

May 15, 2022

## DoD Budget 2022

### Update 06: Pentagon Budget Aims To Shrink the Military by Thousands

Most of the military services are hoping to get smaller, as the Army, Navy and Air Force seek to slash thousands from their rolls. The Defense Department budget request unveiled 4 APR asks for Congress to cut about 25,000 positions from the military services, which would bring authorized end strength much closer in line with current manning levels. The \$813 billion budget request is the largest in history, up more than \$17 billion from last year, but its goal “is not about making the force bigger,” comptroller Michael McCord told reporters 4 APR. “That is not what ... our review concluded we needed to do. We’re looking at making the force more capable.”

The Army and Navy would shrink by more than 5,000 currently serving troops if the proposal is enacted as is, losing about 3,000 and 2,000 service members, respectively. The Air Force wants to drop around 5,700 active duty airmen by the start of fiscal 2023. Overall, the military could draw down by more than 10,000 troops, though the Marine Corps and Space Force would see a small bump. The new authorized end strength could come in at 2,122,900, down from 2,147,540 in 2022.

The Army’s request to drop its active duty end strength marks a new direction for the service. In 2017, after planning to draw down, the Congress authorized the service to grow, from 460,000 to 476,000, with an eye toward 500,000 active duty soldiers by 2022. But that goal proved difficult to reach, as recruiting pushes fell short of goals. The Army topped out at 486,490 in 2021, before falling to 476,000 currently. “This is the same size Army that we had on 9/11, and when I take a look at what the requirements are, when I take a look at what historically we needed, and now that we’re in a time of great power competition, I’m very, very concerned about the size of the Army,” Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said in April 2021.

The decision to shrink the service came down to the recruiting market, McCord said. “The low unemployment rate right now, and the declining propensity to serve that I think several services are seeing — the Army felt it was not productive to try and chase that number,” he said. So, while the Army was authorized to go up to 485,000 active duty soldiers in 2022, a recent estimate put their manning at 476,000 troops. The 2023 budget request would bring them down to a cap of 473,000, a decrease in 12,000 billets — or 3,000 currently serving soldiers. Service officials said 4 APR they plan to regroup, eventually ramping up to 485,000 active duty

soldiers in the next five years. The Army Reserve and National Guard would stay flat at 189,500 and 336,000, respectively.

The Navy's end strength is falling again this year, cutting 1,520 jobs for a total force of 404,000. A recent estimate of force size put the Navy at more than 406,000 sailors, making it technically overmanned. The new request would put the service at 346,300 active duty sailors, down 1,184 and 57,700 in the Reserve, down 951. The Navy on 4 APR also announced its plans to decommission 24 ships, significantly reducing its manning requirements. McCord confirmed that the lower ship count factored into the decision to shrink the Navy's workforce.

The Marine Corps, meanwhile, was allowed to go up to over 214,000 troops in 2022, but came in closer to 209,000. Their budget request would even things out at 210,000: 177,000 active duty Marines, down 250 and 33,000 in the Reserve, up about 650. The Air Force Department is looking to cap its force at 510,400 troops, down from its 516,220-billet ceiling in 2022. The changes work out to:

- 323,400 active duty billets, down from the previous 329,220 cap
- 200 more Space Force Guardian billets, from 8,400 to 8,600;
- 100 more Air National Guard billets, up to 108,400
- 70,000 Reserve billets, a decrease of 300 individual mobilization augmentee jobs

A DoD end strength chart released 4 APR estimated the Air Force and Space Force will have about 510,300 uniformed personnel as of Sept. 30, 2022. Those people would occupy all but 100 jobs in the two services. The service reported having around 329,000 active duty airmen as of 4 APR, putting it just over its current 329,220-billet limit. About 2,000 active duty airmen are slated to return to the Defense Health Agency after temporarily belonging to the Air Force. The changes bring the entire military more in line with its current expectations for recruiting and retention. None of the services have announced any drastic force-shaping measures as a result, though the Air Force has offered early exits to its members in an attempt to correct its overmanning issues.

Otherwise, the services usually approach drawing down by decreasing recruiting efforts and pulling back reenlistment bonuses designed to keep troops who would otherwise finish their contracts in service. Elsewhere, fewer troops may be selected for promotions, eventually forcing them to involuntarily separate from service. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers| May 1, 2022 ++]

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## **Navy Fleet Size**

## Update 24: Too Small To Fight In Two Conflicts At Once

Should Russia and China launch competing world conflicts, the Navy is unprepared to fight two wars in separate regions without additional ships, the service's top officer told senators on 12 MAY. The current fleet of about 298 ships "is not sized to handle two simultaneous conflicts," Adm. Mike Gilday, the chief of naval operations, said during a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "It's sized to fight one and keep a second adversary in check, but in terms of two all-out conflicts, we are not sized for that."

Though Russia's war with Ukraine has garnered much attention in recent months, China is the top "pacing threat" for the U.S. military due to predatory practices in the South China Sea and simmering tensions over Taiwan, according to a document previewing the 2023 National Defense Strategy, which sets the Pentagon's priorities. With China's persistent threat in the western Pacific region and NATO focused on Russia, the Navy's ability to battle in simultaneous conflicts is of growing importance, said Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO).

"What would the impact be on the Navy's ability to meet its operational requirements in [Europe] if we had to withhold Navy forces from Europe in order to deter Chinese aggression in [the Pacific]?" Hawley said at the hearing. Gilday said the Navy would be "challenged" to meet both needs. "You'd have to take a look at how you squeeze the most out of the joint force that you have and use it the best possible way," he said.

In 2018, Congress passed a law requiring the Navy to reach a 355-ship fleet "as soon as practicable," but the number of ships has only dropped in that time due to budget requirements. For example, the proposed 2023 Navy budget calls for adding nine new ships — but cutting 24. By comparison, China already has 355 ships in its fleet and plans to add about 65 more within the next four years, according to the Pentagon's annual China military report published in November. By 2030, the Chinese fleet is expected to reach 460 ships.

The Navy last month released a 30-year shipbuilding plan that included three options for growing the U.S. fleet — only one of which would allow the Navy to reach the 355-ship goal. The problem, however, is the plan's financial requirements, Gilday said. "We would get there with [that option], but it would require real growth in the budget," the admiral said. Under that plan, the Navy would reach 300 manned ships by 2035 and grow to 367 by 2052. Reaching such a fleet would cost between \$25.3 billion and \$32.7 billion per year, according to a September 2021 report by the Congressional Budget Office.

Gilday said the plan would do "a much better job" of meeting the threat in the Pacific but cautioned it would require more of the shipbuilding industry, which doesn't always meet procurement deadlines. "The constraint still facing [that option] is the ability of the industrial base to ... actually produce those ships at pace to meet our requirements," he said. Hawley called it "disturbing" that only one plan comes close to meeting the operational requirements of the Navy to deal with keeping pace with China and urged fellow

senators to take seriously the need for additional ships. “If that’s not a wake-up call to the committee, I don’t know what it,” he said. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Caitlin Doornbos | May 12, 2022 ++]

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## **U.S. Nuclear Policy**

### **Update 01: U.S. Nuclear Commander Warns Of Russia/ China Deterrence**

The head of U.S. Strategic Command, which oversees the nuclear arsenal, warned Congress 4 MAY that Washington faces a heightened nuclear deterrence risk when it comes to Russia and China. “We are facing a crisis deterrence dynamic right now that we have only seen a few times in our nation’s history,” Adm. Charles Richard told the Senate’s strategic forces panel. “The war in Ukraine and China’s nuclear trajectory — their strategic breakout — demonstrates that we have a deterrence and assurance gap based on the threat of limited nuclear employment.”

Richard sits on the Nuclear Weapons Council, and his appearance came during the first hearing assembled by the Senate Armed Services strategic forces subcommittee. The panel was set to hear testimony from the interagency panel’s six voting members who are tasked with managing nuclear policy. “The nation and our allies have not faced a crisis like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in over 30 years,” said Richard. “President [Vladimir] Putin simultaneously invaded a sovereign nation while using thinly veiled nuclear threats to deter U.S. and NATO intervention.” He went on to note that China is “watching the war in Ukraine closely and will likely use nuclear coercion to their advantage in the future. Their intent is to achieve the military capability to reunify Taiwan by 2027 if not sooner.”

Richard said China has doubled its nuclear stockpile within two years, despite expectations it would take Beijing until the end of the decade to do so. “The biggest and most visible one is the expansion from zero to at least 360 solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile silos,” he said, noting China has also made significant advances in its air- and submarine-launched nuclear-capable missiles. Richard used the warning to reiterate his call for “a low-yield, non-ballistic capability that does not require visible generation.” He confirmed to Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) this was a reference to the sea-launched cruise missile nuclear development program, adding additional fodder to the congressional debate over whether to proceed with the Biden administration’s proposal to cancel the project.

Another voting Nuclear Weapons Council member, Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security Administrator Jill Hruby, said the Biden administration would not meet its statutory requirement to produce 80 plutonium pits per year by 2030. It’s unclear what impact this would have on U.S. nuclear modernization efforts as Hruby noted scientists at the National Nuclear Security Administration have yet to determine the effects of using old plutonium pits in new

weapons. “We’re making new pits because we’re concerned about pit aging,” said Hruby. “We don’t want to put old pits in new weapons if we think in 30 years those weapons will be in the stockpile, they may have aging problems, but we don’t know for sure.”

Still, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) criticized the plutonium pit production program for running behind and over budget, while Richard and Angus King (I-ME) who chairs the subcommittee, came to Hruby’s defense. “STRATCOM supports this or any other measure that [the National Nuclear Security Administration] can execute that minimizes the delay and ultimately reduces the operational risk that I’m going to have to carry because we can’t meet the requirement,” said Richard.

King acknowledged nuclear modernization efforts have meant a greater portion of the defense budget is going to maintain the nuclear triad — it now comprises 6.4% of the defense budget — but noted it’s still drastically lower than the 17% of the budget it encompassed in 1962. “That doesn’t mean it’s still not a lot of money,” said King. “I refer to it as the pig in the budget python. It’s a very large expenditure that we’re going to have to cover over a few years.”  
[Source: DefenseNews | Bryant Harris | May 4, 2022 ++]

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## **Navy Submarine Program**

### **Update 05: Sub Builder’s Over Cost, Under Performing, & Over Schedule**

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday had blunt words 12 MAY for two powerhouse companies that build submarines for the Navy: We need your shipyards, but not the problems that come with them. “We know that we don’t have the capacity in our public shipyards to handle all of that [submarine] maintenance. We need Electric Boat and we need Huntington Ingalls to be able to do that work,” said Gilday. “They are under performing. They are over cost and way over schedule.”

Gilday was testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee about the Navy’s fiscal 2023 budget request alongside Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro and Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger. His comments were in response to a question from Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD) who sought the admiral’s opinions on how the Navy weighs the choice of scrapping a submarine against bringing it into maintenance on a very delayed schedule. Todd Corillo, a Newport News Shipbuilding spokesman, in a statement to Breaking Defense, acknowledged the shipbuilder has “experienced challenges” since reconstituting its submarine repair business “following a 10-year hiatus.”

“In this time, we have built a proficient workforce, matured the supply chain, developed process improvements and made smart investments in required facilities,” he said. “Although we experienced challenges with our transition back into this complex business, we are now keeping pace with current submarine repair needs and also forecasting future workflow to drive predictable capacity and performance.” Rounds, who has pressed Navy brass on submarine maintenance frequently in previous hearings, brought up the Boise (SSN-764), a Los Angeles-class attack submarine that was scheduled for a maintenance overhaul in 2015 or 2016. The boat sat in port for several years waiting for space to become available at a public shipyard before the Navy finally reached a deal with HII to do the work.

Gilday told Rounds that the capabilities submarines bring are so critical to deterring and fighting a future conflict that scrapping one should only be a last resort. In the case of the Los Angeles fleet, Gilday noted, the service is planning engineering overhauls for seven boats that could result in them seeing four or five additional deployments before decommissioning. Following those comments, Gilday laid into the shipbuilding giants. “The challenge with Boise really rests inside the private shipyard that is doing that work. We have two private yards that do that work and we need their capacity,” Gilday said. “Because we need them, we need to hold their feet to the fire to those contracts. They need to pay penalties when they don’t meet their requirements.”

Publicly, the relationships between top Pentagon brass, such as Gilday, and the country’s biggest defense firms, like HII (Huntington Ingalls Industries) or GDEB (General Dynamics Electric Boat), is relatively cordial. But, Gilday has previously shown he’s willing to put industry on the spot, as he did last year at a major Navy trade show, admonishing lobbyists who urge Congress to buy planes “we [Navy] don’t need.” Coincidentally, in the same breath, he told that audience to spend more time worrying about completing Navy ship maintenance work on time.

Former Navy Secretary Richard Spencer publicly blasted HII in 2019 at a time when Capitol Hill was becoming increasingly irritated with the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford’s (CVN-78) delays and the Navy’s seemingly incessant stream of bad news about the ship’s status. [Source: Breaking Defense | Justin Katz | May 12, 2022 ++]

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## **DoD 3M Earplug Lawsuit**

**Update 01: 20,000+ Vets Removed From Lawsuit over Missing Documents**



The lawsuits of more than 20,000 veterans who claim earplugs used during their military service caused them hearing damage were dismissed by a federal judge after the veterans failed to provide documents needed to continue their cases, according to court records. District Judge M. Casey Rodgers of the Northern District of Florida, Pensacola Division, ordered the dismissals 6 MAY as roughly 270,000 similar cases are still pending. The group of lawsuits against earplug manufacturer 3M has become the largest multidistrict litigation in U.S. history, according to court records.

The veterans are suing the Minnesota-based company over earplugs that it sold to the military and were used by troops deployed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan until about 2015. The lawsuits claim 3M's combat arms earplug version 2, which was dual-sided, could imperceptibly slip in the ear canal and exposed the wearer to damage, including hearing loss or tinnitus. The company never issued a recall on the product, according to 3M. The judge's orders issued Friday removed cases primarily because the veterans failed to provide to the court their official service record, known as a DD214. If they can produce the document by a specific time, veterans can get their case reinstated, according to the court documents.

When the multidistrict litigation was organized, the court created what it has called an administrative docket, which does not require the standard vetting procedures that come with filing a lawsuit, including filing fees that are in part meant to weed out frivolous cases. As the judge moves cases from the administrative docket onto the court's standard docket to proceed forward, the veterans' cases must begin meeting certain criteria.

"The court has started a process to dismantle the administrative docket, which we strongly support. These orders are an important step in the right direction. Requiring expedient vetting could help provide greater certainty into the actual number of cases in the [multidistrict litigation]," 3M said in a statement. "There is currently no way to know how many of these claims will actually complete the necessary steps to file a lawsuit whatsoever, much less reach trial."

News of the dismissals come as a 16th trial began 9 MAY, the last in a series of bellwether cases, which are meant to present a representative of cases before a jury to gain useful information for potentially reaching a settlement for all cases. The results of the previous cases have varied, with juries siding with veterans — either completely or in part — nine times. Damages paid to veterans have ranged from about \$800,000 to \$55 million.

“3M cannot escape the fact that they are facing more than 200,000 claims from U.S. service members after supplying them a defective earplug that caused irreversible hearing damage,” according to a statement from the veterans’ lead attorneys Bryan Aylstock of Aylstock Witkin Kreis & Overholtz, PLLC, Shelley Hutson of Clark, Love & Hutson GP, and Christopher Seeger of Seeger Weiss LLP. “With more than 85% of plaintiffs transitioning their cases to the active docket, and juries entering verdicts in favor of two-thirds of service members to go to trial to date, we are very much looking forward to the hundreds of cases the court is preparing the parties to try this year.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Rose Thayer | May 9, 2022 ++]

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## **PFAS Toxic Exposure**

### **Update 21: DoD to Temporarily Stop Burning Forever Chemicals**

The Defense Department will temporarily stop burning toxic “forever chemicals” until it formally issues a guidance for how to dispose of the substances, according to a new memo. In

the memo, dated last week, acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and Environment Paul Cramer said the military would issue a “temporary prohibition” on incineration of a class of chemicals known as PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. “Because DoD has not yet finalized the guidance required ... DoD must immediately discontinue contracting activities for the incineration of any PFAS material,” including firefighting foam, he wrote.

PFAS refers to a class of chemicals, some of which have been linked to cancers and other illnesses. They have been used in a variety of household products such as waterproof apparel and nonstick pans and have also been used in military firefighting foam. The Air Force said in 2017 that burning these chemicals as a means for disposing of them could produce “environmentally unsatisfactory” byproducts, including those that may be toxic or contribute to climate change.

PFAS are sometimes referred to as “forever chemicals” because they tend to linger both in the human body and the environment.

The new pause comes after the National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 required the department to halt the incineration of PFAS chemicals until it implements guidance on destruction and disposal of the chemicals. The military has historically used PFAS in its firefighting foam, which has later leached into waterways and harmed some nearby communities. [Source: The Hill | Rachel Frazin | May 4, 2022 ++]

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## **Afghan Terrorist Threat**

### **Intel Leaders Say Ability to Strike Western Targets Still a Year Away**

Terrorist groups within Afghanistan are still about a year away from being able to attack targets in western countries, but remain a significant concern for U.S. military planners, intelligence officials told lawmakers on 10 MAY. Last fall, Defense Department officials said that groups like al-Qaida and Islamic State Khorasan Province (known as ISIS-K) could strike at the United States within six months if left unchecked by military forces, a timeline that alarmed numerous lawmakers.

But this week, Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that his agency believes both groups are still a year away from that kind of disruptive capability. “I’m more concerned about ISIS-K in Afghanistan, and the fact that they have had some successful and catastrophic attacks within Afghanistan,” Berrier said. “That does not portend well for the future. “Al Qaida has had some problems with reconstituting leadership, and to a degree the Taliban have held to their word

about not allowing al Qaida [to] rejuvenate,” he added. “But it’s something that we’re watching very, very carefully.”

Concerns about the terrorist groups gaining strength became a focus last fall after all U.S. military forces withdrew from Afghanistan at the end of August, ending the nearly 20-year American-led war there. The move ceded control of the country to the Taliban. In his written statement to the committee, Berrier said ISIS-K in particular has “gained considerable personnel and resources since the Taliban takeover, and been emboldened since its Aug. 26 attack on Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul,” which killed 13 U.S. servicemembers. He also warned that “the group’s continued growth in Africa will spread instability and increase the threat to U.S. interests on the continent.”

On the other hand, he said al-Qaida has not thrived under Taliban rule as some intelligence experts had feared. “The group probably is on a declining global trajectory after years of organizational resilience and lacks leaders who have global jihadist appeal,” Berrier said. “The deaths of senior leaders, unfavorable operating environments, and sustained counterterrorism pressure have hurt the group during the past two years.” Still, both groups remain a concern. Berrier said intelligence operations in Afghanistan and the Middle East remain challenging without U.S. forces on the ground there, but officials are tracking the persistent threats there.

“Lone-actor attacks by Salafi jihadists, with little or no warning, are more likely to occur than directed attacks,” he said. Berrier also warned that since the departure of American forces from Afghanistan, “countries like China, Russia, and Iran are working to damage U.S. credibility internationally and engage with the Taliban to pursue or develop outcomes favorable to their interests and ambitions.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 10, 2022 ++]

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## **Ukraine**

### **Update 09: Russia Blamed for Viasat Hack Ahead of Invasion**

The U.S., Canada and European powers this week blamed Russia for a February cyberattack that disrupted internet service for tens of thousands of people in the critical moments that preceded the latest invasion of Ukraine. The 24 FEB attack on Viasat Inc., a California-based provider of high-speed satellite broadband services and secure networking systems covering military and commercial markets worldwide, was meant to cripple Ukrainian command and control as Russian forces advanced, U.S. and U.K. officials said 10 MAY. The attack spilled over, impacting wind farms and internet users in central Europe as well.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 10 MAY condemned the hack, describing Russia's alleged belligerence in cyberspace as "irresponsible" and "destructive." A statement from the European Union similarly described the attack as "unacceptable" and "indiscriminate." The bloc said it would consider additional steps to "prevent, discourage, deter and respond to such malicious behavior in cyberspace." While the U.S. and others did not tie the digital assault to any one specific element of the Russian government, Estonia pinned the blame on Russia's infamous intelligence directorate, known as GRU.

"These cyberattacks run counter to international law and, therefore, we are unequivocally condemning them," Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets said in a statement. "The timing of this attack on 24 FEB, when a wide-scale military attack against Ukraine began, is significant and shows once again that cyberattacks are an integral part of how Russia wages war." Moscow has historically denied such operations.

The explicit attribution is the result of new intelligence, according to the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and comes as allied cyber leaders meet in Newport, South Wales, for a conference on shared threats. "This is clear and shocking evidence of a deliberate and malicious attack by Russia against Ukraine, which had significant consequences on ordinary people and businesses in Ukraine and across Europe," U.K. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said in a statement.

Viasat on 10 MAY said it recognized "international governments have identified who they believe to be responsible for the cyberattack on the KA-SAT network" and pledged to continue working closely with relevant law enforcement and governmental authorities as part of the investigation. The company in March told C4ISRNET the attack did not affect U.S. government customers and did not jeopardize customer data. Its core network infrastructure and gateways were also not compromised.

Viasat furnishes satellite and networking capabilities, among other services, to the U.S. military. In January 2020, the company announced it had won a \$90 million Air Force contract to provide specialized Link 16 radios. The National Security Agency in 2018 authorized Viasat to open the use of its radios to members of Five Eyes, an intelligence cooperative comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S., C4ISRNET previously reported. [Source: DefenseNews | Colin Demarest | May 11, 2022 ++]

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**Drone Defense**

## Update 07: Pentagon Tests High-Power Microwave Systems

The Pentagon's Joint Counter-Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems Office has wrapped up a demonstration of high-power microwave technology capable of taking out multiple drone threats at once. Army officials running the effort said the vendors that came with high-power microwave capabilities were successful in defeating incoming drone threats, including two at a time. The threat of drone swarms is increasing, and the Pentagon is racing to ensure it can to defeat them.

The Army is the service tasked to lead the JCO, which was established in late 2019. The office has now conducted three demonstrations — two last year in the spring and fall, and one this spring. The plan is to continue demonstrations twice a year to fix capability gaps identified by the armed services in countering small UAVs. The most recent demonstration took place April 4-22 at Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona. Three industry teams — Epirus, Raytheon Technologies and Leonardo DRS — brought ground-based, aerial-denial systems with high-power microwave capabilities. Such systems are “defined as a solution utilizing focused Electromagnetic Pulses from a fixed ground location at range with energy sufficient to destroy or defeat sUAS over the air,” the JCO said in a statement.

“What we primarily focused on in that first week for high-power microwave was how well the effector emitted,” Michael DiGennaro, the test team lead for JCO's acquisition and resourcing division, said during a 11 MAY media roundtable. “We were looking at range to engage the targets that were inbound and the amount of time it took to either deter or defeat the target,” he added. The targets ranged among UAS groups 1, 2 and 3 and were used either one at a time or two simultaneously. (Group 1 drones weigh up to 20 pounds; Group 2 from 21 to 55 pounds; and Group 3 more than 55 pounds but less than 1,320 pounds.) Counter-drone systems performance was:

- The **Leonardo DRS system** — called a “vector inversion generator” — “was hindered in that it did not have an antenna to radiate,” DiGennaro said. But the JCO was able to assess the technology through its ability to hand off a detected threat from the government-owned command-and-control system, and then generate the power necessary to defeat the threat. “With that, we were able to capture power output and the amount of time that the electromagnetic pulse was on the target just with instrumentation,” DiGennaro explained.
- The **Epirus system** “was able to defeat targets in the range that is normally associated with what is currently in the field,” DiGennaro said, “and has the promise to be a little bit more effective in the future.”

- **Raytheon**'s capability "was very much in development, shows some promise for future development," he said, but "the ranges were somewhat shorter in their ability to defeat the incoming targets."

The office also assessed countering small UAS as a service, or CaaS, through contractor-owned, government-operated capability at fixed locations. The office received a total of 25 whitepapers for CaaS and selected five to demonstrate their capabilities because they met specific requirements. Those five were Anduril Industries, Black Sage, CACI, Rafael Systems Global Sustainment and SAIC. "We had five very complex architectures out there," DiGennaro said. "Each of them brought a host of different components for detection, identification, tracking and defeat, and we tested against each of those components both individually and then as a system, culminating in a 'defend the forward-operating base' scenario."

The data collected is still being analyzed, he added, and a report will be published for limited distribution within the Defense Department next week. "This was as much a learning exercise for us as it was for the companies," DiGennaro said of CaaS. "We had architectures out there that had not previously been working together, components in particular, architectures that were coming out there for the first time." The JCO was able to form new industry partnerships as well as get companies with different elements of the engagement chain together that had not worked together before, he said. "They're trying new combinations. They're developing things as we go."

Last year, in the first demonstration, the office looked at low-collateral interceptors for C-sUAS; in the second demonstration, it examined cheap, ground-launched and hand-held capabilities. The office and some services are in the process of finalizing contracts with vendors that demonstrated technology last year to incorporate into an enduring architecture, but the JCO said it could not get into specifics until those contracts are finalized. The JCO is in the final stages of developing what concepts and capabilities it wants to demonstrate in its next round of experimentation in the fall. The capability gaps the office wants to address will be finalized within a month, the office indicated. [Source: Defense News | Jen Judson | May 11, 2022 ++]

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## **VA Caregiver Stipend**

### **Update 01: Review Nearly Finished But No Word on Payments Yet**

Veterans Affairs officials said they are nearly finished with their review of families receiving caregiver stipends, but still do not have any timeline for when new eligibility criteria for the program will be unveiled. That means for now, the department still has no plans to change any payouts for existing program participants, even as a significant expansion of the program looms

this fall. Department leaders held a meeting on 28 AUG regarding the current status of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Officials said the forum included “veterans services organizations, those who serve caregivers, VA staff, congressional partners and actual caregivers who are participants.”

VA Secretary Denis McDonough referenced the meeting during testimony before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee the same day. “We’re in constant communication with this committee staff and with your individual office staff about these issues,” he said. “And we’ll make a determination as to whether we need to issue new regulations or take some other step for continuation of the program.” In late March, McDonough announced a halt on all expulsions from the program of “legacy caregivers” — post-9/11 veterans who were admitted to the program before October 2020 — in a dramatic reversal of department plans. Since last fall, officials have been reviewing those approximately 20,000 families to see if they still qualify for the program (and its monthly stipend) under eligibility rules updated two years ago.

VA officials said their initial work found that nearly 90 percent of families would have been pushed out of the program under that review, a figure that McDonough called “too high.” Officials have completed about 88 percent of the reassessments now, and expect to finish the rest in coming weeks. However, that information is being gathered to help shape future changes to the program, and will not be used to exclude individuals from the benefit. About 33,000 veterans are currently enrolled in the program, designed to support and compensate full-time caregivers providing at-home assistance to severely wounded veterans. The stipends vary based on where veterans live, but generally hover around \$3,000 a month for the most severely wounded individuals and \$1,800 for others in need of around-the-clock care.

VA officials declined to release specifics of potential changes discussed at the meeting last week, calling it one of a series of planning events designed to improve the program. “We do not want to rush this process,” officials said in a statement. “Once we feel we have gathered enough information, we will be in a better position to provide more detailed updates.” Leadership from the Elizabeth Dole Foundation — one of the outside groups involved — wrote on social media that the meeting was positive and productive, but said no timeline was given for when new requirements or additional reviews may be announced.

At least one major change is already in the works. Currently only veterans who served before 1976 or after 2001 are eligible for the benefit, but the program is scheduled to be open to all veterans starting this October, per orders from Congress. In his testimony to lawmakers, McDonough acknowledged the stress the recent review placed on veterans’ families and promised that future changes would not come as a “surprise” to caregivers or Congress. Lawmakers vowed they will be monitoring the issue in months to come. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 4, 2022 ++]



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## VA Border Role

### VA Downplays It amid Backlash but Defends Potential Deployments



The Veterans Affairs Department has no immediate plans to send personnel to the U.S.-Mexico border in anticipation of an uptick of migrants arriving there, though it is defending its potential role amid backlash from Republican lawmakers.

While Homeland Security Department Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told Congress last week his staff was in talks with VA about deploying health care workers to the border ahead of the potential end to a pandemic policy that immediately rejected and turned away most undocumented immigrants, VA Secretary Denis McDonough clarified that his agency is not in discussions with DHS. McDonough was asked about the potential deployments at a budget hearing as Republicans in Congress criticized the Biden administration for potentially pursuing the strategy, saying it would unfairly rob veterans of needed resources. While pushing back on there being any discussion to date on such assignments, McDonough stressed that any “fourth mission” deployments—how VA labels providing care to the public—would not require any sacrifices from veterans.

“In no case does the 4th mission come at the expense of veteran access to care,” the secretary said, adding that he would consult with Congress on any potential new assignments in that category. VA has throughout the COVID-19 pandemic sent staff and resources to communities that were overwhelmed and had limited access to hospital beds. McDonough noted VA has deployed staff to the border on six occasions to help vaccinate Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel and on two occasions to set up clinics for veterans in Mexico. “I think that is an admirable thing to do squarely in the national interest,” McDonough said.

Republicans in both the House and Senate have in recent days introduced legislation that would **prohibit** VA from spending any money to assist in upcoming emergencies at the border. DHS has projected a significant increase in immigrants arriving at the southern border when Title 42 expires, which is set to occur on 23 MAY. Encounters at the border have remained high despite Title 42 allowing the government to reject and turn away migrants seeking asylum, but the administration is expecting the news of the end of the policy will lead to a renewed interest in individuals fleeing violence, unrest and poverty seeking to enter the United States.

Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR), who introduced the 2022 Veterans First Act with 30 colleagues last week, said VA deployments would be “insanity.” “Our heroes shouldn’t carry the burden of President Biden’s failings,” Womack said. “We won’t stand for having the care of those who have proudly worn America’s uniform redirected to deal with the consequences of the White House’s disastrous immigration policies.” Republicans and a handful of Democrats have called on Biden to delay the rollback of Title 42 authority, which is issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Moving resources away from serving the needs of our veterans to supporting a foreseeable and avoidable crisis at our southern border is unacceptable,” said Sen. John Boozman (R-AK) who introduced similar legislation in the Senate. CBP has already moved 600 personnel to the southwest border ahead of Title 42’s expiration, DHS unveiled last week as part of its six-pillar plan to tackle the anticipated uptick in immigration. DHS has also brought on hundreds of new contractors to engage in processing work and allow an additional 500 agents to return to the field. The department previously said it would ask for personnel assistance from other federal agencies across government.

The exact timing of the policy’s termination could still be in flux, as a federal judge last week signaled he would soon issue an order preventing the Biden administration from taking steps to wind it down. Several states had sued seeking to keep the policy in place, saying its expiration would create chaos at the border. [Source: Government Executive | Eric Katz | May 2, 2022 ++]

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## **VA Homeless Vet Smartphones**

### **Thousands Purchased By VA Went Unused**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs wasted nearly \$2 million dollars when most of the smartphones bought during the pandemic for homeless veterans went unused, according to an inspector general’s report. The report, released 4 MAY, found that the Veterans Health

Administration spent nearly \$7 million to purchase 10,000 phones with unlimited prepaid calling plans but that 85% of the phones gathered dust. As a result, it lost \$1.8 million in wasted data plan costs. The inspector general also found that \$571,000 was wasted on data plans due to poor oversight of its purchase of nearly 81,000 iPads.

The smartphones and iPads were purchased as part of the efforts to increase homeless veterans' access to telehealth, a program that saw video visits increase from about 2,500 in February 2020 to 38,000 in September 2020. The veterans were enrolled in a Department of Housing and Urban Development VA Supportive housing program. The inspector general concluded that Veterans Health Administration officials, who were part of the Connected Care program, made a good faith effort to help veterans get smartphones. But they found there was a "lack of information for officials to be able to determine the quantity needed for the targeted veteran population."

The inspector general recommended improvements in the storage of smartphones and tablets. It called for the VA to "establish a realistic goal for days in storage along with a process for closely monitoring days in storage for each data plan provider and taking corrective actions when the goal is not being met." It also called for a cost-benefit analysis, in coordination with contractors, to create a process that starts the data plan charges only after the device has been issued to a veteran. In the case of the iPads, Connected Care officials purchased 80,930 with prepaid data plans for around \$63 million. But these iPads remained in storage on average for 17 days, the inspector general found, which ended up costing the VA more than \$571,000 in wasted data plans.

"Officials could reduce wasted data plan costs by establishing a realistic goal for days in storage, closely monitoring days in storage for devices with each type of data plan, and then taking corrective actions when necessary," the report said. The VA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But in the report, the VA's undersecretary for health concurred with the recommendations.

The agency said it plans to work with its Denver Logistics Center to analyze inventory, tablet use and shipments over the past year. It then will propose guidelines for how long a device should be in storage, a system to monitor that and corrective actions when storage goals are not met. It also plans to consider a new process that either will launch data plans when devices are issued or consider other ways that data plan costs can be reduced. The VA said the Connected Care program was also transferring excess loaner iPhones to the Veterans Health Administration Homeless Program Office, so that coordinators could provide an iPhone to any veteran lacking stable housing and needing a device. [Source: The Associated Press | Michael Casey | May 5, 2022 ++]

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## VA EHR

### **Update 35: New System Launched at VA Central Ohio Healthcare System**

The Department of Veterans Affairs launched its new electronic health record April 30 at the VA Central Ohio Healthcare System in Columbus, Ohio, marking the third rollout in VA's modernization effort to replace the more than 30-year-old software that tracks and stores patient information. The launch at the VA Central Ohio Healthcare System includes its VA clinics in Grove City, Marion, Newark and Zanesville, Ohio. The next two EHR system deployments are scheduled for June 11 at the Roseburg VA Health Care System in Roseburg, Oregon, and VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics in White City, Oregon.

The latest EHR implementation follows earlier deployments at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Washington, and its community-based outpatient clinics, as well as the West Consolidated Patient Account Center in Las Vegas, in October 2020, and at Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VAMC and its affiliated clinics in the Walla Walla, Washington, area on March 26, 2022.

“This electronic health record rollout is an important step in our progress toward a single instance of a medical record connecting VA, the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Coast Guard that will provide all our patients with seamless care from active duty to Veteran status,” said program Executive Director of VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization Integration Office Terry Adirim, M.D. “With each VA site that adopts this system, we gain momentum. The lessons we carry forward from site to site are refining our rollouts and improving end-user experiences.”

VA has made great strides with its new EHR program since the first system launch in the Pacific Northwest. In response to feedback and lessons learned, the department made several improvements, including adding more computer-based instruction to provide users with more flexibility and autonomy to meet their training needs. Additionally, “super-users,” facility staff with advanced understanding of the system to support their peers, were identified and added to activities, such as system demonstrations, workshops and testing. Increased over-the-shoulder support is also now provided during “go-live,” the period when the medical facility transitions from VA's legacy EHR system to the new one.

During a visit to Washington state last week, VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy heard firsthand accounts of how the new EHR has enhanced the efforts of VHA employees. Remy spoke to a laboratory manager at Mann-Grandstaff, who told him the new system has improved efficiency and streamlined procedures. They are processing more lab samples than with the

legacy system resulting in increased reliable outcomes. These improvements were made to address some of the challenges with the program and VA remains steadfast to getting this right for Veterans and serving as a model for transformative health care innovation. Visit VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization program for information. [Source: VA News Release | May 2, 2022 ++]

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## VA EHR

### **Update 36: New System Has Gone Down 50+ Times since 2020 Launching**

An electronic health record system being piloted at Spokane's VA hospital and other sites in the Inland Northwest has been partly or completely unusable at least 50 times since its launch in 2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs confirmed. The computer system, which health care workers rely on to track patient information and coordinate care, saw a total of 42 "unplanned degradations" and eight "unplanned outages" between its launch in 2020 and April 20, 2022, VA spokesman Randal Noller said in an emailed response to questions from The Spokesman-Review. Two more outages occurred April 25 and 26, VA officials told a congressional panel at the time, for a total of 52 incidents.

The system, which launched at Spokane's Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in October 2020, is being developed under a \$10 billion contract awarded to Cerner Corporation in 2018, without the competitive bidding process that applies to most federal contracts of that size. The VA Office of Inspector General has estimated the planned 10-year effort, which is behind schedule, will cost as much as \$21 billion and another \$2 billion for each additional year it takes to finish.

In the email, Noller emphasized that most of the incidents were not "large-scale outages," such as one in early April that affected VA as well as the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard, which also use the Cerner system. Many of the "degradations of service," he said, affected only some of the users at Mann-Grandstaff and its affiliated clinics in Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Sandpoint, Wenatchee and Libby, Montana. After multiple delays prompted by problems in the Inland Northwest that threatened patient safety and left health care workers exhausted and demoralized, VA launched the Cerner system at facilities in Walla Walla on March 26 and in Columbus, Ohio, on April 30.

The rest of the nation's more than 1,200 VA facilities continue to use an older system, known as VistA, which remains popular among health care providers. "No matter the type or size of

incident, VA and Cerner employ an extensive incident management protocol to ensure users can continue to provide quick, safe and effective care," Noller said in the email. When the system goes down, the affected VA employees are forced to use "downtime procedures," which involve recording all information with pen and paper and entering it into the system once it is restored.

The department had acknowledged several outages in recent months after they were reported by The Spokesman-Review and other news outlets, but had not previously revealed the total number of times the system has gone down. VA did not answer a question about the total amount of downtime that has occurred and did not immediately respond to follow-up questions. In an exchange with Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) in a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing 4 MAY, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said he was frustrated by the six outages that had occurred since 3 MAR. But when Murray asked the VA chief to commit that the system would not be brought to any other sites in Washington until the problems are fixed, he committed only to "make every decision based on the experience of the learning to date."

In a House VA Committee hearing 28 APR, McDonough told Rep. Matt Rosendale (R-MT) he would not allow VA to continue rolling out the Cerner system "if I ever have any reason to think that this is creating risk for our patients." In the same exchange with Rosendale, McDonough said he had closely read an 24 APR Spokesman-Review story about a veteran who was hospitalized with heart failure for five days in March after the Cerner system played a role in a vital medication being mistakenly stopped. A Spokesman-Review investigation in December found Mann-Grandstaff employees fear the system represents a danger to veterans.

In a 26 APR hearing, Rep. Frank Mrvan of Indiana, the Democratic chair of the House subcommittee charged with oversight of the Cerner rollout, said the system should not be deployed at larger, more complex facilities like the VA medical centers in Seattle or Portland until problems are resolved. In the same hearing, Don Pirraglia — who until recently served as the top Veterans Health Administration official working on the Cerner rollout — said he had made that same recommendation, but McDonough has not announced any change to the deployment schedule.

The Cerner system is next set to launch in Roseburg and White City, Oregon, on June 11; Boise on June 25; Anchorage, Alaska, on July 16; Seattle and other Puget Sound facilities on Aug. 27; three sites in Michigan on Oct. 8; and Portland on Nov. 5. [

Source: Spokesman-Review | Orion Donovan-Smith | May 9, 2022 ++]

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## **College Grad Salaries**

**Survey Finds Grads Vastly Overestimate Their Starting Salaries**

Think back to your first job. Were you happy with your paycheck — or just grateful to be getting a paycheck at all? Well, times have changed. Wages have risen in recent years, but so have prices — and so have the expectations of soon-to-be college grads. A recent survey by Clever's Real Estate Witch finds that students overestimate their starting salary by anywhere from about \$20,000 to more than \$60,000, depending on the field. Here's a rundown of how Generation Z's expectations compare with the cold, hard reality of the real world.

### **Computer Science**

Expected starting salary: \$95,690

Median starting salary: \$75,100

Students targeting jobs in this competitive, well-paying field are the most realistic about their beginning salaries — though they still overestimate what they'll be making just a year after graduation by a substantial \$20,590.

### **Nursing**

Expected starting salary: \$104,270

Median starting salary: \$65,000

Nurses are always in demand, and that might be clouding the vision of nursing students. They expect to make \$39,270 more than what's typical in a starter nursing job.

### **Business**

Expected starting salary: \$101,120

Median starting salary: \$50,200

Business students would do well to spend a little more time on sites like Glassdoor or Salary.com. They expect to earn \$50,920 more than what they're likely to get when just starting out.

### **Political Science / Economics**

Expected starting salary: \$108,160

Median starting salary: \$57,100

Political science and economics students are certainly bullish on their job prospects, saying they expect to make \$51,103 more than they're actually likely to see in their first positions.

## **Accounting**

Expected starting salary: \$111,240

Median starting salary: \$59,200

You might lose a little faith in the future number-crunchers of the world when you hear this: Accounting students are confident they'll be earning \$52,040 more than the median starting salary in their industry.

## **Physical or Life Sciences**

Expected starting salary: \$110,360

Median starting salary: \$53,100

Alas, it appears that student scientists are also overestimating their future earning power. They expect to be earning \$57,260 more than the median starting salary.

## **Humanities / Liberal Arts**

Expected starting salary: \$105,790

Median starting salary: \$46,500

It's a classic question: What are you going to do with that liberal arts degree? Whatever the answer, liberal arts students say they expect to be paid handsomely, to the tune of \$59,290 more than the median starting salary in their field.

## **Psychology**

Expected starting salary: \$104,120

Median starting salary: \$44,700

Psychologists can certainly do well, but the field's starting salaries are fairly low. Psychology students haven't gotten the memo, though, and overestimate their earning potential in a starter job by \$59,420

## **Education**

Expected starting salary: \$99,090

Median starting salary: \$44,100

Teaching, on the other hand, isn't typically known as a lucrative field, but education students seem to think they'll be the exception to the rule. They expect to start out making \$54,990 more than the median starting salary in education.



## **Communications / Journalism**

Expected starting salary: \$107,040

Median starting salary: \$44,800

Ouch. They may prefer to spin it as "optimistic," but students aiming for communications or journalism careers have the biggest delusions of salary grandeur. They expect to make \$62,240 more than their field's median starting salary — that's a difference of 139%.

[Source: Cheapism | Sandra Latham | April 29, 2022 ++]

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## ***Torres v. Texas* Lawsuit**

### **Returning Vet Denied Reemployment as State Trooper**

Does Congress have the power to grant suits against nonconsenting states under its constitutional war powers? This case asks the Supreme Court to consider whether an act of Congress which allows veterans to sue states in their state court violates Article I of the Constitution. Leroy Torres, a veteran who served in Iraq, filed an employment discrimination case in Texas state court against his former state employer after it failed to provide relief for military injuries. The Texas courts found that Torres could not draw the state into a lawsuit using Texas courts. Torres argues that the text, history, and precedent of the Constitution's war powers require Texas to participate in the suit. The state employer counters that if a private party were to subject Texas to its own judicial system, it would violate principles of sovereign immunity.

This case has important implications for injured veterans' ability to obtain relief from unlawful discrimination and can potentially radically reshape the balance of power between federal and state courts in deciding war powers questions. Leroy Torres joined the United States Army Reserve ("Reserve") in 1989. In 1998, the Texas Department of Public Safety ("DPS") hired him as a state trooper. In 2007, the Reserve deployed Torres to Iraq, where he suffered lung damage after being exposed to fumes from "burn pits" used to dispose of waste on military installations. In 2008, after receiving an honorable discharge from the Reserve, Torres asked DPS to re-employ him. Torres requested that DPS assign him to a new post to accommodate his lung injury. DPS offered to rehire Torres but did not grant his request for a different assignment. Instead of accepting DPS's offer to resume work as a state trooper, Torres resigned.

In 2017, Torres sued DPS in Texas state court under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (“USERRA”), a federal statute that prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of a person’s military service. USERRA authorizes actions in state courts against the states in their capacity as employers. Torres alleged that DPS violated USERRA by declining to grant his request for a new assignment.. Torres sought damages for lost wages and benefits. DPS objected to jurisdiction by pleading sovereign immunity. After the trial court rejected DPS’s objection to jurisdiction, the Department appealed to the Texas Court of Appeals. The Court of Appeals found in favor of DPS, , concluding that, under the Supreme Court’s decisions in *Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Florida* and *Alden v. Maine*, USERRA’s purported abrogation of state sovereign immunity was invalid, The Supreme Court of Texas declined review on June 5, 2020,

Torres appealed the Texas Supreme Court decision, and on December 15, 2021, the United States Supreme Court granted Torres’ petition for certiorari. The Reserve Organization of America (“ROA”), in support of Torres, argues that by protecting states from liability from employment discrimination suits brought by service members, the Court thereby impairs the military’s ability to recruit and retain essential military personnel. The ROA observes that about one half of all members of the United States Armed Services are reservists, and that nearly one million reservists have actively served since September 11, 2001. The ROA argues that the country’s combat readiness will suffer as the result of fewer people then choosing to join or remain in the military’s reserve forces should states remain immune from suits by reservists in state courts.

The Separation of Powers Clinic at Antonin Scalia Law School (“Scalia Clinic”), in support of DPS, counters that, because the United States has ample alternative means of ensuring obedience to USERRA, recognizing state immunity will not deprive service members of legal protection, and by implication, will not affect readiness. The Scalia Clinic notes that suits by the federal government, rather than by service members themselves, are more likely to deter states from employment discrimination. In addition, the Scalia Clinic contends that even if courts barred suits against the states under USERRA-based sovereign immunity claims, service members would still remain able to bring actions under *Ex parte Young*.

The Scalia Clinic adds that *Young* allows litigants to enjoin a state officer from unlawful conduct, to recover damages for past unlawful action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, and to seek other remedies available under state law. The Scalia Clinic concludes that the adverse effects of recognizing state sovereign immunity would not be severe since state sovereign immunity does not extend to municipalities and cities.

The National Veterans Legal Services Program (“NVLSPP”), in support of Torres, argues that striking down USERRA’s provision for private actions against the states frustrates Congress’s

attempt to satisfy the country's moral debt to discriminated-against veterans. NVLSP argues that aggrieved service members so seldomly invoke USERRA's provision that it is functionally "useless." Accordingly, NVLSP argues that the private right of action made available under USERRA is essential to enforce the law's anti-discrimination provisions. NVLSP therefore insists that to hold the states immune to suits by service members under USERRA would produce "an unconscionable result" by depriving veterans of a remedy for discrimination.

The Scalia Clinic, in support of DPS, argues that USERRA's anti-discrimination provisions remain effective even without a formal private right of action. The Scalia clinic again contends lawsuits brought by the United States on behalf of discriminated-against service members can be a more effective USERRA-enforcement vehicle than suits brought by individual service members and underscores that service members can find adequate relief through private suits under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and the doctrine of Ex parte Young. Thus, the Scalia Clinic concludes that alternative legal remedies affirm the anti-discrimination intent of USERRA's statute, thus preserving the private right of action for individual plaintiffs. [Source: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/cert/20-603> | Bruno Babij & Jack Delano | March 29, 2022 ++]

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## **Vet Unemployment 2022**

### **Update 03: Below 3% for 2<sup>nd</sup> Consecutive Month**

Veterans unemployment remained below 3% for the second consecutive month in April, offering more evidence that the American job market is nearing full recovery from the two-year coronavirus pandemic. Officials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on 6 MAY said the veterans unemployment rate for last month was 2.9%, up slightly from 2.6% in March. It's the first time that figure has stayed below 3% for two months in a row since early 2019, before the pandemic caused business closures and unemployment spikes across the country. For the country as a whole, the economy added about 428,000 jobs in April, but the unemployment rate stayed at 3.6% for the second consecutive month.

In a statement following the BLS report, President Joe Biden called the news proof that the country is experiencing "the strongest job creation economy in modern times." One year ago, in April 2021, the jobless rate for veterans was 5.2% and the national rate was 6.1%. Unemployment among veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan war era rose slightly, from 3.0% in March to 3.4% in April. That group makes up the largest generation of veterans in the U.S. labor force today, with about 3.8 million workers. About half of the estimated 260,000 veterans looking for work last month belong to that younger group. One year ago, that figure was roughly 480,000 veterans looking for full-time employment.

Veterans unemployment has been a particular focus of the White House and Congress in recent years, with research showing that making a successful transition to civilian life can ease a host of potential stressors for military families. A separate BLS report last month found that nearly one in four veterans (23%) was employed in local, state or federal government jobs in 2021. Manufacturing, business service jobs, education and health services were the largest other industries for veterans to find work, making up about one-third of all veterans jobs last year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 6, 2022 ++]

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## Vet Unemployment 2022

### Update 04: New Report Says Federal Veteran Unemployment Stats 'Inaccurate'

With the United States experiencing historically low unemployment rates, along with an equally historic labor shortage, it would be natural to draw the conclusion that veteran unemployment is a thing of the past. The Call of Duty Endowment, the world's largest private funder of veteran employment, says nothing could be further from the truth. Not only are certain subsections of the veteran population still struggling, but the way the government classifies "employment" is misleading, the endowment said.

In a report released on 2 MAY called "Lessons Learned ForThe Future of Veteran Employment", the endowment found the real issue with veterans in the civilian workforce is underemployment -- veterans working in jobs that are beneath their skills and experience or working positions that don't bring home enough pay. In April 2022, the veteran unemployment rate was 3%, lower than the non-veteran rate of 3.6%, which is good news, according to the Department of Labor. Yet, within what seems like welcome news, research from Penn State University's The Veterans Metrics Initiative (TVMI) finds the rates at which veterans struggle with underemployment is much, much higher: as high as 61%.

The report also shows that 55% of veterans believe they are more experienced than the job they have called for, a significant sign of underemployment. One of the fundamental flaws is the statistics used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the report says, calling them "inaccurate, not actionable and gives a false sense of achievement." According to the report, BLS data is opinion-based and doesn't reflect actual outcomes, like payroll data, and requires veterans to self-identify. It also inaccurately reflects veteran employment by counting odd jobs, Reserve or National Guard service, so long as the veteran makes more than \$1 in a given week, as "employment." Finally, BLS information doesn't measure employment data at the local level,

only state and national levels. This kind of tracking, the report says, doesn't help find where employment and other types of assistance should be directed.

Over the previous 12 years, Call of Duty Endowment has helped more than 100,000 veterans find meaningful jobs (not underemployed), while being an advocate for the skills and experience veterans bring to the civilian world. Call of Duty Endowment's white paper offers suggestions in the form of "lessons learned," solutions that it believes would greatly improve upon the government's current methods for helping veterans find fulfilling jobs.

- The first lesson it offers is training employers and veterans how to better translate their military-learned skills and experience to the civilian sectors of their career fields. Call of Duty Endowment's nonprofit partners offer this training.
- Its second lesson is providing even modest personal assistance to transitioning veterans. By providing a job interview coach or mentor, data from TVMI finds veterans are three times more likely to find meaningful employment. They are twice as likely to find a job if they have a coach to help with writing their resume.
- The third lesson is focused on how the government spends money for veteran employment. It says the federal government currently spends .001% of its \$300 billion budget, or about \$300 million, for veteran programs on veteran employment, according to the report – a rate the Call of Duty Endowment believes must be changed.

The study says that increasing efforts toward employment reduces the need for housing and mental health programs, as fully employed veterans are much more likely to provide their own housing and are less prone to depression and suicide. To help address the issue, the nonprofit and its parent, Activision Blizzard, will spend \$30 million to continue the Call of Duty Endowment's mission over the next five years. It's a pledge that it hopes will place 50,000 more veterans in meaningful employment in that time frame.

Read the entire Call of Duty Endowment white paper at "Lessons Learned For The Future of Veteran Employment" at <https://www.callofdutyendowment.org/100k>. To learn more about the Call of Duty Endowment visit the website <https://www.callofdutyendowment.org>. [Source: VVA Web Weekly | Blake Stilwell | May 13, 2022++]

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## **Vet Internet Availability**

### **Update 01: Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**

An updated program from the federal government offers free or discounted internet to many Americans, including many active duty families, veterans and their survivors. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), administered by the FCC, replaces the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program which, while open to more people, was a temporary program enacted during the COVID-19 crisis. It ended March 1, 2022. Those eligible for the ACP include those receiving other federal benefits, such as:

- A VA Veterans Pension
- A VA Survivors Pension (also known as Death Pension)
- SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), or food stamps
- WIC (Women, infants and children) assistance
- Medicaid
- Free or discounted school lunch or breakfast
- Pell grants
- Supplemental security income (SSI) from Social Security

Those with an income that is at twice the federal poverty guideline or lower are also eligible. That includes a family of four earning no more than \$55,500; a family of two earning no more than \$36,620 or a single person who earns no more than \$27,180. There are higher limits in Alaska and Hawaii. Persons who have a Lifeline phone can also apply for the program. Others may be eligible as well. See the ACP website <https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/do-i-qualify>; for more information. Even if you aren't eligible under these existing stipulations, you may be eligible for the program if you are eligible for discounted internet from your service provider.

The ACP program will pay up to \$30 monthly (\$75 for those residing on tribal lands) directly to the internet provider. That means if you have a discounted program like Internet Essentials from Comcast, the nation's largest internet service provider, it may cost you nothing as a participant in the ACP program. The ACP program also provides a one-time discount of up to \$100 to cover the cost of a device to access the internet.

This can be a laptop or desktop computer or a tablet computer. It does not include mobile phones, large phones or "phablets" that can make mobile calls. The participant must contribute a portion of the total cost, and the device cannot cost more than \$150. Many providers offer these devices at a large discount to low-income customers; for instance, Comcast's Internet Essentials program offers a choice of a windows or chromebook laptop computer for \$149.99. There is a limit of one device per household.

You can apply directly to the government at <https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/how-to-apply>, but in many cases, it may be easier to contact your local internet provider directly to see whether they participate in the program. The FCC has a list of all internet providers

participating in the program at <https://www.fcc.gov/affordable-connectivity-program-providers> to assist you in finding a local provider.

Either way you apply, be aware that lots of documentation will be required with your application. You need to show proof of eligibility: either a benefits letter from the Department of Veterans Affairs, or another qualifying agency; proof of address; copies of identification documents and other documentation. If you are applying based on income, you may need to submit copies of tax returns or other documents. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | May 12, 2022 ++]

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## **Massachusetts Vet Homes**

### **Update 01: Holyoke Soldiers' Home Victims Settlement**

Massachusetts has agreed to pay \$56 million to settle a class-action lawsuit brought by the families of veterans who died or became sick after contracting COVID-19 at a state-run veterans' care center during one of the deadliest outbreaks at a long-term care facility in the U.S., officials said 12 MAY. The families of 84 veterans who died during the outbreak at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home will receive a minimum of \$400,000 each, while 84 veterans who contracted the disease and survived will receive a minimum of \$10,000 under terms of the settlement that still requires a federal judge's approval.

"The suit contends that what happened at the Soldiers' Home was so severe that it rose to the level of a deprivation of the veterans' constitutional rights to be free from harms recklessly created by the government," Tom Lesser, one of the families' attorneys, said in a statement. "No amount of money can bring back the veterans who died or erase the pain and suffering that this tragedy needlessly caused those veterans and their families, but justice required that those wrongs not go unaddressed," he said. "This settlement recognizes that the tragedy was preventable and never should have happened."

The number of COVID-19 deaths had previously been reported at about 76, but the higher number reflects further investigation by the state and includes veterans who contracted the disease but did not have it listed as a cause of death on their death certificate, Michael Aleo, another of the plaintiffs' lawyers said. Former U.S. Attorney Donald Stern will serve as the settlement claims administrator and determine how much each family will receive. The terms of the settlement will cover veterans who lived at the facility at any time between March 1, 2020 and June 23, 2020 and who became ill or died from COVID-19 during that period. The settlement amount also covers attorneys' fees.

Gov. Charlie Baker plans to file legislation seeking \$56 million for the claims fund in the coming weeks. "The COVID-19 outbreak at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home was a terrible tragedy. While we know nothing can bring back those who were lost, we hope that this settlement brings a sense of closure to the loved ones of the veterans," Baker said in a statement. The coronavirus tore through the home in the spring of 2020 infecting both residents and staff. An investigation by a former federal prosecutor hired by Baker found that management made several "utterly baffling" decisions that allowed the virus to spread almost unchecked, such as combining two locked dementia units, both of which already housed some residents with the virus. As many as 40 residents were placed in a space designed for 25.

The suit was originally filed in July 2020 by the family of Joseph Sniadach, an 84-year-old Korean War veteran who died at the home on April 27, 2020. Other veterans and their families were later added. The defendants were four former leaders at the home and the state Secretary of Health and Human Services, the state agency that oversees the facility. Claims against five will be dropped when the settlement is approved. The outbreak led to criminal neglect charges against the home's former superintendent and medical director, but the charges were dismissed by a judge last year. The state attorney general has appealed.

The state Inspector General last month released a report saying the superintendent at the time of the outbreak should not have been hired in the first place because he lacked the temperament and skills to run such a facility. The state has announced plans to build a new \$400 million home to replace the current 240-bed facility that was built in the early 1950s. [Source: Associated Press | Mark Pratt | May 12, 2022 ++]

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## **USSF National Guard**

### **Update 01: H.R.5112 / S.4179 | Space National Guard Establishment Act**

A bipartisan group of senators on 10 MAY introduced a bill that would create a Space National Guard under the newly-established U.S. Space Force. Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) said in a press release that the **Space National Guard Establishment Act** pairs with legislation in the House from Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO) and corrects a bureaucracy issue in which National Guard troops are working on space missions within the Air Force instead of within their own branch.

“Without a National Guard component for Space Force, we risk losing many talented individuals who want to keep serving their country and their states after they leave active duty, and that is simply unacceptable,” Feinstein said in a statement. “Creating a Space Force National Guard would also save money and ensure a smoother process in the event we need to activate



personnel. Not establishing a Space National Guard was a mistake when Space Force was created, and this bill will remedy that.”

Former President Trump signed into law a bill creating the Space Force in December 2019, which became the first new branch of the U.S. military in 73 years. Senators said when the Space Force was created, active-duty troops working on space missions in the Air Force were transferred to the new military branch. But there was no such authorized transfer for National Guard troops. About 1,000 National Guard troops work on space-related missions within the Air Force. If the bill became law, it would simply transfer them to the Space National Guard to create a more efficient bureaucracy. In a statement Rubio said “creating a Space National Guard would boost our military readiness and increase efficiency. It would also ensure that the Space Force retains needed talent.”

Feinstein had pushed to create the Space National Guard in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, but the component was not included in the final NDAA. The creation of the Space Force, which was initially mocked when it designated its forces as Guardians and even inspired a now-canceled TV show starring Steve Carrell, was created to ensure the U.S. could achieve superiority in the space domain. The branch has a large focus, including the protection and management of satellites and the monitoring of space surveillance systems. President Biden proposed a \$24.5 billion budget for the Space Force for fiscal 2023. [Source: The Hill | Brad Dress | May11, 2022 ++]

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## **Troop Vaccine Refusal**

### **Update 07: S.4172 | Limits Military Dismissals to Honorable for Unvaccinated**

Defense officials would be required to grant honorable dismissals to nearly all troops who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine and grant waivers to troops with “natural immunity” to the virus under new legislation introduced by Republican senators on Tuesday. The proposal — led by Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and backed by 13 other GOP colleagues — would also mandate that military leaders “make every effort to retain members of the Armed Forces who are not vaccinated” and broaden religious exemptions for the vaccine mandate.

The measure introduced 10 May likely faces a difficult path to becoming law, since Democrats control both chambers of Congress and the White House. But supporters said the move is needed to protect troops’ rights and ability to keep serving the nation. “It is absolutely unacceptable that [President Joe Biden’s] administration is trying to coerce our men and women

in uniform to violate their conscience and religious beliefs, let alone on an issue as polarizing as the COVID-19 vaccine,” Cruz said in a statement.

Last month, defense officials told Congress that about 3,400 troops have been involuntarily separated from service for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine, mandated last fall for all military members. Of that group, about 70% have received general discharges, a designation that allows them to receive most veterans benefits and potentially rejoin the military at a later date. The other 30% have received honorable discharges. Congress last year forbade military leaders from issuing dishonorable discharges for vaccine refusal.

But the new Senate bill would go even further, mandating an honorable discharge for individuals who refuse the vaccine and upgrading the dismissal status to honorable for the roughly 2,400 troops given general discharges already. The measure also called for an exemption to the COVID-19 vaccine requirement for “members with natural immunity,” although the legislation does not define the term. Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have said that contracting COVID-19 may offer some protection from future illness, but the length and strength of that protection remains unclear.

To date, the military services have granted only a small number of vaccine waivers for religious objections. The new bill would broaden that and call for a report on how religious objections have been handled by service leaders so far. Opponents to the vaccine mandate have called it a potential recruiting and retention disaster for the Defense Department. However, in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on April 27, officials from the five services insisted they have seen no readiness impacts from the requirement so far. They framed the vaccine mandate as critical to the health and safety of the force.

As of the start of May, about 73% of the entire armed forces is fully vaccinated, with another 14% partially vaccinated. Among active-duty troops, the number was close to 100%. The figures are expected to rise in the next two months as the deadline for the Army Reserve and National Guard arrives in late June. The military vaccination issue is likely to be a point of debate in congressional work on the annual defense authorization bill in coming weeks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 10, 2022 ++]

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## **Credit Monitoring**

**Update 04: H.R.7526 | Servicemembers’ Credit Monitoring Enhancement Act**

A new House bill would expand existing free credit-monitoring services beyond those on active duty, making all in uniform eligible for the benefit. **The Servicemembers' Credit Monitoring Enhancement Act** (H.R. 7526) would support the Guard and Reserve members who “make enormous sacrifices to keep this country safe,” said Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Ohio), a co-sponsor of the legislation alongside Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.). “To lift their economic burdens and increase the financial readiness of our forces, we should do everything we can to provide them with the information and resources they need to live financially secure lives outside the military.”

The bill also expands the benefit to include those in the commissioned corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and NOAA – another reason it has garnered support from MOAA. “Ensuring all uniformed servicemembers have equal access to financial resources as the active component is vital for our national defense,” said Cory Titus, MOAA’s director of government relations for veteran benefits and Guard and Reserve affairs. “We thank Reps. Stefanik and Ryan for supporting the reserve component, Public Health Service, and NOAA Officer Corps with their bill to expand access to credit monitoring – we urge Congress to pass this bill.”

Active duty servicemembers, including those in the National Guard and Reserve on active status, already qualify for free electronic credit monitoring from the three nationwide credit reporting agencies – Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion – under a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) rule stemming from a 2018 law. Details on using the benefit are available at the credit bureau websites. The rule also requires crediting reporting agencies to notify servicemembers within 48 hours of any “material additions or modifications” to their credit file, and to ensure the members receive free access to the file to review the change. More details are available from the FTC at <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2019/06/ftc-announces-final-rule-implementing-law-providing-free-credit-monitoring-active-duty-military> .

“Our servicemembers have all taken an oath to protect our nation, and it is critical we make sure they are protected,” Stefanik said. “I am proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation to extend these credit monitoring services to all our men and women in uniform. As they answer the call to duty, they deserve to do so with the peace of mind that their finances will be securely monitored.” [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | May 05, 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%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%7D> – **House**
- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%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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## **Marine Sniper Program**

### **Update 01: Multibarrel Sniper Rifle Will Replace Two Existing Weapons**

Marine snipers are about to trim their sniper rifle inventory by combining two in one with a new multibarrel weapon that will give shooters three caliber options and replace two existing rifles — one of which jarheads have been carrying since Vietnam. Marine Corps Systems Command — all things gear for Marines — announced 12 MAY that the Mk22 Mod 0 advanced sniper rifle has nearly completed testing as it approaches fielding in 2023. It is a bolt action, precision rifle system. The system part is important. That designation includes a bipod, sound and muzzle flash suppressor and a caliber agnostic 7-by-35 power Precision day optic.

The rifle will replace both the Mk13 Mod 7 and the M40A6 sniper rifles currently in use. The Army previously announced that it also would replace its M107 sniper rifle and M2010 enhanced sniper rifle with the Mk22 Mod 0. The M40A6 is a heavily modified version of the original M40, which first fielded during the Vietnam War and fires a 7.62 mm round. The A6 model began fielding in 2016. The Corps selected the Mk13 Mod 7 in 2018. It fires the .300 Winchester Magnum round. Accuracy International/Remington Arms makes the Mk13 Mod 7. U.S. Special Operations Command fielded an earlier variant.

Barret Firearms Manufacturing produces the Mk22. The weapon alone weighs 15.2 pounds, according to the company website. The Mk13 Mod 7 weighs 11.4 pounds. The M40A6 weighs

approximately 16.5 pounds. Both use a five-round magazine. The Mk22's effective firing range is 1,500 meters. The M40A6 effective firing range is 800 meters. The Mk13 Mod 7 effective firing range is 1,300 meters. All three rifles are bolt action. The Mk22 Mod 0 is also called the MRAD, which stands for, "multirole adaptive design." That's in part because Barrett makes civilian and versions of the weapon in 10 different calibers, ranging from 6.5 Creedmoor to .338 Lapua Magnum. Barrett has provided .50-caliber sniper rifles to various military units for decades.

Initial fielding is slated for fiscal year 2023, which could mean as early as October. The rifle uses a 10-round magazine. The caliber agnostic scope is another key distinction. This rifle will have four different barrel options, so a versatile scope is necessary. Snipers can swap out either the .338 Norma Magnum, .300 Norma Magnum, 7.62mm and, for a limited time, the .300 Winchester Magnum. That gives shooters ways to adapt shooting to specific mission sets that might require more distance or more punch to get through barriers or body armor.

"Instead of having to learn multiple weapon systems, we just have one," said Staff Sgt. Cruz Nuanez, a scout sniper instructor with the Advanced Infantry Training Battalion, School of Infantry-East, at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The 7-by-35 Precision day optic gives "greater magnification and observation capabilities" when compared with the current 5-by-25 optic, said Sgt. Christopher Frazier, marksmanship instructor with the Scout Sniper Instructor School and systems command liaison. That improved optic gives snipers greater standoff and survivability. They can "reach out and touch someone" from a good bit farther.

With those new accessories and capabilities comes more weight in the single package. But it technically reduces overall weight because shooters won't have to carry an extra rifle, and all of the associated logistics and maintenance pieces. Early issues will include four barrels, one for each caliber. But the .300 Winchester Magnum barrel is a "one-time" issue, officials said. That's to ease the shooting transition, since currently Marine snipers can choose from the 7.62 mm and the .300 Winchester Magnum in existing rifles. "It's definitely more efficient," said Frazier. "Rather than putting one gun away and getting the next gun out, we can quickly change the barrels, and then we only have to carry ammunition and that extra barrel, not an entire extra gun and extra magazines."

All three Marine scout sniper schools and Marine Corps Special Operations Command snipers assessed the entire package during evaluation periods, according to a press release. "This event is a bit unusual for a program to do at this point," said Nick Berger, project officer for the Mk22 program. "However, it is important for us to make sure the sniper community has what it needs to be successful, and the timing of this event allows us to identify issues before fielding and to correct as necessary."

So far, according to the release, early feedback has been good. “They are very user-friendly,” Nuanez explained. “It comes with all the tools you need and the tools are also user friendly. Taking the barrels off and putting them back on, as well as the bolt faces — there should be no issue.” Though new snipers will get a better rifle out of the box, the course qualifications for the scout sniper community will remain the same, according to the press release. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Todd South | May 11, 2022 ++]

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## **USCG Counter-Drug Mission**

### **New Ruling Threatens Their High Seas Key Weapon**

A little-noticed federal appeals court ruling this year threatens a key weapon in the United States’ war on drugs: A decades-old law that gives the U.S. broad authority to make high-seas arrests anywhere in the world, even if the drugs aren’t bound for American shores. It’s a law that’s used to round up and imprison hundreds of foreigners every year, mostly poor, semi-literate fishermen from Central and South America who make up the drug trade’s lowest rungs. “It is a waste of U.S. taxpayer dollars to have these costly misadventures as we play drug police to the world,” said Eric Vos, head of the public defender’s office in Puerto Rico that brought the court challenge.

At issue is the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act, which defines drug smuggling in international waters as a crime against the United States and gives the U.S. unique arrest powers anywhere on the seas — whenever it determines a vessel is “without nationality.” But how a vessel is deemed stateless sometimes gets messy. The case involved Costa Rican plaintiff Jeffri Dávila-Reyes, whose appeal prompted the ruling. The Coast Guard chased down his speedboat in the western Caribbean in 2015 as he and two cousins were allegedly transporting 5-15 kilos of cocaine.

They identified their vessel as hailing from Costa Rica, according to the FBI’s summary of the investigation, but they lacked any documentation. When the U.S. asked the Costa Rican government to confirm the vessel’s registry, it responded 12 weeks after the bust that it could neither confirm nor refute the claim. A few weeks later the men were charged and eventually pleaded guilty to possessing narcotics “onboard a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.” But a three-judge panel of the First Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston ruled in January that one of the law’s provisions — disavowing a captain’s claim of nationality — were an unconstitutional extension of U.S. policing powers beyond America’s borders.

Tellingly, almost none of those arrested under the law had ever set foot in the U.S. nor were they charged with trying to import cocaine. In Dávila-Reyes' case, the cocaine he was accused of transporting was purportedly headed to Jamaica. Despite the ruling that threw out his conviction, Dávila-Reyes remains behind bars seven years into a 10-year sentence as the Justice Department seeks reconsideration by all of the First Circuit's nine judges.

In a series of recent letters to The Associated Press from federal prison, Davila-Reyes reflected on how he only got involved in smuggling as a way to escape poverty in his homeland after years of hand-blistering construction work for \$10 a day. He said taking a chance on smuggling offered him \$6,000. "Nobody can be blamed for being born poor," he wrote.

From the moment President Richard Nixon declared "war on drugs" in 1971, the U.S. Coast Guard has been at the forefront of the campaign to stop illegal narcotics from entering the U.S. Today, it spends more than \$2 billion annually as part of that effort. But, almost from the start, that goal has proven elusive. Cocaine prices, a gauge of supply, have been hovering at historical lows for more than a decade as cocaine production from Colombia has soared to record highs. In a good year, barely 10% of cocaine shipments in the waters off Central and South America — where the bulk of the world's cocaine is trafficked — are actually seized or destroyed, according to the U.S. government's own estimates.

Despite that poor record, U.S. officials continue to tout their success at sea. A 2020 Coast Guard report said at-sea interdictions are the most effective way to combat cartels and criminal networks. Since 2017, the amount of cocaine it has seized or destroyed exceeds 959 metric tons. Prosecutions under the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act exploded last year to 296 — nearly five times the number a decade ago, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, which collects Justice Department data. But since each case involves multiple defendants, the actual number of foreigners detained at sea last year was 635 — the highest tally since 2017.

Critics of U.S. drug policy say most such smugglers fell into the job because of poverty and are hardly worth locking up for so long when legions of their poor compatriots stand ready to take their place. "These are not masterminds like Pablo Escobar or Chapo Guzman," said Kendra McSweeney, an Ohio State University geographer who has spent years researching U.S. drug policies. Neither the Coast Guard nor Justice Department would comment on Dávila-Reyes' appeal but experts say it's too early to judge the fallout from the landmark ruling.

Currently Vos' office in Puerto Rico is preparing 14 motions for dismissal in other boat cases on behalf of jailed defendants from Colombia, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. The ruling has also been cited in at least five proceedings outside the First Circuit. "It's definitely a chink in the armor," said Roger Cabrera, a court-appointed attorney in Miami seeking who has filed one of the appeals. "But like most chinks, I'm sure the federal government is already

looking for a workaround.” For now, U.S. law enforcement continues to conduct regular search and seizures on the high seas with little indication of concern.

In court filings, attorneys for the U.S. government have argued in part that holding up interdictions to wait for an unequivocal denial of registry from a foreign nation before declaring a vessel stateless would be impractical. “Anyone involved with bringing dangerous drugs into the United States will be held accountable, no matter their position in the drug-distribution network,” said Justice Department spokeswoman Nicole Navas Oxman.

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In the interim the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier and Caribbean Corridor Strike Force agents offloaded 626 pounds of seized cocaine 9 MAY in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a May 10 release. The offload of contraband resulted from a go-fast vessel interdiction April 28, 2022, in Mona Passage waters near the Dominican Republic. The interdiction was the result of multi-agency efforts involving the Caribbean Border Interagency Group and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force. The seized cocaine has an estimated wholesale value of approximately \$5.6 million dollars.

During the morning of April 28, the crew of a Coast Guard HC-27J Spartan aircraft detected a suspect vessel north of Mona Island, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan diverted the cutter Joseph Napier that arrived on scene with the suspect vessel. Upon detecting the presence of the Coast Guard cutter, the occupants of the suspect vessel were observed jettisoning multiple bales of suspected contraband into the water and attempting to flee the area toward Dominican Republic territorial waters. Once in Dominican Republic waters, the crew of a Dominican Republic navy vessel interdicted the suspect vessel and apprehended three Dominican Republic nationals who were aboard. Meanwhile, the crew of the cutter Joseph Napier recovered 11 bales of the jettisoned suspected contraband, which tested positive for cocaine.

[Source: The Associated Press / Seapower | Joshua Goodman | May 5 & 10, 2022 ++]

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## **Navy Dry Docks**

**SIOP Costs Grew 400 Percent, At Risk of Years-Long Delays**



The Navy’s costs for refurbishing its dry docks have nearly quadrupled, pinpointing a cost overrun that several lawmakers have publicly bemoaned but not disclosed, according to a new report by government auditors. “For example, the Navy’s first three dry dock projects have grown in cost from an estimated \$970 million in 2018 to over \$5.1 billion in 2022, an increase of more than 400 percent,” according to a new Government Accountability Office report published this week. Several top Navy officials as well as one from GAO appeared before a Senate panel on 10 MAY to testify about the Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program.

That plan is supposed to revitalize the four public shipyards – the oldest being 254 years old – and converting them into modern, efficient facilities that can repair the Navy’s newest and biggest platforms. The dry dock at Portsmouth is particularly important because it will enable the submarine-only repair yard to perform work on the Virginia-class attack submarine, which it can’t do with its current dry docks. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday confirmed last JUN that the effort had hit a snag, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic and partly because the Navy underestimated the complexity of the project. “We saw significant growth in cost for lumber, for cement and for steel, and that’s been pretty steady through the pandemic, although it’s beginning to level off now. I think construction companies have had the same challenges.

SIOP will take over 20 years for a bill of \$21 billion, but what GAO made clear in its report is that the actual price is likely to be far greater. “We reported in November 2019 that this \$21 billion estimate does not include inflation and other significant costs, such as those for utilities, roads, or environmental remediation, which could add billions to the final cost,” according to the GAO report. GAO auditors also reported this month that the Navy’s overall SIOP schedule could be at risk. “The Navy’s effort to complete detailed shipyard investment plans has been delayed by 3 years, which could affect the SIOP’s schedule,” according to GAO. In addition to refurbishing the dry docks, the SIOP aims to redesign the layouts of the shipyards to improve workflow and make numerous capital equipment purchases.

Separately, today, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told House appropriators that the investment the Navy was seeking for SIOP in the fiscal 2023 budget request is a “historic amount.” “We’re asking you for \$1.7 billion to put towards this work going forward. That’s an historic amount. It’s twice the amount that we invested in last year,” he said. “I believe that going forward without the impacts of COVID and some other things, that we’ll be able to come closer to meeting our goals and objectives. But, but again, we’re not where we want to be.”  
[Source: Breaking Defense | Justin Katz | May 11, 2022 ++]

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## Navy Nuclear Weapons

### U.S. Navy Remains Opposed To Buying Ship-Launched Ones

The U.S. Navy remains opposed to buying ship-launched nuclear weapons, even though some in the Pentagon have pushed back. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday told House and Senate lawmakers this week forcing surface ships or attack submarines to haul around nuclear-tipped missiles would be feasible but a burden as they have more pressing missions. The Trump administration planned a Sea-Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear program to develop weapons that could be launched from surface combatants or attack submarines. Traditionally, the sea-based leg of the nuclear deterrence triad is sub-launched missiles on ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), whose sole mission is to stay hidden in the depths of the ocean.

The Biden administration's fiscal 2023 budget request zeroed out the program ahead of the release of an updated Nuclear Posture Review but in coordination with the review's conclusions. In some of the first hearings following the budget release, Republicans expressed their concern over the cancelation — and so did the heads of U.S. European Command and U.S. Strategic Command. EUCOM Commander Gen. Tod Wolters said he wanted the SLCM-N because “having multiple options exacerbates the challenge for the potential enemies against us,” while STRATCOM Commander Adm. Chas Richard wrote in a letter to the House Armed Services Committee “the current situation in Ukraine and China's nuclear trajectory convinces me a deterrence and assurance gap exists.”

Specifically, Richard said in a later hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee, SLCM-N would give the U.S. “a low-yield, non-ballistic capability that does not require visible generation,” as a means of countering the kinds of low-yield nuclear weapons Russia has threatened to use in its ongoing war with Ukraine, for example. During hearings this week on the Navy's budget request, Gilday told lawmakers SLCM-N “has been offered as a single-point solution” to manage the tactical nuclear capability of Russia and China. “There are others to think about, including low-yield nuclear weapons that we deploy right now and had support of the Congress,” he said, as well as non-nuclear deterrent weapons like hypersonic missiles.

Gilday said he wants continued research and development work to support a potential future SLCM-N capability, adding that a “modest” amount of funding would ensure “we don't lose that capability in the workforce and in our labs that's actually proceeding at pace right now.” Based on that effort and more information about Russia's and China's nuclear weapons development and fielding, the Pentagon could then “make informed decisions about whether or not we want to invest a significant amount of money in that capability.” Today, though, he said it doesn't make sense to rush into procurement of the weapon, given an already too-small and heavily worked fleet.

The attack submarine fleet sits at 50, despite the Navy requiring 66 to 72 boats. These submarines could take on a variety of missions, from lurking close to enemy shores to tap into communications cables or project kinetic or non-kinetic effects ashore to searching the open ocean for enemy submarines. The destroyer fleet is busy working alone or as part of carrier strike groups to provide air defense, surface strike, sub-hunting and other missions across the globe — and they’ll be more strained as cruisers leave the fleet in the coming years.

“Having served on a nuclear-capable surface ship in the late 1980s, that mission does not come without a cost. There is a significant amount of attention that has to be paid to any platform that carries that type of weapon in terms of training, in terms of sustainability, in terms of reliability, in terms of the force’s readiness to be able to use and be able to conduct that mission,” Gilday said. As Russia increases its submarine activity, including sending submarines across the Atlantic towards U.S. shores, Gilday said the attack submarine fleet is “dealing with a higher threat” than in the late 1980s, when nuclear-tipped Tomahawk missiles were retired from service.

He pointed to hypersonic missiles as a preferable avenue for sea-based deterrence. The Navy is already working with the U.S. Army on a conventional prompt strike hypersonic missile the Army will field in fiscal 2023 and the Navy will field on its Zumwalt-class destroyers in FY25 and its attack submarines in FY28. Gilday said the ship- and sub-based hypersonic missile efforts are still on track, and that the sea service also requested research and development dollars in its unfunded priorities list — a wish list if more funding were available — for an air-launched hypersonic missile. [Source: Defense News | Megan Eckstein | May 13, 2022 ++]

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## **Military Grade**

### **Why It Is Just another Way of Saying ‘Cheaply Made Junk’**

When advertisers describe their products as “military grade,” they may not realize that troops and veterans have a vastly different understanding of the military industrial complex than consumers who look at MOLLE, picatinny rails, and abundant camouflage like taticool accessories rather than products that serve a specific purpose. And sometimes, they don’t even do that right. To wit: Your average American may think that a product that is “military grade” must be tough or efficient. Whereas troops and veterans assume that the military often awards contracts to the lowest bidder. For those who have been issued gear only to see it fall apart after the most gentle of wear and tear, something that is “military grade” is “a piece of shit.”

Just ask any veteran who has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan how well the earplugs they were provided worked. The military also has a track record of buying absurdly useless camouflage uniforms, including the Army's "Universal Camouflage Pattern," which made soldiers actually stand out from the terrain, and the Navy's blue Type I Navy Working Uniform, which sailors dubbed the "blueberries" and "aquaflage." The infamous Uniform made sure that if sailors fell overboard, they would blend in with the water.

Thus, when Ford boasts that its F-150 truck is "battle tested" because it is made from a "military grade" aluminum body, that may sound cool to someone who has never had to drive or repair an actual military vehicle. Ford describes the metal used to make F-150s as "high-strength, military grade aluminum alloy" because the trucks are made from the same aluminum alloy used to build Bradley Fighting Vehicles and Humvees, said Michael Levine, director of North American product communications for Ford Motor Company. That may not be a great selling point for anyone who has seen the movie "The Pentagon Wars," based on the book by retired Air Force Col. James Gordon Burton, who fought with defense officials to reveal how the Bradley's original aluminum armor would melt if hit by Soviet anti-tank rounds. The vehicles have since been redesigned.

Humvees also proved to be extremely vulnerable to explosions from underneath, which made them particularly perilous during the early days of the Global War on Terror when improvised explosive devices began seeing heavy use in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, a 1994 report distributed throughout both the Army and Marine Corps determined that the Humvee "remained a deathtrap in the event of an anti-tank mine detonation," even if it were fitted with extra armor. When Task & Purpose asked Ford if it still believed that stressing that F-150s are made out of the same aluminum as Bradleys and Humvees is a selling point, Levine replied: "We're proud of every Ford F-Series Truck we make, including the materials that make them Built Ford Tough. We've used high-strength, military-grade, aluminum alloy since 2014 and F-Series continues to be America's best-selling truck for 45 years and best-selling vehicle for 40 years."

Nonetheless, troops and veterans know all too well that "military grade" does not mean 'reliable' or 'well designed.' "I doubt anybody would want to buy a truck that is overly complicated like a lot of modern military vehicles are because maintenance costs would be absolutely through the roof in that case," said Marine veteran Dan Grazier.

When veterans scoff at advertisements that use the term "military grade," they typically think about some of the personal equipment that they had to haul when they were on active duty, said Grazier, who now works with the Project on Government Oversight. Grazier said he remembers how he was issued not one but three sleeping bags while he was in the Corps, but the first time he tried using them in the field, he shivered his ass off for the entire night. As he lay awake, Grazier thought about how his personal sleeping bag that he used on camping trips would have

kept him warm and it weighed less than half as much as the three sleeping bags that he had lugged for 12 miles.

“‘Military grade’ to a veteran is an understanding that this object made the minimum standards for ruggedness, based on the military’s standards, and it was made by the lowest bidder,” Grazier told Task & Purpose. “What you knew about it was that: Yeah, it worked, but there were much better products out there.” There is certainly a good deal of truth to that. Until 1984, the Defense Department awarded most contracts to companies that submitted the lowest bid. Then the Competition in Contracting Act allowed the military to take a “best value” tradeoff approach that allows the Defense Department to accept a higher bid to get better quality products.

While many Defense Department contracts are now awarded on the basis of both quality and cost, the military continues to use the “lowest price technically acceptable” process to buy products that are not complex. Yet contracting reforms have not stopped the Pentagon from defecating the proverbial bed on several big-ticket items, including the Littoral Combat Ships – which may go down as the most expensive artificial reefs in history – and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, a plane that could ultimately cost American taxpayers \$1.7 trillion. Hey, for that much money, the F-35 must be the most technologically awesome piece of machinery that humanity has ever produced, rig

Oh, wait. Given the civil-military divide, it is likely that advertisers will continue to glowingly describe their products as “military grade,” while service members and veterans continue to chuckle at one of the greatest inside jokes of all time. [Source: Task & Purpose | Jeff Schogol | May 4, 2022 ++]

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## **Navy Budget Request | FY 23**

### **Downsizing Rational**

With the Navy’s fiscal 2023 budget request looking to cut the overall number of ships, the service’s top uniformed officer is making the case that such cuts are needed to ensure weapons stockpiles don’t fall short in a conflict. Speaking before the House Armed Services Committee today, a body historically skeptical of attempts to trim ship numbers, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday stressed that the decision to decommission 24 hulls was made strategically, with real-world consequences in mind.

If the service isn’t allowed to decommission those ships, it means the Navy will “pay for that in terms of people, we’re going to pay for it with less ammunition and magazines, fewer spare

parts and storerooms,” Gilday said. “We’re going to pay for it with reduced maintenance, reduced flying hours, reduced steaming days — everything that’ll yield you a ready force today.” The Navy’s top officer added that money saved on decommissioning ships will go directly into the kind of munitions that will be vital in any conflict between the US and China. “So with respect to readiness, we’re trying to maximize the domestic production lines for all high-end missiles, LRASM, JASM-ER, Maritime Strike Tomahawk, SM6. So that the ships that we do send to sea actually have systems that matter from both a deterrence and from a fight —”

At that point Gilday was cut off by HASC chair Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) who summed up the argument like this: “Rather than spending money on ships that aren’t capable and don’t perform, you would like to spend it so the ships we do have, actually have missiles that they can use, which seems to make sense to me.”

The FY23 request seeks to retire five cruisers, nine Littoral Combat Ships, four dock landing ships, two submarines, two fleet oilers and two expeditionary transfer docks. Early in the hearing, Gilday laid out his reasoning for making those calls.

- On the five cruiser retirements, Gilday argued that they have suffered, collectively, “over eight years in delay days out of shipyards, and over a half a billion dollars above budget with respect to the modernization programs.” On top of that, he said, “the older SPY radars can’t see the threat. If they can’t see it, they can’t shoot it down.
- “In terms of reliability, three recent cruisers that we’ve deployed, we’ve had to pull them in for repairs overseas with leaks below the waterline, we’ve had to pull them back into their home ports in the United States for leaking fuel tanks,” he continued. “So there have been survivability, reliability and lethality challenges with the cruisers that are near the end of their service life at 35 years. We think that at this point we’re throwing good money after bad.”
- As to the decision to retire nine LCS ships, Gilday said the “primary” reason for that move is the failure of the anti-submarine warfare system. “After about a year and a half [of] study, I refused to put an additional dollar against the system that wouldn’t be able to track a high-end submarine in today’s environment,” he said.

The LCS move was perhaps the most eyebrow-raising of the retirement options, with Rep. Elaine Luria, a Virginia Democrat who also sits on HASC, telling Breaking Defense last month she thinks those ships could have a mission set for the service even without the anti-submarine capability working. [Source: Breaking Defense | Aaron Mehta | May 11, 2022 ++]

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## Battle of Mobile Bay

### What Did 'Damn the Torpedoes' Mean Anyway?

Outside of the Merrimack fighting the Monitor, the U.S. Navy doesn't get a lot of attention when it comes to histories of the Civil War. But it deserves some. And maybe its finest moment came at the 1864 Battle of Mobile Bay, where Adm. David Farragut forced his way through a Confederate minefield and fought the Confederate Navy to a standstill. His victory over the last port on the Mississippi River completely cut the South off from moving cargo that could be sold abroad or importing critical weapons and supplies. It also helped secure an election victory for President Lincoln, ensuring the war would continue until the Federals won.

The enduring memory of the Navy at Mobile Bay is Adm. Farragut's order, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" But if submarines weren't exactly a common thing in 1864, what did he mean by that? The answer starts with his order to sail through the minefield. Farragut was the U.S. Navy's first Admiral – a Rear Admiral, to be exact – and after 53 years in uniform by that time, one could argue that he deserved the title. Mobile Bay was the Confederacy's last port on the Gulf of Mexico, so taking it was critical to the North's plan to cut the South off from the rest of the world. It would be no easy undertaking.

The harbor was defended by three forts that guarded the entrance to the bay, as well as three smaller gunboats, the ironclad CSS Tennessee, and a large minefield made up of what was then called "torpedoes." During the Civil War, underwater mines were referred to as "torpedoes" after the seagoing electric ray, known then as a torpedofish, that could deliver electric shocks. Civil War-era mines were often modified beer barrels filled with gunpowder. If they stayed in the water too long, they could get waterlogged, and the gunpowder rendered useless.

Farragut was attacking the defenders with 18 ships of many different types. Some were wooden hulls, others were ironclads, a mix of sail and steamships. When the flotilla steamed into Mobile harbor on August 5, 1864, the Confederate ships took positions just beyond the minefield. Leading the charge was the USS Tecumseh, an ironclad monitor which was ordered to stay east of the minefield. For whatever reason, the Tecumseh ran right into the minefield and was immediately struck by a torpedo. The ship sank in just two minutes, and so did the hearts of the Union sailors. But Farragut wasn't deterred. He ordered the fleet to continue sailing.

Farragut had been in Navy uniform since he was nine years old and he knew a thing or two about naval combat, whether it was sails or steam, iron or wood. When he ordered his ships to sail into the minefield, he knew two things many others may not have. The first is that the torpedoes were marked by floating black buoys. Their intent wasn't necessarily to sink ships, it was to steer them closer to the guns of the coastal defenses. Secondly, even though the torpedoes

had just sunk the Tecumseh, he knew that they had been submerged for so long that they were likely going to be ineffective in the fighting. The crew did hear the sound of barrels hitting their hulls, but as Farragut predicted, they did not explode.

During the crossing of the minefield, Farragut had lashed himself in the upper rigging of the USS Hartford, so that he could better see the fighting unobscured by the smoke of the battlefield. Farragut didn't give his now-famous order until after the Tecumseh sank (if he did at all). According to lore, Farragut noticed the USS Brooklyn slow as it approached the remains of the Tecumseh, apparently hesitant to enter the minefield. That's when Farragut shouted the famous phrase, ""Damn the torpedoes! Four bells. Captain Drayton, go ahead! Jouett, full speed!" which later, through a historical game of telephone, became, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!"

The latter is likely just easier for landlubbers to understand. Farragut's order was successful and the Union Navy hit the gunboats and the CSS Tennessee so much that they all struck their colors eventually. It was still a gamble for the admiral, however. Not all of the mines had become waterlogged. When clearing the minefield the next day, one exploded, killing some of the sailors sent to clear them. [Source: We Are The Mighty | May 5, 2022 ++]

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## National Guard Logo

**Capt. Isaac Davis | The Minuteman Upon Which it is Based**



Many service members know the National Guard logo depicting a minuteman from the Revolutionary War days. But not as many people know Capt. Isaac Davis, the Massachusetts gunsmith and militia officer who the logo is based on. That's a pity, because despite his brief time in the nation's service, Davis set an example of bravery that made him worthy of the image created in his likeness.

"To march within range of the enemy's guns and let them take the first shot requires enormous courage," wrote the National Park Service in an article about Davis. That was precisely the situation the 30-year-old Davis found himself in on April 19, 1775, the first day of the American Revolutionary War. It was likely the most momentous day in his life or that of any of the Massachusetts farmers around him.



Born on February 23, 1745, Davis lived in Acton, a small town which to this day has only about 24,000 residents, so presumably it was even smaller in Davis' time. The Massachusetts man became a gunsmith and had four children with his wife, Hannah Brown. By the early 1770s, Davis seems to have been a well-respected member of the community, and was described by people who knew him as a "thoughtful, sedate, serious man, a genuine Puritan like Samuel Adams." Like Samuel Adams, Davis was a true believer in the revolution. The gunsmith was "so moved by a Sunday sermon on the state of the colonies that he applauded at its conclusion and asked the minister to repeat it".

A few months before the fight on April 19, with talk of war in the air, Davis was elected captain of Acton's minuteman company. One of his soldiers, Thomas Thorpe, said later that the captain was "esteemed, a man of courage and prudence and had the love and veneration of all his company.". Though the National Guard evokes the minuteman militia on its seal, the two fighting groups were very different organizations. American militias in Massachusetts developed first as a way to fight Native Americans, and those militias were highly decentralized so that individual groups of armed men could act quickly, according to PBS. Unlike the organized bureaucracy of the modern-day American military and its National Guard, the militias were grassroots by nature, with captains like Davis being elected by the men they commanded.

For example, the Lexington Training Band, "was not a strict military unit," PBS wrote. "Instead, the Training Band was more of a democratic assembly in which the captain freely asked the advice of older veterans, and everyone stood by the captain's decisions once they were made." Also unlike the National Guard today, members of the Massachusetts militia were expected to bring their own weapons. Luckily for the men of Acton, their new captain was a bit of a gun nut, and he made sure his troops were well-equipped with bayonets, guns, and cartridge boxes.

But besides having good weapons, it was important to Davis that his men knew how to use them. Like in other minuteman companies, the captain had his men train twice weekly, including marksmanship at a firing range behind his house, according to Concord Magazine. All of this meant that on the night of April 16, when Paul Revere rode through the countryside, warning his fellow colonists that British troops were on the march, and word eventually spread to Davis, the captain knew his men were well-prepared. Despite his preparations, Davis himself was grim about his chances of surviving. A few days earlier, he and Hannah came home to find a large owl, a symbol of death, had flown into their house and perched on Davis' favorite gun hanging over the mantel. "No one was allowed to disturb the brooding presence, which stayed for days and was interpreted by the captain as an omen that, if the struggle became a full-pitched battle, he would not survive."

Now it seemed that day of reckoning had come. Davis gathered about 30 men in his yard, some of whom had floured their hair “so that they might meet the king’s troops as gentlemen.” Some joked amongst themselves, boasting that they would finally get ‘a hit at old [General Thomas] Gage,’ the British officer who led a military government in Massachusetts backed by about 4,000 British troops intending to crack down on the rebels gathering momentum in the colony. Davis disapproved of his men’s joking. “Blood would be spilt, that was certain,” he told his men. “The crimson fountain would be opened; none could tell when it would close, nor with whose blood it would overflow. Let every man gird himself for battle and be not afraid, for God is on our side.”

When it was finally time to go, Davis turned to Hannah, telling her to ‘take good care of the children.’ They were the last words he said to her. Then he and his militia marched off to Concord. It may have been a solemn moment, for the men knew that they would be deemed traitors if they failed. Davis was unbothered. “I have a right to go to Concord on the king’s highway,” he allegedly said. “And I will go to Concord.”

Though this would be the first fight for Davis’ troops, it was not the first fight of the revolution. Ever since 1774, Gage had been trying to stop New Englanders preparing for war by seizing stores of their weapons and gunpowder, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. The colonists responded by storing their powder in secret caches and stealing some from the British. On April 14, 1775, Gage received orders from William Legge, 2nd Earl of Dartmouth and the secretary of state for the colonies, that it was time to “arrest and imprison the principal Actors and Abettors” in rebellious Massachusetts. Unfortunately for Gage, the rebels got the drop on him.

Starting on April 16, Revere rode through Massachusetts, warning colonists to secure their powder and guns before the British arrived. The element of surprise slipped further out of Gage’s hands when 700 of his troops spent the evening of April 18 forming up in public view on Boston Common. The troops crossed the Charles River and marched to Lexington, hoping to find rebel leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams on their way to capture military supplies in Concord. They marched all night through the deep, brackish waters of a swamp before arriving soaked and tired at about 5:00 a.m. to meet 77 minutemen waiting for them at the village green. After a tense standoff, the two sides opened fire on each other, sending off “the shot heard ‘round the world” and leaving eight Americans dead.

The rebel forces fled, and the British troops marched on to Concord, intending to seize the guns and powder stored there. Several hundred colonists were gathering on a ridge overlooking the town, but in the meantime British troops began finding and destroying weapons in the town. A fire broke out, and British troops joined in the bucket brigade to put it out. However, the colonial troops on the ridge assumed their enemies were going to raze Concord, so they marched

down to meet them, with Davis leading the way. When asked if he was afraid to lead the advance, Davis is believed to have said, “No I am not, and I haven’t a man that is.”

Before they could take Concord, the minutemen would first have to take the North Bridge, which was held by British troops. Davis led the way towards them, but was ordered not to fire unless fired upon. The British struck first, and one of their volleys shot Davis through the chest, killing him instantly. Though Davis and two of his men lost their lives that day, their fellow colonists went on to push the British troops back into Boston. The “esteemed man of courage and prudence” from Acton had set off a chain of events that helped create a new country. Davis’ body was carried back to Acton over a road that was no longer the king’s, local reverend James Trask Woodbury pointed out nearly a century later. His wife Hannah went on to marry twice more, but both husbands died and by 1818 the 71-year old was impoverished. It would take another 20 years for her to finally receive a pension, but that was not the end of the Davis story.

About 76 years later, in 1851, Reverend Woodbury successfully petitioned the Massachusetts government for money to build a monument to Davis, which took the form of a 75-foot stone obelisk completed that year. 24 years later, in 1875, sculptor Daniel Chester French, who would later sculpt the image of Abraham Lincoln seated in the Lincoln Memorial, was commissioned to sculpt a generic minuteman. French was so inspired by Davis’ story that he modeled his statue off of photographs of the minuteman’s descendants, and he modeled the plow in the statue off of Davis’ plow on display at the Acton town hall.

Considering his values of training and preparedness, it makes sense that the National Guard and Air National Guard would use Davis’ likeness on their logo. In fact, the image is so popular that in 2019 the National Guard caused a stir when it unveiled a new logo that did not include the long-haired militia man. The new logo was never meant to replace the minute man, a spokesman explained at the time.

Though thousands of men and women have died in service to America since Davis, he will always be among the first. “There can never be but one man who headed the first column of attack on the King’s troops in the Revolutionary War,” said Reverend Woodbury in 1851. “And Isaac Davis was that man.” [Source: Task & Purpose | David Rosa / HistoryNet | May 2022 ++]

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## **Hanoi Hilton POW Hero**

**The Incredibly Stupid POW Douglas Hegdah**

Douglas Hegdahl walked freely around the infamous “Hanoi Hilton” prison camp, one of many American prisoners of war held in Vietnam in 1967. He was sweeping the courtyards during the prison guards’ afternoon “siesta.” The American sailor that fell into their laps was known to the guards as “The Incredibly Stupid One.” They believed he could neither read nor write and could barely even see. But the “stupid” Seaman Apprentice Hegdahl was slowly collecting intelligence, gathering prisoner data, and even sabotaging the enemy. He even knew the prison’s location inside Hanoi.

This young man came from a solid, patriotic Norwegian Lutheran stock that believed when your country called, you answered. You did not go to the bus station but to the recruiting station. You did not go to Oxford, you went to Vietnam. So Douglas Brent Hegdahl III shipped out to boot camp at San Diego, where he slept through the Code of Conduct lectures since he would not be fighting in the trenches. Lo and behold, he did get orders to the USS Canberra which would have fulfilled his desire to visit Australia. At that time Canberra with 8-inch guns mounted on the pointy end and missiles on the round end was assigned to steam with the Gulf of Tonkin Yacht Club in the South China Sea off the coast of Vietnam. (And, yes, She did have Canberra, Australia on her Port of Call list.)

Doug’s battle station was the aft ammunition handling room for the 5-inch guns, located aft in the bowels of the ship. One morning he had the 0100 watch while the Canberra was steaming down the coast of North Vietnam firing its 8-inch guns against targets of opportunity (bicycles, water buffalo and occasional trucks) on Highway 1. At about 0330 he rolled out of the rack. Being a prudent farm boy, he locked all his valuables in his locker and then proceeded to go out on deck for a breath of fresh air before manning his battle station. Now there is a non-repetitive exercise in the surface Navy called “going out on deck when big guns are firing.” If the concussion does not blow you over the side, it will at least blow out your eardrums.

But Doug must have slept through that safety lecture. He doesn’t know what happened. Either not being night-adapted, or being without his glasses, or concussion did it, he ended up going arse over teakettle into the South China Sea about three miles offshore with no life preserver, no identification, no nothing. To learn what happened next and about how he earned the title of ‘The Incredibly Stupid One’ go to the attachment to this Bulletin titled “**Hanoi Hilton POW Hero**”

Also, at <https://youtu.be/OB3BOCuzFF0> is a 2 hr 20 min video of Capt Rick Stratton’s account of this story. [Source: The Pacific Times | Michael Kunzelman | April 25, 2022 ++]

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## **Medicare Drug Procurement**

**Update 06: Biden Issues New Rule to Help Lower Cost**

With the legislation to lower drug costs stalled in Congress and its fate uncertain, last week the Biden Administration took action that it hopes will lower drug costs for many seniors. Under a final rule issued 29 APR, seniors enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans and Medicare Part D prescription drug plans can expect improved transparency and lower out-of-pocket costs for medications by requiring Medicare prescription drug plans to pass certain savings on to customers.

More Medicare Part D drug plans are entering “price concession” arrangements in which they pay reduced costs to some pharmacies for certain dispensed drugs. But these arrangements are not publicly disclosed, and the drug plans do not pass the savings along to Medicare patients who purchase the drugs. The new rule requires Part D plans to give all price reductions they receive from network pharmacies to the person buying the drug, which should reduce the out-of-pocket cost charged to the customer. The policy will take effect on Jan. 1, 2024. The delay in the starting date of the new rule is to give the Part D plans time to adjust their pharmacy contracting and avoid any possible disruptions.

However, the insurance companies that offer the Part D plans are not happy. They say that only pharmacists will benefit from this requirement, with seniors and taxpayers paying the price through higher premiums. The final rule also requires, among other things, private Medicare Advantage plans to streamline the grievance and appeals processes in certain cases for those who are “dual-eligibles,” who are seniors who qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid. The rule makes a change in Medicare Advantage plans’ co-payment rules that would result in more equitable payments to health-care providers who serve dual-eligibles.

The rule also includes a new maximum out-of-pocket policy for dual-eligible beneficiaries for Medicare Part A hospital services and for Part B outpatient services. [Source: TSCL | May 2, 2022 ++]

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## **Medicare Advantage**

### **Update 12: IG Reports Some Plans Denying Medically Necessary Care**

Medicare Advantage Plans that have become popular among many seniors are offered by private insurance companies. They are advertised as alternatives to traditional Medicare that can be less expensive and provide a wider array of benefits than the traditional government-run program offers. More than 27 million seniors are covered through private Medicare Advantage plans,

which receive a set amount to cover each enrollee’s projected cost of care. The plans receive higher “risk-adjusted” payments for sicker individuals with more projected medical costs.

Those plans are offered because they are very profitable for the companies. However, a new report from the Office of the Inspector General (IG) of the Department of Health and Human Services raises troubling questions about how some companies are trying to increase their profits. According to the report, some companies have denied access to medically necessary care by denying prior authorization and payment requests that, in fact, met Medicare coverage rules. They have done that by:

- Using clinical criteria that are not contained in Medicare coverage rules;
- Requesting unnecessary documentation; and
- Making manual review errors and system errors.

They have also sometimes denied payments to providers for some services that met both Medicare coverage rules and the companies’ own billing rules. Denying requests that meet Medicare coverage rules may prevent or delay beneficiaries from receiving medically necessary care and can burden providers.

Under traditional Medicare, there may be an incentive for hospitals and doctors to overtreat patients because they are paid for each service and test performed. But the fixed payment given to private plans provides “the potential incentive for insurers to deny access to services and payment in an attempt to increase their profits,” the report concluded. According to one health care lawyer, people signing up for Medicare Advantage are surrendering their right to have a doctor determine what is medically necessary, he said, rather than have the insurer decide. The investigators urged Medicare officials to beef up oversight of Advantage plans and provide consumers “with clear, easily accessible information about serious violations.”

Medicare officials said in a statement that they are reviewing the findings to determine the appropriate next steps, and that plans found to have repeated violations will be subject to increasing penalties. The agency “is committed to ensuring that people with Medicare Advantage have timely access to medically necessary care,” officials said. [Source: TSCL | May 2, 2022 ++]

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## **Lung Cancer**

**Update 05: New Snakelike Robot Slithers Down Your Lungs and Could Spot Cancer**

Researchers in Britain have developed an autonomous, snakelike robot designed to slither down human lungs into places that are difficult for medical professionals to reach. The tool could improve the detection and treatment of lung cancer and other pulmonary diseases. In a medical paper released in the journal of Soft Robotics last week, scientists from the University of Leeds unveiled a new "magnetic tentacle robot," which is composed of magnetic discs and is roughly 2 millimeters thick - about double the size of a ballpoint pen tip - and less than a-tenth-of-an-inch long. In the future, the robot's use could be expanded to help doctors better, and more thoroughly, investigate other organs, such as the human heart, kidney or pancreas, they said.

"It's creepy," Pietro Valdastri, the project's lead researcher and chair of robotics and autonomous systems at the University of Leeds, said in an interview. "But my goal . . . is to find a way to reach as deep as possible inside the human body in the least invasive way as possible." The robot is still 5 to 10 years away from showing up in a clinical setting, researchers said, but the device comes on the heels of a fleet of other robotic innovations allowing doctors the ability to better scan a patient's lungs for cancerous tissue. They are designed to ease a task doctors have long struggled with: reaching the inner recesses of the human body, for diagnostic and treatment purposes, without causing damage or using invasive procedures.

Doctors now use a medical device called a bronchoscope to examine a person's lungs and airways. Normally 3.5 to 4 millimeters in diameter, nearly twice as wide as Valdastri's tentacle robot, the device enters through a patient's nose or mouth and goes into the lung's airways, called bronchioles. But the bronchoscope's width and rigidity limits how deep doctors can venture down a patient's lungs in search of cancerous or other problematic tissues. Parts of the lungs are left unexamined, Valdastri said, potentially causing harm. "If you are not able to get a tissue sample, then you have to evaluate the risk of . . . not doing anything," he said. "This is a reason why, very often, cancer is detected at a very late stage."

The British robot would be the first to glide down a patient's lungs using magnetic control and not require manual guidance from a physician, allowing a more precise, agile and less-damaging way for doctors to investigate lung diseases, the study's research team said. Although Valdastri's robot is years away from clinical application, its smaller size and magnetic composition would allow it to shape-shift more easily and better navigate the intricate shape of a lung's network of airways, which can look like a tree.

Magnets mounted on robotic arms outside the patient would be used to help guide the device into the lungs. Once inserted into a patient, the magnets would help the robot move down a patient's lungs autonomously, following a map of the patient's lung network, which would be mapped out before the procedure. Once at its desired location, the robot could ultimately have the capability to take a tissue sample or deliver a clinical treatment. "Depending on where a tumor is," he said, "this may be the only way to reach [it] successfully."

Nitish V. Thakor, a professor of biomedical engineering at Johns Hopkins University, said the autonomous robot is "very novel and interesting technology" that could become potentially useful in areas outside the lungs, most notably the heart. The device's autonomous capability is its unique factor, he said, and has the capability to change invasive surgeries. "I can imagine a future," he said, "where a full CAT scan is done of the lungs, and the surgeon sits down on a computer and lays out this navigation path of this kind of a snake robot and says: 'Go get it.' " Despite that, Thakor said any autonomous robot would face an uphill climb being accepted by clinicians. "Which surgeon is going to want to lose business," he said. "People who do the clinical practice . . . guard it very carefully until they get trained."

Many steps remain before hospitals might put the robot into use. Valdastris team recently wrapped up trials of the robot in cadavers, which he said were successful. After that, they plan to test it in small animals. Ultimately, the technology could be licensed by a large medical device manufacturer, he said, which could shepherd the product through further clinical trials and approval by the Food and Drug Administration. Alternatively, the study team could form its own company, find investors and control the process itself.

The future is not without challenges, Valdastris said. From a technical perspective, the robot will need to adapt to a human's rhythms of respiration. Currently, magnetic fields help the robot navigate a patient's lungs, excluding people who have pacemakers or otherwise can't get MRI's from being able to use the technology. Meanwhile, Janani S. Reisenauer, a surgeon at the Mayo Clinic who specializes in lung cancer, said that the jury is still out on how innovative the robot could be. She noted that recent bronchoscopy robots made by Johnson and Johnson and Intuitive Surgical have made significant gains in letting doctors reach hard-to-reach parts of the lungs and collect tissue samples for lung cancer.

However, she said, if the autonomous robot develops the capability to go deep into the lungs and then deploy a medicine, screen for proteins that indicate tumors are developing, or other treatment, that would be of significant value to the field. "If it's a small, maneuverable autonomous system that can get out there and then do something when it's out there," she said, "that would be revolutionary." [Source: MOAA | Karen Ruedisueli | April 14, 2022 ++]

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## **Chemotherapy**

### **Hair Loss Side Effect**

Cancer treatment can cause serious side effects. Many find it especially troubling that chemotherapy can make them lose the hair on their scalp and body. There are ways to try to



prevent this from happening, but there hasn't been enough research on whether they really work. Hair loss due to chemotherapy is usually temporary, though: The hair nearly always grows back after chemotherapy. In the meantime, many people use wigs or hats to cover their head.

## **Symptoms & Causes**

The hair may become thinner overall, but it often falls out completely within days or weeks of the start of chemotherapy. It can also fall out bit by bit, in clumps. This doesn't just affect the hair on your scalp, but also your eyebrows, eyelashes and facial hair, as well as body hair and pubic hair. If the hairs break off close to the scalp, they can leave behind stubble. That can feel itchy or unpleasant. And sometimes the scalp can be tender even before the hair falls out, or it may hurt when the hair is touched.

The roots of the hair are made up of living cells that become hardened. The cells that constantly grow from the root to replace them push the hair out of the skin. Many of the medications used in chemotherapy (cytostatic drugs) disrupt the way that the cancer cells multiply. But these medications also damage the fast-growing cells in the hair roots, causing the hair to break off inside the skin or close to it. Some of the hair we have isn't actively continuing to grow. That hair isn't harmed by chemotherapy, but makes up less than ten percent of our total hair. Cancer medications that aren't cytostatics may cause hair loss as well. Those include tamoxifen, which is used for breast cancer, and a number of other "targeted" cancer drugs.

## **Prevalence & Outlook**

It isn't possible to say how often chemotherapy causes hair loss in general. For one thing, it depends on what medication is used: Some medications almost always cause hair loss, while others rarely lead to hair loss. Other factors may also influence whether hair falls out and how severe the hair loss is. These include the chemotherapy dose or whether the medication is taken as a tablet or given as an infusion.

Hair loss typically starts one to three weeks after chemotherapy is started. The hairs on the scalp fall out first, and then a little later facial hair, body hair and pubic hair may fall out too. A few weeks after the end of chemotherapy, the hairs start to grow back in most people. Scarring on the scalp or other problems are rare. In some people, the hair that grows back may be a little lighter or darker, and often it's curlier than it was before. But this is usually only temporary.

## **Diagnosis, Prevention & Treatment**

Hair loss is such a typical side effect of chemotherapy that it usually isn't necessary to run any special tests on the hair or the scalp. That only makes sense if the hair doesn't grow back healthy after chemotherapy – or if doctors think that something else might be causing the hair loss, like a fungal skin infection. There are currently no medications that can effectively prevent

chemotherapy-related hair loss. Sometimes it may possibly help to wear a cooling cap during the infusion of the medication. Cooling the scalp is supposed to reduce the damage to the roots of the hair. There is no effective treatment for chemotherapy-related hair loss. After most types of chemotherapy, though, the hair grows back on its own again. It's not clear whether the hair-growth drug minoxidil can make the hair grow back faster.

## Everyday life

For many people, hair loss is one of the worst side effects of chemotherapy – for instance, because then others can tell that you have cancer. It can also affect how people perceive themselves as men and women. In women, the loss of hair on their scalp is the main issue; in men it is the loss of facial and body hair as well. There are various ways of dealing with these problems:

- If you have long hair, you could get it cut short before the start of chemotherapy, for instance. Then when hair starts to fall out, the clumps that are lost seem less alarming. Shaving the hair off yourself prevents you from feeling like you're constantly losing hair – and will save you from having to keep removing hair from your bed, clothing or bathroom.
- You can cover a bare scalp with hats, scarves or caps, as well as wigs made of either artificial or real hair. Wigs made of real hair can be cut to match your previous hairstyle and look very natural. They are more expensive than wigs made of artificial hair, though. If you decide to wear a wig, the doctor who is giving you the chemotherapy can write you a prescription for one. Statutory health insurers in Germany usually cover part of the costs for artificial hair wigs.
- Eyelashes and eyebrow hair that falls out can be replaced using artificial lashes and make-up. If you've never put on make-up before, you can find a lot of online videos offering tips and suggestions. Some hospitals and support groups even offer special courses.
- Another option is to meet with others who are affected by chemotherapy-related hair loss. You could also get support from a specialist in psycho-oncology and talk with them about any worries or anxieties that you have related to the hair loss.

It is important to be very careful when washing your hair until it has grown back completely. That includes things like not washing it more than twice a week, using baby shampoo, not drying it with a hairdryer for too long or at too hot a temperature, and not using any hair dyes.

[Source: <https://www.informedhealth.org/hair-loss-in-chemotherapy.html> | May 2022 ++]

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## **Military Abortions**

### **Update 01: Army Drafting Policy in Case Roe v. Wade Overturned**

Army officials are drafting a policy “to ensure we take care of our soldiers” seeking abortions, in case the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade, according to the sergeant major of the Army. Various officials, including the office of the assistant secretary of the Army, personnel officials and the sergeant major’s office are working in collaboration on the drafts, said Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston. He testified 12 MAY before the House Appropriations Committee’s subcommittee on military construction, veterans affairs and related agencies. “Those policies have not gone to the Secretary of the Army.... there are drafts if it were to be overturned, but that will be a decision for the secretary of the Army to sign a policy,” Grinston said.

An initial draft of a Supreme Court opinion, leaked earlier this month, appears to indicate the Supreme Court is likely to overturn the landmark case. “If that opinion goes unchanged, in its final form there will be massive ramifications for women, including those in the armed services,” said Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., chairwoman of the subcommittee. “For those female soldiers in states with restrictive abortion laws, their options for safe abortions may be completely erased if Roe v. Wade is overturned,” she said, as she pressed Grinston for answers. “It’s good to know you are preparing in anticipation of that possibility.” “Women in the military already have a higher rate of unintended pregnancies than civilian women. Currently the Defense Health Agency has the limited authority to only provide abortions in the cases of rape, incest or danger to a woman’s life,” Wasserman Schultz said.

Advocates have long expressed concern that military women have very limited options in states with more restrictive abortion laws, because they may not have the means to travel to another state to get an abortion. These restrictions could put abortions out of reach for some military women, advocates contend. Rep. David Trone (D.MD) said he was “extremely pleased” to see that the Army’s new directive about parenthood eliminates the requirement for unit commanders to pre-approve a service member’s leave to seek an abortion.

Grinston said Army officials are also looking at drafting a policy regarding support of LGBTQ soldiers. Wasserman Schultz cited the recent Air Force policy to provide assignment, medical, legal and other resources to support their airmen and Guardians if they’re serving in states with discriminatory laws. “It’s important we’re making sure we’re taking care of our service members, and protecting them from discrimination,” Wasserman Schultz said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | May 12, 2022 ++]

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## Post-COVID-19 Syndrome

### Update 01: Experts Perplexed Over Number of People Getting Long COVID

Public health experts are divided over how many people are getting long COVID-19, a potentially debilitating condition that comes after a patient has recovered from the coronavirus. Ill effects from the condition can include fatigue, pain, neurological issues and even changes in mental health. Initially, public health officials believed that only a small minority of people would suffer from long COVID-19. But some studies now indicate a majority of those infected with the coronavirus are experiencing long COVID-19 symptoms. Still, estimates on the numbers of people with long COVID are all over the map.

- Researchers from the Penn State College of Medicine found that more than half of COVID-19 survivors had long COVID-19.
- Another study from the University of Arizona found that about 2 out of 3 people who experienced mild or moderate cases of coronavirus had long-lasting symptoms.
- Other reports have been more conservative, estimating anywhere between 10 to 30 percent of those infected develop long-term symptoms.

Those who experience ongoing symptoms from long COVID-19 have sometimes come to be known as COVID-19 long haulers. It's generally believed that people who developed severe cases of COVID-19 are more likely to have long COVID-19, but even those who had asymptomatic cases have reported lingering after-effects months after testing negative. One problem in figuring out how many people get long COVID-19 is defining it. Apart from the wide range of symptoms, there is still debate over when a person is considered to have long COVID-19. Some health care authorities consider a patient to have the condition if symptoms persist after three to six weeks, while other think it should be considered on a longer basis.

Jim Heath, president and professor at the Institute for Systems Biology, is leading the Pacific Northwest consortium researching long COVID-19 as part of the National Institute of Health's (NIH) RECOVER initiative, which is looking into the post-COVID-19 condition and potential ways of preventing and treating it. Heath told The Hill that if one definition of long COVID-19 was being used — one in which symptoms lingered about four to six weeks after infection — then roughly half of those infected would be considered to have long COVID-19. “But if you look at like six months out, which is for people that are really going to have to live with something, it's probably more like 15 percent, something like that. I don't know if we have really firm numbers on that yet,” Heath said.

According to Heath, an estimate of 15 to 20 percent of coronavirus survivors experiencing long COVID-19 after six months was a reasonable “educated guess” and he added that there was evidence to support that rate of occurrence. When reached for comment by The Hill, the NIH said initial studies have found that at least half of COVID-19 patients who were hospitalized reported “persistent weakness or fatigue” months after their recovery. Studies on the prevalence of long COVID-19 have been “relatively few,” according to the NIH, and they have all focused on people who had symptomatic cases of COVID-19.

Heath reiterated that most people will not get long COVID-19, at least if you consider the condition to be something that will last six months post infection. In comparison, around 15 percent of people who contract Lyme Disease, a bacterial infection spread through ticks, will experience effects that go beyond six months. What makes long COVID-19 unique is its occurrence in those who had mild cases, Heath said. The NIH said numerous observational studies in both children and adults are being conducted to find potential treatments for long haulers. The agency has requested applications for new clinical trials to launch this summer to test potential ways of preventing and treating long COVID-19.

“In contrast to the wealth of prior knowledge that led to the vaccines for Sars-CoV-2 and a host of other viruses, there is much less known about what causes persistent symptoms following infectious illnesses or how to best treat them. As a consequence, there is more knowledge needed to fuel the scientific advances to come,” the NIH said. [Source: The Hill | Joseph Choi | May 13, 2022 ++]

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## **Turbo Tax Bait and Switch**

### **Update 01: Sued for 'Free' Tax Filing Promises**

Corporations may enjoy many of the same rights as citizens under American law, but they certainly aren't punished the same way for wrongdoing. Since an organization itself can't serve jail time, often the only recourse is seeking monetary damages. Here are some of the costliest big-business court settlements ever reached. The affected companies include TurboTax, which just agreed to pay out \$141 million after being sued for misleading customers with ads for "free" tax filing services.

It turns out those TurboTax ads promising "free free free free free" tax filing aren't just annoying — they may also be intentionally misleading, according to the Federal Trade Commission. The consumer protection agency is suing TurboTax parent company Intuit to stop what it calls a "bait-and-switch" con job. While TurboTax does offer a free option, most people — up to two-thirds of tax filers in 2020 — aren't eligible to use it because their returns aren't simple enough. Nevertheless, TurboTax has made the word "free" the focus of its ad campaigns for years. “TurboTax is bombarding consumers with ads for ‘free’ tax filing services, and then hitting them with charges when it’s time to file,” said Samuel Levine, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection, in a statement. “We are asking a court to immediately halt this bait-and-switch, and to protect taxpayers at the peak of filing season.”

Intuit says it has helped 100 million taxpayers file for free in the last eight years. "Far from steering taxpayers away from free tax preparation offerings, our free advertising campaigns have led to more Americans filing their taxes for free than ever before and have been central to raising awareness of free tax prep," says Kerry McLean, executive vice president and general counsel of Intuit. McLean notes that 17 million taxpayers were able to file for free in 2021, up from 11 million in 2018, before TurboTax ads started focusing on free filing.

The FTC is asking the company stop what it calls deceptive advertising during the tax season. Whether that happens, the fact remains that for most of us, we still have to file — free or not — by April 18. [Source: Cheapism | Liane Starr | March 30, 2022 ++]

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## Probate

### Update 01: How to Avoid It

Probate is the process of proving the validity of a will and supervising the administration of an estate usually in the probate court. State law governs the proceedings in the probate court, so the process can vary from state to state. Supervising the administration of an estate can result in additional expense, unwanted publicity, and delays in the distribution of estate assets for a year or longer, which is why planning to avoid the probate process may be beneficial. There are several ways in which assets may transfer on death directly from the decedent/owner to others without probate. The following are some of the more common ways.

**Create a living trust.** A revocable living trust is a separate legal entity that can be set up to hold assets. You can transfer most assets to a living trust while you're alive and have complete access to and control of those assets during your lifetime. You can also direct who is to receive assets held in trust upon your death. The use of trusts involves a complex web of tax rules and regulations, and usually involves upfront costs and ongoing administrative fees. You should consider the counsel of an experienced estate planning professional before implementing a trust strategy.

**Name a beneficiary.** Many types of contracts allow you, as the account owner, to designate a beneficiary or beneficiaries to receive the assets directly upon your death, avoiding probate. Examples include life insurance, annuities, and retirement accounts such as IRAs and 401(k)s.

**Make accounts payable on death.** Certain other types of accounts, such as bank accounts and brokerage accounts, also allow you to designate a beneficiary to inherit the account at your death without going through probate.

**Own real estate jointly or create a life estate.** Owning property jointly, as joint tenants with rights of survivorship, is another way to transfer property at death while avoiding probate. When one joint owner dies, property ownership automatically transfers to the surviving joint owner. You can also create a life estate in the property. In this case, you transfer ownership of the

property to others, often called remainder beneficiaries, while you retain a life estate in the property. This means you have the right to use and control the property during your lifetime. Upon your death, complete ownership of the property passes to the remainder beneficiaries.

[Source: Navy Federal Investment Services | David Hammond | May 2022 ++]

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## **COLA Watch 2022**

### **Where Could Yours's Land in 2023?**

The economic indicator responsible for setting the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for military retirees, disabled veterans, Social Security recipients, and others has edged even closer to record-setting territory. Frequent visitors to MOAA's COLA Watch page (<https://www.moaa.org/content/take-action/cola-watch/#COLA-Watch>) won't be surprised by this trend, but new figures point to an even larger adjustment in 2023 to combat ongoing inflation. The March Consumer Price Index for Urban and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), a figure released in April, was 1.52% higher than the February number. It's the largest February-to-March jump for CPI-W since at least 1978, when the statistic underwent a major revision and name change

While the figures determining the annual COLA won't be set until later in the year – a walkthrough on the math is available at <https://www.moaa.org/content/take-action/cola-watch/> – predictions point to a major uptick from last year's 5.9% COLA. The Senior Citizens League, a nonpartisan advocacy group, predicted an 8.9% 2023 COLA increase based on the March data. That's up from the group's 7.6% estimate the previous month. If that figure holds, it would be the third-largest COLA since 1975, behind an 11.2% increase in January 1982 and a 14.3% boost the previous year. No other increases topped 10%.

### **COLA Challenges**

Why monitor this figure? Aside from financial planning purposes, MOAA's advocacy team tracks these numbers for a very simple reason – after the COLA hikes in the early 1980s, Congress attempted to claw back COLA from military retirees to boost other parts of the federal budget. In addition to a series of COLA delays from 1982 to 1986, Congress passed a 1985 law ending automatic spending increases, including COLA increases for military retirees (Social Security beneficiaries and other groups were exempted). This threat to retirees' earned benefits led to the formation of The Military Coalition, what was then a group of 15 associations united against this unfair treatment.



Thanks in part to the efforts of MOAA (then TROA, The Retired Officers Association) and the coalition, Congress rejected a White House plan to eliminate COLA for military retirees in 1987. The move ended the immediate threat to the value of military retirement, though challenges would continue through the decades. Now, as COLA reaches historic highs and budget pressures begin mounting, MOAA stands watch to protect your benefit from lawmakers or administration officials who may not appreciate the value of service – who may not understand a proposal to shave a percentage point or two from your COLA may look good on the bottom line, but could prove disaster to military retirees attempting to stretch their earned benefit as prices skyrocket.

Keep track of these efforts and others at MOAA's Advocacy News page <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/news-listing/?cat=107> or via The MOAA Newsletter. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | April 27, 2022 ++]

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## **Food Inflation**

### **What's Behind It and How to Cope**

As measured by the Consumer Price Index for food at home, grocery prices increased 3.4% in 2020, a faster rate than the 20-year historical average of 2.4%.<sup>1</sup> More recently, food inflation accelerated by 6.5% during the 12 months ending in December 2021, while prices for the category that includes meat, poultry, fish, and eggs spiked 12.5%.<sup>2</sup> Food prices have long been prone to volatility, in part because the crops grown to feed people and livestock are vulnerable to pests and extreme weather. But in 2021, U.S. food prices were hit hard by many of the same global supply-chain woes that drove up broader inflation.

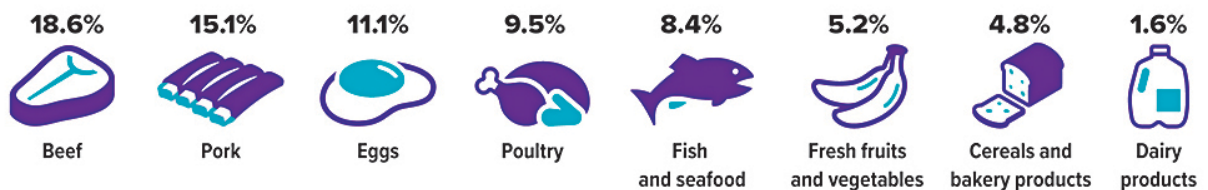
The pandemic spurred shifts in consumer demand, slowed factory production in the United States and overseas, and caused disruptions in domestic commerce and international trade that worsened as economic activity picked up steam. A shortage of metal containers and backups at busy ports and railways caused long shipping delays and drove up costs. Severe labor shortages, and the resulting wage hikes, have made it more difficult and costly to manufacture and transport many types of unfinished and finished goods.

As long as businesses must pay more for the raw ingredients, packaging materials, labor, transportation, and fuel needed to produce, process, and distribute food products to grocery stores, some portion of these additional costs will be passed on to consumers. And any lasting

strain on household budgets could prompt consumers to rethink their meal choices and shopping behavior.

Seven Ways to Master the Supermarket. The U.S. Department of Agriculture expects food inflation to moderate in 2022, but no one knows for certain how long prices might stay elevated. In the meantime, it may take more effort and some planning to control your family's grocery bills. Here are seven ways to master the supermarket

- Set a budget for spending on groceries and do your best not to exceed it. In 2021, a typical family of four with a modest grocery budget spent about \$1,150 per month on meals and snacks prepared at home. Your spending limit could be higher or lower depending on your household income, family size, where you live, and food preferences.<sup>5</sup>
- To avoid wasting food, be aware that food date labels such as "sell by," "use by," and "best before" are not based on safety, but rather on the manufacturer's guess of when the food will reach peak quality. With fresh foods like meat and dairy products, you can usually add five to seven days to the "sell by" date. The look and smell can help you determine whether food is still fresh, and freezing can extend the shelf life of many foods.
- Grocery stores often rotate advertised specials for beef, chicken, and pork, so you may want to plan meals around sale-priced cuts and buy extra to freeze for later. With meat prices soaring, it may be a good time to experiment with "meatless" meals that substitute plant-based proteins such as beans, lentils, chickpeas, or tofu.
- Stock up on affordable and nonperishable food such as rice, pasta, dried beans, canned goods, and frozen fruits and vegetables when they are on sale.
- Select fresh produce in season and forgo more expensive pre-cut and pre-washed options.
- Keep in mind that a store's private-label brands may offer similar quality at a significant discount from national brands.
- Consider joining store loyalty programs that offer weekly promotions and personalized deals.



Annual Change in Consumer Price Indexes for Food (through December 2021)

[Source: Navy Federal Investment Services | David Hammond | May 2022 ++]

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## IRS Backlog

### Update 01: Millions of Returns Currently Delayed Due to Staff Shortages

The Internal Revenue Service is failing to process millions of tax refunds in a timely manner due to staffing shortages, as it continues to struggle to bring on desperately needed employees, according to the agency's inspector general. As of mid-March, IRS had onboarded just 9.5% of the nearly 5,500 submission processing staff it hopes to hire for the filing season, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration found in a report released on a 5 MAY.

The agency is still short about 5,000 employees in that position alone. It has found more success in hiring for accounts management—workers who handle taxpayer interactions, including by answering calls—filling 77% of its vacancies. Still, the IG said IRS is nearly 1,200 employees short of where it wants to be. More than one-in-four taxpayer assistance centers, where individuals can schedule in-person appointments, are closed due to staffing shortages, the IG said. About half of the centers only have one or two employees and are subject to those workers' availability.

Due to the shortfalls, “millions of tax returns are not being timely processed, refunds are not being timely issued, and taxpayers are not receiving timely assistance with their tax account issues,” the IG said. The agency appears to have made some progress since the watchdog wrapped up its report. IRS has said in March it hopes to add 5,000 employees per year for the next two years to address its backlogs and Commissioner Charles Rettig recently told lawmakers it is already halfway to its goal for 2022. Congress “rescued” the agency from “death” when it provided direct hiring authority in March, Rettig said.

Despite that success, the IG recommended IRS develop a new approach to address its staffing issues. “The continued and ongoing hiring shortfalls of employees needed to fill mission-critical submission processing positions warrant the ongoing development of new hiring and retention initiatives and strategies,” the watchdog said. “Approaches to date have not resolved the significant hiring and staffing shortfalls.” IRS has taken other measures in the interim to reduce its unprecedented pending casework. It has mandated overtime for 6,000 employees and allowed for voluntary overtime for an additional 10,000 workers, deployed surge teams and brought on contractors. IRS started the filing season with 8 million backlogged returns and while it has made some progress, there are still about 6 million outstanding.

The IG is separately conducting probes in how IRS is addressing its backlogs, as well as its staffing shortages. Rettig has said IRS has found great success in recent job fairs since receiving direct hire authority. At those events, he said, the agency has hired 90% of those who show up. Congress has provided IRS with a funding increase of \$675 million as part of the fiscal 2022 omnibus spending bill, the largest bump since 2001. President Biden requested an additional

18% bump for fiscal 2023, and has sought an \$80 billion surge over 10 years as part of his larger social and climate spending package. Republicans pushed back on the need for more spending at IRS, saying the agency must learn to be more efficient.

Rettig has said IRS is still facing a \$100 million shortfall for operations support in the current fiscal year, warning the agency will have to make cuts elsewhere in its budget if the situation is not addressed. [Source: Government Executive | Eric Katz | May 5, 2022 ++]

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## IRS Tax Filing

### Update 02: IRS Balks at Public Free-file GAO Suggestion

The IRS doesn't think that a public, free-filing option would "significantly improve the taxpayer experience," the tax agency said in a new report from the Government Accountability Office. That stance goes against a recommendation from the government watchdog, which suggested that the agency identify and create more free options for filing tax returns online. The GAO report focuses on the tax agency's 20-year-old Free File program run by the IRS and a consortium of tax preparation companies to give most Americans options to electronically file their tax returns at no cost.

Currently, about 70% of Americans are eligible for the program, which is meant for those who fall under a certain income threshold, but most people eligible for the program use other means to file their taxes, which they might have had to pay for, the GAO says. The IRS doesn't itself currently have an online filing service like the GAO is suggesting it look into developing, but the question of whether or not the agency could or should offer its own option has been a question from the start of the program. "Historically, IRS had agreed that it would not develop its own online filing services in exchange for the participating companies offering free services to eligible taxpayers," the report states.

When the agency signed the first agreement with the servicers in 2002, the IRS agreed that it wouldn't offer its own free online tax preparation and filing services. GAO's report says that companies are participating in the program, "to help ensure the federal government does not create its own tax filing system, which could compete with them." The deal that the IRS wouldn't make its own service was removed from the agreement between the IRS and the consortium in 2019, according to the GAO report. Whether taxpayers would have better experiences if the IRS were to establish its own system is something stakeholders differ on, the report says.

One concern for an IRS-run service cited by stakeholders referenced in the report, and by the IRS itself, is IRS funding, capacity and outdated tech. But others say that the IRS is best situated to use data it has on taxpayers to potentially prepopulate tax returns and to help low-income Americans file their taxes and get the social benefits that come with that. GAO itself writes that "given that the law generally requires taxpayers to file a return, and because many federal benefits are only available to those who file, it is reasonable to expect the federal government to help citizens with their filing obligations at the lowest possible cost."

The watchdog recommended in this new report that the IRS eliminate a remaining provision in its memorandum of understanding with the consortium that requires the agency to notify the group if it commits money to provide free services. Then, the watchdog recommends that before the current agreement with this consortium ends in October of next year, the IRS commissioner "work with relevant stakeholders to identify and develop additional options for free online filing of tax returns." The IRS said in reply comments that it "does not believe a public free-filing option would significantly improve the taxpayer experience, nor do we have sufficient funding to develop this solution," wrote IRS Deputy Commissioner for Services and Enforcement Douglas O'Donnell.

"If new legislation and funding were approved, then the IRS would expect to assess the feasibility and utility of offering additional free tax preparation and filing options," he continued. The watchdog's report also calls into question the Free File program overall, saying that "IRS is not managing the risk of relying on the Free File program as the way it helps taxpayers file for free online." GAO points to the fact that companies can leave the consortium freely, and the consortium can also end the program altogether if the IRS were to develop its own system.

Intuit, which runs TurboTax, recently opted out of the program earlier this year. That's along with five other companies that left between 2016 and 2021, which also included H&R Block. With Intuit, it had served about 70% of people in the Free File program in 2019, the report says. "The departure of the two largest companies from the program raises questions about its continued viability. While IRS expressed concern about the resources required to develop an alternative, such concern needs to be weighed against the potential of an abrupt end to the program and the customer service challenges it would present," the GAO report states. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Lila Quintiliani | April 21, 2022 ++]

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## **Job Scams**

**Update 08: This Secret Shopper Job Sounds Cool, But It's Really a Scam**

You've been invited to check out one of your favorite retailers to secretly shop their store and evaluate the quality of service and product availability. The best part? You get to keep the items plus earn a paycheck as a mystery shopper. If this sounds too good to be true, it very well could be. Many mystery shopper opportunities are scams. Here's how to tell a real gig from this common con.

### **How this scam works**

- You receive an offer via email, text, or a social media network to become a secret shopper. In other cases, you may apply to a secret shopper job advertised online. Either way, the company offers you the job right away. You are so perfect for the position, they claim, you don't even need to interview.
- In the most common version of this scam, the company mails you a check to cover your secret shopper purchases. You are asked to buy a few things and send back the remaining money. Unfortunately, the check is a fake. It will bounce, and you'll be left footing the full bill and the bank fees associated with it
- However, scammers are getting creative with secret shoppers cons. Be on the lookout for twists. For example, one victim told BBB Scam Tracker about the following: "I saw a job posting on LinkedIn for a secret shopper position. I applied and shortly afterwards received a check in the mail. The check was for \$2,470 and the business wanted me to go to local stores, purchase gift cards with \$2,000, and keep the rest as pay. I was supposed to scratch off the security covers and send pictures." In another version of this scam, con artists offer high paying assignments with one small catch: you need to pay a registration fee to participate.

### **How to spot these scams:**

- Research the secret shopper companies before applying. Before applying to a secret shopper job, make sure the company exists, has working contact information, and has good reviews and feedback from previous employees. Search online with the company name and the word "scam" to find other reports.
- Check the Mystery Shopper Professionals Association database. Visit MSPA Americas to search a database of MSPA members for legitimate mystery shopping providers. However, scammers do impersonate real companies and their job postings, so watch out for these other warning signs too.
- Be wary of companies that hire on the spot. Real businesses will want to get to know you before they hire you. If a company reaches out to you out of the blue with a guaranteed position in their company, it's probably a scam.

Read more tips in the [complete Scam Alert on BBB.org](#)

### **For more information**

Read [BBB's job scams study](#) to learn more about employment scams and how to avoid them. You can also find good general information at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#). 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](#). [Source: Better Business Bureau | May 6, 2022 ++]

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## **Tax Laws**

### **Update 01: Strange but True | Kansas thru New Mexico**

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.

#### **Kansas: Balloon Payment**

Want to ride in a hot air balloon in Kansas? If it is tethered to the ground, passengers are taxed for the entertainment. But if the rope is untied, it's treated as air transportation and the ride is tax-free. Wisconsin and Missouri have had similar laws on the books.

#### **Kentucky: Breeding Contempt**

Home to the world-famous Kentucky Derby, this state has a 6% sales tax on thoroughbred stud fees. The revenue has topped \$15 million in some years, split among three horse breeder incentive funds.

#### **Louisiana: Worth a Shot**

Every September, Louisiana has a Second Amendment sales tax holiday. Hunting supplies, ammunition, and firearms are all exempt from state and local sales taxes, as well as use taxes. At one point it was accidentally repealed, but it was subsequently reinstated last year.

#### **Maine: Blue Laws**

Officially called the Maine Wild Blueberry Tax, this charge amounts to 1.5 cents per pound of wild blueberries sold. Businesses generally pass the tax on to consumers.

### **Maryland: Waste of Money**

Homeowners with septic systems in Maryland have had to pay \$5 a month, or \$60 a year, with the money going to upgrade wastewater treatment plants and failing septic systems and reduce pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

### **Massachusetts: Outside the Lines**

Massachusetts residents traveling for a holiday or celebration might run afoul of the law if they bring a bottle of liquor or wine. A special permit and fee are required to bring alcohol that wasn't purchased, and isn't intended for resale, in the state.

### **Michigan: Be Prepared to Pay**

Like many states, Michigan taxes prepared food but not unprepared food, and the law goes into detail about how to distinguish the two. Buying hot popcorn at a concession stand may be taxable, as that counts as prepared food, but a bag of chips isn't (unless it's heated or sold with an eating utensil).

### **Minnesota: A Fur Cry**

Those trying to stay warm during the Minnesota winter used to think twice before buying a fur coat. While most clothing items are tax-exempt, real fur was subject to sales tax — 6.875% statewide plus local taxes. The tax applied to fur coats bought online, as well. The rule has since been revoked, likely because fur has become a less popular option.

### **Mississippi: Grows on Trees**

Individuals and groups of "private nonindustrial landowners" have been able to get a tax credit for up to 50% of the costs associated with hardwood and pine reforestation. The credit has a cap of \$10,000 a year and a lifetime limit of \$75,000.

### **Missouri: The Bachelor Tax**

To encourage young men to marry, Missouri charged an annual tax of \$1 to single men between the age of 21 and 50. The "bachelor tax" was passed in 1820, when \$1 was equivalent to about \$20 today, and it's no longer enforced.

### **Montana: Prescription for Savings**



In Montana, prescribed drugs and insulin count toward medical expenses for those who itemize deductions. Even with a valid medical marijuana card, though, the cost of buying or growing marijuana isn't deductible.

### **Nebraska: Drug Tax Stamps**

Like Alabama, Nebraska taxes the sale of illegal controlled substances. The state's law says drug dealers must buy drug tax stamps at a rate of \$100 per ounce of marijuana, \$150 per gram of controlled substances, or \$500 per 50 dosage units of controlled substances that aren't generally sold by weight.

### **Nevada: The Body Oil Deduction**

Since 1999, the Mr. Olympia bodybuilding competition has been held in Las Vegas. Like everyone else, bodybuilders can deduct ordinary and necessary business expenses. But it's one of the few professions that can count body oil among those expenses.

### **New Hampshire: Improperly**

New Hampshire has neither a sales tax nor an income tax (with the exception of a 5% tax on interest and dividends above \$2,400, or \$4,800 for joint filers). Instead, many local governments rely on property taxes, which are among the highest in the nation.

### **New Jersey: The Pumpkin Rule**

Several states, New Jersey included, have made a distinction between pumpkins used for food and pumpkins used for decoration. If they were painted, cut, or sold as decorations, the pumpkins were taxable.

### **New Mexico: Happy Birthday**

The year-round warmth of New Mexico draws many retirees, and the state tax rules have an interesting twist for the elderly: Those who are over 100 years old and not claimed as a dependent don't have to pay income tax.

[Source: Cheapism | Louis DeNicola | March 03, 2022++]

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## **CBD Scam**

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Cannabidiol (CBD), [an active ingredient of cannabis](#), is now [legal in many US states](#) and [Canadian provinces](#). If you want to try it, watch out for scams. [BBB Scam Tracker](#) received dozens of reports from frustrated consumers who thought they bought discounted CBD online but ended up with hundreds of dollars in credit card charges.

### **How this scam works**

- You see an ad for CBD on social media or in an online search. A company is offering new customers a significant discount on CBD gummies. For example, one common scam offers a buy-one-get-one free deal. In some cases, the product seems to be endorsed by a celebrity. For example, recent [Scam Tracker](#) reports mention TV show Shark Tank, actor Kevin Costner, actress Mayim Bialik, and journalist Katie Couric.
- Sounds great, right? Unfortunately, if you order the discounted gummies, the scammers now have your credit card number. Victims report being charged for extra bottles or on-going monthly subscriptions that they never agreed to. Other victims report being charged random amounts for products they never received.
- Once scammers have your credit card information, cancelling is not easy! Consumers report that scammers used numerous excuses to avoid issuing refunds. They claimed everything from trouble with the computer system to it being outside the cancellation window. Many victims also told Scam Tracker that the charges continued even after they cancelled their subscription.
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### **How to spot these scams:**

- Research the company online. See what other people are saying about the company's free trials. Complaints from other customers can tip you off to "catches" that might come with the trial. Check the business's BBB Rating and see if there are any alerts.
- Be skeptical of celebrity endorsements. Resist being swayed by the use of a well-known name. Scammers often fake celebrity endorsements.
- Report losses to credit card companies. If you pay with a credit card, you can dispute fraudulent charges. Keep an eye on your monthly statements and notify your credit card company of any suspicious charges.
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[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 | May 13, 2022 ++]

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## **Tricks of the Trade**

### **Update 01: More 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 some more ways you're being primed to spend:

#### **Creative Merchandising**

Those end caps at grocery stores may indeed display great deals, but that's unlikely to be true for every product. Grocery stores often pair a loss leader — a product sold at a deep discount — with a premium product with a price to match, hoping you'll also get the latter while assuming it's also a deal. It's a good strategy, because experts say highly visible end-aisle displays can boost sales by 30%.

#### **Clustering Products at Eye Level**

You find name-brand items staring you right in the face in grocery aisles, with cheaper store brands closer to the floor. Those companies pay big for premium product placement, betting you're too lazy to look up or down to find a better deal. And if you've noticed that your kids always throw a fit in the cereal aisle, there's a reason for that: Flashy boxes festooned with cartoon characters are likely to be placed at a lower height where they can see (and beg) for them.

#### **Carefully Chosen Colors**

Red at Target, blue at Walmart: Far from random design choices, colors can affect how we feel about a company and even prime us to buy more than we otherwise would. Target shoppers who feel they spend way too much there can partially blame all the red, which experts say can make us more likely to buy quickly, without too much thought. Walmart's blue is chosen carefully to appeal to the masses.

#### **'Social Proof' and Peer Pressure**

There's a reason that brand you've never heard of is trumpeting all its five-star reviews in a stream of Facebook ads. You'll probably be a lot more curious about a product — and more likely to buy, of course — if "everyone" is raving about it. This simple concept, called "social proof" in marketing circles, also applies when companies bring in expert testimonials or include sales numbers in their advertising.

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"Would you like to add a bakery item for 99 cents?" If you've eaten a meal at Panera Bread, you've no doubt heard this casual attempt at upselling. And if you've shopped on Amazon, you've no doubt been shown items related to the product you're checking out, or bundles of related items (such as a camera, a case, and a memory card) sold for less than what they would cost if bought separately. A deal? Only if you were planning to buy all three to begin with.

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Even the most ardent Ikea devotees will admit how hard it is to navigate the maze-like store. Want to sound smart? Call it the "Gruen effect" — the simple idea that exposing you to more products will encourage you to buy more products. You can also see it in action at the supermarket, where you'll have to traverse as much of the store as possible just to get that gallon of milk tucked away in the back corner.

### **Decoy Pricing**

Many people would balk at shelling out \$50 for a T-shirt. But what if you were also shown a \$30 T-shirt and a \$100 T-shirt? Suddenly the \$50 T-shirt doesn't seem so expensive anymore — and if you want to balance price and quality, it seems downright reasonable. This tactic is rampant online, where shoppers are often shown a few choices at checkout. Chances are the retailer wants you to choose a certain one, and will price one of the other options — the "decoy" — in a wild, overblown way that will steer you back to the preferred option.

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Grocery stores love to dangle deals such as "10 for \$10" or "3 for \$6." The reason is obvious: Shoppers usually buy more, sometimes much more, than they need to maximize this "deal." This often holds true even when the store doesn't require shoppers to buy 10 cartons of yogurt, for instance, to get them for \$1 each — simply because of the power of suggestion.

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Is a size 8 really an 8? Or is it closer to a 10, or even a 12? Many clothing brands have been putting smaller-size labels on larger-cut clothes for a while now, and while it can make figuring out what size you really are a headache in any given store, the practice shows little sign of

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[Source: Cheapism | Sandra Latham | February 25, 2022 ++]

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## **DPRK Missile Program**

### **Update 08: Launches this Year Bring Leader Uh Closer to his Goal**

North Korea launched a ballistic missile toward its eastern waters on 4 MAY, South Korean and Japanese officials said, days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to speed up the development of his nuclear weapons “at the fastest possible pace” and threatened to use them against rivals. It launched another likely submarine-launched ballistic missile 7 MAY. The launches, the North’s 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> round of weapons firing this year, also came days before a new conservative South Korean president takes office for a single five-year term.

It called North Korea’s repeated ballistic missile launches “a grave threat” that would undermine international peace and security and a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions banning any ballistic launch by the North. The statement said that Won In-Choul, the South Korean JCS chief, held a video conference about the launch with Gen. Paul LaCamera, an American general who heads the South Korea-U.S. combined forces command in Seoul, and they agreed to maintain a solid joint defense posture. Japan also detected the North Korean launch and quickly condemned it. “North Korea’s series of actions that threatens the peace, safety and stability of the international community are impermissible,” Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters during his visit to Rome.

Kishida said he’ll discuss the launches when he meets Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi. “Naturally, we will exchange views on the regional situation in the Indo-Pacific and East Asia, and I will thoroughly explain the reality of the region including the North Korean missile launch today, to gain understanding about the pressing situation in the East Asia,” he said. Japanese Vice Defense Minister Makoto Oniki said that the missile was believed to have landed in waters outside of the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone. There has been no report of damage or injury reported from vessels and aircraft in the area.

It wasn't immediately known what missile North Korea launched on the 4<sup>th</sup>. South Korea's military said the missile flew about 290 miles at the apogee of 485 miles, while Oniki of Japan said it traveled about 310 miles at the maximum altitude of 500 miles. Observers say North Korea's unusually fast pace in weapons testing this year underscores its dual goal of advancing its missile programs and applying pressure on Washington over a deepening freeze in nuclear negotiations. They say Kim eventually aims to use his expanded arsenal to win an international recognition of North Korea as a nuclear state that he believes would help force the United States to relax international economic sanctions on the North.

One of the North Korean missiles tested recently was an intercontinental ballistic missile potentially capable of reaching the entirety of the American homeland. That missile's launch broke Kim's self-imposed 2018 moratorium on big weapons tests. There are signs that the North is also preparing for a nuclear test at its remote northeastern testing facility. If made, the nuclear bomb test explosion by North Korea would be the seventh of its kind and the first since 2017. Last week, Kim Jong Un showcased his most powerful nuclear-capable missiles targeting both the United States and its allies during a massive military parade in capital, Pyongyang. During a speech at the parade, Kim said he would develop his arsenal at the "fastest possible pace" and warned that the North would preemptively use its nuclear weapons if its national interests are threatened.

North Korea has previously unleashed harsh rhetoric threatening to attack its rivals with its nuclear weapons. But the fact that Kim made the threat himself and in a detailed manner have caused security jitters among some South Koreans. Taken together with North Korea's recent tests of short-range nuclear-capable missiles, some experts speculate North Korea's possibly escalatory nuclear doctrine would allow it to launch preemptive nuclear strikes on South Korea in some cases.

The 4 MAY launch came before the inauguration of South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol on 10 MAY. He has vowed to boost Seoul's missile capability and solidify its military alliance with Washington to better cope with increasing North Korean nuclear threats. North Korea has a history of raising animosities with weapons tests when Seoul and Washington inaugurate new governments in an apparent bid to boost its leverage in future negotiations. Yoon's power transition office called the latest North Korean launch "a grave provocation" and urged Pyongyang to stop acts that raise tensions and threaten international peace. It said in a statement that the Yoon government will strongly respond to North Korean provocations in close cooperation with the international community.

North Korea fired three short-range ballistic missiles toward the sea on 12 MAY, its neighbors said, in the latest of a series of weapons demonstrations this year that came just hours after it confirmed its first case of the coronavirus since the pandemic began. The launches could underscore North Korea's determination to press ahead with its efforts to expand its arsenal

despite the virus outbreak to rally support behind the leader, Kim Jong Un, and keep up pressure on its rivals amid long-dormant nuclear diplomacy. Thursday's launches were the North's first weapons fired since the inauguration of new conservative South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol. North Korea has a history of rattling new governments in Seoul and Washington in an apparent bid to boost its bargaining chips in future negotiations. The North Korean nuclear threat will likely top the agenda when Yoon meets visiting U.S. President Joe Biden in Seoul next week.

Some experts say the Biden administration's passive handling of North Korea as it focuses on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and an intensifying rivalry with China is allowing more room for the North to expand its military capabilities. The Biden administration's actions on North Korea have so far been limited to largely symbolic sanctions and offers of open-ended talks. North Korea has rejected the administration's offer for talks, saying it must first abandon its "hostile policy," in an apparent reference to U.S.-led international sanctions and U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises. [Source: Associated Press / Reuters / | Mari Yamaguchi / Joyce Lee / Hyung-Jin Kim | May 4, 7 & 12, 2022 ++]

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## **Ukraine Nuclear Strike**

### **Regarding Possibility Russia says: It's All in Our Military Doctrine**

Asked if Russia would rule out a preemptive tactical nuclear strike on Ukraine, Russia's deputy foreign minister said on 9 MAY that a decision on the possible use of nuclear weapons was clearly set out in Russia's military doctrine, RIA reported. "We have a military doctrine - everything is written there," Alexander Grushko was quoted by state news agency RIA as saying. Russia's official military deployment principles allow for the use of nuclear weapons if they - or other types of weapons of mass destruction - are used against it, or if the Russian state faces an existential threat from conventional weapons.

The decision to use Russia's vast nuclear arsenal, the biggest in the world, rests with the Russian president, currently Vladimir Putin. Russia's invasion has killed thousands of people, displaced nearly 10 million, and raised fears of a wider confrontation between Russia and the United States - by far the world's biggest nuclear powers. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns said on 7 MAY that Putin believes he cannot afford to lose in Ukraine and cautioned that the West could not ignore the risk of the use of tactical nuclear weapons by Moscow. "We don't see, as an intelligence community, practical evidence at this point of Russian planning for a deployment or even use of tactical nuclear weapons," Burns said. He cautioned, though, that "the stakes are very high for Putin's Russia."

A decree signed by Putin on June 2, 2020, said Russia views its nuclear weapons as "exclusively a means of deterrence". It repeats the phraseology of the military doctrine but adds details about four circumstances under which a nuclear strike would be ordered. These include reliable information of a ballistic missile attack on Russia and an enemy's attack "on critical state or military installations of the Russian Federation, the incapacitation of which would lead to the disruption of a response by nuclear forces."

Putin, who has repeatedly expressed resentment over the way the West treated Russia after the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, says Ukraine has been used by the United States to threaten Russia. He justified his 24 FEB order for a special military operation by saying Ukraine had persecuted Russian speakers and the United States was keen to enlarge the NATO military alliance in a way that would endanger Russia.

U.S. President Joe Biden casts Putin's invasion of Ukraine as a fight in a much broader global battle between democracy and autocracy. He has also called Putin a war criminal and has said the former KGB spy cannot remain in power. Ukraine dismisses Russian claims that it persecuted Russian speakers and says it is fighting for its survival. Russia denies Ukrainian and Western accusations that its forces committed war crimes. [Source: Reuters | May 10, 2022 ++]

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## Electric Cars

### Update 03: EV Charging Station Locations

To expand electric vehicle use nationwide, the departments of Transportation and Energy announced funding for a national electric vehicle charging network in February. Over the next five years, the program will provide nearly \$5 billion to create a network of EV charging stations along Federal Highway Administration-designated alternative fuel corridors on major interstates. This funding will promote equitable charger deployment and enable more long-distance travel by reducing EV drivers' "range anxiety." That anxiety is particularly acute in the middle of the country.

As seen on the new interactive map above developed by Esri, the most EV charging stations are found in coastal, population-dense states like California, New York and Florida. Refer to <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/984572ed531a4c3d981367b344c78bb5/page/Page/?source=https%3A%2F%2Flinks.esri.com%2FEVChargingStations>. California is far and away the leading state in terms of EV adoption, boasting over 425,000 registered electric vehicles and

more than 13,000 charging stations. New York has the second highest number of EV charging stations in the country, followed by Texas, Florida and Washington.

Unsurprisingly, states with lower population densities have the fewest charging stations. Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming all post numbers below three figures. Alaska, largely isolated from the rest of the country’s infrastructure, has only 40. The map shows the location of existing public EV charging stations, active as of Feb. 15, 2022, along 13 of the country’s major interstates. It was built with data from the Department of Energy’s Alternative Fuels Data Center.

Users can click on each state or select an interstate route. A pop-up window displays metrics like state population, total electric vehicles, EVs per 1,000 people, the number of charging stations and charging stations per EV. Clicking on an individual charging station also displays details such as the date it was installed and its operating hours. [Source: Route Fifty | Shourjya Mookerjee | MAY 9, 2022 ++]

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## New Fruits

### 9 More You're Suddenly Seeing at the Grocery Store

Grocery stores are always evolving, and these days grocers attract customers to the produce section with unusual offerings beyond apples and oranges. Specialty stores, such as Asian grocers, are even better sources for exotic fruits, which can benefit your diet. “Generally speaking, eating foods that are not a regular part of your diet can increase consumption of nutrients that you may not be getting elsewhere,” says New York-based dietitian Jessica Levinson. “It’s also good for your gut health to have a diverse diet.” Here are the most unusual fruits you might spot in the grocery store — and how to prepare them once you get them home.



Watermelon Gherkin, Durian, Mangosteen, Tamarind, & Water Apple

### Watermelon Gherkin

Watermelon gherkins live up to their name by resembling tiny watermelons with smooth, green-and-white striped skin. They [grow on a vine](#) like watermelons, too. The green pulp is dotted with edible seeds. Their flavor bears little similarity to melon; they taste more like cucumbers.

## **Durian**

You'll probably smell durian before you see it. The fruit gives off an aroma similar to rotting meat, Limburger cheese, or gym socks. Its stench is so powerful, [it's banned on Singapore Rapid Mass Transit](#). If you can get beyond the smell, the fruit has a mild, sweet flavor and is an excellent source of fiber, potassium, vitamin C, and folate, Levinson says. "Durian is used in sweet and savory dishes in Southeast Asia — soups, ice cream, sticky rice, cheesecake," she says. It's grown in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand.

## **Mangosteen**

Mangosteen is a study in contrasts: It has a dark purple (when ripe) rind and a light, white flesh. The rind isn't edible, so remove it with a serrated knife before consuming the fruit. It has a mild flavor like a banana. [Rich in antioxidants](#), mangosteen can help fight chronic disease and cancer, promote weight loss, and support balanced blood sugar. It can be added to smoothies and fruit salads. It can be juiced or even powdered to make it easier to consume.

## **Tamarind**

You've likely already eaten tamarind without knowing it; it's an [ingredient in Worcestershire sauce](#). It grows in India and Thailand, but it's a staple in Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Mexican cooking. The fruit grows in pods — like a bean — and combines a citrus tang with notes of brown sugar. It becomes sourer as it ripens. Although it can be eaten raw, tamarind is most often consumed in a paste form that's added to condiments. Tamarind candy is also popular.

## **Water Apple**

Water apples are [91.6% water](#), much like watermelons. The white or pink flesh has tasting notes of rose. The juicy fruits have a glossy skin that begins green but turns red when it ripens. Unripe fruit makes its way into jellies or syrups, while ripe fruit can be eaten raw on its own or in fruit salads.



**Buddha's Hand, Cherimoya, Breadfruit, & Hala Fruit**

## **Buddha's Hand**

Also known as fingered citron, this tropical fruit has a refreshing citrus taste. It grows in sections that look like fingers splaying out. There's [little flesh](#) beneath the skin, so this fruit is great when used to infuse alcohol for cocktails, candied, or used as a marmalade. Because it's in the citrus family, it can also serve as a substitute for lemons, limes, and oranges in any recipe calling for their zest.

## **Cherimoya**

Native to South America, this grapefruit-sized fruit has a scaled exterior that makes it look like an artichoke. Cherimoyas have dark brown seeds that must be removed before eating because they are toxic. The fruit is a rich [source of vitamins](#) C and B6, magnesium, potassium, and manganese; they contain more protein than many fruits. Cherimoyas are most often consumed raw or in fruit salads.

## **Breadfruit**

A relative of the jackfruit, breadfruit has a similar size, a bumpy green exterior, and a white pulp interior. When cooked, it tastes like [baked bread](#). The starchy fruit can also taste like potatoes, so it can be used similarly to that starchy vegetable by mashing it, baking it, or slicing and frying it. The fruit [grows in the South Pacific](#) and is popular throughout Oceania.

## **Hala Fruit**

Native to Hawaii, hala fruit looks like a gigantic pinecone or a cousin of the pineapple. The sections of the cones reveal the pulp, which Pacific Islanders [chew](#) raw or grind into a paste. The flavor is slightly sweet and grassy, like sugar cane, and mildly citrusy, like mango.

[Source: Cheapism | Ashley M. Biggers | March 29, 2022 ++]

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## Lies

### Update 06: Some Your Parents Told You as a Kid

As little kids we believe everything our parents say — until reality comes knocking and we start to realize that some things parents say might not be completely true. Whether trying to protect children from the harsh facts of the world, delay a difficult conversation, or just have a little fun with fiction, all parents have probably told more than a few white lies, and maybe the occasional whopper. Here are some of the biggest lies parents tell, including some they may even believe themselves that need debunking.

#### **Reading in the Dark Will Ruin Your Eyes**

Young bookworms who wanted to stay up past bedtime and read their favorite stories with a flashlight were likely warned that reading in the dark would damage their eyesight. But according to eye doctors at Harvard, reading in dim light won't cause any ongoing medical condition. It could tire eyes and cause strain, which could mean a bit of a headache. So it's probably a good idea to read with some decent lighting.

#### **Knuckle-Cracking Leads to Arthritis**

This warning is just plain wrong. Recent studies show that pulling or twist joints creates space between the bones, and that expansion causes negative pressure to fill with the synovial fluid that keeps bones from rubbing together. The "crack" we hear is actually the pop of the synovial fluid filling that new space, and doing so doesn't cause damage or weakness to joints. The sound will probably still annoy some people, though.

#### **Swallowed Gum Takes Seven Years to Digest**

Maybe there wasn't a trash can around, or you were trying to hide gum from your parents — whatever the case, you probably swallowed gum at some point and then worried you'd be stuck with that wad for seven years. Well, it turns out that myth doesn't stick. Gum is mostly indigestible — some brands use the same rubber as inner tubes — and will pass through the digestive system easily. There have been a few cases of kids swallowing too much gum, which led to gastrointestinal issues. So maybe try not to swallow the whole pack.

#### **Chocolate Milk Comes From Brown Cows**



As much fun as this one may have been to believe, brown cows do not produce chocolate milk. The lie, however, seems to have had a profound impact on many people, as 7 percent of U.S. adults — that's around 17.3 million grownups — still believe chocolate milk comes from brown cows. More than 17 million adults.

### **Crossed Eyes Will Get Stuck That Way**

Whether making faces at siblings or goofing off in public, kids should feel free to cross away: There are six muscles that allow eyes to move in all different directions, and looking in any one direction — including toward each other — won't cause them to stay that way. Crossed eyes can, however, result from disease, muscle, or nerve damage.

### **Swim Too Soon after Eating and You'll Cramp up and Drown**

This whopper has been around for ages. Even the 1908 book "Scouting for Boys" implores young swimmers to wait 90 minutes after chowing down or a drowning "will be your fault." Yikes. Well, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Red Cross, your folks were lying. Just finish swallowing before jumping in the water to avoid accidentally choking and you'll be safe. The hour wait was probably just made up to give parents a brief reprieve from lifeguard duty.

### **Watermelons Will Grow in Your Stomach from Swallowed Seeds**

You might have panicked when your parents warned you not to swallow watermelon seeds one hot, summer day. But the digestive system is not a friendly place for a seed to grow, so swallow a seed or two during a watermelon seed-spitting contest and it will just continue on its merry way to the toilet. Your parents may have worried about choking — or maybe were just pulling your leg. Either way, you can grow watermelons if you plant them, or you can sprout them and eat them to get the nutritional benefits.

### **Sitting Too Close to the TV Will Cause Eye Damage**

You probably heard this while watching Saturday morning cartoons. Like reading in the dark, sitting too close to the TV won't damage vision. While there were concerns that TVs developed before the 1950s emitted unsafe levels of radiation, that's no longer a concern. And while extended close viewings could cause strain and a headache, there's no lasting damage. In fact, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, kids can focus up close without eye strain better than adults. Take that, Mom.

### **Touch a Toad and You'll Get Warts**

Parents probably tell this one to stop clothes from getting muddied. You can't get warts from any amphibian, including toads and frogs. The myth likely started because some toads have

warty-looking glands on their skin that are often there to secrete a protective poison to defend against predators, so they probably should be avoided anyway. Warts are caused by a virus — a human one. Some frogs and toads do secrete toxins that can be hallucinogenic or even fatal, and most may have bacteria and parasites on their skin, so don't try kissing one. Plus, you could harm them.

### **Keep Your Eyes Open When Sneezing and They'll Fall Out**

This one seems especially cruel — and has likely led to many playground dares. But fear not. You may have a hard time keeping your eyes open when you sneeze — blame the reflexes — but they won't pop out of your head. Blood pressure behind your eyeballs might increase slightly when you sneeze, but nowhere near enough to cause them to come flying out.

### **The Family Pet Is Living Happily on a Farm Upstate**

Dealing with the death of a family pet is never easy, so it's no surprise parents often say the dog/cat/hamster/etc. went to live happily in a "better place" with plenty of wide open spaces to run, fresh air, and their favorite treats. It's easier than dealing with the emotionally charged concept of death, or explaining why the vet had to put a pet down. But the farm fiction can lead to more fabrications after requests to visit the pet on the farm.

### **Your Nose Will Grow If You Lie**

To keep kids from lying, parents tell a lie of their own. Kids likely realized that their nose didn't grow like Pinocchio's after fibbing — but there's a bit of truth to the idea that the nose can give away a lie. Researchers have found that noses actually heat up after a lie, thanks to activity in the brain's insular cortex.

### **Drinking Coffee Stunts Growth**

Kids often want to try coffee to feel more grown-up or perhaps out of curiosity about a beverage loved by adults, and parents will often warn it will stunt their growth — perhaps believing a disproved theory that coffee causes osteoporosis. Coffee will not stunt growth. But no adult wants overly caffeinated kids.

### **The Toy or Candy Store Is Closed**

To stem incessant demands from a kid to go to the toy store or candy store, parents will often lie and say the place is closed. This can apply to just about anywhere kids want to go that parents don't, including amusement parks, the beach, the playground, McDonald's ... and the list goes on.

### **Eating Carrots Will Let You See in the Dark**

Parents have been known to try anything to convince their kids to eat more vegetables — including suggesting they'll grant superpowers. It is true that vitamin A rich carrots are good for eye health, but seeing in the dark? It's a myth that may have originated in England during World War II as part of a propaganda campaign to confuse German pilots and bolster English confidence.

### **If You Pee in the Pool, the Water Will Turn Red**

Parents discouraging their kids from peeing in swimming pools will often perpetuate the lie that there's a special chemical added to the water that turns bright red (or blue, or purple, etc.) if someone pees, revealing the guilty party. Anyone who's ever encountered an unexpected warm spot in a pool knows there's no such thing. That said, mixing urine and chlorine may actually be harmful, so maybe it's not such a bad lie. Also, gross.

### **You Are the Most Talented Kid in the World**

After a school art project or newly discovered love of magic, many a parent has told their kid they are the most talented/intelligent/creative child on the planet. With the exception of some child prodigies, probably not. You can't really blame someone for wearing proud-parent goggles with their kid, and positive encouragement is great — but it might be good to tone down the praise a bit.

### **Ice Cream Trucks Play Music Only When Out of Ice Cream**

Whether it was playing "Yankee Doodle," "The Entertainer," or some other iconic tune, you probably grabbed whatever change you could and went running after the ice cream truck when you heard its familiar sound. Unlucky kids had parents who convinced them the truck only played music when it ran out sweet treats — when really they just didn't want the kid having ice cream.

[Source: Cheapism | Danny Jensen | May 5, 2022 ++]

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## **Vocabulary**

### **Some Words to Enhance Yours | 220515**

Which word best fits these example sentences?

1. (a) Which professionals would be most interested in remontant species?  
(b) *bankers – florists – lawyers - singers*
2. (a) What is a synonym for a “monopsony”?  
(b) *multiplayer - tri-county - single buyer - quadruple*
3. (a) What do people interested in notaphily collect?  
(b) *craft beer - vinyl albums - bank notes -rare coins*
4. (a) The mountain’s southern \_\_\_\_\_ has more lakes than its northern side.  
(b) *vestiture – vicar – versant – variety*
5. (a) The tutu was a mint-green \_\_\_\_\_.  
(b) *gemstone – emerald – gossamer – envelope*
6. (a) What is another way to describe a copybook phrase?  
(b) *clank – clear – clique - cliché*
7. (a) Terrence was used to ignoring his \_\_\_\_\_.  
(b) *anemone – anima – anchovies - anchor*
8. (a) The diner had an \_\_\_\_\_ menu to satisfy everyone.  
(b) *omnipotent – onerous – opaque – omnifarious*
9. (a) What is an antonym for vanguard?  
(b) *olders - followers – follicles - folios*
10. (a) The earring will \_\_\_\_\_ the nose piercing.  
(b) *occlude – occult – octane - occur*

### Answers

1. Remontant [rə-MAHN-tənt] - (Of a plant) blooming or producing a crop more than once a season.
2. Monopsony [mə-NAHP-sə-nee] - (Economics) a market situation in which there is only one buyer.
3. Notaphily [no-TAH-fə-lee] - the collecting of banknotes as a hobby.
4. Versant [VER-sənt] - A region of land sloping in one general direction.
5. Gossamer [GAH-sə-mər] - a fine, filmy substance consisting of cobwebs spun by small spiders, seen especially in autumn.
6. Copybook [KA-pee-book] – (Cliché) exactly in accordance with established criteria; perfect.
7. Anima [AN-ə-mə] - The part of the psyche that is directed inward, in touch with the subconscious.
8. Omnifarious [ahm-nə-FER-ee-əs] - comprising or relating to all sorts or varieties.

9. Vanguard [VAN-gard] - the foremost part of an advancing army or naval force.
10. Occlude [ə-KLOOD] - stop, close up, or obstruct (an opening, orifice, or passage)

[Source: [www.wordgenius.com](http://www.wordgenius.com) | May 15, 2022 ++]

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## News of the Weird

MAY 01 thru 15, 2022

**They're Lovin' It** -- Rob and Grace Jones wanted to replace a built-in toilet paper holder in their home in Crystal Lake, Illinois, on April 16, which required them to cut into the wall of their bathroom, NBC New York reported. That's when they came across a most unusual find: a towel containing two McDonald's hamburger wrappers and a full order of french fries inside. Vintage 1959. "We were expecting the worst," Grace said. "I was shielding my kids in case there was any dried blood." More like dried ketchup. "Not a cold case, just some cold fries," she said. "They were very well preserved." Must not be many mice in Crystal Lake. [NBC New York, 4/27/2022]

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**Questionable Judgment** -- An American family returning to the United States from a trip to Israel on April 28 set off a chaotic bomb scare at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv when they tried to take an unexploded artillery shell through a security check, the BBC reported. They had found the shell in the Golan Heights and picked it up as a souvenir; at the airport, a family member pulled it from a backpack and asked if it could be put in a suitcase. The security official called for her immediate area to be cleared, but someone misheard her, and panic ensued. The family members were later questioned and allowed to board their flight. [BBC, 4/29/2022]

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**That's One Way To Do It** -- As his United Airlines flight taxied to its gate at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport on May 5, one passenger apparently couldn't wait to deplane, WLS-TV reported. So he opened the emergency exit and walked onto the wing, then slid down the wing and onto the runway. The ground crew stopped the man, and he was turned over to law enforcement officers. [WLS, 5/5/2022]

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**Bright Ideas** -- Five students at Ponte Vedra High School in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, have been accused in a "senior prank" in which a probable sandbar shark (prohibited from recreational and commercial harvest in Florida state waters, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission) was hoisted over a staircase at the school on May 5, News4Jax reported. "I was going to first period, and there was this massive shark hanging from the ceiling, and it smelled really bad," said Cooper Gottfried, a sophomore at the school. The shark is the school's mascot. The responsible parties may face charges of trespassing, wildlife violations and criminal mischief. [News4Jax, 5/5/2022]

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**Bright Ideas** -- An unnamed man in Detroit was arrested in late April for illegally possessing guns, but the federal agents who arrived at his home with a search warrant were more interested in how he made a living: He sold marijuana from a vending machine attached to his house, clearing \$2,000 a day, he told them. The Associated Press reported that agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives made purchases from the machine to collect evidence before the bust. The man was released on bond. [AP, 5/3/2022]

**o-o-O-o-o-**

**Recent Alarming Headline** -- During a funeral in Lambayeque, Peru, on April 26, pallbearers were stunned to hear knocking coming from within the coffin of Rosa Isabel Cespedes Callaca as they carried it, Metro News reported. They lowered the box to the ground and opened the lid to find that Callaca was weak, but alive, following a serious car accident. Cemetery caretaker Juan Segundo Cajo said that Callaca "opened her eyes and was sweating." She was rushed to a hospital, where she was shown to have faint signs of life, but sadly, she expired a few hours later. Her family members suspect she may have been in a coma following the accident, rather than deceased. Police are now investigating the incident. [Metro News, 5/2/2022]

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**Florida OG** -- Even the retirees are getting crazy in the Sunshine State. On April 24, as Herbert Merritt, 64, walked his dog near the Kings Point golf course in Delray Beach, Robert Levine, 74, drove up in his golf cart and confronted him about walking too close to the course. Next, the victim said, Levine pulled out a handgun and started shooting as Merritt ran away. CBS12-TV reported that Merritt was shot in the ankle, causing him to fall, but Levine couldn't leave it there; he kicked Merritt in the head, then retrieved a golf club from his cart and hit him with it several times. Levine

is being held on attempted first-degree murder charges along with aggravated battery and discharging a firearm in public. [CBS12, 4/28/2022]

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**Welcome Home!** -- After a trip to Sacramento, Gary and Patti Reitemeyer returned to their home in Redding, California, on April 22 to a most unwelcome surprise: hundreds of swallows that had apparently entered their home through the chimney, KRCR-TV reported. A neighbor had noticed a few birds earlier when he stopped by to feed the cat, but the numbers had increased dramatically by the time the couple got home. "We open the door and it's like an Alfred Hitchcock movie," Gary said. "It was crazy. We were ducking and dodging." They called a restoration company to help clean the house, as it was uninhabitable. "All of the furniture is gone, all of the carpet is gone, the blinds are gone," Gary said. Sadly, their homeowner's insurance won't cover the damage from the bizarre incident. [KRCR, 5/4/2022]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/oddties/news-of-the-weird/2022/05/06> | May, 2022 ++]

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## Have You Heard or Seen?

Intelligence | Toons | Kid's Jokes #2

### Intelligence

A young boy enters a barber shop and the barber whispers to his customer, "This is the dumbest kid in the world. Watch while I prove it to you." The barber puts a dollar bill in one hand and two quarters in the other, then calls the boy over and asks, "Which do you want, son?"

The boy takes the quarters and leaves. "What did I tell you?" said the barber. "That kid never learns!" Later, when the customer leaves, he sees the same young boy coming out of the ice cream store. "Hey, son! May I ask you a question? Why did you take the quarters instead of the dollar bill?"

The boy licked his cone and replied, "Because the day I take the dollar, the game is over!"

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Three men who were raised in the wild are living in the wilderness together. One of them is extremely smart, one is average, and one is extremely stupid.

One day, it is the extremely smart one's turn to catch and cook dinner. He goes out and comes back with a bear. The other two are astounded and ask, "How did you catch this bear?" The extremely smart one replies, "I see tracks, I follow tracks. I see bear, I shoot bear."

The next day, it is the average one's turn to hunt and cook dinner. He goes out and returns with a deer. The extremely stupid one is amazed to see the catch and asks, "How did you catch this deer?"

The average one replies, "I see tracks, I follow tracks. I see deer, I shoot deer."

The following day, the extremely stupid one goes out to hunt and comes back half dead. The other two ask, "How did you mess up so badly? Didn't you follow our instructions?" To which the stupid one replies, "I did! I see tracks, I follow tracks. I see train, I shoot train, and that's when my mistake hit me.

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I was having trouble with my computer. So I called Nathan, the 13 year old next door whose bedroom looks like Mission Control, and asked him to come over. Nathan clicked a couple of buttons and solved the problem. As he was walking away, I called after him, "So, what was wrong? He replied, "It was an ID ten T error."

I didn't want to appear stupid, but nonetheless inquired, "An ID Ten T error? What's that? In case I need to fix it again." Nathan grinned, "Haven't you ever heard of an ID ten T error before?"

"No", I replied. "Write it down," he said, "And I think you'll figure it out."

So I wrote down: I D 1 0 T. I used to like that little boy.

XXXXXXXXXX

A young LCDR meets with a Chief in his office. The LCDR asks, "Chief, how do you run such an efficient shop? Are there any tips you can give to me?" "Well," says the Chief, "the most important thing is to surround yourself with intelligent people."



The LCDR frowns and says, "but how do I know if the people around me are really intelligent?" The Chief takes a sip of coffee and says, "oh, that's easy. You just ask them to answer an intelligence riddle." Then the Chief yells out to one of his First Class Petty Officers.

The First Class walks into the room, "yes, Chief, what can I do for you?" The Chief smiles and says, "answer me this, please. Your mother and father have a child. It is not your brother, and it is not your sister. Who is it?" Without pausing for a moment, the First Class answers, "Well, that would be me." "Yes, Very good. Thanks," says the Chief.

The LCDR goes back to his office, assembles his junior officers, and asks them the same question, "answer this for me. Your mother and your father have a child. It's not your brother, and it's not your sister. Who is it?" All of the junior officers look at the LCDR in amazement, "We're not sure; let us get back to you on that one." The junior officers then have numerous meetings to discuss the question without any resolution.

Finally, they run into the Chief. The junior officers ask, "Chief, can you answer this for us? Your mother and father have a child, and it's not your brother or your sister. Who is it?" The Chief yells back, "That's easy. It's me!" All of the officers smile and say, "Thanks!"

The junior officers schedule a meeting with the LCDR, and at that meeting, report, "sir, we found the answer to your question. We did some research, and we have the answer to that riddle. It's a Chief!" The LCDR gets up and starts screaming at them, "No, you idiots! It's the First Class!"

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## **Kid's Jokes 2**

Q: Which is heavier, a pound of bricks or a pound of feathers? The same – a pound is a pound!

Q: I'm light as a feather, yet the strongest man can't hold me for more than 5 minutes. What am I? Breath.

Q: Can you name three consecutive days without using the words Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday? Yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Q: Timmy's mother had three children. The first was named April, the next was named May. What was the name of the third child? Timmy of course!

Q: What kind of coat can only be put on when wet? A coat of paint.

Q: What occurs once in a minute, twice in a moment, and never in one thousand years? The letter M.

Q: What has three feet but cannot walk? A yardstick.

Q: What runs, but never walks, often murmurs – never talks, has a bed but never sleeps, has a mouth but never eats? A river.

Q: If you are running in a race and you pass the person in second place, what place are you in? Second place.

Q: What gets sharper the more you use it? Your brain.

Q: If I have it, I don't share it. If I share it, I don't have it. What is it? A secret.

Q: What can you catch but not throw? A cold.

Q: How many months have 28 days? All 12 months!

Q: They come out at night without being called, and are lost in the day without being stolen. What are they? Stars.

Q: What is full of holes but can still hold water? A sponge.

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## Thought of the Day

If the enemy is in range, so are you.

-- Infantry Journal

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