely on the VA for services like healthcare, banking, retirement, education, and GI bill payments, and the agency claims to

operate the largest integrated health system in the US. Even small fractures in someone's ability

to access these sprawling benefits can have outsized effects. These issues were compounded by

Ask VA's reliance on ID.me. Veterans seeking help with creating an account or verifying their

identities were often met with dead ends from the agency, which required they verify their

identities before being helped.

One woman, who said she was struggling to create an account while dealing with her veteran

husband's illness, was told she was "unauthenticated" and would first need to log in through

ID.me or another service before asking a question. Many complaints in the document about

verification through ID.me received similar responses. "Is there anyone there that can help me.

This is a frustrating matter that, when you are dealing with a dying husband, it's just too much to deal with," she wrote. "He's in hospice at home and he's on oxygen and barely breathing... We are a family in crisis and we could really use help."

In a statement to Insider, a VA spokesperson confirmed that the agency would not provide specific answers "if the inquirer is unauthenticated" but that "customers can use Ask VA (AVA) without providing authentication to ask generic questions about their VA benefits and services."

They added that someone needing help with ID.me should visit a VA-specific help article at

<https://www.va.gov/resources/signing-in-to-vagov> or contact ID.me customer support at (866)

775-4363 or

<https://idme.pissedconsumer.com/sendEmail.html?group=Customer%20Service>

#### Technical hurdles to proving identity

Several people said they encountered technical issues with ID.me, such as an error with two-factor authentication or web page timeouts. Others said they were rejected from making an

ID.me account without reason, or that ID.me customer service was unhelpful. Veterans living

abroad found particular difficulty. They said ID.me rejected identity documents from outside

the US, reported their logins as fraudulent, refused to recognize international phone numbers,

and in some cases blocked access completely. "I have a German phone number and the option

of putting +49 in the country is not offered,"

One veteran living abroad wrote. "I've been unable to access and apply for my education

benefits as well as my healthcare for over three months due to the ID.me authentication app not

working." Another veteran based in Colombia accused ID.me of forgetting that "there are

thousands of US [veterans] that're overseas." Dorton, the spokesperson, said that ID.me does

accept non-US documents, though he acknowledged that the company had blocked IP addresses

"from certain countries associated with cyberattacks." He said those restrictions had since been

removed.

The VA's other options for identity verification -- a Premium My HealtheVet account, or a

Premium DS Logon account -- may not be easier.

☞ In order to get a Premium My HealtheVet account ([https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-](https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home)

[portal-web/home](https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home)), a person either has to make an ID.me account, or verify their identity

at one of the VA's health facilities, which can be difficult for some veterans, especially



those living abroad. A video call with a VA health facility is also an option.

☞ To get a Premium DS Logon account (<https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/st20161202>), a person has to enroll in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting

System, which similarly requires verification at one of the VA's physical facilities, or by

reading social security and banking information over the phone.

While ID.me doesn't currently use facial recognition for its VA contract, its use of facial

recognition and other business practices have come under scrutiny from privacy-focused and

anti-surveillance advocacy groups. A coalition of more than 40 activist groups -- including the

Electronic Privacy Information Center, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Algorithmic Justice League -- published a letter on Monday imploring all federal and state

agencies to stop using ID.me.

ID.me recently announced that beginning March 1, all users "will be able to delete their

selfie or photo." ID.me also said that people can opt out of submitting a selfie for facial

recognition, and instead have a video call with a human -- a step normally reserved for when

ID.me can't verify an identity through a face and document match. Dorton told Insider that the

announcement "addresses some of the feedback" from activists.

EMO Note: This article highlights a significant problem for older vets like myself.

On

numerous occasions I have had difficulty dealing with ID.me and have often given up. At age 82, unable to use a cellphone, no video capability on my computer, and frequent problems with two-step authentication, it is a major time consuming chore to try to use it. An alternate simpler system needs to be developed by VA for senior use. Perhaps they could provide a fingerprint option with whatever is necessary to use it for issue to seniors upon their request.

[Source: Business Insider | Caroline Haskins | February 22, 2022 ++]

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## VA Disability Claims

### Update 05: Supreme Court Case Challenges Filing Deadline Rule

The U.S. Supreme Court has accepted the case of a Navy veteran who believes his Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation should have been paid starting from the date he left the military rather than the day he submitted his paperwork, a decision that could mean some veterans who waited years to file claims would be eligible for substantial back pay.

The veteran, Adolfo Arellano, served from 1977 to 1981, during which he was assigned to an aircraft carrier that experienced a collision that "killed and injured several of his shipmates

and nearly swept him overboard," according to court documents. Arellano developed post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions; 30 years later, he applied for disability benefits, which were approved as service-connected by the VA and backdated to his 2011 filing date. But Arellano appealed, saying he should have received payments retroactive to his discharge, since his service-connected mental health conditions prevented him from filing a claim sooner -- in particular, filing during the one-year grace period given to transitioning service members that expedites their cases.

Arellano said the statute of limitations should have been waived since he wasn't mentally able to file a claim before the time limit expired -- a legal concept known as "equitable tolling." When the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims denied Arellano's claim, he appealed. The Federal Circuit judges then split their decision on the case 6-6, with half saying the equitable tolling policy couldn't be changed, and the other half saying it should be eliminated. As a result of the split, Arellano's attorneys petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court. A ruling in Arellano's favor has the potential to affect "thousands of current and future veterans," according to his attorney, James Barney, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and partner in the D.C.-based firm

Finnegan.

Barney said that, as the equitable tolling doctrine stands now, veterans have no recourse for seeking a waiver to the one-year deadline, "no matter how compelling the individual circumstances." "It would apply a more flexible rule that would be to the benefit of potentially thousands of disabled veterans," Barney told Military.com. "The equitable tolling doctrine is only supposed to apply in extenuating circumstances, but when you are talking about disabled veterans, there often are extenuating circumstances."

In Arellano's petition to the court, his attorneys noted that veterans fail to file claims within the one-year period for reasons other than incapacitation, including that they may be discouraged by others, may not be aware they are eligible for benefits, or they were injured during operations that involved secrecy and fear disclosing classified information. "This would at least give these veterans an opportunity to ask the court to toll these deadlines because, as of right now, the veteran has zero chance of asking for [a waiver]," Barney said.

The Supreme Court is petitioned between 7,000 and 8,000 times a year with requests to review cases, but it hears only about 80. Barney said the justices likely decided to take

Arellano's case because of the division on the issue in the Federal Circuit. "When you see that kind of split, it means they need to look into it. That's the role of the Supreme Court, to step in and try to decide," Barney said. With the case, Arellano v. McDonough, now accepted, the federal government is required to file a response. Oral arguments have yet to be scheduled.

"It's an unfortunate reality that many members of the armed forces face a difficult path once discharged from the service," Arellano's attorneys wrote in their petition to the court. "Indeed, the sad irony is that the very illnesses the veterans' benefits system is designed to address, such as PTSD, are often the ones that cause veterans to miss the one-year deadline." [Source:

Military.com | Patricia Kime | February 23, 2022 ++]

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### VA Caregiver Program

Update 75: Families Fear Financial Impact as VA Prepares To Drop Thousands Since suffering traumatic brain injury in an explosion in Iraq in 2007, Army veteran Brad Blazek

has had trouble remembering when to feed himself, when to take his medications, and sometimes even who he is married to. So it came as a shock to Terri, his wife and full-time caretaker, when

she received word from the Department of Veterans Affairs last fall that they were being

dropped from the department's caregiver program because Brad no longer needed around-the-

clock help.

"He has tried to cook in the past, but he burns himself because he forgets to protect himself

and use potholders," she said. "So we don't do that anymore. And there's the possibility of him

leaving on the stove, or the gas. It's not worth those chances. "So when [VA] told me that he

doesn't qualify for continuous care, I don't know. It just didn't make any sense."

The Blazeks

are among numerous "legacy" participants of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for

Family Caregivers whose cases are currently being reviewed as officials work to standardize and

update the benefit.

VA leaders say those reviews are needed to ensure that all veterans who apply for the

program — and its generous monthly stipend — are treated fairly and meet the same criteria for

eligibility amid years of changes mandated by Congress. But outside advocates say the moves

are arbitrary and cruel, making families choose between financial hardship or the best care for

their injured veterans. "They have completely lost sight of the purpose of this.

There is no

question about that,” said Holly Ferrell, executive director for Veteran Warriors, an advocacy group which works with more than 3,500 caregivers in the program. “And the result comes at the expense of the veterans community.”

About 33,000 families are currently enrolled in the caregiver program, first established in 2011 as a way to recognize the work — and cost-savings — of family members providing critical care for infirm veterans. While the program offers a series of legal and support services

to families, the most prominent benefit is the monthly caregiver stipend. Currently, a full-time caregiver tending to a veteran who is “unable to self-sustain in the community” can receive the full monthly stipend, while a caretaker for a vet with lesser but still life-altering limitations can receive a partial payment. The totals vary based on where veterans live, but generally hover about \$3,000 a month for the full Level 2 stipend and \$1,800 for the partial Level 1 stipend.

Initially the program was open only to post-9/11 veterans, but in 2018 Congress approved expansion to other generations as well. Individuals who served before May 1975 were admitted starting in fall 2020, and all remaining veterans will be eligible starting this fall. Two years ago,

when the Vietnam-era veterans were admitted to the program, VA officials announced changes to eligibility criteria focused on whether veterans can perform “activities of daily living.”

Department leaders said the changes were forced by Congress under the law. Veteran Warriors and the National Veterans Legal Service Program have sued, saying VA officials raised the eligibility standards arbitrarily and ignored lawmakers’ intent.

Last fall, program administrators announced a full review of all 19,800 “legacy” participants — the post-9/11 veterans who entered the program before October 2020 — to ensure they met the program’s new eligibility criteria. At the time, Colleen Richardson, executive director of the PCAFC, said she expected about one-third of the group to be dropped from the program.

Officials this week would not say how many individuals have been told they are being processed out. Ferrell said her group alone is working with several hundred families. As concerns about the new round of reviews mounted, VA pledged that all current program participants would receive their stipends through 2022, even if they were deemed ineligible. Richardson said that has been extended to March 2023, because of delays with some of the reviews. That means no families will see their financial support cut off for another year.



“This is a hard process,” Richardson said. “It is hard for our post-9/11 veterans. It is hard for our staff too. Some of these families have been in the program for many, many years.” She emphasized that families do have appeals options if they are kicked out of the program, and officials expect to process those cases as quickly as possible in coming months. “If we got it wrong, they have expanded review and appeals options now. And this doesn’t mean they won’t be eligible again in the future. Of course we want to encourage them to reapply should they feel that they meet that criteria again later on.”

Army veterans Terri (right) and Brad Blazek pose with their daughters in August 2021. Brad suffered a traumatic brain injury in an explosion in Iraq in 2007. Terri has acted as his full-time caregiver ever since.

But families like the Blazeks said they can’t reapply for the program again in the future if they don’t understand why they were dropped in the first place. “Shortly after he got hurt, the doctors told me that Brad would need someone to take care of him for the rest of his life,” said Terri, who is also an Army veteran. “At the time, I didn’t really understand what that meant.

“Brad is very intelligent, and he has great coping skills, so some days he can look fine. But he’ll

always have this traumatic brain injury and memory loss. He can’t remember what medication he

is on or when he should take it. A lot of my day is spent just managing that.”

The Blazeks live in Georgia and have been receiving the VA caregiver stipend for about a

decade. Terri works part time, usually after her husband and children go to sleep, but the salary

isn’t enough to make up for the \$30,000-plus the family stands to lose.

Department handouts

explaining the Activity of Daily Living requirements specify that to qualify, veterans must

“require personal care services each time he or she completes one or more of the listed

activities.” They include getting dressed, bathing, grooming, eating, walking up stairs and using

a toilet. Officials specify that “requiring assistance with [a task] only some of the time does not

meet the definition of an ‘inability to perform,’” needed to qualify for eligibility.

Glendell Murray has been a full-time caregiver for her husband, Rayshawn, since he was

seriously injured in a weight room accident aboard a ship in 2016. Before he suffered a brain

injury, Rayshawn was outgoing and energetic, serving as the ship’s DJ for parties and always

talking with other sailors. “Now he doesn’t like socializing,” his wife said. “When he’s talking,

he can't stay on topic. His cognitive function has gotten better over the years, but it's still bad. I

can't ever leave him alone in the house, because I don't know what would happen." Some days

he can dress or feed himself, Glendell said. Other days he gets confused or upset. She relies on

her teenage sons to watch him when she runs routine errands around town. The Murrays were

accepted into the caregiver program in early 2020 but informed last fall that they would be

removed because Rayshawn no longer met the criteria for eligibility. "We had two assessments

done over video and before I knew it we were told we were out of the program," she said. "It

feels like they're just trying to push people out of it, and I don't know why. "It all feels rushed.

They didn't even contact our health care providers to get their opinions."

VA officials have acknowledged shortcomings in communicating with families and outside

advocates about how the process works and why certain decisions were made.

Richardson said

officials are looking at revamping letters to families to better explain the reasons why they no

longer qualify and what their appeal options are. But Ferrell and other advocates say even if

caregivers better understood the reasons, they still wouldn't be fair. A petition to the department

filed last month by 22 veterans organizations (including Vietnam Veterans of America, the

Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Independence Fund) stated that the new wording regarding daily living activities is “too narrow to properly evaluate a veteran’s disability and symptoms, and may result in veterans being unfairly and unnecessarily deemed ineligible” for the program.

They argue that a veteran who fails at the everyday tasks most of the time — but not “each time,” as outlined in the criteria — needs a caregiver’s help. “The current language of the regulation assumes the disabled veterans are some binary automatons, either fully capable of completing [daily tasks] or completely incapable, with no allowance for the variation, aggravation, and progression of a service-connected disability that is at the heart of the disability rating system,” the groups stated. Ferrell said her group is fielding 40 new cases a week from caregivers upset over the changes and worried about their future finances. Many complain that the VA documentation of their veterans’ injuries doesn’t match what is actually happening in their homes. “We’re seeing statements like, ‘the veteran doesn’t require assistance in this area anymore,’” she said. “And so if that’s wrong, what chance do they have to win an appeal?”

Timothy Jobin, deputy director of the VA Caregiver Support Program, insisted that officials are taking care to make sure their assessments are accurate and fair for all of the families. "These are long, lengthy interviews so that we do get it right," he said. "We have another team of clinicians that reviews that documentation, and then we also have another team to make sure that documentation is correct ... We're working to get the answers as accurate as we possibly can."

Last month, in a press conference with reporters, VA Secretary Denis McDonough promised leadership would take a closer look at the caregiver reviews to ensure the process was running smoothly and ways to calm some of the concerns already surfacing among families. "We work for the caregivers, we work for the veterans," he said. "We want to make sure that they're getting the information they need and the clarity they need about why we're making the decisions we're making."

Terri Blazek said that nothing is clear about her family's future right now. She is appealing

the decision to drop her from the program, but is not optimistic about its potential to work.

"When the stipend goes away, we're gonna have to just try to tighten down our budget and make things work," she said. "It's not a situation where I can just run out and get a full-time job and

leave him to fend for himself. “And it’s not just us. I can’t even count how many caregivers I’ve heard from about the stress that this has caused for their veterans and themselves, trying to plan for when the money goes away. They just don’t seem to understand how many lives they could ruin with this.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 6, 2022 ++]

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VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse  
Reported 01 thru 15 MAR 2022

Massachusetts – TriMark USA—a contractor based in Mansfield, that provides kitchen and food service equipment to federal customers—has agreed to pay \$48.5 million to resolve allegations that its fraudulent actions led to federal agencies improperly awarding small business set-aside contracts to three small business with which TriMark worked. The settlement constitutes the largest-ever False Claims Act recovery based on allegations of small business contracting fraud. Between 2011 and 2021, TriMark identified federal set-aside contract opportunities for the small businesses to bid on using their set-aside status; instructed them on

how to prepare their bids and what prices to propose; “ghostwrote” emails for those companies to send to government officials to make it appear as though the small businesses were performing work that TriMark was performing; and affirmatively concealed TriMark’s involvement in the contract. The case began in May 2019, when a whistleblower, a company known as Fox Unlimited Enterprises, filed a qui tam complaint under seal in the US District Court for the Northern District of New York. Per the False Claims Act, such complaints require the United States to investigate the allegations and elect whether to intervene and take over the action. In this case, the United States elected to intervene in the action in December 2021 and subsequently reached this settlement. Pursuant to the settlement agreement, Fox Unlimited Enterprises will receive \$10.9 million of the settlement amount paid by TriMark. The VA OIG helped to investigate this case. [Source: [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 2, 2022 ++]

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New Jersey – Wagner “Wanny” Checonolasco of Lyndhurst, who previously pleaded guilty

to conspiring to steal government property, was sentenced to 42 months in prison for his role in a scheme to steal more than \$8 million worth of prescription HIV medication. According to an investigation by the VA OIG and FBI, from August 2017 to November 2019, Checonolasco conspired with Lisa M. Hoffman, a former pharmacy technician at the East Orange VA Medical Center, to steal HIV medication belonging to VA. Hoffman stole the medication from her employer and then sold it to Checonolasco for cash. In addition to the prison term, he was sentenced to three years of supervised release and ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$8.2 million. Hoffman, who previously pleaded guilty to her role in the scheme, is awaiting sentencing.

-o-o-O-o-o

Arkansas -- Hunter Matthew Burroughs and Stephen Keith Andrews, both of Fort Smith, were indicted by a federal grand jury in Fort Smith, Arkansas, for their roles in three separate conspiracies to defraud the US government and private workers' compensation insurers. Their alleged crimes include a billing and kickback fraud scheme with multiple physicians and



medical clinics and separate fraud schemes involving the shipment of medications from Arkansas to two Louisiana physicians, who then distributed those medications from their clinics in violation of Louisiana laws. Additionally, Burroughs was charged with wire fraud for allegedly falsifying emails he provided in a civil lawsuit involving his sale of the company.

[Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 3, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o

Massachusetts -- Robin Calef of Brockton was sentenced to one month in prison followed by three years of supervised release after previously pleading guilty to one count of theft of public funds in November 2021. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$102,289 to the VA. In December 2006, Calef's sister, who was receiving VA monthly benefits, passed away. She failed to inform the VA of her sister's death, and the VA continued to deposit monthly benefits into a joint bank account held by Calef and her sister until September 2017. Bank records revealed that Calef made monthly withdrawals of approximately the exact amount

of VA benefit funds deposited into the joint account. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal

IG | March 3, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o

Texas -- Nick L. Medeiros and Bobby D. Greaves, both of San Antonio, were found guilty of

federal fraud and false statements charges by a jury in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A federal

grand jury indicted Medeiros and Greaves on June 13, 2018, charging the two men with

conspiracy, major fraud against the United States, and two counts of false statements. On March

10, 2020, a federal grand jury returned a four-count superseding indictment charging Medeiros

and Greaves with unlawfully obtaining more than \$3 million in government contracts by falsely

and repeatedly representing to the United States that Medeiros, a service-disabled veteran, was

operating independently from Greaves, his brother-in-law. The indictment alleged that instead

Medeiros relied on Greaves, who is not a veteran, to complete all his government contract work

by providing the labor and equipment. "Conspiring to gain federal contracts set aside for

service-disabled veterans is reprehensible," said Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Breen of the

VA OIG's South Central Field Office. "These guilty verdicts send a clear message that anyone who attempts to do so will be held accountable. We thank the U.S. Attorney's Office and our other law enforcement partners for their efforts in this case." [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J.

Missal IG | March 10, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o

Connecticut -- Derrick Brewer of Enfield pleaded guilty to one count of theft of government funds. In March 2018, Brewer submitted paperwork to the VA offices in Hartford as part of an application for service-connected disability benefits. Specifically, he submitted form DD-214, which indicated that his discharge from his former service in the U.S. Coast Guard was characterized as "Honorable." However, the form had been altered prior to its submission. According to official Coast Guard records, Brewer's discharge was characterized as "Other Than Honorable Conditions" following his convictions under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. There is no record of the discharge characterization ever being upgraded. As a result of this submission, Brewer collected nearly \$70,000 in VA benefits from March 2018 through

September 2020. Sentencing is scheduled for May 27, 2022. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J.

Missal IG | March 10, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o

California -- Former VA cardiologist John Giacomini of Atherton pleaded guilty to one count

of felony abusive sexual contact. Beginning in the fall of 2017, Giacomini repeatedly subjected

a subordinate electrophysiologist to unwanted and unwelcome sexual contact, to include

hugging, kissing, and intimate touching while on VA premises. On November 10, 2017, the

victim explicitly told Giacomini she was not interested in a romantic or sexual relationship with

him. Nevertheless, Giacomini continued to subject his subordinate to unwanted sexual advances

and touching, culminating on December 20, 2017, when Giacomini turned out the lights in an

office, pulled the victim out of her chair, and fondled her until a janitor opened the office door

and interrupted the encounter. The victim later resigned from her position at the VA, citing

Giacomini's behavior as her principal reason for leaving. Sentencing is scheduled for July 12,

2022. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 10, 2022 ++]

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## Vet Unemployment 2022

### Update 01: Matched Its Lowest Levels of the Pandemic in February

Veterans' unemployment levels matched their lowest mark of the pandemic in February as the U.S. economy added more jobs than expected last month. According to estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics released Friday, the overall veterans' unemployment rate was 3.2% in February, down from 3.8% in January and matching the rate posted in December. The veterans estimate has not been below that level since December 2019 — before the start of the coronavirus pandemic in America — when the unemployment rate was at 2.8%. The figure translates into about 285,000 veterans across the country looking for work last month but unable to find steady employment. In February 2021, that number was nearly 500,000 individuals. The monthly unemployment rate for younger veterans saw an even bigger drop from January (5.9%) to February (3.2%). One year ago, the unemployment rate for those individuals who served during the Iraq and Afghanistan War eras was at 5.1%. The national unemployment rate also saw a drop, from 4.0% a month before to 3.8% in February. The

economy added about 680,000 jobs last month, well above the 425,000 predicted by financial experts in recent days.

About 8.7 million veterans were employed in full-time jobs across the country last month.

That's about 200,000 below the number of veterans working before the start of the pandemic, but the total U.S. veterans' population has also declined by the same amount over the last two

years. As recently as last August, that total was around 8.1 million, as numerous businesses

continued to struggle with hiring and finances in the wake of partial closings caused by

coronavirus mitigation efforts. About half of the 18.5 million veterans in America today are not

in the civilian workforce, either because of age or injury. [Source: Military.com | Leo Shane III

| March 4, 2022++]

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Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of MAR 16, 2022

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops

are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. Note that some of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. You will need to review each site

below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

🔗 <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>

🔗 <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>

🔗 <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | March 16, 2022 ++]

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ALS

Update 17: S. 3483/ H.R.5607 | Justice for ALS Veterans Act

In January 2022, Senator's Chris Coons (DE) and Lisa Murkowski (AK) introduced S. 3483,

the Justice for ALS Veterans Act, which is a companion bill to H.R. 5607, introduced in the

House last year. This bill would provide the survivors of veterans who die of amyotrophic

lateral sclerosis (ALS) the DIC (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation) "kicker" amount

without meeting the required eight-year total disability rating time period.

Current law allows an additional DIC monthly payment of \$288.27 to survivors in the case

of a veteran, who at the time of death was in receipt of or was entitled to receive compensation

for a service-connected disability that was rated totally disabling for a continuous period of at

least eight years immediately preceding death. This extra compensation installment is

commonly referred to as the DIC "kicker."

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (a.k.a. Lou Gehrig's Disease) is an aggressive disease that

leaves many veterans totally incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. VA

already recognizes ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease and due to its progressive

nature, automatically rates any diagnosed veteran at 100% once service connection is



established. Individuals diagnosed with ALS only have an average lifespan of between two to five years, meaning that, sadly, many veterans are unable to meet the existing eight-year total disability requirement to become eligible for the additional “kicker” compensation benefit.

DAV supports S. 3483, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act which would provide increased DIC payments to surviving spouses of veterans who die from ALS regardless of how long they had been rated as totally disabled prior to death. They are asking readers to either use the following prepared e-mail or their own message to request their Senators to support this important bill.

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Subj: Please Support S. 3483, Justice for ALS Veterans Act

Dear Sen. \_\_\_\_\_,

As your constituent, and in recognition of our fallen veterans and their survivors, I urge you to co-sponsor and support the enactment of S. 3483, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act. This legislation would provide the survivors of veterans who die of ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) an additional amount of monthly DIC (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation) from

the Department of Veterans Affairs without having to meet the existing eight-year  
time period

requirement of a total disability rating prior to death.

Current law allows an additional monthly DIC payment of \$288.27 to survivors in  
the case of a

veteran, who at the time of death was in receipt of or was entitled to receive  
compensation for a

service-connected disability that was rated totally disabling for a continuous  
period of at least

eight years immediately preceding death. This extra compensation installment is  
commonly

referred to as the DIC “kicker.”

ALS is an aggressive disease that leaves many veterans totally incapacitated and  
reliant on

family members and caregivers. VA already recognizes ALS as a presumptive  
service-connected

disease and due to its progressive nature, automatically rates any diagnosed  
veteran at 100%

once service connection is established. Individuals diagnosed with ALS only have  
an average

lifespan of between two to five years, meaning that, sadly, many veterans are  
unable to meet the

existing eight-year total disability requirement to become eligible for the  
additional

compensation benefit.

Please advise me of your position on S. 3483, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act and  
the actions

you plan to take in respect to this important bill. Thank you for your support of  
America's  
disabled veterans and their survivors.

Sincerely,  
Your Name

Your Address

[Source: Disabled American Veterans | Andrew Marshall | March 8, 2022 ++]

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### VA Medical Marijuana

Update 72: H.R.2916/ S.1467 | VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021  
Marijuana, still identified as a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances  
Act, is now  
approved for medicinal use in 37 states and the District of Columbia. For years,  
veterans have  
claimed the benefits of marijuana for conditions they suffer—often as a result of  
military service.

Veterans seeking relief for conditions such as chronic pain and post-traumatic  
stress disorder  
(PTSD), that may be resistant to more conventional treatments are eager to have  
additional

options that may improve the quality of their lives.

Bipartisan companion bills, H.R. 2916 and S. 1467, the VA Medicinal Cannabis  
Research Act

of 2021, would require VA to conduct randomized clinical trials into the effectiveness of cannabis on improving certain health outcomes for veterans with chronic pain and PTSD.

Specifically, for veterans diagnosed with chronic pain, the bills would identify the effects of cannabis on osteopathic pain, sleep quality, inflammation, and agitation in addition to the effects on use of alcohol, benzos, and opioids while the trial is ongoing. For veterans diagnosed with PTSD, the study would identify the effects of the trial on measures in standardized PTSD clinical scales, alcohol and benzo use in addition to social functioning, mood, sleep, and suicidal ideation. The trials may also investigate the longer term effects of cannabis on other medical conditions.

DAV supports this legislation for more comprehensive and scientifically rigorous research by the VA into the therapeutic benefits and risks of cannabis and cannabis-derived products as a possible treatment for service-related conditions. They are asking readers to either use the following prepared e-mail or their own message to request their Representative and Senators and urge them to cosponsor and support H.R. 2916 and S. 1467.

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: Please Support the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021

Dear Rep/Sen. \_\_\_\_\_,

I urge you to support the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021.

Marijuana, still identified as a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act, is now

approved for medicinal use in 37 states and the District of Columbia. For years, veterans have

claimed the benefits of marijuana for conditions they suffer—often as a result of military service.

Veterans seeking relief for conditions such as chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD), that may be resistant to more conventional treatments are eager to have additional

options that may improve the quality of their lives.

Bipartisan bills, H.R.2916/S.1467 would require VA to conduct randomized clinical trials into the

effectiveness of cannabis on improving certain health outcomes for veterans with chronic pain

and PTSD. Specifically, for veterans diagnosed with chronic pain, the legislation would identify

the effects of cannabis on osteopathic pain, sleep quality, inflammation, and agitation in addition

to the effects on use of alcohol, benzos, and opioids while the trial is ongoing. For veterans

diagnosed with PTSD, the study would identify the effects of the trial on measures in standardized

PTSD clinical scales, alcohol and benzo use in addition to social functioning, mood, sleep, and

suicidal ideation. The trials may also investigate the longer-term effects of cannabis on other medical conditions.

Please let me know of your intentions to cosponsor the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021.

Thank you for your support of our nation's service-disabled veterans.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Address

[Source: Disabled American Veterans | Andrew Marshall | March 10, 2022 ++]

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Congressional Resources

Member's Contact Info & Vet Bill Status

If in doubt as to your legislator's online contact info or who they are, the below websites

provide ALL legislator's names with contact info to facilitate the copying and forwarding of

suggested letters to them, asking them questions, or seeking their assistance:

?

<https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%22>

5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%7D – House



<https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%22%7D%7D>

5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%2C%22chamber%22%3A%22Senate%22%7D – Senate

To check status on any veteran related legislation go to

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the

117th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills

are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before

sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole. To read the text of bills that are to be

considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>.

Note that anyone can sign up and use MOAA's Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/issueareas>. You do not have to be a member.

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### Tax Tips for Military Life

#### Update 01: Common Tax Situations and Mistakes

Military members and their families often have unique tax situations. These military tax tips can

help you prepare your taxes and ensure you get the largest tax refund possible. Many service

members dread filing their taxes every year. For some, it's almost as bad as going to the dentist.

There are so many rules for filing your taxes. And, as military members, interpreting those rules can be even more complicated. But, it doesn't have to be that way. There are a lot of resources for members of the military to help you file your taxes on time and correctly. Here are a few common situations for military members and their families to be aware of when filing income taxes, plus some tax tips to help you maximize your return.

#### Live and Work Outside Your State of Legal Residence?

Members of the military may keep their home of record as their state of legal residence, or change it as they move around over the course of their careers. You can also change your state of legal residence to the one you plan to return to in retirement.

#### Home of Record vs. State of Legal Residence

Your home of record is the state from which you entered active-duty service (that the military will pay to move you back to when you finish your term of service). Or, if you're a reservist or National Guardsman, it's probably where you live. Active-duty service members can change their home of record if there was an error (the wrong one was recorded) or when exiting and re-entering military service from another state. Reservists and National Guardsmen typically



update their home of record when they move to a new permanent residence. Your state of legal residence is where you pay state taxes if your state requires you to pay state tax. Several states do not have a state income tax, and others exempt portions of military income from state taxes. Federal law prohibits another state from taxing the military wages of nonresident military members stationed there. However, the state where you're stationed can tax other non-military income, like income from a second-job, independent contract, or a gig like Uber driving.

So, if you are a resident of South Carolina but stationed in North Carolina, you won't have to pay North Carolina state taxes on your military income. South Carolina would tax your military income instead. Some special tax provisions apply to military spouses. The Military Spouses Residency Relief Act (MSRRA) allows military spouses (in most cases) to choose to be taxed by the service member's state of legal residence instead of the duty station state for their earned income and most other income.

#### Combat Zone Tax Exemption

Income earned in a combat zone is tax-exempt. You won't have to show that amount of income

earned from combat on your tax return. DFAS will list both taxable and tax-exempt incomes on your W-2 if you have qualifying time in a combat zone. Some services in support of a combat zone may also qualify for tax exemption. (This most often applies to pilots and members of the Navy). Another benefit of deploying to a combat zone is that you may still be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which can increase your tax refund. The Earned Income Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit that applies to workers with low to moderate incomes. You don't have to report any nontaxable military pay on your income taxes, such as basic pay earned in a combat zone, imminent danger pay, hazardous duty pay earned in combat, Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), or Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS). But, you can decide to include your nontaxable combat pay in your calculations as earned income counted toward the EITC, even though you're not paying federal or state income taxes on that combat pay. Including combat pay as earned income for the EITC calculations may reduce the amount of tax you have to pay and may increase your income tax refund through the EITC. Learn more on the IRS website <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/military-and-clergy-rules-for-the-earned-income-tax-credit>.

You should calculate your income taxes using both your combat pay as earned income for the EITC and without it to compare refund amounts. Deploying to a combat zone reduces your family's taxable income, which may help you qualify for low-income tax credits that might not be available otherwise.

#### Being Stationed Overseas But Not In a Combat Zone

If you're stationed overseas, in most cases you should treat your income tax and tax filings exactly like you would if you were in the United States. You must continue to file your federal income tax and state taxes for your state of legal residence by the filing date.

#### Tax Extensions for Military

Members of the military and government civilians serving in a combat zone can receive an automatic income tax extension if needed to file their income taxes. The extension applies to filing deadlines and payments. It also suspends audits and enforced collections for 180 days until after the service member or civilian has left the combat zone. Military members living or serving outside of the United States or Puerto Rico are entitled to an automatic two-month filing extension. But, keep in mind that you will have to pay interest on any tax due that was not paid by the original filing deadline.

#### Other Non-Taxable Military Income

As mentioned above, combat pay is not taxable. But, other allowances such as the basic

allowance for housing (BAH) and the basic allowance for subsistence (BAS) are not taxable

either. These allowances can account for a significant portion of a military member's total

compensation, especially for junior soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

#### National Guard and Reserve Travel Costs

If you are a member of the National Guard or Reserves and have unreimbursed travel costs for

drill or other duties that are more than 100 miles away from your home, you may be able to

deduct those travel costs on your income taxes. For more details on qualified expenses take a

look at the Form 2106 Instructions <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-2106>.

#### Six Military Tax Mistakes to Avoid

1. Not Updating Address with IRS or other Tax Authorities. - Typically the address the IRS

has on file is the one that is on your last tax return. With frequent moves, service members

and military families should update the address on file to ensure no correspondence is

missed. States should also be updated.

2. Military Spouses Not Getting W-2 Withholding Set Correctly. - Usually, this comes up due

to a PCS when the spouse is claiming the service member's state of legal residence for taxes

in accordance with the MSRRA. If you're a military spouse beginning a new job at a new duty station, make sure your tax withholding is set for the state of legal residence, not the state your duty station is in. If an employer doesn't allow tax withholdings for another state, try to claim exemption from the duty station's state income tax withholding. Otherwise, you may need to file an extra tax return for the state you're stationed in to get the taxes refunded.

If your employer doesn't withhold taxes for your state of legal residence, consider paying estimated taxes throughout the year to avoid owing when filing your state tax return.

3. Married Couples Filing Separately When it isn't Helpful - Some military couples think that

if they live separately that they have to file tax returns as "Married Filing Separate." That is

not true. If you prefer to keep your taxes separate, remember that at best, filing separately

has the same total tax result as filing jointly. At worst, it disqualifies taxpayers for credits or

deductions, causing couples to pay more in taxes than is necessary.

4. Missing Out on the Saver's Credit. - The Retirement Savings Contribution Credit (<https://www.irs.gov/retirement-plans/plan-participant-employee/retirement-savings-contributions-savers-credit>) is available to many service members – particularly those in

lower pay grades. Even at higher pay grades, a large portion of military compensation is non-taxable, so it doesn't count against the income limit for this credit. Taxpayers may miss the saver's credit if they don't transpose all of the information from box 12 of the W-2 into their tax software. TSP contributions noted in box 12 can be the basis for the saver's credit. IRA contributions can also qualify taxpayers for the saver's credit. Enter IRA contributions in your tax software separate from TSP/401k contributions. If entered correctly, the IRA deduction will show on your Schedule 1 (Form 1040).

5. Missteps on Taxes for Rental Property. - Military Permanent Changes of Station (PCS) can lead many military members to become landlords. Having a rental house complicates tax returns. Your first tax return for a rental property is very important in setting the stage for your future tax returns. Pay special attention to basis and depreciation. If you make errors here, they'll carry forward to future years. More information on common errors with rental property can be found [here](#).

6. Claiming an Education Credit When Not Qualified. - The Lifetime Learning Credit (LLC)

and the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) are two valuable tax credits that  
service

members can sometimes claim. However, tuition costs covered by the GI Bill,  
tuition

assistance or scholarships don't count toward these tax credits. Tuition costs  
covered by a

qualified tuition program (QTP), 529 or Education Savings Account (ESA) don't  
count

either.

- o LLC - <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/llc>

- o AOTC - <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/aotc>

- o QTP - <https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc313>

- o ESA - <https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc310>

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There are many more tax situations that apply to military members and their  
families. In fact,

it can be a part-time job just keeping up with them all. Thankfully, there are  
resources available

to you so you don't have to study the whole tax code. If your base is large  
enough, you may

have access to volunteer tax preparation services through the Volunteer Income  
Tax Assistance

(VITA) program. MilitaryOneSource also offers free tax preparation software each  
tax season and

has free tax consultants available year-round. Another option is using tax  
preparation software

from a trusted company. [Source: Three Creeks Media | Jerry Ziegler | January 31, 2022 ++]

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## Military Travel

### Advanced PCS Pay Axed & Mandatory GTCC Use Is Coming for Sailors

The Navy will soon require sailors to use a Government Travel Charge Card (GTCC) for all

military Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves, the service announced late last year, while

also using the MyPCS Travel Voucher system for claims and eliminating advanced travel pay in

most instances. The change puts the Navy in line with the other military services. Mandatory

use of the card starts July 1, 2022. Sailors should work with their chain of command to apply for

a card. Using the GTCC for PCS moves can make it easier for service members to handle costs

incurred during moves without needing to take advances or pay out-of-pocket.

While that sounds great, the GTCC program and the PCS mandate do cause concern for

many, thanks to potentially slow reimbursement and the impact on personal credit scores from

not paying the card on time. That's a worry officials acknowledged in their December

announcement, saying that pairing the GTCC with the new travel voucher system will give



faster reimbursements. "Mandatory use of the GTCC for PCS travel expenses and electronic submission of travel claims through MyPCS Travel Voucher will help the Navy improve accountability and auditability of funds and reallocate resources for more timely travel claim processing," the release states. Sailors can still request advanced Dislocation Allowance (DLA),

but the guidance says exceptions will be made only for dependents who are traveling on separate orders or for sailors who don't qualify for the card.

Sailors and other military members often have questions about how they are supposed to use the GTCC during their PCS move, how the bill will be paid, what items can be charged to the

card and what happens when there are paperwork problems -- all good questions. But first, a

disclaimer: Always follow the rules that are given by your branch, your chain of command, or

your support office. This information can and does vary by branch, and can change at any time.

#### What Can I Charge to My GTCC?

- ☐ Lodging en route between your old duty station and your new duty station
- ☐ Meals en route between your old duty station and your new duty station
- ☐ Temporary lodging at your old or new duty station (as covered under the Temporary

Lodging Expense/Temporary Lodging Allowance)

☐ Fuel for your personally owned vehicle used as transportation for the move, or being moved

☐ Tolls or ferry fees

☐ Rental car, if authorized in your PCS orders

☐ Personally procured move expenses (depending on your branch)

☐ Dislocation allowance (DLA)-type expenses

That last one is really tricky. Dislocation allowance is a flat rate, based on rank and dependency status and payable to everyone who moves. While its purpose as stated by the

Pentagon is to defray the costs of leaving an old home and setting up a new home, there are no

specific rules about what it can and cannot be used for. You don't have to explain it to anyone.

You could literally take your dislocation allowance to a casino and play blackjack with it. But

when you use your GTCC for DLA-type expenses, there is accountability. So what should it be

used for?

This columnist is not a lawyer but, based on her personal experience with nine military

moves, here are some ideas of things that are probably reasonable expenses in this category:

☐ Having the carpets cleaned when you move out of your old house

☐ The basics of that Target run when you get to your new home: toilet brushes, shelf liner,

shower curtains, curtain rods, cleaning supplies, etc.

☐ Utility deposits

☐ What Items Cannot Be Charged to My GTCC?

☐ Personal expenses that are not part of the PCS move

☐ Airfare, which must be booked through the appropriate office for your branch of service

☐ Entertainment of any kind

☐ Medical expenses, even if they happen during the PCS

☐ Any personal travel days during the move/leave en route

☐ Personally procured move expenses (depending on your branch)

#### How Does the Bill Get Paid?

You must submit a travel claim when you arrive at your new duty station, and the system you

use for doing so depends on your branch. While your card should be set to mission critical

status for a move and not require immediate payment, it's still not a good idea to delay your

claim. You will be reimbursed up to the limit of your allowances, including temporary lodging

expense/temporary lodging entitlement, dislocation allowance, monetary allowance in lieu of

transportation (mileage), and per diem for travel days. Any amount that exceeds those

allowances is your responsibility. If you have a dislocation allowance remaining after the

reimbursement, that should be paid to you.

The Government Travel Charge Card does solve some PCS problems, but it is important to use it properly and file your claim in a timely manner after arriving at your new duty station.

Think of it as another tool in your military life toolbox. [Source: Military.com | Kate Horrell

(AFC) | February 14, 2022 ++

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### Thermobaric Weapon

#### Bomb That Ignites a Fireball That Sucks In All Surrounding Oxygen

A thermobaric weapon, aerosol bomb, fuel air explosive, or vacuum bomb is a type of explosive that uses oxygen from the surrounding air to generate a high-temperature explosion. In practice, the blast wave typically produced by these weapons lasts significantly longer than that of a conventional condensed explosive. This can be launched as a rocket or dropped from an airplane as a bomb. The initial explosive charge detonates as it hits its target, opening the container and dispersing the fuel mixture as a cloud. The fuel-air explosive is one of the best-known types of thermobaric weapon.

Most conventional explosives consist of a fuel–oxidizer premix (black powder, for example, contains 25% fuel and 75% oxidizer), but thermobaric weapons are almost 100% fuel and so are significantly more energetic than conventional condensed explosives of equal weight. Their reliance on atmospheric oxygen makes them unsuitable for use under water, at high altitude, and in adverse weather. They are, however, considerably more destructive when used against field fortifications such as foxholes, tunnels, bunkers, and caves. Many types of thermobaric weapons can be fitted to hand-held launchers.

#### Russian RPO-A Shmel (Bumblebee) rocket and launcher & Russian TOS-1M Weapon Systems

The thermobaric weapon is a two-stage munition. The first-stage charge distributes an aerosol made up of very fine material – from a carbon-based fuel to tiny metal particles. A second charge ignites that cloud, creating a fireball, a huge shock wave, and a vacuum as it sucks up all surrounding oxygen. The blast wave can last for significantly longer than a conventional explosive and is capable of vaporizing human bodies. Such weapons are used for a variety of

purposes and come in a range of sizes. Extremely large, air-launched versions are designed to

destroy caves and tunnel complexes.

Where have they been used?

Ukraine's Ambassador to the U.S. alleges that Russia is using them in the current conflict. Dr.

Marcus Hellyer, senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said while it was not

clear if they had been deployed yet by Russia in Ukraine, it was only "a matter of time". The

bombs have been used by Russian and western forces since the 1960s. The U.S. relied on them in

its attempts to eliminate al-Qaida in the mountains in Afghanistan. Russia has a longer track

record with them than the west. Their systems run across the spectrum ... from quite small

tactical weapons, to huge, air-launched bombs. The Ukrainian separatists that Russia was

supporting in the Donbas region have been using them for a number of years.

On 1 FEB 2000, Human Rights Watch condemned Russia's reported used of the weapons a

year earlier in Chechnya as "a dangerous escalation" with "important humanitarian

implications". Their report said, "The [blast] kill mechanism against living targets is

unique—and unpleasant. ... What kills is the pressure wave, and more importantly, the

subsequent rarefaction [vacuum], which ruptures the lungs. ... If the fuel deflagrates but does not detonate, victims will be severely burned and will probably also inhale the burning fuel. Since the most common FAE fuels, ethylene oxide and propylene oxide, are highly toxic, undetonated

FAE should prove as lethal to personnel caught within the cloud as with most chemical agents.”

According to a US Central Intelligence Agency study, “the effect of an FAE explosion within confined spaces is immense. Those near the ignition point are obliterated. Those at the fringe are likely to suffer many internal, thus invisible injuries, including burst eardrums and crushed inner ear organs, severe concussions, ruptured lungs and internal organs, and possibly blindness.”

Another Defense Intelligence Agency document speculates that, because the “shock and pressure waves cause minimal damage to brain tissue ... it is possible that victims of FAEs are not rendered unconscious by the blast, but instead suffer for several seconds or minutes while they suffocate”.

How dangerous are they?

Hellyer said thermobaric weapons were effective at their “specific purpose” of “primarily destroying defensive positions”. While they would not be used to penetrate a tank, they could be

a ““very destructive weapon” against an apartment complex or other building.  
“They are not  
illegal even though their effects can be pretty horrific, because of that effect of  
creating a  
vacuum and sucking the air out of the lungs of defenders,” he said. Given their  
use is “pretty  
standard” in terms of Russian tactics, Hellyer said he expected to see more  
thermobaric warfare  
in Ukraine.

[Source: MilitaryTimes & Wikipedia | Howard Altman | March 2, 2022 ++]

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### Army Email Transition

Update 07: Army Still Has No Solution, Delays Sunset to End Of Fiscal Year

Officials from the Army’s IT and communications directorate quietly posted a  
press release 9

MAR conceding that they won’t have a new email system for junior troops in  
place by the end of

March, as previously promised. Instead, they plan to extend the existing system  
— Defense

Enterprise Email, which was scheduled to go dark on March 31 — until at least  
Sept. 30. The

unsigned release described the move as part of a “bridging strategy” to ensure  
soldiers “maintain



access to government email accounts.”

The issue arose when planning documents and briefings on the transition to the service’s new

email and collaboration program, Army 365, revealed that about 250,000 junior enlisted troops

would not automatically receive a license to use the platform. The service opted to buy fewer

licenses than personnel in order to save on costs, reasoning that lower-ranking soldiers were less

likely to need the Army 365 suite’s collaboration tools. Troops in the grade of E-4 and below

require a colonel’s approval to receive a license, according to interim guidance previously

obtained by Army Times. That meant that a quarter of a million troops stood to lose their access

to official email, though Army officials quickly decided to pursue an “alternate solution” to the

issue.

The solution, according to IT officials, was to build those troops a new, lower-cost email

platform to ensure they maintained access to official email for sensitive personal documents,

such as orders, medical records and other benefits. Before Wednesday’s release, they said it

would be complete by March 31. “Between now and March, when [DEE] is slated for

decommissioning, we will have a solution to transition everybody and their current email capabilities to either Army 365 or an alternate [email] solution,” Dr. Raj Iyer, the Army’s chief information officer, told reporters in a Dec. 15 roundtable. The service’s G-6, Lt. Gen. John Morrison, was less bullish, warning that the March deadline could be extended if necessary.

IT sources who spoke with Army Times in December argued that Iyer’s timeline was impossible. “Any option at this late stage besides buying licenses will see [the Army] exceed [the] deadline,” argued one source. A second source, in an interview conducted before the Dec. 15 roundtable, suggested the Army may “play chicken” with the Defense Infrastructure Security Agency in an effort to buy more time with mail.mil email and extend the deadline to field an alternate email solution. And that’s exactly what happened.

The alternate email solution is taking longer than expected, the unsigned release said. But it claimed that the service is “making significant progress towards implementing an alternate email solution for Soldiers.” According to a source who attended a 3 MAR meeting discussing the Army 365 transition, a draft version of the release specified that the alternate email solution is for the junior troops who don’t rate Army 365 licenses. Col. Joseph Garner, a G-6 division chief

involved in the Army 365 transition, said in the release that the delay is needed to permit the

Army to “work our way through the mission analysis to ensure the alternate email solution will

deliver an enduring capability for our Soldiers.”

Meanwhile, some service members are experiencing issues with the transition, but they’re

taking it in stride. One anonymous poster on an Army Reddit community reported their Army

365 email account had been deleted, and that they had previously lost access to their mail.mil

Defense Enterprise Email account, too. “My friends, I refuse to use my personal email for work

purposes not out of spite, but out of principle,” the user said, jokingly. “I will not bow down to

the Office 365 overlords.”

Note: Bulletin subscribers are reminded, upon their transition from ‘@mail.mil’ to

‘@army.mil’, their need to submit a change of address message to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) .

[Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | March 9, 2022 ++]

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WWII Coca-Cola

Contribution to Troop Morale

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Coca-Cola was bottled in 44 countries, including

those on both sides of the conflict. The war was taking a devastating toll on families as their loved ones left to fight and serve overseas. Coca-Cola saw employees leaving to enlist in the war and experienced rationing of the daily essentials for the business. Rubber and gasoline proved hard to come by making deliveries of Coca-Cola difficult. Sugar rationing slowed production in many plants with one in Alberta, Canada completely closing over the lack of ingredients.

Finally, a special tax during the war forced the cost of a Coca-Cola to increase by one penny –an increase of 20 per cent. The entry of the United States into the war brought an order from Coca-Cola Company president Robert Woodruff in 1941 “to see that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents, wherever he is and whatever it costs the Company.”

Despite the difficulties, Woodruff knew that Coca-Cola could support the war effort. He found out just how important two years later when a special cablegram arrived at the Coca-Cola Export office in New York City.

The effort to supply the armed forces with Coca-Cola was being launched when an urgent cablegram arrived from General Dwight Eisenhower’s Allied Headquarters in North Africa.

Dated June 29, 1943, it requested shipment of materials and equipment for 10 bottling plants.

Prefaced by the directive that the shipments were not to replace other military cargo, the cablegram also requested shipment of 3 million filled bottles of Coca-Cola, along with supplies for producing the same quantity twice monthly. Within six months, a Company engineer had flown to Algiers and opened the first plant, the forerunner of 64 bottling plants shipped abroad during World War II.

To build those plants a special group of Coca-Cola employees called Technical Observers (TOs) were asked to plan the logistics to install the plants and get the bottling started. One hundred forty-eight men served as TOs, complete with Army officer's rank, pay and uniforms that had a unique identification patch. One such TO was John Talley, an American who at that time had spent his entire Coca-Cola career in Canada working in Toronto, Winnipeg, Port Arthur and Windsor.

John Talley arrived in Europe in 1944 and was first set with the seemingly impossible job of establishing bottling operations in a newly liberated Paris. Against all odds Talley managed the

feat and went on to set up bottling plants across the American zone of occupation in Germany.

TOs like Talley supervised the shipment and operation of the 64 complete bottling plants

Coke's campaign to give troops everywhere their soda did encounter issues in the Pacific.

While the efforts to build bottling plants were successful, it was harder to get to more remote

areas. There was a solution, though: jungle fountains. These were soda fountains, which were

not common yet, that could be transported anywhere easier than bottles could.

To meet this

need 1,100 jungle fountains were produced to aid in the war on thirst.

Through this effort American GIs halfway around the world deprived of the tastes of home

who did not get to experience many creature comforts, sustained mostly by C-Rations and

whatever could be made in a field kitchen, had access to a supply of the drink. In a modern

cynical view, the whole Coca-Cola ordeal could come off as a marketing stunt, and it is no

secret that the company did take advantage of the good publicity it gave them.

Coke ads from

the time showed GIs sharing Cokes with other Allies, which helped to spread the brand

globally.

The effort did accomplish its mission of boosting troop morale, though. It is not hard to find accounts from troops excited about having access to Coca-Cola. In times of chaos, something as simple as a familiar sugary soft drink did a lot of good, and Coke did its part by providing GIs with more than 5 billion sodas. [Source: <https://www.coca-cola.ca/faqs/coca-cola-faqs-history> | March 2022 ++]

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## Healthcare SOU Takeaways

### Items Addressed in Biden's 2022 State of the Union Speech

A theme of unity emerged from President Joe Biden's State of the Union address March 1 as he discussed the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the economy and strides made against the COVID-19 pandemic. "We've reached a new moment in the fight against COVID-19, where severe cases [are] down to a level not seen since last July," President Biden said. The daily average for new cases the day of the address was 58,986, down from the peak in January when new cases topped 800,000, data from The New York Times shows.

&quot;Thanks to the progress we have made in the past year, COVID-19 no longer need control

our lives,&quot; the president said, referring to access to vaccinations and tests and the development of

antiviral treatments. Here are seven key healthcare takeaways from the speech with context:

1. &quot;Test to treat&quot; program: The government is launching a &quot;test to treat&quot; initiative &quot;so people

can get tested at a pharmacy, and if they prove positive, receive antiviral pills on the spot at no

cost,&quot; President Biden said. He specifically called out Pfizer&#39;s COVID-19 antiviral pill regimen,

Paxlovid, which was found to reduce the risk of death or hospitalization by about 89 percent. The

treatment is intended for patients at high risk of developing severe illness and should be

administered as soon as possible after diagnosis and within five days of developing symptoms.

The U.S. has purchased 20 million courses of the treatment, with the first 10 million set to be

delivered by the end of June.

&quot;Pfizer is working overtime to get us 1 million pills this month and more than double that

next month,&quot; the president said, adding that the nation has ordered more of the pills &quot;than anyone

in the world.&quot; The program could launch this month, enabling eligible people to receive pills

through pharmacies at places such as CVS, Walgreens and Kroger, a White House official who



spoke on the condition of anonymity told The New York Times, adding the government will also

distribute the pills directly to long-term care facilities.

2. The Justice Department will name a chief prosecutor for pandemic fraud: &quot;We're going

to go after the criminals who stole billions in relief money meant for small businesses and

millions of Americans,&quot; the president said. The prosecutor will &quot;lead teams of specialized

prosecutors and agents focusing on major targets of pandemic fraud, such as those committing

large-scale identify theft,&quot; as well as &quot;investigate major cases of criminal fraud in programs like

the Paycheck Protection Program and Unemployment Insurance,&quot; the White House said in an

accompanying fact sheet. It is not clear when the Justice Department will appoint someone to the

role.

3. Lowering prescription drug costs is part of the president's plan to fight inflation: &quot;We

pay more for the same drug produced by the same company in America than any other country in

the world,&quot; President Biden said. &quot;Just look at insulin. One in 10 Americans has diabetes.&quot;

Although insulin costs pharmaceutical companies about \$10 per vial to make, &quot;drug companies

charge up to 30 times that amount," he said. "Let's cap the cost of insulin at \$35 a month so everyone can afford it." The president urged Congress to allow Medicare to negotiate the price of prescription drugs.

4. More free tests: Starting 7 MAR, Americans will be able to order a second round of free rapid at-home COVID-19 tests. "I'm announcing you can order another group of tests. Go to covidtests.gov starting next week and you can get more tests," President Biden said. The government launched covidtests.gov in January, where there was initially a limit of one order, which includes four individual tests, per residential address. In all, the Biden administration has said it plans to distribute a total of 1 billion at-home kits to Americans' homes. Since mid-January, fewer than 300 million tests have been ordered, Kevin Munoz, White House assistant press secretary, told CNN.

5. He highlighted pediatric mental health: President Biden emphasized a commitment to mental health, "especially among our children, whose lives and education have been turned upside down." He specifically called for strengthening privacy protections, as well as banning targeted advertising to children. "And let's get all Americans the mental health services they

need," President Biden said. "More people they can turn to for help, and full parity between physical and mental healthcare if we treat it that way in our insurance." His remarks come as the American Medical Association has been asking congressional leaders to prioritize parity and do more to ensure mental health care benefits to be covered at the same level as physical healthcare benefits, as called for in the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. President Biden said his fiscal year 2023 budget will propose that all insurers cover robust behavioral health services with an adequate provider network, including three behavioral health visits annually without cost sharing.

6. He announced a unity agenda that includes plans to sign a clinician mental health bill:

In January, HHS announced it would distribute \$103 million to address staffing needs, burnout and mental health among healthcare workers. President Biden said he will also sign the

bipartisan Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act into law. Congress passed the

Dr. Lorna Breen legislation, named for a physician who died by suicide, in February to improve the mental health and well-being of healthcare workers. Among other things, the bill requires

HHS to award grants for training health profession students, residents and healthcare

professionals to reduce and prevent suicide, burnout, mental health conditions and substance use

disorders, according to the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation. The grants are for hospitals,

medical professional associations and other healthcare entities.

7. He called for higher standards for nursing homes: President Biden unveiled a nursing

home quality improvement plan Feb. 28. The plan, which CMS will carry out, aims to increase

nursing home staffing and oversight. President Biden said: "Medicare is going to set higher

standards for nursing homes and make sure your loved ones get the care they deserve and that

they expect." In a separate statement, CMS cited the COVID-19 deaths of nursing home

residents and staff during the pandemic and emphasized the agency's commitment to implement

the quality improvement plan. "The time is now for a bold new approach and a strengthened

commitment to deliver on our moral responsibility to care for our nation's elders and people with

disabilities," the CMS statement said. "These actions will be carefully coordinated alongside

CMS' efforts to ensure people can access long-term care in an appropriate setting of their choice,

including through home and community-based services."

[Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Kelly Gooch & Erica Carbajal | March 2, 2022 ++]

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## Insulin

### Update 05: Senate Working on Bill to Lower Cost

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has announced that legislation to lower the cost

of insulin will be a priority in that chamber in the next few weeks. The bill under consideration

would cap consumers' out-of-pocket insulin costs at \$35 per month without changing the price

drug makers charge for insulin. This is an effort on the part of the Democratic leadership to get

some kind of drug reduction legislation through Congress this year because their more

comprehensive bill that would empower the government to negotiate with drug makers to reduce

consumers' prices, limit year-to-year increases in the cost of medicines, and cap out-of-pocket

costs is tied up in the Senate.

However, not all Democrats like this idea. Some say the insulin bill simply isn't enough to

lower Americans' drug costs in a meaningful way. The bill would cap consumers' out-of-pocket

insulin costs at \$35 per month without changing the price drug makers charge for insulin. They believe that passing bills to cap copays on an individual basis will simply shift costs and lead to higher premiums and taxes for consumers and that by creating a partial solution it would take away from the mission to create a complete solution.

The purpose of trying to pass the insulin cost cap alone is meant to test whether it can get

bipartisan support in coming weeks. It is expected that no Republicans will support legislation to

lower overall drug costs, but Democrats are hoping they can get ten Republican to support the

bill to lower insulin costs. [Source: The Senior Citizens League | February 28, 2022 ++]

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### TRICARE Pharmacy Network

#### Update 03: Independent Pharmacies Feel Pushed out of Contract

Tricare, the health care program for the U.S. military, in December dropped retail pharmacies at

Walmart and its affiliate Sam's Club across the United States and replaced them with CVS

Pharmacy Inc. It also dropped many small, independent pharmacies in the Cardinal Health network, a decision that shortchanges many of the plan's beneficiaries – active-duty service members, retirees and their families – and those pharmacies, too, said a spokeswoman for independent pharmacies.

“There is no negotiating, these are take-it-or-leave-it contracts provided from Express Scripts

Inc. to a pharmacy,” Karry La Violette, senior vice president for the National Community

Pharmacists Association, told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday. “So, if you want to be in

the network you take this horrible reimbursement rate or you don't.” Express Scripts manages

the Tricare Pharmacy Program for its 9.6 million beneficiaries. The new contract adds

approximately 1,700 new pharmacies to the plan for a total of 59,000, according to a Tricare

news release in November. CVS alone has nearly twice the pharmacies that Walmart and Sam's

Club have, according to Tricare.

Walmart failed to offer competitive discounts for Tricare beneficiaries, Express Scripts told

Military Times in October. CVS held the contract prior to Walmart and Sam's Club. Although

Express Scripts dropped 3,000 community pharmacies, many with the Cardinal Health network,

more than 14,000 remain part of program, according to Tricare. “With this change, nearly 90% of beneficiaries will have access to a network pharmacy within five miles of their home,”

Defense Health Agency spokesman Peter Graves told Stars and Stripes by email on Feb. 17.

Cardinal Health, based in Dublin, Ohio, is one of the largest wholesale distributors of

pharmaceuticals and related health care products in the United States. The company did not

respond to recent email and phone messages from Stars and Stripes seeking comment. The

change in providers meant dislocation for a fraction of Tricare beneficiaries. “In all, 64,000

beneficiaries using independent pharmacies needed to transfer their prescriptions,” Graves said.

Express Scripts negotiated the new contract, set the terms for access to retail pharmacies that

contractors must meet and “uses its own discretion” to contract for a competitively priced

network, he said.

For independent pharmacies, those terms are tougher to meet each year, said La Viollette of

the community pharmacists’ association. “You can’t fill a prescription at a loss and stay in

business,” she said. “It’s tough, but a lot of our members do fill them at a loss because they want



to do good for their community.” Plus, the mail-order program, lucrative for Express Scripts, sends unwanted medications to Tricare beneficiaries, La Viollette said. Those beneficiaries bring their unwanted medications to community pharmacies to dispose of them, she said. “They try to shut it off, but they keep sending it. Sometimes it would be a senior that gives up trying to figure out what number to call; it’s not an easy process,” she said. Graves said the Express Scripts mail-order service is a Tricare advantage, and the new contract preserves choice for its beneficiaries. “Many community and retail pharmacies remain in-network and there are several options beneficiaries can take to ensure in-network copayments such as transferring their prescription to a new community, retail or military treatment facility pharmacy, or switching to home delivery via Express Scripts,” he said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Jonathan Snyder | March 9, 2022 ++]

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## Hospital Charges

Update 11: More Medical Bill Horror Stories

In many cases, insured patients are getting prices that are higher than they would if they

pretended to have no coverage at all. The following horror stories, from Kaiser Health News

unless otherwise identified, will remind you that the next time you get a \$1,000 bill from your

doctor, at least your statement doesn't have another zero at the end — or two.

#### Jaw Surgery

By getting jaw surgery, a Seattle man hoped to relieve his pain, migraine headaches, and high blood pressure. He didn't bargain for a bill that would make most people's jaws clench. After a

2018 surgery that cost him \$3,000, the bill came to \$27,119 on a follow-up procedure in 2020 -

— so more than \$24,000 over what he expected. The jump in cost was because of a change in

insurance coverage when he switched jobs, despite both employers having the same insurer.

When his surgeon intervened on his behalf, the man's bill was reduced to just more than \$7,000,

which he is paying. Refer to: [https://khn.org/news/article/surprise-medical-bill-jaw-surgery-](https://khn.org/news/article/surprise-medical-bill-jaw-surgery-takes-bite-out-of-budget)

[takes-bite-out-of-budget.](https://khn.org/news/article/surprise-medical-bill-jaw-surgery-takes-bite-out-of-budget)

#### Rabies Shot

A cat wasn't the only thing that bit a Florida man a couple summers ago. After a rabies shot in

the emergency room in the summer of 2020 came a bill big enough to leave a mark: \$18,357.

After insurance the man still owed north of \$6,000, which was the standard fee at the hospital

he happened to choose, The New York Times reports. Refer to <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/08/22/upshot/hospital-prices.html>.

### Giving Birth

A Colorado mom had a straightforward delivery in April 2020 and left the hospital with her

bundle of joy. She wasn't as joyful when she got a \$16,221.26 bill that included "Level 5"

emergency services for her son's by-the-book birth. After negotiating with insurance, the family

ultimately paid more than \$3,600 to the hospital. Refer to:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/10/27/1049138668/childbirth-how-hospitals-inflate-bills>.

### Sliced Finger

Cutting a finger while slicing vegetables is a common occurrence. But when one finance

reporter cut his hand, he did more than ruin dinner. He racked up a hospital bill for more than

\$14,000 in June 2016 for a few minutes and a few stitches. The bill he got the next November

included "skin tissue rearrangement," aka "holding my skin flap down as [the doctor] sewed,"

the reporter tweeted. He negotiated the bill down to \$4,500, CafeMom reports.

Refer to

<https://cafemom.com/news/hospital-bill-outrageous>.

## About Apnea Study

After a man's sleep apnea sent him to the hospital with an excruciating headache, a doctor

prescribed a hospital sleep study. That single night in a hospital cost him enough to lose sleep

over: \$10,322, to be exact. He's still paying the negotiated rate of more than \$5,000. Refer to:

<https://khn.org/news/article/enough-to-wreck-their-rest-10322-for-a-sleep-study>.

## Arm Cast

Who knew getting a cast counted as "surgery"? Certainly not the Arizona mom who took her

kindergartener to the emergency room after he fell off a trampoline in October 2019. The

hospital bill jumped to \$2,117 citing a minor surgery, though getting a cast on is not a surgery

as most would understand it. Then the hospital argued that the expense was related to a "facility

fee" and a "pre-certification penalty." The Arizona Republic newspaper intervened on the

family's behalf and the bill was dismissed. Refer to

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/consumers/2020/10/29/ober-st-family->

[challenges-phoenix-childrens-hospital-charges-boys-broken-arm/3750261001](https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/consumers/2020/10/29/ober-st-family-challenges-phoenix-childrens-hospital-charges-boys-broken-arm/3750261001).

## Epidural Injection

A pain-ridden California woman who requested an epidural while in labor got more than she

bargained for during delivery. She got a \$1,600 bill because, according to the hospital, she'd chosen an out-of-network provider to dispense the pain blocker. "I didn't choose anything. I was in labor," she explained to NBC News. After appealing to her insurance provider that the selection was involuntary, she received a reimbursement nine months after giving birth. Refer to:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-care/surprise-medical-bills-two-babies-two-very-different-price-tags-n988926>

[Source: Cheapism | Ashley Biggers | February 25, 2022 ++]

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## Graves Disease

### Most Common Cause of an Overactive Thyroid

Graves' disease is the most common cause of an overactive thyroid. It is caused by a malfunction in the person's immune system. Their body produces antibodies that cause the thyroid to make too many hormones. This sends the body's metabolism into overdrive, making lots of processes speed up unnecessarily. One thing that can be affected by this is the heartbeat. The increased amount of hormones causes the following symptoms typical of an overactive thyroid:

☒ A pounding heart (palpitations) and rapid heartbeat, and sometimes an irregular heartbeat

too

☒ High blood pressure

☒ Weight loss despite an increased appetite

☒ Diarrhea

☒ Tremor (shaking), nervous restlessness, irritability, sleep problems

☒ Weakness, tiredness

☒ Sweating and warm, moist skin

☒ Hair loss

Sometimes the antibodies also stop the thyroid from working properly. In rare cases that may

lead to an underactive thyroid.

Bulging eyes in Graves' disease

People with Graves' disease often have a noticeably enlarged thyroid and a swollen neck (this

is known as a "goiter"). Some people have problems with their eyes too. The eyes may then feel

gritty, sting or water, or the person's vision may be blurred. If the tissue behind the eyeballs

becomes severely inflamed (a condition known as "Graves' ophthalmopathy"), the eyeballs tend

to bulge. Sometimes they bulge so much that the eyelids cover less of the eye.

Then you can see

the whites of the person's eyes and all of their iris (the colored part of the eye).

This bulging of

the eyes and swelling of the muscles around the eye can cause problems with the person's vision.

For example, they might start seeing double. In rare cases, Graves' disease also leads to swelling

in the lower legs, or in the hands and feet.

#### Causes & risk factors

Graves' disease is caused by an autoimmune response. The body's own immune system

produces antibodies that then stick to the thyroid cells. This makes the cells reproduce and

release too many hormones into the bloodstream. The body functions that are controlled by

thyroid hormones are then thrown out of balance. It is not quite clear why people develop

Graves' disease. It seems that genes probably play a role because the disease often occurs in

people who are related to one another. Smoking increases both the risk of developing the disease

and of having severe symptoms.

#### Prevalence & Effects

Graves' disease is the most common cause of an overactive thyroid, especially in women.

Around 30 out of 1,000 women get Graves' disease at some point in their life, compared to only

about 5 out of 1,000 men. The disease usually starts between the ages of 30 and 60, and less

often in children or elderly people.

If Graves' disease goes untreated, there's an increased risk of the type of long-term effects

that occur with an overactive thyroid. They include cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel)

diseases like atrial fibrillation and frequent bone fractures caused by osteoporosis. In rare cases,

the person's thyroid hormone levels suddenly increase drastically in what is known as a

thyrotoxic crisis or a "thyroid storm." Warning signs include a very high temperature, vomiting,

restlessness and anxiety. If someone has a thyroid storm, they need to get hospital treatment

quickly because of the possible complications. These include an irregular heartbeat, loss of

consciousness and cardiovascular collapse (where not enough blood flows around the body).

Thyroid storms can be triggered by things like extreme stress or substances that contain iodine.

### Diagnosis & Treatment

The doctor begins by discussing your symptoms with you in detail and giving you a general

physical examination. They then usually check the thyroid by feeling your neck to see whether

the gland is bigger than usual. This is often followed by an ultrasound scan to take a closer look



at the thyroid tissue. In most cases, a blood test is used to confirm the diagnosis.

The results of

the test show whether the thyroid is producing too many hormones and whether antibodies are

responsible. Graves' disease rarely goes away by itself. It is usually treated with anti-thyroid

drugs for 1 to 1.5 years. These tablets reduce the production of thyroid hormones. If the person

has a rapid or irregular heartbeat, beta blockers can also be taken at the beginning.

The anti-thyroid drugs can make the level of thyroid hormones return to normal.

But about

half of the people affected have increased hormone levels again when they stop taking the tablets

– even if they've taken them for long enough. Then it can make sense to remove the thyroid

gland surgically or treat it using radioiodine. Radioiodine therapy involves swallowing

radioactive iodine that is absorbed by the thyroid gland and destroys the overactive cells there.

This releases more antigens, which can cause a stronger autoimmune response to start with.

Sometimes this can make existing eye problems worse or cause new ones.

Backing the treatment

up with steroids can usually prevent that from happening. Ultimately, both the surgical procedure

and the radioiodine therapy permanently stop the thyroid from making thyroid hormones, which

means that the person has to take tablets to replace them.

Steroid tablets or drips are also often used to treat the eye problems.  
Radiotherapy is another possible option. Sometimes a surgical procedure is performed to make space in the eye socket.

This can involve removing some of the bone tissue, for instance. [Source: [www.informedhealth.org/graves-disease.html](http://www.informedhealth.org/graves-disease.html) | January 27, 2022 ++]

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## Bruxism

### Medical Impact on Teeth Grinders and Jaw Clinchers

You might not even realize that you're doing it, especially while you're sleeping. But your jaw can grit and grind with as much as 250 pounds of force. Ouch! Chronic, involuntary teeth grinding – technically called bruxism – can lead to all sorts of health problems. You could crack or fracture your teeth, which may require crowns or dental implants. You could also wear down the enamel on your teeth, leading to periodontal disease or lost teeth. Teeth grinding can cause chronic pain in your head, neck and ears. It can lead to migraines, noise sensitivity and tinnitus, said Navy Capt. (Dr.) Cecilia Brown, director of dental services at Naval Hospital, Jacksonville, Florida.

In the most severe cases, you might need a total joint replacement for the hinge on your jaw.

Surgeons can implant a titanium joint. That's needed when bruxism wears down the jaw

cartilage so that moving your mouth grinds bone against bone, Brown said.

Bruxism, to varying

degrees, is common. Up to 30% of people grind their teeth in some way, and estimates suggest

that about 10% to 15% of adults suffer painful bruxing during sleep, according to Air Force Lt.

Col. Preston Duffin, director of orofacial pain at the 59th Dental Training Squadron-Joint Base

San Antonio-Lackland.

"Most people have some degree of clenching, grinding, muscle guarding or other jaw activity

during the day and night that is not associated with normal functioning like eating, talking, or

swallowing," Duffin said. Any "evidence of excessive tooth wear" could warrant some

treatment, he said. Many people don't fully understand how harmful teeth grinding can be. "It'

very difficult to manage, and difficult to get patients to understand" the possible consequences,

Brown said.

#### Bruxism as a Coping Mechanism

"You can't pinpoint one thing" that leads to bruxism behavior, Brown said. But teeth grinding

and jaw clenching can be coping mechanisms for stress. Bruxism also shows up in patients with post-traumatic stress. Active duty service members on deployment can develop bruxism due to sleep deprivation, stress, or not eating properly. Some people clench their teeth to keep focused, Brown said.

Teeth grinding can occur during the day and at night. "If you have this condition during the day when you're 'biting your tongue'" to keep your words in, it's a coping mechanism that you will likely feel in your jaw muscles when you get home or off-duty and relax, Brown said. At night, bruxism occurs during periods of dreaming when your body has more muscle activity.

"It's involuntary and unconscious," Brown said. If your facial muscles are working all the time, "like a body builder's muscles, they get big, sore and inflamed," she said. "Eventually, this can cause you to not be able to open your mouth fully. Those who have obstructive sleep apnea or fibromyalgia also are susceptible to bruxism."

#### Night Guards and Other Treatments

The first line of defense is to wear a night guard to protect your teeth while you sleep. But that may or may not work. "Some people grind right through the night guard," Brown said.

TRICARE (<https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/IsItCovered/TempMandJoint?p=1>) covers night

guards when medically necessary. Typically, “if you are aware of nighttime grinding and wake

in the morning with jaw pain or tiredness, then there is a better chance you will be a good

responder to night guard therapy,” Duffin said.

Beyond a night guard, Brown said, there are a variety of treatment options that can reduce the

frequency or harm caused by teeth grinding. They include:

☐ Physical therapy such as massage, compresses and mouth stretching exercises

☐ Yoga

☐ Counseling

☐ Treatment for acid reflux, which is a factor for bruxism development

☐ Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

☐ Muscle relaxants

☐ Botulinum toxin injections (Botox)

☐ Anti-anxiety medications

☐ A diet limited to soft, non-chew foods

☐ Changing pillows if they are not firm enough

The pandemic has impacted on the number of people experiencing this problem.

Duffin said

he can “certainly say there is a greater tendency for patients to complain of higher levels of

perceived stress and anxiety, which is likely influencing increased activities like  
bruxing, jaw  
pain, and tooth wear.” While many people who suffer from bruxism have mild  
symptoms, in  
some cases it can become a serious medical condition. “Bruxism is a real  
condition that’s very  
debilitating,” Brown said. “We need to make sure our medical practitioners can  
identify it and  
try to intervene earlier.”

[Source: Health.mil | Janet A. Aker | February 28, 2022 ++]

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## Human Body Facts

### Update 05: A Few More You Most Likely Do Not Know

The human body is one of the strangest and most fascinating machines out there.  
There is so  
much that we don’t know, and a plethora of facts that will surely give you a much  
better  
understanding of what our bodies are capable of. From being able to prevent  
cavities through  
kissing to human hair being virtually indestructible, read on to find out the  
weirdest facts about  
the human body.

The Left Kidney Can Be Found Higher Up In Comparison To the Right One

Since we are on the topic of organs anyway, here's an interesting fact about our kidneys. While the two of them may be identical, they are not always found in symmetrical order. As a matter of fact, the position of the kidneys in most bodies is completely different, with the left one being located slightly higher up than the right one.

#### One Cannot Swallow and Breathe At the Same Time

Most people who read this one tend to try to do it, so go ahead and try it! It may sound easy, but it's actually impossible to do. While some animals are able to swallow and breathe at the same time, humans aren't. That is because the voice box is placed in a way that results in the body only being able to do one movement at a time.

#### If One Laid Out a Brain Completely Flat, It Could Cover an Entire Pillowcase

While it's pretty creepy to imagine this, it's almost mind-blowing to think that our brains could be the same size as an entire pillowcase. Though the head is pretty tiny (some heads, at least), the brain takes a whole bunch of space, much more space than people think. In order to realize how big the brain is though, one would have to smooth out every single wrinkle.

#### There Is a Possibility That Your Body Has Fought Against Cancer Before

Your body may have previously fought cancer without you necessarily knowing or noticing.

While your cells are constantly dividing between them, the body is very capable of catching

errors or unusual movements. So if a cell notices that something in there isn't right, it is usually

able to realize that it's broken and to commit suicide before it goes crazy.

### A Human's Tongue Print Is as Unique as One's Fingerprint

The fingerprint is not the only thing in our body that is completely unique to one person in the

world. It seems like a person's tongue is also very distinctive. Now, the possibility of people out

there asking a person to do a print of their tongue is incredibly small, but it's still cool to know it

exists. In order to get a tongue's print, one would have to use 3D imaging for it to be noticeable

enough.

### Babies Blink Much Less Than Adults Do

Like we already mentioned before, an adult blinks an average of ten times per minute. Babies, on

the other hand, blink much less than an adult does. They only blink about once or twice per

minute as they barely close their eyes when they are awake. This can be because blinking serves

to keep the eyes lubricated, and babies' eyes may not require as much lubrication as adults do.

### A Human Being Sheds About 600,000 Skin Particles Every Hour

Can you imagine the number of skin particles that people shed in this world?

Billions of people



shedding approximately 600,000 particles every single hour is simply mind-blowing. Yearly, one person loses 1.5 pounds worth of skin, and over a lifetime, it adds up to more than 100 pounds.

While this sounds like a whole bunch, it is barely noticeable

### The Jaw Is the Strongest Muscle in the Human Body

There is no doubt in this world that our bodies are incredibly strong, some parts more than

others. But did you ever know that the jaw's muscle is one of the strongest members of our body?

This can depend on how a person measures strength, obviously, but based on weight, the jaw actually comes in the first place. With one's jaw, their molars could chomp down as much as 200 pounds of force.

### Every Human Body Has Around Three To Five Pounds of Bacteria

Here we go again with the bacteria. It's safe to say that human bodies are huge pools of bacteria that we barely notice throughout our lives. According to scientists, a human body carries about three to five pounds of bacteria everywhere it goes. This bacteria is equivalent to about one or

two percent of one's body mass and is enough to fill an entire soup can.

The Highest Fever Temperature Ever Measured Was 115 Degrees Fahrenheit  
It's hard to imagine a body as hot as 115 degrees Fahrenheit, but it seems like this was in fact the

highest temperature ever recorded in an individual. And in case you are wondering, the person

survived! To put things into perspective, the normal body temperature in humans is 98.6° F. Any temperature above 100.4 is definitely concerning, and in most people, if the temperature reaches 107, their organs begin to fail.

[Source: The Fun Post | Brenda Miller | November 2021 ++]

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### Tricks of the Trade

#### Ways Companies Induce You into Spending More Money

Most of us know retailers are doing everything they can to get us to spend big. But many of their tactics involve a surprising level of consumer psychology — especially during this age of soaring prices — and some are downright shady. Following are the most notable ways you’re being primed to spend, including a calculated move by a Burger King franchisee to keep customers from protesting price hikes.

#### Changing Everything but the Price

Given that we’re all watching our bottom lines like a hawk right now, there’s a classic way companies like to fool us: By keeping their prices the same, but changing the product itself so

that they still fatten profits. For instance, Burger King's largest franchisee will soon give customers eight chicken nuggets instead of 10 for the same amount of money, betting that a smaller portion will be less objectionable to customers than a higher price. Some retailers may even markup jumbo-size packages that shoppers assume represent a good deal without actually doing the math, according to The Wall Street Journal. Companies also aren't above watering down product quality, unbundling services, pulling back on discounts, or charging membership fees, all in order to give the appearance of steady pricing.

#### Blaming Inflation for Unnecessary Price Hikes

Most shoppers understand why prices have been rising, even if they don't like it. But here's something that will make your blood boil: A Digital.com survey of 1,000 business owners and executives found that more than half — 56% — are jacking up prices more than they need to in order to recoup the higher costs of doing business. That's particularly the case at larger companies, where 63% of respondents say they expect increased profits to outpace necessary "inflation" price hikes. The worst offenders, according to the survey: The auto industry, where 72% of respondents said their prices are higher than inflation really requires.

#### Limited-Time Deals

"Don't wait!" "Order now!" "Sale ends tomorrow!" Whether you're shopping in store or online, chances are you see this kind of urgency everywhere. Some online retailers, including Amazon, even use countdown timers that tell shoppers exactly how long they have to make a purchase at a certain price. This tactic is among the more transparent ways retailers get you to spend, in the hopes you'll be more likely to buy if you think a sweet deal may pass you by.

### One-Click Ordering

Being able to order everything from clothing to groceries with just one click is all about making shopping convenient, right? Sure, but it comes with a huge upside for retailers such as Amazon.

One-click ordering makes us much less likely to abandon those virtual carts, meaning we spend more than we otherwise might if we had to — ugh — click a few more times or enter payment information.

### Charm Pricing

This one's for anyone who ever wondered why that bottle of shampoo isn't \$5 instead of \$4.99.

In a strategy called "charm pricing," researchers have found that we're more likely to think we're getting a deal at \$4.99 because we associate the price more closely with \$4 instead of \$5. That, of course, makes us more likely to buy. In the flip side, called "prestige pricing," high-end

retailers are better off using rounded prices shoppers are more likely to associate with quality and luxury.

### Subscription Services

There's a reason other than convenience that subscription boxes and similar services suddenly seem so common. Inertia — namely, the hassle of canceling a subscription, even one that we don't often use — keeps companies' pockets nicely lined. It's true even though we're also unlikely to consume enough of something to justify the fixed price, and researchers find we would be better off giving in to the occasional splurge than signing up for a flat recurring rate — even if it "seems" like a great value.

### Liberal Return Policies

Common sense tells us that customers return more purchases when retailers have liberal return policies. True — but retailers have also found that shoppers are more likely to buy in the first place when such policies are in effect. Interestingly, longer return windows also correlate with fewer returns, possibly because shoppers become more attached to their buys and feel less urgency to decide whether to take them back.

### Supersized Carts

It turns out shoppers don't like pushing around empty carts — and marketing experts say a cart

that's double the size can lead shoppers, on average, to buy 40% more than they may actually need. So while no one likes to run out of room, next time you head to the store, consider opting for a basket or a smaller cart to avoid supermarket overspending.

### Free Samples

Ever gone to Costco on a weekend just for the samples? Our favorite warehouse club may seem generous with the freebies, but there's an ulterior motive: You're more likely to buy something when you get a free sample, largely because of reciprocity — the idea that you buy a product as a "thank you," whether out of gratitude or even guilt for being given the sample in the first place.

### No Dollar Signs

It might seem sleek and chic for that high-end restaurant to omit dollar signs on its menu, or for that little boutique not to include them on price tags. But there's something more at play:

Researchers theorize that we're likely to spend more when we don't see the dollar signs, likely because it helps reduce the psychological "pain of paying."

### Good Old Nostalgia

Retro game consoles have been a hot holiday gift for a couple years now, and to marketers, that's no surprise. It turns out that fond memories make shoppers happy — and that blast of emotion is

far more likely to make you buy something. Next time a company churns out  
some sort of

throwback product, enjoy the reminiscing, but consider keeping your wallet  
closed.

[Source: Cheapism | Sandra Latham | February 25, 2022 ++]

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## Tax Laws

### Strange but True | Alabama thru Iowa

The United States tax code is anything but simple. The instructions for the  
standard 1040 tax

form alone are more than 100 pages long, and good luck getting through them in  
one sitting.

Tax rules and regulations at the state level provide no relief, riddled as they are  
with strange

fees and exemptions, some of them decades out of date. Every state has odd and  
sometimes

unbelievable state tax laws — including a number of regulations that could save  
consumers

money.

### Alabama: Taxing Illegal Drugs

Alabama taxes the proceeds from the sale of illegal drugs by requiring sellers to  
have tax

stamps. Anyone caught with large quantities of drugs and no stamps would face  
not only jail

time but also prosecution for tax evasion unless they paid up. Though this brought in sizable revenue in the '90s, so little money comes in through the stamps now that the Revenue Department no longer includes it as a line item in the agency's books.

#### Alaska: Whaling-Related Expenses

Whaling captains recognized by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission can deduct up to \$10,000 for whaling-related expenses. The deduction is considered a charitable contribution, even if the money isn't paid to a charitable organization.

#### Arizona: Ice Blocks and Ice Cubes

Several states, including Arizona, tax ice blocks and ice cubes differently. Since ice cubes are used in mixed drinks, and considered food, they aren't taxed by the state. Ice blocks, however, are subject to sales tax.

#### Arkansas: Odd Jobs

What do pet grooming, gutter cleaning, and body piercing have in common? In Arkansas, each of these services is subject to a 6.5% gross receipts sales tax — a tax to the business providing the service.

#### California: Vending Machine Fees

There is plenty of fresh fruit to be found in the Golden State and there's a 33% tax if it is bought



from a vending machine. The tax applies to other food items, as well, including hot drinks,

although there is an exception for vending machines operated by educational institutions when

the items are sold to students.

#### Colorado: The Cost of Safety

Consider this when taking a full cup to go and driving down a bumpy road in Colorado.

Retailers in the Centennial State aren't taxed on the purchase of cups, but they are taxed when

they buy lids and straws. Other items, such as toothpicks, portion dividers, cup sleeves, and

bibs, are taxed as well.

#### Connecticut: Exemptions for Safety Items

The Constitution State promotes public safety through its tax code by making numerous items

tax exempt. Bicycle helmets, child car seats, firearm safety items like trigger locks and lock

boxes all qualify as tax exempt.

#### Delaware: Corporate Bargains

Delaware is one of five states with no sales tax. The state has a low 8.7% flat income tax on

corporations, and if a business doesn't conduct its operations in Delaware, the corporate income

tax might not even apply. Add to that the state's business-friendly laws and its non-jury

chancery court known for impartial decisions, and incorporating in Delaware is a no-brainer.

About half of all publicly traded companies in the country do just that.

#### Florida: The Farmer Exemption

Many states have tax exemptions for farmers and ranchers, but Florida's "greenbelt law" was

vaguely worded and notoriously open to abuse — at least, until being strengthened over the past

couple of legislative terms. Property developers had rented cows to avoid paying taxes while

preparing their land for building. Even Disney World took advantage of the loophole.

#### Georgia: The Tax Cap

In 2014, Georgia became the first state to cap its income tax rate through a ballot measure. The

tax rate cap of 6% is now part of the state's constitution. In 2017, a bill was introduced in the

state legislature that could replace the state's six income tax rates with a flat 5.4% tax, but failed

to pass. The current top rate in Georgia is 5.75%.

#### Hawaii: Saving a Tree

Trees with historic or cultural value, and those that are otherwise deemed worthy of

preservation due to their age, rarity, location, size, or aesthetic quality, come with a tax

deduction of up to \$3,000 a tree in Hawaii. The deduction can be used to cover the cost of

maintaining the tree.

### Idaho: Merrily Streaming

In 2014, Idaho changed its statute governing sales tax on cloud computing. The state no longer taxes purchases of cloud-based or downloaded computer software. Digital entertainment, such as ebooks and movies, is subject to sales tax if the purchase includes a permanent right to the work, meaning streaming or rental services may be exempt.

### Illinois: Flour Power

Pity the poor candy-store owner. In Illinois, Twix bars aren't taxed because they are made with flour, so they don't meet the state's definition of candy. Other Mars candy bars such as Snickers, though, are taxed, because they contain no flour. Similar laws are on the books in Washington, Colorado, and Connecticut.

### Indiana: Cake Treat

The Hoosier State has several oddball food taxes. For example, marshmallow creme is tax exempt, but marshmallows are not. Icing in tubes and containers of frosting are also exempt, but cake decorations are not.

### Iowa: Use It or Lose It

A use tax is assessed for the use, storage, or consumption of something in a state, regardless where the purchase was made. If a computer is bought while visiting a state that doesn't charge

sales tax, the buyer may still need to pay a use tax when returning home. Iowa has use-tax

exemptions for prescription drugs and medical devices, including catheter trays, oxygen

equipment, when they're sold to the user (rather than a business).

[Source: Cheapism | Louis DeNicola | March 03, 2022++]

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### Tax Tips for Military Life

#### Update 02: New 2021 Rules Might Bump Up Your Refund

Service members and families will find some gems in this year's tax law changes that could

lessen their tax burden or bump up their refund. Younger service members with or without

children might see some extra cash coming to them through changes in qualifications for the

Earned Income Tax Credit. And those with children are seeing bigger benefits with two major

child tax credits. But first, the basics. The deadline for filing the 2021 tax returns — or to file an

extension — and pay any taxes owed is April 18 for most taxpayers.

There are some long-standing tax filing extensions available for service members: If your

duty station is outside the U.S. and Puerto Rico, you are allowed an automatic two-month

extension without requesting an extension. If you're unable to file your taxes by then, you can request an additional extension to Oct. 15 by filing Form 4868. If you are in a combat zone, your deadline for filing and paying taxes is generally extended for the period of your service in the combat zone, plus 180 days after your last day in the combat zone. Your tax preparer can help you file for these extensions, or you can refer to the "Extension of Deadlines" rules in IRS

Publication 3, the Armed Forces Tax Guide.

The safest, fastest and most accurate way to file those taxes is electronically, and choose direct deposit if you're expecting a refund, said Susan Mitchell, executive director of the Armed Forces Tax Council. Sometimes filing electronically with tax software or with a tax professional helps answer a lot of questions and makes sure returns are complete. There are a lot of other things military tax filers need to be aware of, especially the new rules that might apply to

military filers to lessen their tax burden. To learn about them refer to the Attachment to this

Bulletin titled, "Military Federal Income Tax". [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers |

March 6, 2022 ++]

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## Student Loan Debt

### Update 11: PSLF Program Changes Benefit Active Duty & Vets

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program is an important—but largely unmet—promise to provide debt relief to support the teachers, nurses, firefighters, and others

serving their communities through hard work that is essential to our country's success. By

cancelling loans after 10 years of public service, PSLF removes the burden of student debt on

public servants, makes it possible for many borrowers to stay in their jobs, and entices others to

work in high-need fields.

On 6 OCT 2021, the Department of Education is announced a set of actions that, over the

coming months, will restore the promise of PSLF. They will offer a time-limited waiver so that

student borrowers can count payments from all federal loan programs or repayment plans toward

forgiveness. This includes loan types and payment plans that were not previously eligible. They

will pursue opportunities to automate PSLF eligibility, give borrowers a way to get errors

corrected, and make it easier for members of the military to get credit toward forgiveness while

they serve. They will pair these changes with an expanded communications campaign to make sure affected borrowers learn about these opportunities and encourage them to apply.

These changes are important steps toward a better and stronger PSLF program, one that will

move away from the current situation in which too few borrowers receive forgiveness, and too

many do not receive credit for years of payments they made because of complicated eligibility

rules, servicing errors or other technicalities. The Department is also working to identify further

improvements to ensure public servants get the relief they deserve, including partnerships with

employers and revising regulations. These actions are informed by the more than 48,000

comments the Department received on a request for information on improving PSLF issued over

the summer.

The Department estimates that the limited waiver alone will help over 550,000 borrowers

who had previously consolidated their loans see their progress toward PSLF grow automatically,

with the average borrower receiving 23 additional payments. This includes approximately 22,000

borrowers who will be immediately eligible to have their federal student loans discharged

without further action on their part, totaling \$1.74 billion in forgiveness. Another 27,000

borrowers could potentially qualify for \$2.82 billion in forgiveness if they certify additional

periods of employment. For reference, just over 16,000 borrowers have ever received

forgiveness under PSLF prior to this action. They anticipate that many more will also receive

additional credit as other changes are implemented over time, such as counting previously

ineligible payments that were not affected by a loan consolidation.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a tremendous strain on public servants, making it even more

critical that borrowers are able to access PSLF. Many public servants have been on the front

lines of the pandemic, making personal sacrifices to keep the rest of us safe.

Nonprofits are still

recovering jobs lost in the last year, and some public service workers have reported they are

considering leaving public service altogether. Frontline sectors like teaching and healthcare are

already seeing burnout and employee shortages. Alleviating some of the financial strain

associated with student debt can help borrowers in these sectors as they continue to navigate the

fallout of this pandemic.

### What Borrowers Need to Know

☐ This Limited PSLF Waiver will apply to borrowers with Direct Loans, those who have



already consolidated into the Direct Loan Program, and those with other types of federal

student loans who submit a consolidation application into the Direct Loan Program while

the waiver is in effect. The waiver only applies to loans taken out by students.

☒ The waiver will run through October 31, 2022. Borrowers who need to consolidate will

have to submit a consolidation application by that date. Similarly, borrowers will need to

submit a PSLF form—the single application used for a review of employment certification, payment counts, and processing of forgiveness—on or before October 31,

2022 to have previously ineligible payments counted. The Department recommends

borrowers take this action through the online PSLF Help Tool, which is available at [www.StudentAid.gov/pslf](http://www.StudentAid.gov/pslf).

☒ Refer to the PLSF Fact Sheet at [https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-](https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-public-service-loan-forgiveness-pslf-program-overhaul)

[public-service-loan-forgiveness-pslf-program-overhaul](https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-public-service-loan-forgiveness-pslf-program-overhaul) for additional information. If you

encounter challenges working with your loan servicer, you should contact the FSA Ombudsman by visiting [www.StudentAid.gov/feedback](http://www.StudentAid.gov/feedback) .

[Source: U.S. Department of Education | Press Release | October 6, 2021 ++]

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Inflation

## Update 03: Surged to 7.9% in February

### Consumer Price Index, all items Since Dec 1979

Inflation continued its relentless surge in February, driving the rate of consumer price increases

to a new generational high. The new numbers include precious few signs of inflation abating

—and mostly don't reflect the impact of the Ukraine war on global commodity prices. Wall

Street forecasters and the Biden administration have been counting on inflation peaking early

this year. The February numbers, combined with developments in the news, are more consistent

with stubbornly high inflation. The Consumer Price Index rose 0.8% in February, and was up

7.9% over a year earlier, the steepest 12-month rise since 1982.

Excluding volatile food and energy — so-called core inflation — the numbers were still

high, at 0.5% for the month and 6.4% year-over-year. Over the last three months, core inflation

rose at a 6.8% annual rate while total inflation increased at an 8.4% rate. Those numbers point

to an acceleration of inflation this winter, not a deceleration. The steepest price gains were for

gasoline (+6.6%) and fuel oil (+7.7%). But there were price surges for many non-energy items

as well,

☐ Air fare (+5.2%) and fruits and vegetables (+2.3%).

☐ Rents were up 0.6%, and the equivalent rent on homes people own rose 0.4%.

Those are

extremely rapid rates of increase for some of the biggest components of  
peoples’

spending.

Prices for oil, wheat, and many other key commodities have surged since the  
Russian

invasion of Ukraine began at the tail end of February. That points to higher prices  
in the months

to come. The bottom line: It looks like inflation will get worse before it gets  
better. [Source:

Axios | Neil Irwin & Matt Phillips | March 10, 2022 ++]

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## Gambling Scams

Sports Betting is Booming. Scams Are Too.

Thanks to new legal changes, the popularity of sports betting has exploded. If you  
think

scammers haven’t noticed, think again. BBB Scam Tracker is seeing reports from  
people who

accidentally placed bets with scam sports betting websites or apps.

How this scam works

☐ You want to place a bet on an upcoming game, so you search online for a sports  
betting

service. You find a website or app that looks trustworthy. It may even offer an enticing

introductory bonus, so you can make an initial bet “risk free.”

☒ You place a bet, and, at first, everything seems normal. But as soon as you try to cash

out your winnings, you find you can’t withdraw a cent. Scammers will make up various

excuses. For example, they may claim technical issues or insist on additional identity

verification. In other cases, they may require you to deposit even more money before

you can withdraw your winnings! Whatever you do, you’ll never be able to get your

money off the site. And any personal information you shared is now in the hands of

scam artists.

☒ One victim reported to BBB Scam Tracker: “I deposited money to put a wager for a sports game. I won the bet [and] attempted 3 times to cash out and 3 times it was

declined. Spoke to their representative, and they needed a picture of my driver’s license,

a photo of myself holding my ID, and a blank check from my bank. With all the run around I’ve been given, it prompted me to read their reviews. All horrible reviews of a

scam. Called my credit card company to file a fraud report.”

How to avoid sports betting scams:

☒ Look for an establish, approved service. Look for “white-listed” sports books that have been approved by your area’s gaming commission. In the United States, ESPN has a list of where sports betting is legal. For more information about laws in Canada, see this article.

☒ Don’t fall for tempting ads. Ignore gambling-related pop-up ads, email spam, or text messages.

☒ Read the fine print on incentives. Gambling sites and apps often offer incentives or bonuses to new users and around major games. But like any sales pitch, these can be deceptive. Be sure to read the fine print carefully.

☒ Even legitimate sports betting sites have the right to freeze your winnings. Gambling companies can restrict user’s activity for “seeming to have an ‘unfair advantage’ or ‘irregular playing patterns,’” reports Lifehacker. Be sure to check the terms of service.

For more information

Check out BBB’s tips for spotting a lookalike website and downloading apps. Visit [BBB.org/ScamTips](http://BBB.org/ScamTips) to stay alert to new and commonly used scam tactics. If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to BBB Scam Tracker. Your report can help

others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](http://BBB.org/SpotAScam).

[Source: Better Business Bureau | March 5, 2021++]

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## Instagram Scam

### Update 01: Users Being Tricked into Sharing Their Passwords

In this clever new scam, con artists are getting greedy. Not only are they trying to steal your

Instagram password, they also are phishing for your email log-in. Follow these tips for spotting

this tricky scam and protecting your passwords.

#### How this scam works

❓ You receive an official-seeming email from Instagram. According to the message, you

have violated copyright laws, and your account will be deleted within 24 hours.

But don't

worry! If you think that Instagram has made a mistake, all you need to do is click the

button and “verify” your account. Then, you are taken to a website that prompts you to

input your Instagram credentials. Most scams would end there, but not this one!

❓ Immediately, another message appears. This pop-up claims that you must also verify your

email address. You'll see a list of e-mail providers. Choose yours, and you'll be urged to enter your email address and password. As a final touch, the scam site redirects to the real Instagram website, a trick that "lends additional credibility to the scam," explains Kaspersky.

How to spot these scams:

❓ Double check the "from" email address and link destinations. Hover over any links in an email you receive to see where the link really leads. Suspicious links are one of the main giveaways of email scams. Also, make sure the "from" address is actually from the business it claims to be.

❓ Understand how businesses handle communications. If you know how a company handles disputes and suspicious activity with your account, it will be easier to spot a scam. Will they email you? Call? Send a text message?

❓ Look into the claims before clicking. Don't act without first verifying the claims. Log into your account or look up the company's official phone number (check your bill or welcome email) and call them to confirm that there really is a case of suspicious activity associated with your account before you decide what to do.

❓ Don't panic and don't feel intimidated. Scammers use intimidation tactics, such as false

deadlines, to pressure you into giving up your personal information or making payments.

Legitimate businesses will not intimidate you in this way. Stay calm and think things

through before you act.

For more information

On BBB.org, read our tips for spotting scams on email and social media. Read more about how

to protect yourself from phishing cons. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost

money), report it to BBB Scam Tracker. Your report can help others avoid falling victim to

scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](https://www.bbb.org/SpotAScam). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | March

11, 2022 ++]

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Notes of Interest

MAR 01 thru 15, 2022

🔗 Consumer Debt. An estimated \$88 billion in medical debt landed on consumer credit

reports last year, according to a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau report released 1

MAR.

🔗 Russia. Russia will treat any hacking of its satellites as a justification for war, the head



of the country's space agency was quoted as saying in a news report on 2 MAR.

☒ Sanctions. In his State of the Union speech the president said he had an agreement with allied countries to release 16 million barrels of oil. He claimed that would help drive down gas prices. He said nothing about the oil the U.S. buys from Russia, enabling it to underwrite the cost of tyranny against Ukraine.

☒ Sanctions. David Barlow, in solidarity with our friends in Ukraine, is no longer buying Russian Dressing, eating Russian caviar, never playing Russian roulette (no fun anyway; not recommended). He also will never drink Moscow Mules. He suggests patriots join him. He may begin to buy Russian Dressing again when Putin gives up this war. But that's his decision.

☒ Russia. On 3 MAR Vladimir Putin, speaking publicly on the country's war with Ukraine, promised the families of Russian military casualties a special payout of 5 million rubles or nearly \$50,000 each.

☒ Holocaust. Surviving members of Hitler's Third Reich speak in chilling new documentary 'Final Account' released 21 MAY whose trailer can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/qobRIgAyQiY>. This rare perspective of the Holocaust is taken from that of that

of the perpetrators vice the victims.

🔗 Epic TV Battles. Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXzy-YDieCo> to view clips of the

top 10 most TV Epic battles.

[Source: Various | March 15, 2022 ++]

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### Disinfecting Wipes No No's

#### Things You Should Never Clean With Them

When you buy disinfecting wipes, you may want to use them on almost everything. But don't do it. On certain surfaces, disinfecting wipes can do a lot more harm than good. Save them for the hard, nonporous surfaces not on this list, manufacturers recommend.

#### Leather Purses or Upholstery

No matter your lifestyle, a well-loved handbag can get filthy. So can your leather car seats or furniture. While disinfecting wipes seem like a quick way to clean them, they contain alcohol and ammonia that can dry out the supple leather and damage its finish. Instead, opt for a commercial leather cleaner, or try a mix of warm water and dish soap, taking care not to soak the leather.

## Granite Countertops

Tempted to clean those gleaming granite countertops with disinfecting wipes?  
Use caution.

Repeatedly scrubbing them with the acidic wipes can break down the sealant on  
the granite,

leaving them vulnerable to long-term damage. For daily cleaning, you can simply  
use dish soap

and hot water. To disinfect them, a spritz of isopropyl alcohol can do the trick,  
according to the

Kitchn.

## Eyeglasses

Resist the urge to swipe your specs with disinfecting wipes, because they can eat  
away at the

delicate lens coatings, experts say. Instead, clean glasses with a drop of dish soap  
and warm

water, or use a commercial lens cleaner with a soft cloth.

## Pearl Jewelry

Swiping and scrubbing those heirloom pearls with alcohol-infused disinfecting  
wipes isn't a

good idea. They can damage softer stones including pearls, opals, and emeralds.

Pearls are also

susceptible to damage from ammonia, also typically found in wipes. Again, all you  
really need

here is warm water and a mild soap, experts say.

## Your Toilet and Plumbing

Your toilet can be ground zero for germs, and you can certainly use disinfecting  
wipes to clean

the seat and exterior with no ill effects. But there's a big catch: Never, never flush them when

you're done, experts warn. Unlike toilet paper, wipes don't adequately dissolve when they're

flushed, which can clog your pipes and mean big plumbing bills in the long run.

### Delicate Clothing

Got an embarrassing midday stain? Scrubbing at it with a disinfecting wipe may make it less

noticeable, but it won't do certain types of clothing any favors. The alcohol in the wipes can

fade colors and damage more delicate acrylic and acetate garments. Our favorite way to clean

up in a pinch? Portable stain solutions like Tide to Go.

### Vehicle Touchscreens

Your greasy fingerprints are all over it, but put those disinfecting wipes away. The alcohol and

ammonium compounds in the wipes can eat away the screens' protective coatings and

eventually cause fogging or blotching, manufacturers warn. Instead, clean these screens with

soap and water, taking care not to get them too wet. Nissan also recommends wipes specially

formulated for screens, but specifically warns against any that are "anti-microbial."

### Produce

We hope we don't need to tell you this, but you should never clean fruit, veggies, or any other

food with disinfecting wipes, as the ingredients are not meant to be ingested and may lead to

vomiting. The FDA says all you need to do is rinse, rub, or scrub produce under running water

to make it safe to eat (you don't even need soap).

#### Unfinished Wood Furniture or Floors

Like the rustic look? Be careful. While Clorox says you can use its disinfecting wipes on wood,

an asterisk notes the company means only "polyurethane treated wood." Because unfinished

wood acts as a sponge, it can absorb too much of the wipes' cleaning solution, eventually

swelling, cracking, or warping. The Canadian Conservation Institute recommends dry cleaning

methods such as using a stiff brush and a vacuum.

#### Fabric Upholstery and Carpet

Always check labels before using any sort of cleaner on fabric upholstery or carpet, which can

become discolored when used with certain cleaners. And as Apartment Therapy notes,

disinfecting wipes just plain won't work on most soft, porous surfaces.

#### Dishes and Food Storage Containers

If you eat off of it or store food inside it, be sure not to wipe it down with a disinfecting wipe, as

convenient as it may be. The chemicals in the wipes aren't meant to be ingested, of course, and

can linger on hard surfaces. If you really want to disinfect your dishes, use the hottest water

possible on their next trip through the dishwasher, buy antibacterial dish soap, or use a solution

of bleach and water, Real Simple recommends.

### Use Caution: Your Smartphone

Until recently, most experts cautioned against using disinfecting wipes to clean your

smartphone, but the pandemic has turned conventional wisdom on its head.

Apple now says it's

okay to use wipes to clean your phone, but warns that you need to be gentle and stick to the

hard outer surfaces, taking care not to get cleaner inside the charging ports or other openings.

(For the record, Samsung also says disinfectants are okay, but recommends they be applied with

a microfiber cloth.)

[Source: Cheapism | Sandra Latham | March 02, 2022++]

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### Hidden Design Features

#### Cleverly Built-In Functions Often Neglected

As consumers, we interact with so many products on a regular basis that it's easy to overlook all

of their features, even when they serve a specific purpose. In fact, many common items boast

useful add-ons that can easily be mistaken for inconsequential elements of design, especially

when they don't come with instructions. Here are some cleverly built-in functions you've probably been neglecting in your clothes, appliances, and more, plus how and why they came about.

### Scalloped Edges on Ritz Crackers

Surprising use: Slicing cheese -- Those dainty little snack crackers sure look pretty, but according to the official Nabisco Ritz Cracker TikTok channel, the scalloped edges have a practical purpose, too. And that purpose is? Cutting cheese down to size so it fits on a Ritz, by rolling the cracker back and forth across a cheese slice. The video went viral after it was posted during the July 4 holiday weekend, with viewers expressing surprise, delight, skepticism, and delight. Ritz's response to commenters accusing the brand of making this up: "We're allowed to."

### Soda Cans

Surprising Use: Straw holder -- The metal pull tab used to pop open a soda can also be flipped around over the opening and used to hold a straw in place, so you can sip from the can without the inconvenience of raising it to your lips, the cold affecting your teeth, or the straw tipping out. Called a stay-on-tab, this design only became standard after its patenting in 1975 — replacing

the detachable pop-tab — though it's hard to confirm how this particular feature of its design

came about.

#### Takeout Boxes

Surprising Use: Portable plates -- The trapezoidal to-go boxes most associated with Chinese

takeout restaurants are actually designed to hold food both in storage and while you're eating it.

When unsealed and unfolded, they serve perfectly well as single-use plates, sparing the trouble

of using your own dishes to consume the meal as well as prepare it. Technically called "oyster

pails," they were patented around the turn of the century to transport freshly shucked oysters, but

evolved into a leakproof container for prepared foods after World War II.

#### Small Jeans Pocket

Surprising Use: Storing pocket watches -- The average pair of jeans has several purposeful

features most modern wearers may take for granted. For one, the metal rivets around the pockets

serve to secure the pants' common stress points, making for more durable workwear since they

were patented by Levi Strauss & Co. in 1873.

This same design also included the tiny pocket embedded above the larger front pocket,

which was originally meant to hold a pocket watch. Since these have long fallen out of fashion,



Levi's and other jeans keep the watch pocket around as a lingering tribute to their original design, though they've also been associated with holding other items including tickets, coins, and matchbooks.

#### Indentation on Tic Tac Cap

Surprising Use: Serving mints -- Tic Tac-branded mints are easily recognized by their transparent rectangular containers, featuring a flip-action hinged lid. While the company has been denied a patent for this container, it still became internet-famous for the indentation inside of its lid, which serves as the perfect space to dispense a single mint.

#### Fabric Swatches

Surprising Use: Testing cleaners -- Many newly purchased articles of clothing come with a plastic baggie containing an extra button and swatch of fabric. While this textile sample can be used to patch tears, it also functions as a way to test the effects of various cleaners or wash cycles before applying them to the whole garment.

#### Screwdriver Handle

Surprising Use: Combining with a wrench for more leverage -- It's common for screwdrivers to have flat-sided handles to improve grip. Many designs go beyond this with a hexagonal shape that fits neatly inside a wrench or ring spanner, which can then be used to improve torque and

leverage when turning to screw or unscrew something.

#### Pen Cap Holes

Surprising Use: Saving lives -- Because seemingly everyone likes chewing on something while

they think or write, which is how roughly 100 Americans die each year from choking on pen

caps. This number would probably be much higher, had the pen company BIC not added a larger

hole to their caps, so even if one does get lodged in your wind pipe, enough air will still flow

through to the lungs.

#### Holes in Airplane Windows

Surprising Use: Managing pressure and condensation -- If you've ever looked closely at an

airplane window, you've surely noticed a small, singular opening near the bottom. Called a

breather hole, this is built into the middle of the windows' three panes to equalize the difference

in air pressure that builds up between a plane's sealed cabin and the high-altitude atmosphere

outside. In addition, it serves to release moisture from between the panes to avoid fog or frost

forming on the windows and obstructing passengers' sky-high views.

#### Lines on Box Cutters

Surprising Use: Refreshing the blade -- You may have noticed a series of diagonal lines on the

metal blade of your boxcutter. If so, this is a snap-off blade. When cutting cardboard dulls the sharp edge, you can snap off the top segment along the next line to reveal another sharp edge like new, making use of the small hole or "blade snapper" at the base of the knife. This nifty design was first introduced by the Japanese Olfa Corporation in 1956, drawing on inspiration from broken glass and segmented chocolate bars.

#### Notches Between Tire Treads

Surprising Use: Indicating wear -- If you aren't auto-savvy enough to know, standard car tires come with a built-in indicator to judge when they're ready for replacement. Within their treads you'll find a series of rubber notches. When the treads become flush with these perpendicular bars, it's a sign that the tire has lost much of its traction and needs to be replaced or retreaded for safe driving.

#### Bobby Pin Grooves

Surprising Use: Holding hair in place -- Why do bobby pins have grooves on one side? To better help hold your hair in place. The straight side is meant to face up while the grooves face down against the scalp, so it grips the hair in place while the other side presses it down. Though wearing them otherwise largely defeats their purpose, this knowledge seems to have faded since

bobby pins were invented in the 1920s, during the height of the bobbed hairstyle.

[Source: Cheapism | JeffreyRindskopf | February 04, 2022 ++]

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News of the Weird

MAR 01 thru 15, 2022

Just doesn't get it -- Nicole Gregory, 28, was arrested on Nov. 22  
in St. Petersburg, Florida,

after a sheriff's deputy observed her dropping baggies containing fentanyl.

According to The

Smoking Gun, Gregory admitted to selling the opioid, saying she gets \$10 per

"bump." But she

had a good(?) reason: She was selling the drugs "to make money to pay for  
an attorney for a

pending drug charge." Actually, two charges: one in August and one in  
October. Along with the

fentanyl, Gregory was most recently found to have meth, morphine and

Oxycodone. [Smoking

Gun, 11/22/2021]

o-o-O-o-o-

The Way the World Works -- You may be grouching about your mail taking  
FOREVER to get to

your mailbox, but that's nothing compared to a couple in Chicago, CBS  
Chicago reported. Last year, a

postal worker tossed a package onto Vera and Donald Rideaux's front porch  
-- then pulled away in his

vehicle, hitting the Rideauxs's van, "and he kept backing the truck up, back and forth, back and forth, pulling my car at the same time," Donald said. The worker got out of his truck, looked at the car, and "got back in it and he drove off," Vera added. The couple called the USPS but as of Dec. 7, there had been no resolution of the \$1,467 in damages caused to their van. A spokesman said drivers are supposed to notify immediate supervisors when they're involved in an accident but wouldn't confirm that such a report had been made in this instance. [CBS Chicago, 12/7/2021]

o-o-O-o-o-

Who Knew!? -- The Saudis take their beauty contests seriously, it appears: Judges at a competition northeast of Riyadh are cracking down on artificially enhanced contestants. The contest is part of the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival. Yes, the contestants are camels, the Associated Press reported, and 43 of them have already been disqualified. Camel breeders enter their most beautiful animals with the hope of winning \$66 million in prize money, but Botox injections, face lifts and other cosmetic changes will not be tolerated this year. How, you ask, are those procedures implemented? Breeders might stretch the lips and noses of their camels,

inject their heads or lips with Botox, inflate body parts with rubber bands and use fillers to relax

their faces. "The club is keen to halt all acts of tampering and deception in the beautification of

camels," the Saudi Press Agency said. [Associated Press, 12/8/2021]

o-o-O-o-o-

It's a Living -- Hasan Riza Gunay, known as Turkey's one and only stress coach, has a unique

method for easing his clients' angst: He lets them hit him (and doesn't hit back), Oddity Central

reported. After a decade in the business, though, Gunay is ready to train someone to take his

place. "Most of my clients suffer from depression or panic attacks," he said. "I would like to

train other potentially interested people ... and hand over my gloves to the new generation."

Gunay said around 70% of his clients are women whose strength is equivalent to that of boys 12

to 14 years old, so he doesn't worry about getting hurt. And he wears protective gear, sometimes

accompanied by a photo of the person the client is unhappy with. [Oddity Central, 12/10/2021]

o-o-O-o-o-

Thank You, I Think? -- According to the Associated Press, Suyin Ting, collections manager for vertebrate paleontology at the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science, is retiring, so researchers in Alabama and South Carolina honored her with a unique gift: They named a prehistoric shark species after her. *Carcharhinus tingae* lived 40 million years ago and was identified using fossilized teeth in the museum's collection. "I am very honored to be recognized by my peers for my work," said Ting on Dec. 23, her retirement day. [Associated Press, 12/24/2021]

o-o-O-o-o-

Ooohhh-kkkaaayyyyy -- Some romantic relationships are full of drama and strife, so maybe Sandra, 28, of Budapest, Hungary, has come up with a better model. According to Oddity Central, Sandra has fallen for Luffancs, a plastic model of an airplane. After breaking up with her latest human boyfriend in January, Sandra bought Luffancs for \$660 and fell madly in love. "I don't know why I love him, I just love him," she said. Sandra works in the aviation industry and is around airplanes every day, but says she will never cheat on Luffancs. In fact, she doesn't

know if she'll ever date another human being. "Planes are more reliable as partners," she said.

[Oddity Central, 3/10/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Unclear on the Concept -- When Bshar Ahmed, 30, of Youngstown, Ohio, was arrested on March 7, he told police that he was selling marijuana from the gas station where he was working the midnight shift because he just got out of prison and he needs the money, WKBN-TV reported. The owner of the station called officers about Ahmed and produced a bag, which Ahmed admitted was his, that contained bags of weed and a loaded .38-caliber semiautomatic handgun, along with suspected methamphetamine, crack cocaine, indeterminate pills and over \$1,000 in cash. Ahmed's previous convictions bar him from possessing a firearm. [WKBN, 3/8/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

The Neighbors -- When ya gotta go ... At 4:40 p.m. on March 4, Kenneth Clark Carlyle, 64,



walked up his neighbor's driveway in his birthday suit and relieved himself, No. 2 style, on the neighbor's glass patio table, The Smoking Gun reported. The whole thing was caught on not one, but two "separate angles of the victim's home security video footage," the police report noted. Clearwater, Florida, officers arrived at Carlyle's RV camper, where they spoke to him "through the door ... and he was still visibly naked and highly uncooperative." The bond on this incident is \$250, but he was already in trouble from a December infraction, so he remains in the pokey.

[Smoking Gun, 3/7/2022]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | March 15, 2022 ++]

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## Vocabulary

### Some Words to Enhance Yours | 220315

Which word best matches these example sentences?

1. (a) After dating for 4 years, she had never imagined the ways in which he would eventually

\_\_\_\_\_ her.

(b) umami – noxious – detectorist - hoodwink

2. (a) The medicine was only meant to \_\_\_\_\_ the patient on the way to the hospital to

ensure they arrived comfortable.

(b) winebibber – crestfallen – palliate - knackered

3. (a) Odysseus's \_\_\_\_\_ and wit made him a legend in Greek mythology.

(b) aleatory – imperious – legerity - cascade

4. (a) The doctor said it was normal for him to produce \_\_\_\_\_ because of his cold.

(b) phlegm – akimbo – ailurophile - vermilion

5. (a) Let's \_\_\_\_\_ the tally marks to determine who won the game.

(b) clerestory – conflagration – inextricably - enumerate

6. (a) The letter would seem innocent, if not marked by an ominous \_\_\_\_\_ in red wax.

(b) sigil – micawber – equinox = millefleur

7. (a) Chaos tends to \_\_\_\_\_ when enough rowdy partygoers congregate in a single

place.

(b) bumfuzzle – coruscation – infamy - ensue

8. (a) The yoga studio provided a \_\_\_\_\_ for every student.

(b) bolster – libertine – sesquipedalian - gormandize

9. (a) As the last step, the chef went to \_\_\_\_\_ the whipped cream over the desserts.

(b) dollop – didactic – absquatulate - saudade

10. (a) The little boy loved searching for \_\_\_\_\_s after the rain.

(b) rambunctious – criterion – pseudonym - polypod

## Answers

1. Hoodwink [ hood-wingk ] - to deceive or trick.
2. Palliate [ pal-ee-eyt ] - to relieve or lessen without curing; mitigate; alleviate.
3. Legerity [ luh-jer-i-tee ] - physical or mental quickness.
4. Phlegm [ flem ] - the thick mucus secreted in the respiratory passages and discharged through the mouth, especially that occurring in the lungs and throat passages, as during a cold
5. Enumerate [ ih-noo-muh-reyt ] - to ascertain the number of; count.
6. Sigil [ sij-il ] - a seal or signet.
7. Ensue [ en-soo ] - to follow in order; come afterward, especially in immediate succession.
8. Bolster [ bohl-ster ] - a long, often cylindrical, cushion or pillow for a bed, sofa, etc.
9. Dollop [ dol-uhp ] - a small quantity.
10. Polypod [ pol-ee-pod ] - (of insect larvae) having many feet  
[Source: <https://www.wordthirst.com> | March 15, 2022 ++]

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Have You Heard or Seen?

Kid's Jokes (1) | Toons | Present Century Philosopher Quote

Kid's Jokes (1)

Q: What gets wetter the more it dries? -- A towel.

Q: When you look for something, why is it always in the last place you look? --  
Because when  
you find it, you stop looking!

Q: A cowboy rode into town on Friday. He stayed in town for three days and rode  
out on

Friday. How was that possible? -- Friday was the name of his horse.

Q: Railroad crossing, watch out of cars. Can you spell that without any "r's"? -- T-  
H-A-T

Q: What has a face and two hands, but no arms or legs? -- A clock.

Q: What has to be broken before you can use it? -- An egg.

Q: It lives in winter, dies in summer, and grows with its roots upward. What is it? -  
- An icicle.

Q: It starts out tall, but the longer it stands, the shorter it grows. What is it? -- A  
candle.

Q: What belongs to you but is used more by others? -- Your name.

Q: What goes up and never comes down? -- Your age.

Q: How can a man go 8 days without sleep? -- He only sleeps at night.

Q: I'm full of keys but I can't open any door. What am I? -- A piano.

Q: What has a thumb and four fingers but is not alive? -- A glove.

Q: What do you call a fly without wings? -- A walk!

Q: How did Benjamin Franklin feel when he discovered electricity? Shocked!

-o-o-O-o-o-

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Present Century Philosopher Quotes (1)

☒ The only reason they say “Women and children first” is to test the strength of the lifeboats.

~ Jean Kerr

☒ When a man opens a car door for his wife, it;s either a new car or a new wife.

~ Prince Philip

☒ A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kickboxing.

~ Emo Philips

☒ Wood burns faster when you have to cut and chop it yourself.

~ Harrison Ford

☒ The best cure for sea sickness, is to sit under a tree.

~ Spike Milligan.

☒ Kill one man and you;re a murderer, kill a million and you;re a conqueror.

~ Jean Rostand

☒ Having more money doesnt make you happier. I have 50 million dollars, but im just as

happy as when I had 48 million.

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

☒ We are here on earth to do good unto others. What the others are here for, I have no idea.

~ W.H. Auden

☒ In hotel rooms, I worry. I can’t be the only guy who sits on the furniture naked.

~ Jonathan Katz

☒ If life were fair, Elvis would still be alive today and all the impersonators would be dead.

~ Johnny Carson

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Thought of the Day

You can always count on Americans to do the right thing - after theyve tried everything else.

-- Winston Churchill

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