

# RAO BULLETIN

1 January 2022

PDF Edition



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**NOTE**

1. The page number in which an article is located is provided to the left of each article's title.
2. To read the articles, open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.

3. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written to date on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) 'or' [raoemo77@gmail.com](mailto:raoemo77@gmail.com).

4. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin or articles to other vets or veteran organizations.

5. The current and previous 3 Bulletin issues can be viewed at <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html>

**\* DoD \***



## **U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces**

### **Background, Developments, and Issues as of Dec 2021**

Even though the United States has reduced the number of warheads deployed on its long-range missiles and bombers, consistent with the terms of the 2010 New START Treaty, it is also developing new delivery systems for deployment over the next 10-30 years. The 117th Congress will continue to review these programs, and the funding requested for them, during the annual authorization and appropriations process.

During the Cold War, the U.S. nuclear arsenal contained many types of delivery vehicles for nuclear weapons. The longer-range systems, which included long-range missiles based on U.S. territory, long-range missiles based on submarines, and heavy bombers that could threaten Soviet targets from their bases in the United States, are known as strategic nuclear delivery vehicles. At the end of the Cold War, in 1991, the United States deployed more than 10,000 warheads on these delivery vehicles. With the implementation of New START completed in February 2018, the United States is limited to 1,550 accountable warheads on these delivery vehicles, a restriction that will remain in place through February 2026, while New START Treaty remains in force.

- At the present time, the U.S. land-based ballistic missile force (ICBMs) consists of 400 land-based Minuteman III ICBMs, each deployed with one warhead, spread among a total of 450 operational launchers. This force is consistent with the New START Treaty. The Air Force has modernized the Minuteman missiles, replacing and upgrading their rocket motors, guidance systems, and other components, so that they can remain in the force through 2030. It has initiated a program to replace these with a new Ground-based Strategic Deterrent beginning around 2029.
- The U.S. ballistic missile submarine fleet currently consists of 14 Trident submarines. Each can carry 20 Trident II (D-5) missiles—a reduction from 24 missiles per

submarine—with the total meeting the launcher limits in the New START Treaty. The Navy converted 4 of the original 18 Trident submarines to carry nonnuclear cruise missiles. Nine of the submarines are deployed in the Pacific Ocean and five are in the Atlantic. The Navy also has undertaken efforts to extend the life of the missiles and warheads so that they and the submarines can remain in the fleet past 2020. It has designed and is beginning production of the new Columbia class submarine that will replace the existing fleet beginning in 2031.

- The U.S. fleet of heavy bombers includes 20 B-2 bombers and 40 nuclear-capable B-52 bombers. The B-1 bomber is no longer equipped for nuclear missions. This fleet of 60 nuclear-capable aircraft is consistent with the U.S. obligations under New START. The Air Force has begun to retire the nuclear-armed cruise missiles carried by B-52 bombers, leaving only about half the B-52 fleet equipped to carry nuclear weapons. The Air Force plans to procure both a new long-range bomber, known as the B-21, and a new long-range standoff (LRSO) cruise missile during the 2020s. DOE is also modifying and extending the life of the B61 bomb carried on B-2 bombers and fighter aircraft and the W80 warhead for cruise missiles.

The Obama Administration’s review of the size and structure of the U.S. nuclear force, and a subsequent review of U.S. nuclear employment policy, advised the force structure that the United States has deployed under the New START Treaty. The Trump Administration completed its review of U.S. nuclear forces in February 2018, and reaffirmed the basic contours of the current U.S. force structure and the ongoing modernization programs. The Trump Administration also deployed a new low-yield warhead on Trident II (D-5) missiles. The Biden Administration started its review of U.S. nuclear posture in July 2021 and plans to complete this review in early 2022. Congress will review plans for U.S. strategic nuclear forces and will likely assess the costs of these plans in the current fiscal environment

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The above is from the Summary page of the Dec. 14, 2021, Congressional Research Service report: U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces: Background, Developments, and Issues. To read the entire report go to <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/21154709/us-strategic-nuclear-forces-background-developments-and-issues-dec-14-2021.pdf> . [Source: USSVI Tucson Base | Bud Cunnally | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Extremism Policy**

### **Likes, Shares & Posts Now Prohibited In New Anti-Extremism Policy**

Membership in extremist groups is still not prohibited by the Defense Department, but an updated instruction released 19 DEC seeks to prohibit pretty much everything that one might do in association with an extremist group. The project of defining extremism for the purpose of

punishing those who engage it is like “threading a very fine needle, when we’re engaging in prohibiting conduct that may be protected by the First Amendment,” a defense official told reporters on the 19<sup>th</sup>, as the Countering Extremism Working group released its final report. “We wanted to push forward with the same standard that we had in our previous iterations of this policy, which is that active participation,” an official said. “So it was really important to us that we preserve First Amendment rights to the extent that we could, and that we focus on an individual’s actions, regardless of whether they did that on their own or as part of an organization.”



Instead, the new policy expands the previous definition of prohibited activity, for the first time explicitly including online interactions that might promote terrorism or the overthrow of the U.S. government, as well as attending rallies, fundraising or organizing in support of those ideologies. In practice, online activity could already be prosecuted by the services. In 2019, the Army began investigating Maj. Jeff Poole, an Army Reserve infantry officer at Fort Benning, Georgia, with a prolific Reddit presence advocating for violent anti-government and anti-military insurrection. A board of inquiry voted to hand him an other-than-honorable discharge earlier this year.

Now, commanders have a much more detailed list of prohibited online activity, down to likes and retweets, rather than just going as far as to post an anti-government manifesto. “It would be very difficult to really be any form of an active participant or member in any organization that was espousing extremist views or acts,” a defense official said. As the report’s original July due date came and went, Pentagon officials have hinted that the new definition likely wouldn’t include membership or any list of prohibited groups. Rather than calling out Oath Keepers, III-Percenter or Proud Boys — then inevitably facing questions about Antifa or Black Lives Matter — the Pentagon chose to prohibit the promotion of certain kinds of messaging.

“We were very conscious of not focusing on any particular ideology, or any political organization, focusing exclusively on actions,” an official said. The instruction also lays out a two-part process for verifying the activity. Step one is the report, but step two involves leadership speaking with the service member, to see whether liking an extremist tweet, for example, was intentional. “... it’s going to be very case-specific, and will be up to the individual’s chain of command, and his or her senior leadership in the unit, to have that discussion, that determination, whether this was a very deliberate act of active participation in extremist activities, or whether it was maybe a mistake,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said 19 DEC.

Likewise, it will be up to the chain of command to decide how to respond. Liking a tweet does not equal a court-martial or an involuntary discharge. It could be a counseling, or a non-judicial punishment. “And we ... have full confidence in our commanders’ ability, when something’s reported to them, to treat it appropriately ... and to look into it in the manner that they see fit,” Kirby said. The working group also updated screening procedures for recruits, as well as the transition checklist for troops preparing to separate from service, to ensure they are aware that extremist groups might target them for recruitment.

Recruits won’t be subject to any sort of social media screening before signing a contract, a defense official said, but recruiters will ask some questions about their activities or affiliations. Some of these are covered during the application process for a security clearance, the official said, but the new policy will ask those questions during the recruiting process. And finally, DoD will commission a study to gather more data on the prevalence of extremism in the services, with a final report “anticipated” in June. Some of this work has already begun, as DoD earlier this year began piloting voluntary extremism questions on command climate surveys.

As part of the working group’s study, they pulled data from the services and found around 100 extremism investigations in 2021, “which represents, we believe, an increase,” the official said. “Now, whether that is an increase because our data fidelity has gotten better, or whether it’s an increase overall, is something that we’ll have to look at closely in years to come, as ... data fidelity improves,” the official added. “But certainly, looking at case rates of domestic violent extremism across the country as a whole could be a precursor to what we may be experiencing or could experience in the military.” The second part of the working group’s mandate included recommendations for further action. Those include developing training and education to support the new extremism guidelines, updating any similar policies governing DoD contractors and modernizing existing insider threat programs.

The Pentagon has also toyed with the idea of creating an article under the Uniform Code of Military Justice to address extremism, as requested in the 2022 budget submission. While other misconduct regulations can currently cover extremist activity, creating an extremism specification could help the services better track charges and adjudications for it. Kirby could not say Monday whether that effort could get underway without the requested funding from Congress. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers| December 20, 2021 ++]

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## **NDA 2022**

### **Update 12: Congress Passes Defense Policy Bill**

After months of debate and weeks of angst, the Senate on 15 DEC voted 89-11 to finalize plans for a \$740 billion authorization bill for the Department of Defense, sending the sweeping military policy measure to the White House for the 61st consecutive year. The move codifies the annual

2.7% pay raise for troops in 2022, backs \$25 billion more in military spending for fiscal 2022 than the White House requested and overhauls how certain sexual misconduct crimes are prosecuted under military rules. But what the bill doesn't include has gotten more attention than what it does.

To speed up passage, congressional leaders dropped language to add women to the Selective Service System for potential future conscription, scaled back plans for even more dramatic military justice changes and dumped several other provisions. Completion of the bill — considered “must pass” legislation by congressional leaders each year because of the hundreds of reauthorization and policy reforms it includes — appeared in doubt as recently as two weeks ago, when Senate lawmakers still had not completed preliminary work usually done in late summer. That prompted House and Senate Armed Services Committee leaders to ditch the typical conference and amendment process in favor of a simplified compromise bill, frustrating lawmakers from both parties.

But both Republican and Democratic leaders praised the final product as providing key support for the military in an uncertain global environment. “It addresses a broad range of pressing issues, from strategic competition with China and Russia, to disruptive technologies like hypersonics, [artificial intelligence], and quantum computing, to modernizing our ships, aircraft, and vehicles,” Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jack Reed (D-RI), said “It provides our forces with the resources and support they need to defend our nation, makes historic reforms to help improve the lives of our service members, and takes important steps to care for their families.”

“While the process has been imperfect, I’m glad that bipartisan work has produced a bill that authorizes an increase in top-line funding for our national defense,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said ahead of a procedural vote 14 DEC. President Joe Biden has signaled he will sign the measure into law in coming days.

### **More defense spending**

Lawmakers’ biggest addition to the defense bill in recent months was arguably the \$25 billion in additional military spending. White House officials and House progressives complained in recent months the money was unnecessary, given significant defense funding plus-ups over the past four years under former President Donald Trump. But the extra funding found bipartisan backing in both chambers, with supporters pointing to military build-ups by Russia and China. Moderate Democrats said the money was needed to boost research and development spending, and future budget plans from Biden should follow suit.

“We’ve lost a lot of ground to the Chinese while we’ve been focused over the last 20 years on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, and they’ve caught up in [artificial intelligence], machine learning, hypersonics and a lot of other things,” said Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s panel on emerging threats. “It’s important to me that we can regain the ground we’ve lost and make sure the Defense Department is well manned and well equipped.”

Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NB) echoed that sentiment in a floor speech 14 DEC. The Biden administration originally proposed a top-line defense spending increase ... that would not have kept pace with inflation even in a normal year,” she said. “But in a year when it is threatening to spiral out of control, it would have meant an unacceptable cut in resources for our military. “[This bill] offers an increase of \$25 billion on top of President Biden’s proposal, and we came together across party lines to agree to that because it is what our military needs.”

### **Spending priorities**

Thanks to the bill’s higher top line, lawmakers are calling for 12 more Boeing-made F/A-18 Super Hornets than the administration requested; five more Boeing F-15EX jets above 12 already planned; and 13 ships total — including two attack submarines and two destroyers — for five more than the White House’s budget plan. Lawmakers also authorized 85 Lockheed Martin-made F-35 aircraft. The spending total includes parameters for a 2.7% pay increase for all troops starting Jan. 1 and reauthorizes dozens of specialty pays and bonuses military commanders said are needed for recruiting and retention.

With regard to military end strength, the number of Army soldiers would drop by 900 (to 485,000) compared to this year’s levels and the Marine Corps would cut its troop numbers by 2,700 (to 178,500). That’s in line with White House end strength plans. The Navy’s end strength total would drop by about 900 (to 346,920), about 700 more sailors than the White House requested. The Air Force would see a decrease of about 4,200 personnel (to 329,220), about 1,000 more airmen than the administration requested. The Space Force end strength would be set at 8,400 guardians.

Lawmakers also included a new Basic Needs Allowance to give additional financial support to some low-income service members. And the measure has language to provide 12 weeks parental leave to all service members following the birth or adoption of a child, standardizing the rule across the services. The bill authorizes \$2 billion above Biden’s request for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, meant to bolster the military’s posture in the region and deter China, for a total of \$7.1 billion. The bill authorizes \$4 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative, to deter Russia by bolstering cooperation with Eastern European allies, an increase over Biden’s \$3.4 billion request. Lawmakers added \$50 million to Biden’s request for security assistance for Ukraine for a total of \$300 million.

All that said, the policy bill only sets priorities. Lawmakers have deadlocked over actual federal spending for fiscal 2022, which began on Oct. 1. The government is operating on a funding patch through mid February, which Congress passed to allow time for further budget negotiations.

### **Missing items**

To the dismay of some, the bill does not include language requiring women to register with the Selective Service System for a potential future military draft. That proposal was included in earlier versions of the House and Senate authorization bill drafts, but was deemed too controversial for the final measure. Similarly, advocates for sexual assault victims sparred with

chamber leaders over changes made to reforms of the military justice system related to how sexual misconduct cases are prosecuted. Under the final bill, the Defense Department would be required to create an independent prosecutorial office within each service to handle some serious crimes, including rape, sexual assault, murder, manslaughter and kidnapping.

Last week, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) hailed those changes as “a long overdue and crucial set of reforms [that] will dramatically improve the military’s response to the problem of sexual assault within the ranks.” But Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, (D-NY) had pushed lawmakers to go even further, asking for all serious crimes to be taken out of the traditional military chain of command. She voted against the final measure in protest of the omission.

“[This bill] does not make the necessary changes to the military justice system,” she said in a floor speech Monday. “The change we must make, the change that survivors and veterans have asked for, is to remove all serious non-military crimes from the chain of command.” Gillibrand, who voted against the NDAA on 15 DEC, has vowed to continue the fight for additional reforms next year, when Congress tries to pass the authorization bill for the 62nd consecutive year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould | December 15, 2021 ++]

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## **NDAA 2022**

### **Update 13: President Signs Defense Policy Bill**

President Biden on 27 DEC signed a sweeping \$768 million defense policy bill, setting up top lines and policy for the Pentagon, the White House announced. Biden signed the fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) after Congress scrambled to pass the annual bill earlier this month. In a statement, the president said the bill “provides vital benefits and enhances access to justice for military personnel and their families, and includes critical authorities to support our country’s national defense.”

The House passed the bill by an overwhelmingly bipartisan 363-70 vote in early December, and the Senate later passed the bill by a bipartisan 88-11 vote. Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a statement that “there’s a lot to be proud of in this bill.” The \$768.2 billion compromise bill came after efforts to pass an earlier version of the bill in the Senate hit several snags, including failures to reach agreements on which amendments would receive floor votes. The NDAA provides \$740 billion for the Department of Defense, which is \$25 billion more than what the president requested for the agency for fiscal 2022. It also includes \$27.8 billion for defense-related activities in the Department of Energy and another \$378 million for other defense-related activities.

While passing the NDAA is an important step, the measure does not authorize any spending, meaning Congress still needs to pass an appropriations bill. Earlier this month, Congress passed a short-term continuing resolution which funds the government through Feb. 18. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said earlier this month that passing a full-year continuing resolution, as opposed to a full-year appropriations bill, would be “an unprecedented move that would cause enormous, if not irreparable, damage for a wide range of bipartisan priorities.”

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, had warned that a full-year continuing resolution would put defense spending at \$35 billion less than what the NDAA provides for. “We can all stand up here on the Senate floor and back at home, declaring our unwavering support for our troops and their families, and claiming to support a strong national defense, but until we put our money where our mouth is and provide the funding we say we support, those words ring hollow,” Leahy said in a statement.

Among its provisions, the NDAA includes a 2.7 percent increase in military basic pay, which the White House recommended. This year’s defense policy bill also includes major changes to how the military prosecutes certain crimes, like sexual assault. For those crimes, like rape, murder and manslaughter, the decision to prosecute would be made outside of the chain of command. However, commanders would still have authority to conduct trials, pick jury members, approve witnesses and grant immunity. The bill also weighs in on the military’s vaccine mandate, directing that service members who are discharged for not getting the COVID-19 vaccine get at least a general discharge under honorable conditions.

But in his statement, Biden pointed to several provisions in the bill that he was against. Among them, he urged Congress to eliminate provisions that restrict the use of funds to transfer detainees at Guantanamo Bay. He also opposed provisions that require sharing with Congress information regarding the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the threat of Iranian-backed militias to U.S. personnel in Iraq and the Middle East. The measures would include “highly sensitive classified information,” Biden said, that “could reveal critical intelligence sources or military operational plans.” [Source: The Hill | Jordan Williams | December 27, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse**

### **Reported DEC 16 thru 31, 2021**

A privatized military housing company settled a criminal investigation and a civil lawsuit on 22 DEC by pleading guilty to one count of major fraud and agreeing to pay \$33.6 million in fines and \$31.8 million in restitution to the military services, according to a Justice Department release. **Balfour Beatty Communities LLC** had been the subject of civil action by military families, as well as a DoJ criminal inquiry, for alleged mismanagement of private military housing that included pests, delayed repairs and mold.



“Instead of promptly repairing housing for U.S. servicemembers as required, BBC lied about the repairs to pocket millions of dollars in performance bonuses,” Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco said in the release. “This pervasive fraud was a consequence of BBC’s broken corporate culture, which valued profit over the welfare of servicemembers. Today’s global resolution sends a clear message to companies that if they do not maintain adequate compliance programs, voluntarily self-disclose misconduct, and fully cooperate with the government, they will pay a price that outweighs the profits they once reaped.”

DoJ described the housing management company as defrauding the Army, Navy and Air Force by failing to record service requests, thereby increasing their performance rating and earning bonuses for good service. “According to court documents, from around 2013 to around 2019, BBC employees, including former community manager Stacy Cabrera (who pleaded guilty to related charges on April 21) and former regional manager Rick Cunefare (who pleaded guilty to related charges on June 9), and others, falsified information so that BBC’s incentive fee requests falsely reflected that BBC had met performance objectives,” according to the release.

Balfour Beatty also agreed to three years of probation and three years of compliance monitoring. The company’s vice president did not respond to phone and email requests for comment Thursday. The settlement brings to a close a multi-year saga for military families throughout the services. A civil lawsuit included 10 families at Fort Bliss, Lackland Air Force Base and Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, who alleged their housing units were beset by mold, cockroaches, leaks and more.

One Fort Bliss family scrambled out of bed in the middle of the night to find a ruptured hot water pipe in the concrete foundation of their children’s bedroom, which “woke the children by burning them with [scalding] hot water,” according to the lawsuit. Housing conditions were so bad that the services’ criminal investigative commands got involved. “We take all service requests from our residents very seriously, and have comprehensive protocols in place to address any

potential life, health or safety concerns,” Balfour Beatty said in a statement after the lawsuit’s filing in June. “We are committed to the continuous improvement of our military housing, and are laser-focused on ensuring we provide the highest quality living experience.”

The rampant mismanagement of privatized military housing caught the attention of Congress and pushed the services to create tenants’ rights policies that include a formal dispute process, as well as the right to withhold rent when service requests are not resolved. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Housing Program**

### **Update 03: Why Guilty BBC Remains One of the Pentagon’s Biggest Landlords**

The Department of Justice’s announcement last week that a private military housing company guilty of “pervasive fraud” would be fined \$65 million only further angered some service members who believe that the government should stop contracting with the company altogether. The company, Balfour Beatty Communities LLC, falsified its performance data and destroyed resident comment cards so it could pocket performance incentive fees from the Army, Air Force and Navy, according to the Department of Justice. Balfour Beatty Communities operates military housing communities at 21 Air Force, 18 Navy, and 16 Army bases across the country.

Instead of performing maintenance on the homes of family members, Balfour Beatty employees allowed toxic mold, insect infestations, water leaks, burst pipes and other problems to spread through those homes, leading to health problems like migraines, asthma, and even burns from the ruptured hot water pipes. “Instead of promptly repairing housing for U.S. service members as required, BBC lied about the repairs to pocket millions of dollars in performance bonuses,” said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco, the second-highest-ranking official in the Department of Justice. “This pervasive fraud was a consequence of BBC’s broken corporate culture, which valued profit over the welfare of service members.”

Balfour Beatty Communities pleaded guilty to major fraud against the United States and was sentenced to pay over \$33.6 million in criminal fines and over \$31.8 million in restitution to the U.S. military, serve three years of probation, and engage an independent compliance monitor for a period of three years. However, onlookers said it was not enough to outweigh the harm the company had done to service members and their families.

- “This is a fucking joke right, there is no way the DoD is going to allow a company who pled guilty to defrauding its troops all over the country to continue to do business with its troops right?” wrote one commenter reacting to the news on the unofficial Air Force subreddit.

- “They should have the contract revoked and be banned from our bases,” wrote another on Twitter. “There is no incentive to treat [service members] well or maintain the homes.”
- “The management of this company should be in jail,” said another Twitter user.

When asked about those concerns, Balfour Beatty Communities directed Task & Purpose to a statement released last week, where the company said it was “committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct,” and that “the wrongdoing that took place is completely contrary to the way the Company expects its people to behave.” However, last week’s headlines were only the latest in a series of stories documenting the company’s poor record maintaining the homes of service members.

- One lawsuit alleged one instance after another of “squalid conditions,” such as plumbing issues, insect and rodent infestations, asbestos, and mold that the housing provider did little to repair.
- One family involved in the lawsuit alleged that they developed asthma and migraines after moving into their Balfour Beatty-maintained home at Sheppard Air Force Base. James Banner, the father of the family, had such intense migraines he was eventually discharged from the military, the lawsuit said.
- Another family at Fort Bliss said a hot water pipe ruptured in their children’s bedroom in the middle of the night, “burning them with [scalding] hot water,” the lawsuit said.

With that kind of track record, you would think the Department of Defense would have cut ties with Balfour Beatty a long time ago. After all, individual service members are routinely fired for much less serious offenses, such as allegedly trying to turn an AK-47 into a plaque, or for trying to stop a COVID-19 outbreak, or for just plain old penis drawings.

Despite mismanaging homes across the military and getting paid millions of dollars while doing it, Balfour Beatty will keep its post for the foreseeable future. In fact, most contracts between the company and military bases will last another 40 or 50 years or sometimes longer, said Sarah Lynne Kline, co-founder and community outreach director for Armed Forces Housing Advocates, a non-profit for helping military families affected by poor housing issues. That’s because military housing is such a financially risky business that in order to acquire loans, companies have to have longer contracts, Kline explained.

Even if the military wanted to cancel those contracts, the government’s goal for at least the past quarter-century has been to privatize military housing as much as possible. In 1996, Congress stood up the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, which was meant to encourage private companies to provide housing “faster and more efficiently than traditional military construction processes would allow,” wrote the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment on its website. “DoD’s long-standing policy is to rely first on the private sector for its housing, paying housing allowances to its service members, where roughly 63 percent of military families live,” the office continued.

Believe it or not, at the time MHPI was meant to address “the poor condition of DoD owned housing” and “a shortage of quality affordable private housing.” However, 25 years later, the quality of military housing still leaves much to be desired, as does the government’s oversight of the contractors who provide it. The Department of Defense does not appear interested in changing the situation, Kline explained. “The DoD did not want to manage housing at the time MHPI was created, as the priorities of the DoD and the branches were focused elsewhere,” she said. “It appears that DoD would sooner approve a few billion dollars on procuring aircraft, which is just an estimated amount of what it might cost to shift housing back to the DoD and dissolve MHPI.”

It’s not as if the military can’t cancel its half-century-long contracts with companies like Balfour Beatty Communities, Kline explained. For example, the military services could send cure notices, where a contract can be terminated if the contractor does not resolve a breach of contract in a set period of time. The branches could also buy out the rest of the contracts, but neither the military nor Congress have yet to take that step. “The U.S. government can take these people to court and seize the funds but they have not done that,” Kline said.

Part of the problem is that even if the military did dissolve its contracts with Balfour Beatty Communities, it would need another private company to take its place. But those companies are not necessarily much better than Balfour. There are 14 other private companies involved in MHPI, and they all “have their own financial, legal, and stability issues and could not feasibly take over their contract,” Kline said. “We have searched for a model of privatized housing and a company doing it well and as of today we haven’t been able to find one,” Kline added.

At this point, the MHPI simply does not have enough oversight to prevent private companies from abusing their tenants, Kline said, and the proof seems to be in the pudding. Besides the Department of Justice’s statement last week, there are or have been lawsuits against private military housing companies at Tinker, Laughlin, Goodfellow, Keesler, and MacDill Air Force bases; Army Forts Hood, Belvoir, Meade and Bragg; Marine Corps Camps Lejeune and Pendleton; Naval Base San Diego, Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads, and Joint Bases San Antonio and Lewis-McChord, Kline said.

Not all of those lawsuits involve Balfour Beatty Communities. However, given the company’s vast portfolio across the military, and given the extent of the problems families have found there, the \$65 million fee is a “drop in the bucket” and a slap on the wrist, Kline said. “It’s disgusting to know that some of these privatized company employees caused families to become ill and lose their homes, and they just pay a fine?” she said. “It’s another example of white-collar crime.”

In August, the Department of Defense released a finalized Tenant Bill of Rights for service members and their families living in private military housing. The bill is supposed to validate a tenant’s rights to live in a healthy, working home; to obtain maintenance information from a landlord before signing a lease; to report violations to the chain of command without fear of reprisal, and other necessities.

Fifteen of the 18 rights on the current bill were implemented in February 2020. However, Kline said she has so far not seen the bill make a dent in the issues service members and their families are dealing with. "Since the tenant bill of rights has been implemented, we've seen the same level of fraud just implemented differently," she told Federal News Network. "Readiness starts with a safe home," she told Task & Purpose. "MHPI programs have created a national security issue where service members are unable to focus on their operational readiness and jobs, and are instead suffering in substandard living conditions with their families." [Source: Task & Purpose | David Roza | December 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Army Email Transition**

### **Update 05: Bulletin Subscriber's Need to Provide Non-mil Email Addees**

Army leaders overseeing the force's sweeping move to a new email service are saying that all soldiers will have access to email, in some form, when it switches to its "Army 365" platform, tentatively set for March, amid some confusion across the force over who will have email access and when the old system is turned off.

The Army is ditching the current Defense Enterprise Email System and moving to a Microsoft Office 365-based service that, in addition to email, would provide some soldiers with access to Teams and SharePoint, among other software services. The force also will move to the new Army.mil email domain, which many soldiers already have. "This is one of many leaps that the Army is making with modernization," Col. Joseph Gardner, the senior officer overseeing the service's email migration, told Military.com. "The Army remains committed to ensuring that all soldiers, civilians and contractors, as necessary, have access to the tools for collaboration and communication they need for their daily duties."

The Army purchased roughly 200,000 fewer 365 licenses than there are civilians who work for the force and soldiers across active duty, the Reserve and National Guard. Not buying the full roster of Microsoft 365 tools for the entire Army can save the branch \$150 million next year, and leaders pointed out that not all soldiers, such as junior combat arms troops in the National Guard, need all of Microsoft's services. But that purchase of licenses for less than the full force has led to broad confusion about whether some soldiers would not have access to email, a fear that has played out on social media.

Sgt. Maj. Richard Knott, the senior enlisted adviser on the platform's rollout, told Military.com that "everyone will have a government-provided email account" but that the Army is trying to "be good stewards of taxpayer money." For now, commanders are in charge of deciding who needs all of Microsoft's services. Leaders in charge of the rollout urged that all soldiers will have access to the tools that they reasonably need. When asked by Military.com on what would stop

commanders from making blanket demands for the full suite of services, Gardner said that request is approved or disapproved by the first colonel in the chain of command.

The move also introduces more stringent Defense Department-mandated security measures, one of which **doesn't allow soldiers to download email attachments**, even if they do not hold any sensitive materials, when on civilian networks. This could make it impossible for some tasks to be completed at home, a hurdle even greater for part-time forces in the Reserve and Guard, who often have limited access to government computers and networks. "It goes back to the DoD's mandate on what we're allowed to download from a security perspective; being able to download documents to your personal device is restricted," Gardner said. "So we're in line with that guidance. But what is in place is other methods to share like MilSuite and DoD SAFE."

MilSuite and DoD SAFE are tools for troops and Defense Department personnel to share digital files. But both are locked behind a Common Access Card wall, meaning ID cards are needed to be inserted into computers to access those websites, which is often a barrier for troops working from home. Ahead of the March deadline, all soldiers and Army civilian employees need to migrate to the new Army.mil email address. However, Gardner noted that all units should have received instructions to mass-migrate their soldiers automatically, which is done through a request with the Army's Network Enterprise Technology Command. [Source: Military.com | Steve Beynon & EMO| December 2 & 27, 2021 ++]

**EMO Note:** Per the new **no attachment policy** being incorporated into the Army's new system, all Bulletin readers currently using army.mil addees need to provide a back-up non-army email addee to ensure receipt of future Bulletins. When the af.mil changed their system in 2001, 600+ subscribers could no longer receive their Bulletins.

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## Passport Renewal

### Update 01: DOD Personnel, Families Can Renew Online



Active-duty, reserve and retired service members, and Defense Department civilians and contractors and their families will soon be able to renew their U.S. passports online, according to the State Department. The online portal, which became available 23 DEC, will enable customers

to renew their passports from the convenience of their homes 24/7 without having to go to a post office to mail their application and supporting documents, an official said. The requirements include:

- The most recent passport is or must have been valid for 10 years. It's OK if the passport is expired.
- Children under the age of 16 cannot renew their passports.
- The passport was issued over nine years ago (2012), but less than 15 years ago (2006).
- No changes were made with respect to name, gender or other personal information, such as date or place of birth.
- No travel internationally can be made within three weeks of the date of renewal. The State Department will offer routine (8-11 weeks) and expedited processing (5-7 weeks).
- Online applications may be for a passport book only; passport cards may not be requested online.
- Applications must be for regular (tourist) passports only. Special issuance diplomatic or official passports may not be renewed online.
- Applicants must live in the United States.
- Applicants must have the passport in their possession, and it cannot be damaged or mutilated.
- An applicant can pay for a passport using a credit/debit card or an automated clearing house payment transferring funds from a bank account.
- Applicants can upload a digital photo in the .JPEG file format.

Applicants who don't meet all of these requirements may still be eligible to renew by mail or in-person, the official said. The State Department will send a confirmation email with more instructions after those interested [preregister](#) by going to <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe4qBPgIziTAAb5IokDkXZypT799tFleg81Vc3-CXAh7zNo-w/viewform?source=GovDelivery>. Preregistration does not obligate those interested to renew online. Registrants will receive email updates and a customized link based on a registrant's individual email address to access the online portal.

Interested parties will have the flexibility to renew online over a six-month period through June 30, 2022, the official said. For any additional information, contact the State Department at [pptmandi@state.gov](mailto:pptmandi@state.gov). [Source: DoD News | David Vergun | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials**

**Reported DEC 15 thru 31, 2021 | Seven**

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century

as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on 'Our Missing'. Refer to <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories> for a listing and details of the 141 accounted for in 2005. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D. C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also call the following Service Casualty Offices: U. S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U. S. Army (800) 892-2490, U. S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U. S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U. S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The names, photos, and details of the below listed MIA/POW's which have been recovered, identified, and/or scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin are listed on the following sites:

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

### **LOOK FOR**

-- **Army Pfc. Jimmy Rowland, 19**, of Baldwyn, Mississippi, was assigned to Heavy Mortar Company, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on July 16, 1950, while fighting North Korean forces along the Kum River north of Taejon, South Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Rowland will be buried in his hometown on Jan. 15, 2022. [Read about Rowland](#) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News->

[Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839919/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-rowland-j](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2839919/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-rowland-j) .  
-- **Army Cpl. Marvin D. Actkinson, 18**, of Sudan, Texas, was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Actkinson will be buried in Colorado City, Texas. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Actkinson](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2800232/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-actkinson-m) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2800232/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-actkinson-m>

-- **Navy Lt. Cmdr. Hugh R. Alexander, 43**, of Potters Mills, Pennsylvania, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Alexander. He will be buried in San Diego. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Alexander](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2586328/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-alexander-h) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2586328/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-alexander-h>

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 1st Class Hubert P. Clement, 30**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Clement. Interment services are pending. [Read about Clement](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2874003/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-clement-h) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2874003/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-clement-h>

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Tceollyar Simmons, 18**, was assigned to the battleship USS California, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS California sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to catch fire and slowly flood. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 104 crewmen, including Simmons. Interment services are pending. [Read about Simmons](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2874015/uss-california-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-simmons-t) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2874015/uss-california-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-simmons-t>

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 1st Class Edward L. Conway, 29**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Conway. Interment services are pending. [Read about Conway](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2874020/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-conway-e) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2874020/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-conway-e>

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wilbur F. Newton, 29**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Newton. Interment services are pending. [Read about Newton](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2875872/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-newton-w) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2875872/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-newton-w>

\* VA \*



## **Agent Orange & MGUS**

### **Study Finds Increased Risk to Exposed Vietnam Vets**

A study that used stored blood samples from U.S. Air Force personnel who conducted aerial herbicide spray missions of Agent Orange during the Vietnam war found a more than 2-fold increased risk of the precursor to multiple myeloma known as monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS), according to an article published online by JAMA Oncology. While the cause of MGUS and multiple myeloma (plasma cell cancer) remains largely unclear, studies have reported an elevated risk of multiple myeloma among farmers and other agricultural workers and pesticides have been thought to be the basis for these associations, according to study background.

Ola Landgren, M.D., Ph.D., of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, and coauthors examined the association between MGUS and exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War in a study sample of 958 male veterans, including 479 Operation Ranch Hand veterans who were involved in aerial herbicide spray missions and 479 comparison veterans who were not. The study found the overall prevalence of MGUS was 7.1 percent in the Operation Ranch Hand veterans and 3.1 percent in the comparison veterans, which translates to a 2.4-fold increased risk for MGUS in Operation Ranch Hand veterans.

The authors noted limitations to their study, including a lack of women in the study group and the potential for unknown confounding factors such as family medical history and civilian occupation. “Our findings of increased MGUS risk among Ranch Hand veterans support an association between Agent Orange exposure and multiple myeloma,” the study concludes. In a related editorial, Niklhil C. Munshi, M.D., of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, wrote:

*“The study by Landgren et al has brought clarity to the risk of AO [Agent Orange] exposure and plasma cell disorder. It also highlights the importance of tissue banking that allows investigation of a number of unanswered questions using modern methods. The emphasis now is to store samples from almost every major study with correlative science*

*in mind, and this is essential if we are to understand disease biology, mechanism of response and resistance to therapy in the era of targeted therapy and precision medicine.”*

**Editor’s Note:** This work was supported in part by grants from the Veterans Administration and the National Institutes of Health. [Source: <https://media.jamanetwork.com/post-embargo-news-releases> | December 17, 2021 ++]

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## **Presumptive Exposure Claim**

### **Are You Eligible To File For Benefits?**



Were you exposed to hazardous materials while serving in the military, such as from Agent Orange or burn pits? Did you serve in Vietnam, Thailand or Southwest Asia? If so, you may be eligible to file for service-connected benefits based on presumptive exposure. Over the course of the last six months VA has begun processing service-connected disability claims for six new presumptive conditions related to exposure to hazardous materials.

In May 2021, VA started implementing provisions of the William M.Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (NDAA), adding bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism to the list of medical conditions presumptively associated with exposure to Agent Orange. A few months later, VA added asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis (to include rhinosinusitis) on a presumptive basis based on particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia and certain other areas. Any Veteran who was previously denied service-connection for any of these six conditions but had symptoms manifest within 10 years of military service would need to file another claim.

Be sure to use VA Form 20-0995, “Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim” when filing. An online fillable one is available at <https://search.yahoo.com/search?p=va+form+20-0995+fillable+pdf&fr=yfp-t-s&ei=UTF-8&fp=1>. The claim form should include the name of the medical condition and also specify that the medical condition is being claimed due to in-service exposure to environmental hazards. VA is committed to assisting Veterans who may have been exposed to hazardous materials during their military service. Be sure to stay plugged in to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for the most recent developments around environmental hazards; VA is constantly

conducting research and surveillance, as well as reviewing scientific literature for conditions that may be related to exposure during military service.

If you feel you have a chronic condition attributed to an in-service exposure, we highly encourage you to file a claim. For more information about VA benefits and eligibility, or how to file a claim, Veterans and survivors can visit VA’s website at <https://www.va.gov> or call toll-free at 1-800-827-1000. [Source: The Patriot Reader Newsletter | Bill Dudley | January 2022 ++]

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## **VA Disability Compensation System**

### **Update 07: Compensation Charts for 2022**

The following rates cover only the veteran. Also displayed are the previous two years so you can see how your compensation has changed over time.

<b>VA Rating</b>	<b><u>2022</u> Rates</b>	<b><u>2021</u> Rates</b>	<b><u>2020</u> Rates</b>
10%	\$152.64	\$144.14	\$142.29
20%	\$301.74	\$284.93	\$281.27
30%	\$467.39	\$441.35	\$435.69
40%	\$673.28	\$635.77	\$627.61
50%	\$958.44	\$905.04	\$893.43
60%	\$1,214.03	\$1,146.39	\$1,131.68
70%	\$1,529.95	\$1,444.71	\$1,426.17
80%	\$1,778.43	\$1,679.35	\$1,657.80
90%	\$1,998.52	\$1,887.18	\$1,862.96
100%	\$3,332.06	\$3,146.42	\$3,106.04

[Source: The Military Wallet | Ryan Guina | December 8, 2021++]

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## **VA Disability Ratings**

### **Update 05: Who You Should Contact If You Have Questions**

There are many organizations that specialize in helping veterans with their benefits and claims. The first place to start is with the VA. VA representatives have access to your records and are the best source for up-to-date information. However, the VA isn’t always the best place to get assistance with your claim, especially if you are filing an appeal after the VA denied your claim. In that case, I recommend contacting a veteran benefits counselor at your county VA office, or an

organization such as the DAV, AMVETS, VFW, American Legion, or a similar Veteran Service Organization.

You can also use the Physical Evaluation Board Forum at <https://www.pebforum.com> to anonymously ask questions about VA disabilities, ratings and the military medical board process. If that doesn't work, consider hiring a lawyer that specializes in VA disability claims. I don't have any specific recommendations for lawyers, so please do your research before hiring a law office to represent you. At the minimum, you will want to ensure they specialize in military law, VA disability claims, social security disability claims, or similar types of law. As with all legal agreements, also make sure you understand the compensation structure. [Source: The Military Wallet | Ryan Guina | December 8, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse**

**Reported 16 thru 31 DEC 2021**

**Concord, NH** -- Acting United States Attorney John J. Farley announced that Joseph A. Foistner, 67, of Mont Vernon, was found guilty of four counts of bank fraud, as well as charges of wire fraud, money laundering, and making misrepresentations during bankruptcy proceedings. The verdict was returned by Senior U.S. District Judge Paul Barbadoro on December 23, 2021, following a two-week bench trial.

According to exhibits and witness testimony during the trial, Foistner used fraudulent means to apply for over \$8 million in loans from five different financial institutions, laundered money, and made material misrepresentations during bankruptcy proceedings between 2015 and 2018. Foistner, at the time of the scheme, was a licensed attorney in Massachusetts. He did not have any paying clients and earned no income through his law firm. In order to obtain millions of dollars in loans from multiple financial institutions, Foistner provided banks with misleading documents that suggested that he was operating a lucrative law firm. For example, he claimed that he was a "seasoned attorney" with international clients and that his firm earned over a million dollars in annual income. In fact, all the firm's purported income was based upon bogus, unpaid invoices the firm submitted to entities that the defendant controlled, including bankrupt entities. The defendant also made other false statements to obtain bank loans, including lying about whether he was involved as a party to any lawsuits and denying that he had an interest in other companies. He also falsely represented that he had a salary by mischaracterizing loan proceeds as a salary. In one of the bank fraud schemes, the defendant submitted false information to obtain a loan by claiming falsely that his wife was earning over \$200,000 per year as a paralegal. Each of the loans made to Foistner were backed by either the Department of the Veterans Affairs or the Small Business Administration.

The evidence further showed that Foistner committed several crimes during Chapter 7 bankruptcy court proceedings in 2017 and 2018. He made false representations by falsely denying that he held or controlled property owned by others when he actually controlled funds that were held in the name of a business. He also made false statements under oath by lying about what happened to the proceeds of one of the fraudulent loans and lying about not knowing the location of a piece of real estate that had been purchased in part with funds he borrowed and had subsequently funneled into bank accounts not in his name. Foistner is scheduled to be sentenced on April 4, 2022. [Source: DOJ Dist. of New Hampshire | U.S. Attorney's Office | December 27, 2021 ++]

\* Vets \*



## **Troops to Teachers Program**

### **Update 01: Reinstated through NDAA 2022**

The Defense Department will be required to restart its Troops to Teachers program next year thanks to language included in the annual defense authorization bill finalized by Congress earlier this week. The 28-year-old program had been shut down by defense officials earlier this fall as part of department planning in post-military transition efforts. The final financial payouts for individuals completing degrees under the program were scheduled to end next May. But that decision drew objections from a number of outside veterans groups who called the Troops to Teachers program an important resource for service members looking at education jobs after their service.



The program, originally administered through the Department of Education, is designed to help veterans interested in teaching jobs by providing up to \$10,000 of financial support and coordination with state officials on placement in schools in need of teachers. About 23,000 individuals have taken part in the program since 1993. The program costs about \$15 million per year. But Pentagon leaders had indicated in recent years that they believed the money could be spent more effectively and efficiently elsewhere. Congress disagreed. In the defense authorization bill, lawmakers mandated the department to continue the program until at least July 2025, three years longer than officials had planned.

They also require military leaders to provide a full analysis of the program by next December, looking at the operating costs, number of veterans helped by the assistance, and the impact on schools in need of additional educators. The extension of the transition assistance effort drew praise from officials at the American Legion, who along with other veterans groups has been lobbying to protect the program for months. “Just like military service is an honorable profession, so is the education of our nation’s youth,” said Paul Dillard, national commander of the American Legion, in a statement. “We believe it is a benefit not just to the veteran but to students in classrooms across the country who would be taught by men and women that are battle-tested leaders.” President Joe Biden is expected to sign the measure into law in coming days. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 16, 2021 ++]

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## **GI Bill**

### **Update 316: Remote Student Vet’s Full Tuition to Continue**



Congress on 15 DEC finalized plans to extend GI Bill protections for student veterans still forced into remote classes by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, ensuring they’ll receive full benefits until next summer. The move is expected to affect about 57,000 students currently enrolled in degree programs, according to Veterans Affairs data. At issue is how post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are paid out to students who attend college classes remotely, rather than in-person.

Students using the veterans education benefit receive money for tuition plus a monthly housing stipend. Individuals enrolled in traditional in-person classes receive the full financial benefit, while

students in online-only classes get half of that housing stipend. But when the coronavirus pandemic shuttered college campuses across America in spring 2020, that left tens of thousands of students worried they may not have their rent payments covered because their classes were forced online. The difference between half of a housing stipend and the full payout can range from a few hundred dollars to nearly \$2,000, since the payouts depend on the location of the student and school. Making up that difference could force some individuals move out mid-semester or drop course entirely.

To avoid those types of financial problems, Congress granted VA leaders broad authority to continue paying out the full housing stipends even if students had been forced out of the classroom. That authority was set to expire on 21 DEC. But the Senate on 15 DEC finalized legislation to push that date back to summer 2022, in recognition of the ongoing transition from online to in-person classes. The measure, sponsored by Rep. David Trone (D-MD) passed the House without objection on 8 DEC

“While we’ve made a lot of progress in getting this virus under control, many veterans continue to take classes online due to the pandemic and need the protections in this legislation in order to continue their studies,” said Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) and chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s panel on economic opportunity. “At a time when we are trying to keep veterans housed and encourage them to pursue a higher education, the last thing we can afford is to let these protections expire and risk derailing their studies or, even worse, forcing them out of their homes.” Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) echoed that sentiment after the Senate’s passage of the bill. “No veteran should ever have to face uncertainty when it comes to their future,” he said in a statement.

The measure was not seen as controversial in either chamber but took months to finalize amid other legislative priorities, frustrating advocates who warned that student veterans were facing significant financial stress as a result of the inaction. In California alone, more than 15,000 students are still receiving full stipend payouts even though they have not fully resumed in-person classes. In some cases, the decision to remain remote lies with individuals and schools. In others, state and local regulations limit class attendance and availability. President Joe Biden is expected to sign the measure into law in coming days. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Civil War’s Last Vet**

### **Refuted to be Walter Washington Williams**

Walter Washington Williams was the last surviving veteran of the Civil War when he passed away at the ripe old age of 117 in Houston, Texas, during December of 1959. President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared a day of national mourning. Americans across the nation bid goodbye to

the last Civil War veteran. But was Williams' story truth or fiction? Over 150 years since the end of the Civil War and 59 years since Williams' passing, we examine this tale of the last living Confederate.



Williams claimed to have been born in Mississippi in 1842 and to have gone on to serve under Confederate General John Bell Hood. According to Williams, he was a foragemaster under Hood, in charge of locating and transporting food supplies, and later he rode with Quantrill's raiders. In 1870, five years after the close of the war, Williams began farming 20 acres in Eaton, Texas. He lived a quiet life with his family until the 1940s, when newspapermen began showcasing the final surviving veterans of the bloody War Between the States. It was then that Williams became a small-town celebrity, earning the nicknames "Honorable Colonel" and "Five Star General Williams."

Williams offered *The Dallas Morning News* this bit of wisdom about how to reach old age: "I never eat much. I get up for breakfast, turn around for dinner, and go to bed for supper. When I was riding up the Chisholm Trail the range cooks sort of held it against me because I was a light-eating man. I've always drunk lots of coffee, chewed plenty of tobacco, and haven't tried to avoid any of this good Texas weather."

Scandal struck only months before Williams passed away. A reporter named Lowell Bridwell published an expose that called into question William's date of birth and veteran claims. Bridwell referred to Williams as an "enfeebled old man" who was a "Confederate veteran only in his memory-clouded mind." Bridwell backed up his debunking with the fact that the 1860 census listed Willimas as a five-year-old, making the year of his birth 1854. If this was his true year of birth, Williams would have been only nine in 1864, making it unlikely he fought in the war. Bridwell also noted the National Archives didn't list any Walter W. or Walter G. or Walter L. Williams from Mississippi as serving in the Confederate Army. One historian who met Mr. Williams as a boy wrote to [TexasHillCountry.com](http://TexasHillCountry.com) to say that his grandfather once told him that Mr. Williams was too young to have fought in the war, but Williams' older brother had served in the Confederate Army. Mr. Williams later claimed his brother's Civil War veteran's pension check and told reporters he was older than his actual years.

Williams' defenders contended that official records from that time period were frequently unreliable. This was especially the case for the Confederacy during the final year of the war, when

their records were often nonexistent or contained inaccurate dates of birth. It was also discovered that a Jackson, Mississippi archive did indeed list “Private Walter L. Williams” in the 5th Mississippi Cavalry. Williams claimed that he often used different middle initials in his youth. Many Texans were offended at Bridwell’s questioning of Williams’ credentials. Charles Morris, the Texas Veteran Affairs Commissioner, stated, “They’ll have an awful hard time proving he wasn’t a Confederate veteran.”

Williams was laid to rest at Mount Pleasant Church Cemetery not far from New Baden, Texas. The Texas Civil War Centennial Commission placed a marker there in 1963, though reports indicate it has since been removed. The sign read: “Reputed to have been the last surviving soldier of the Civil War...he had lived very quietly until in extreme old age he gained fame as one of the very few remaining veterans. After the nation lost all other men who had fought in the Civil War, he was given the honorary rank of General by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. When Gen. Williams died in Houston at home of a daughter, President Eisenhower proclaimed a period of national mourning.” If Williams wasn’t the true last surviving veteran of the Civil War, that title falls to Albert Woolson, who died three years before Williams and was known to have served as a drummer boy in the Union Army. [Source: <https://texashillcountry.com> | Max McNabb | December 4, 2018 ++]

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## **Obit: Clifton Brooks Sr.**

**West Virginia's Last Tuskegee Airmen, Dies at 99**



Clifton E. Brooks Sr., West Virginia's last surviving Tuskegee Airman and a longtime resident of Keyser, died Friday, 24 DEC. He was 99. Born on March 12, 1922, in Cumberland, he was a son of the late James L. and Nellie E. (Johnson) Brooks. He also was preceded in death by his wife of 61 years, Bessie Reva (Washington) Brooks on Feb. 16, 2010; two brothers, James L. Brooks Jr. and Raymond A. Brooks Sr.; a sister, Lelia Mae Baskins; and two granddaughters.

"Gene" as he was called by family and friends, graduated from Howard High School, in Piedmont, and attended West Virginia State College (now University.) While he was a young man

studying mechanical engineering at West Virginia State College, Brooks was recruited to serve in the Army Air Corps as a cryptologist during World War II. He was a sergeant and was member of the famed Tuskegee Airman, where he served as a cryptologist with the 332nd Fighter Group. He came to serve as the head code technician in Italy. "To my knowledge the code was never broken," Brooks told the Times-News during a 2005 interview. "Twenty-five years after I got out of the Air Force, FBI agents would come to my house in Keyser. They wouldn't interview me, but would talk to my relatives to see if I leaked any information about the code, because it was still being used."

Brooks retired with over 40 years of service with the Kelly-Springfield Tire Company, in Cumberland, where he was named "Man of the Year" when he retired. Gene was a life member with over 75 years of service to the Washington-Smith Post 152, American Legion in Keyser, was a member of the Chaplain's Hall of Fame and served in numerous offices at the state department level. He was a member of Potomac Masonic Lodge 41, Keyser and was a member of the Shrine Temple where he became a 33rd degree mason, Lodge 662, Loyal Order of Moose, Keyser and Queen's Point Memorial Post 6775, VFW, in McCoolle. He also was a member of Janes United Methodist Church, in Keyser, where he served as a lay leader and treasurer until his passing.

He was one of the pioneer members of the Eastern West Virginia Community Action. In 2007, he was recognized by then Governor Joe Manchin, during an Armed Forces Day program for his dedication and courage while serving in World War II and he was presented with a bronze replica of the Congressional Medal in 2010. He also received Mineral County Day citations from the West Virginia Senate and House of Delegates in 2019, and was honored by the Aubrey Stewart Project with the installation of a sign honoring him at the North entrance to Keyser at the foot of Memorial Bridge. In 2018, the South End Park, in Keyser, was renamed Brooks Park in honor of him by the City of Keyser.

Surviving are his children, Clifton E. Brooks Jr. and wife, Barbara, of Martinsburg, Raeford "Micky" Brooks and wife, Alta, J. Ricardo Brooks and wife, Vanessa, Timothy F. Brooks Sr. and wife, Renee', Jacquelyn F. Washington, Apryle A. Smith, Victoria Brooks and Brenda Brooks, all of Keyser; 24 grandchildren, 48 great-grandchildren, seven great-great-grandchildren, and a host of nieces, nephews and cousins. Mr. Brooks was the last surviving member of his immediate family. Interment with military honors will be in the Thorn Rose Cemetery, Keyser. Condolences and personal reflections to the family may be left after Mr. Brooks' obituary at <https://www.smithfuneralhomes.net>.

The Tuskegee Airmen were African-American military pilots who fought in World War II. They formed the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Forces. The name also applies to the navigators, bombardiers, mechanics, instructors, crew chiefs, nurses, cooks and other support personnel. [Source: <https://obituaries.times-news.com/obituary/clifton-brooks-sr-1084088830> & Cumberland Times-News | Lindsay Renner-Wood | December 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Russia U.S. Vet Detainees**

### **Paul Whelan & Trevor Reed after 3 Years**



As tensions rise while Russia continues to station troops near the Ukraine border, the U.S. State Department 28 DEC reiterated its call for the release of two Marine veterans currently imprisoned by Russian authorities. Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed are currently being detained in separate Russian prisons, serving sentences for alleged crimes against the state. Ned Price, State Department spokesperson, said that their recovery is a top priority in a press briefing.

“Three years ago today, Paul Whelan was detained by Russian authorities,” Price said. “He traveled to Russia as a tourist and was imprisoned and sentenced on false charges. Secretary [Antony] Blinken has been very clear about the need for Russia to release U.S. citizens Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed unconditionally and immediately so that they can be home with their families.”

Whelan, 51, originally from Novi, Michigan, is a citizen of the United States, Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom. He enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserves in 1994, serving two tours in Iraq in 2004 and 2006. Whelan was discharged from the Marine Corps as a staff sergeant in 2008 after receiving a bad conduct discharge. He was working as a security executive in December 2018 when he was arrested at his Moscow hotel for espionage — a charge Whelan has vehemently denied. He is currently serving a 16-year sentence of hard labor at a prison camp in Mordovia.

“It’s not just the injustice of Russian hostage diplomacy,” Whelan’s brother, David, told Detroit News. “It’s the stolen years with our parents as they age, missing Christmases and birthdays and family time. It’s the stolen life, as one by one, Paul lost his job, his home, his ability to communicate and be with friends. He lost everything he’d known.”

Reed, 30, is a Fort Worth, Texas native and served in the Marine Corps as a presidential guard, once providing security to former President Barack Obama at Camp David. He received an honorable discharge. Reed is currently serving a nine-year sentence for allegedly assaulting Russian police officers during a night out with his girlfriend in Moscow in 2019. He pleaded not guilty to the charges, stating that he does not remember the incident.

According to his lawyers, the Marine veteran briefly went on a hunger strike last month, protesting his treatment in prison. “Russian authorities are holding Trevor in a small room with a hole in the floor for a toilet. They will not allow him to communicate in his own language, to receive books or letters, to receive commissary items like other prisoners do, nor will they allow him to use a phone,” Reed’s family said in a statement in November. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Rachel Nostrant | December 29, 2021 ++]

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## **State Veterans’ Benefits Nebraska 2021**

The state of Nebraska provides a number of services and benefits to its veterans. To obtain information on many, but not all these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**State Veteran’s Benefits – NE**” for an overview of those in the below areas. They are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below plus the state’s current position on veteran issues refer to MOAA’s [www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard](http://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard) and Nebraska’s Department of veteran Affairs website <https://veterans.nebraska.gov>:

A large number of services/benefits, both state and federal, are provided to veterans in Nebraska. This attachment applies mostly to those provided or obtained through the state and addresses many, but not all, following areas:

- Housing
- Healthcare
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation
- Women Vet Program
- Homeless Vet Assistance
- Other

[Source: [www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/nebraska-state-veterans-benefits.html](http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/nebraska-state-veterans-benefits.html) | December 2021 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule**

**As of DEC 31, 2021**

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree\veterans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- HTML: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.html](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html).
- PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf).
- Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc).

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com). [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | December 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs**

**Scheduled As of DEC 31 2021**



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

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

- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | December 31, 2021 ++]

### \* Vet Legislation \*



## **Vet Bill Progress**

**16 thru 31 DEC 2021**

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee On 15 DEC cleared 25 bills to better serve veterans nationwide—including 11 priorities authored by Chairman Jon Tester to deliver stronger benefits and health care under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Committee also advanced Kurt D. DelBene to serve as VA's Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology—a position responsible for delivering adaptable, secure, and cost-effective technology services to VA employees and veterans.

“I’m glad the Committee took decisive action today to advance a critical nominee for VA, along with 25 bills on behalf of veterans in Montana and across the country,” said Tester. “I’m especially proud we cleared a number of my bills to tackle the claims backlog, improve rural veterans’ access to health care, support survivors of military sexual trauma, and meet the mental health care needs of post-9/11 veterans. These efforts reflect a continued priority of improving benefits and services

for our nation’s veterans and their families, and I’ll keep pushing until we get them across the finish line.” The Committee considered—and passed—the following bills with backing from the Chairman:

- ***Department of Veterans Affairs Information Technology Reform Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to increase transparency and accountability through Congressional oversight into proposed and current information technology systems and management at VA.
- ***Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act*** – [Bipartisan, bicameral legislation](#) to strengthen and expand access to high-quality breast cancer screening and life-saving care for veterans.
- ***FY2022 Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act*** – Bipartisan legislation authorizing several VA construction projects to serve veterans for fiscal year 2022.
- ***Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan, bicameral legislation](#) to improve permanently expand travel assistance programs and advance travel reimbursements for low-income veterans.
- ***Guard, Reserve, and Active Duty (GRAD) Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Educational Assistance Parity Act Educational Assistance Parity Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to expand GI Bill benefits to select National Guard and Reserve duty statuses.
- ***Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to provide VA’s Office of Inspector General the authority to subpoena testimony from former VA employees who have left federal service, former contractor personnel who performed work for the Department, or other potentially relevant individuals during the course of its inspections, reviews, and investigations.
- ***Veterans’ Prostate Cancer Treatment and Research Act*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to expand treatment and research of prostate cancer to help diagnose and treat veterans through VA, which is the number one cancer diagnosed by the Veterans Health Administration.
- ***Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan, bicameral legislation](#) to improve MST survivors’ access to benefits and health care, as well as bolster MST claims processing and access to MST care for former Guard and Reserve members.
- ***Reform and Update Rural Access to Local (RURAL) Exams Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to improve rural veterans’ access to medical disability examinations, by enhancing the transparency of the medical disability examination program and revamping how VA delivers exams to rural and housebound veterans.
- ***Post-9/11 Veterans’ Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to strengthen VA’s mental health care workforce, expand care options, and support mental health research at the Department.
- ***Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to tackle the Department’s claims backlog, increase transparency over the claims process, and provide veterans with timelier access to their earned benefits.
- ***Student Veterans Transparency and Protection Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to improve veterans’ access to information about higher education and allow the VA to restore benefits that veterans use at schools subject to civil enforcement.

- ***Department of Veterans Affairs Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Processing Claims Improvement Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to improve VA’s post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) claims processing training, to ensure veterans experiencing PTSD have access to the health care, treatment, and compensation.
- ***Chaplains Memorial Preservation Act*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to allow the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces to update the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish chaplains’ memorials at Arlington National Cemetery with the names of all military chaplains who died on active duty.
- ***GI Bill National Emergency Extended Deadline Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to protect veterans’ educational benefits from expiring due to institutional closures or other factors caused by the COVID-19 national emergency.
- ***Vet Center Improvement Act of 2021*** – Bicameral legislation to mandate recommendations from a [Government Accountability Office investigation requested by Senators Tester and Reed](#), requiring VA to evaluate productivity expectations for readjustment counselors at Vet Centers in order to assess the impact of these expectations on the welfare of counselors and on the care provided to veterans. It also creates a pilot program at Vet Centers to assist veteran and servicemembers experiencing food insecurity.
- ***Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan, bicameral legislation](#) to ensure all members of Reserve components and the National Guard are eligible to be buried in state veterans cemeteries, so long as their service was terminated under honorable conditions.
- ***Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General Training Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) requiring VA to provide training to employees on reporting waste, fraud, and abuse, in coordination with the VA Office of the Inspector General.
- ***Brian Neuman Department of Veterans Affairs Clothing Allowance Improvement Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) to improve the application and review process of VA for clothing allowance claims submitted by veterans.
- ***Every Veteran Counts Act of 2021*** – [Legislation](#) directing VA to establish and regularly update a database of veterans’ demographic data.
- ***Supporting Families of the Fallen Act*** – [Legislation](#) to increase the VA’s Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance and Veterans’ Group Life Insurance coverage—upgrading these coverage amounts for the first time since 2005.
- ***Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) requiring VA to expand veterans’ access to the Medical Foster Home program—which allows veterans in need of long-term care to choose to live in the home of a VA-approved caregiver, rather than institutional care.
- ***Reaching Every Homeless Veteran Act of 2021*** – [Bipartisan, bicameral legislation](#) to expand the Department of Labor’s Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program to all 50 states and U.S. territories. This program offers customized employment and training services to homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness veterans to address their specific barriers to employment.
- ***A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the role of doctors of podiatric medicine in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes*** – [Bipartisan legislation](#) that aligns the position of podiatrists with that of physicians for pay and grade purposes within the Veterans Health Administration.

- *A bill to rename the Provo Veterans Center in Orem, Utah, as the “Col. Gail S. Halvorsen 'Candy Bomber' Veterans Center.”*

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**The Major Richard Star Act** – a bill to expand eligibility to certain military retirees for concurrent receipt of veterans’ disability compensation and retired pay or combat-related special compensation which would end an unjust offset faced by tens of thousands of combat-injured veterans – has grown co-sponsors in recent weeks as staffers have time to access constituent requests and engage with elected officials. The number grew to 55 in the Senate and 151 in the House. You can check to see whether your lawmakers support the House or Senate versions at:

- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/344/cosponsors>
- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1282/cosponsors>

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly & MOAA| December 20 & 23, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Claims Backlog**

### **Update 171: H.R. 5944 | VA Backlog Accountability Act**

In February 2020, there were 70,000 compensation claims pending over 125 days, which the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) determined to be backlogged. As of December 2021, there were 255,000 compensation claims pending over 125 days, which is over 40% of VA’s current workload. The COVID-19 pandemic aided in creating this significant backlog. This, coupled with the new presumptive diseases being added for Agent Orange and burn pit exposure, has also dramatically increased the pending compensation claims backlog.

**H.R. 5944, the Veterans Administration Backlog Accountability Act**, would require the VA Inspector General (IG) to report on the backlog of disability compensation claims. Specifically, it would require the IG to determine how the VA is addressing the backlog, how the backlog is affecting the amount of a time a veteran or survivor is waiting for their claims decision and recommendations on how to reduce the backlog.

Lost time in deciding veterans’ claims imposes a serious burden on veterans, their families and survivors. DAV strongly supports H.R. 5944, as it would require the VA Inspector General to review and provide recommendations for improving claims process wait times and reducing the backlog. This bill is consistent with DAV Resolution No. 036, which calls for support of significant and meaningful claims processing reform to address VA’s overall workloads.

DAV supports H.R. 5944 and is requesting all readers to contact their legislators to ask them to support this important legislation or thank them for their support. Towards this they have provided the below editable letter to assist readers to use in that effort:

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*Subj: Please Support H.R. 5944, Veterans Administration Backlog Accountability Act of 2021  
Dear Rep \_\_\_\_\_*

*As your constituent, I urge you to support of an important bill that will affect the quality of life of injured and ill veterans, their dependents and survivors.*

*On November 9, 2021, Representative Norma Torres (CA), introduced H.R. 5944—the Veterans Administration Backlog Accountability Act. The bill would require the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to report on the backlog of disability compensation claims.*

*In February 2020, there were 70,000 compensation claims pending over 125 days, which VA determined to be backlogged. As of December 2021, there were 255,000 compensation claims pending over 125 days, which is over 40% of VA’s current workload.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic aided in creating this significant backlog. This, coupled with the new presumptive diseases being added for Agent Orange and burn pit exposure, has also dramatically increased the pending compensation claims backlog.*

*H.R. 5944, the Veterans Administration Backlog Accountability Act, would require the VA Inspector General (IG) to report on the backlog of disability compensation claims. Specifically, it would require the IG to determine how the VA is addressing the backlog, how the backlog is affecting the amount of time a veteran or survivor is waiting for their claims decision and recommendations on how to reduce the backlog.*

*I ask that you support H.R. 5944 and consider being a cosponsor of this important legislation. Please advise me of your intentions with respect to this bill.*

*Sincerely,  
Your Name  
Your Address*

[Source: Disabled American Veterans | Andrew Marshall | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Enlistment to Avoid Prosecution**

**Update 01: SB1356 | Military Service Option**



You can join the Army, or you can go to jail. It’s an old cliché that’s more fiction than fact, and hasn’t been a common practice for decades. Now, a new proposal in the Florida legislature wants to once again offer military service as an alternative to jail time. Filed on 21 DEC by Sen. Darryl Rouson (D-St. Petersburg), SB1356 would allow those who are 25 years old or younger and facing less than four years of jail time for misdemeanor offenses to potentially enlist in the military. There are, of course, some caveats.

The bill would only apply if “the offender has not been convicted of an offense or, if the offender has prior convictions, is not a habitual felony offender, a habitual violent felony offender, or a violent career criminal.” Additionally, one would have to pass the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, complete basic training and successfully serve an initial enlistment. Otherwise, it’s back to court and back to jail. And the biggest caveat of all is, of course, that the all-volunteer military is under no obligation to accept anyone.

Without a waiver, Army Regulation 610-210 — which covers Army recruiting guidelines — states that an applicant who “As a condition for any civil conviction or adverse disposition or any other reason through a civil or criminal court, is ordered or subjected to a sentence that implies or imposes enlistment into the Armed Forces of the United States is not eligible for enlistment.” In other words, a judge’s authority does not extend into a recruiting office, making the “join the military or go to jail” trope largely symbolic. In 2006, a New York judge offered Michael Guerra, a man facing a year in jail after pleading guilty to aggravated assault charges, the chance to join the Army. The Army, however, rejected the proposal.

More common has been the waning of military recruiting standards, as the military has at times struggled to fill its ranks. Prior to the implementation of the all-volunteer force, enlistment standards remained fairly lax, making it easier for those with certain criminal convictions to join up. In the 2000s, struggling to meet enlistment quotas at the height of the Iraq war, the military notably began increasing the number of moral waivers for enlistment, which allowed soldiers to join the Army despite past drug use or criminal misconduct. In 2007, Army documents showed that 8,259 waivers were given for serious misdemeanors such as burglary and aggravated assault.

An article published by retired Army Col. Charles Allen in the Armed Forces Journal in November of that same year, though, found that “soldiers who enlisted with moral waivers were more likely to have disciplinary action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and to be discharged.” More recently, the military has been tightening back up its recruiting standards. As of 2018, waivers for prior misconduct in the Army require approval at the branch’s headquarters. So while the various branches continue to face some challenges in finding all the people they need, it’s doubtful they will be combing the courthouse halls anytime soon. [Source: Task & Purpose | Max Hauptman | December 23, 2021++]

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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>.

**\* Military \***



## USS Gerald R. Ford

### Update 20: US Navy Completes Final Onboard Weapons Elevator



The U.S. Navy tested and certified the last of 11 Advanced Weapons Elevators on aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford, after that system threw a wrench into final construction, testing and training of the first-in-class ship.

The weapons elevators transport massive munitions from the depths of the ship up to the hangar bay and to the flight deck, where fighter jets can be armed before missions. AWE is one of 23 brand-new technologies developed for the Ford-class carriers, several of which lagged in development or saw delays during testing — ultimately pushing the ship’s planned maiden deployment from 2018 to the currently projected late 2022. AWE was the last of these new technologies to be fixed. To avoid further delays, the Navy allowed the crew and air wing to start training on the ship in spring 2020, conducting post-delivery tests and trials and eventually conducting shock trials over the summer of 2021. Throughout this time, contractors have worked on the elevators both while the ship was in port and while it was operating at sea, completing one elevator after the next and turning them over to the crew to begin using in operations.

The final elevator was turned over to the crew on 22 DEC, according to a Navy news release. “This is a significant milestone for the Navy, ship, and her crew,” Rear Adm. James Downey, Program Executive Officer for Aircraft Carriers, said in the statement. “With completion of this final AWE, we now have the entire system to operate and train with.” He also praised the “hundreds of craftsmen, technicians and engineers, working around the clock — through multiple underway and holiday periods — to get these advanced systems online and operational.” Still, the elevators have been a headache for the Navy for years now.

The first was turned over to the ship crew in January 2019, after the Navy realized its original design for the elevators, which operate via electromagnetic motors rather than hydraulics, was flawed. Navy leaders have explained since that each of the 11 had to be designed and programmed separately, rather than having one design that worked for all 11 locations. That same month, in January 2019, then-Navy Secretary Richard Spencer announced he’d told then-President Donald Trump that if the weapons elevators aren’t functioning by midsummer, Trump should fire him. But within months, Spencer had to admit that the weapons elevators would not be finished until the end of 2021 or maybe 2022, which he blamed on Huntington Ingalls Industries for a lack of adequate communication.

At one point in 2020, the Navy was pushing to complete all the elevators by mid-2021 ahead of shock trials, which also did not pan out. Sen. Jim Inhofe, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, told Defense News in a statement he had been tracking the elevator issue closely for the last three years and that, while recognizing the effort of the contractors to get the work done, this work shouldn’t still be taking place four and a half years after the carrier was commissioned into the fleet.

“Based on the contract signed by the Navy and shipbuilder in 2008, the Ford should have been delivered in September 2015 at a cost of \$10.5 billion. What actually happened is ship

construction was not completed until yesterday — **six years late and \$2.8 billion over budget,**” he said. “The burden of this six-year delay has been borne by the other 10 aircraft carriers in our fleet deploying longer and more often, as well as gaps in carrier presence when no carrier could deploy, at a time when naval presence and capability could not be more critical for our national security.” Noting that annual defense bills in recent years have included several measures aimed at improving lead ship performance, he said the Navy needed to do better going forward, especially in light of a growing Chinese naval fleet.

To help mitigate some of the delay caused by the elevator and other new technology snags, the Navy, Huntington Ingalls Industries and their team of contractors also advanced some work planned to take place during the ongoing six-month Planned Incremental Availability, which began in August after the shock trials. Instead, they started that effort alongside the elevator work while the crew was conducting its trials. Some of this work included installing the latest versions of computers and combat systems, which is typically done as late as possible in the new ship construction and testing process so that the latest and greatest can be installed ahead of a maiden deployment.

Program and ship officials told reporters pulling up this work would ensure the PIA stayed on schedule despite the elevator work stretching into that maintenance availability, taking place at HII’s Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia. The PIA is expected to wrap up in the spring, according to the news release, at which time the crew can enter basic-phase training ahead of its first deployment cycle. [Source: DefenseNews | Megan Eckstein | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Basic Allowance for Housing**

### **Update 11: Only 2% of Eligible Troops Have Applied for Extra Money**



The military services have so far approved just 4,167 claims for the temporary increase in Basic Allowance for Housing, far fewer than were anticipated by defense officials. When the temporary allowance was announced, officials estimated that up to 200,000 service members could be eligible for the extra housing money. So far, about 2% of that number have submitted claims and

been approved. The Air Force is at the head of the pack, with 3,174 claims processed — more than three-fourths of the total DoD claims.

Given the extensive marketing campaigns that have been conducted by the services and by the Defense Department, and the actual number of claims received, “it would appear the original estimate was inflated, thus potentially setting a false expectation,” said DoD spokesman Army Maj. Charlie Dietz.

In September, defense officials announced that service members in 56 areas of the country could be eligible to apply for a temporary BAH increase to ease the financial burden on service members and their families — especially those making permanent change of station moves — affected by housing shortages and skyrocketing rental costs. The temporary payments apply to the months of October, November and December, and represent increases of 10% to 20 % over the current 2021 BAH rates. The announcement of new housing allowance rates that will take effect Jan. 1 is expected soon.

Dietz said DoD officials are drafting more messages targeting all service members who are potentially eligible for the temporary increases to remind them of the entitlement, eligibility criteria and the application process. Those eligible can receive retroactive payments to the first month when their qualifying extra costs are verified, but no earlier than 1 OCT. Active-duty service members and full-time National Guard and Reserve members, with dependents and without, are eligible to apply. Those who generally qualify for the temporary extra BAH in the 56 high-cost areas are:

- Service members who relocated after March 13, 2020, and are now paying housing costs at their new duty station that exceed the regular BAH rate there;
- Service members who renewed a lease after March 13, 2020, and are now paying more their regular BAH; and
- Service members who relocated within their military housing area and are now paying higher housing costs.

March 13, 2020, is the date the president declared a national emergency due to the ongoing pandemic. DoD officials determined that the pandemic’s impact on rental housing costs allowed them to authorize the temporary BAH increase. “Our intent is to push the message to each service member as soon as possible,” Dietz said, but no later than 23 DEC. The original DoD estimate was designed to capture all potentially eligible troops, he said. “All service members living in the identified Military Housing Areas who were receiving BAH were included,” he said.

It wasn’t an exact science. Data wasn’t available at the time of the estimate — and still isn’t — to accurately determine how many service members in that potentially eligible group actually experienced housing cost increases over their current BAH to such a degree as to motivate them to submit a claim, he said. “The need for this temporary BAH increase was identified during multiple visits to the Pacific Northwest by senior Navy leadership, who spoke with sailors in the

area,” said Navy Capt. Dave Hecht, spokesman for Chief of Naval Personnel. Many service members who contacted Military Times this summer and fall lamented the toughest PCS moves of their careers because of the shortage and cost of suitable housing. (Army)

Of the sailors living in the 56 approved areas, 30,000 could be eligible for the extra money if they meet the eligibility requirements, he said. The Navy has been heavily promoting the temporary BAH increase through social media. Navy leaders, like those in the other services, heard service members’ dismay about shortages of suitable housing and rapidly rising costs and brought their concerns to senior DoD leadership. Defense officials’ analysis of rental housing market data from March through August revealed the pandemic’s significant impact.

Of the 56 military housing areas with temporary BAH hikes, five get a 20% increase; 11 get a 15% increase; and 40 get a 10% increase. The five areas with a 20% increase are: Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; Boise, Idaho; Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho; and Spokane, Washington. The Air Force had processed 3,174 claims for airmen and Space Force guardians as of Dec. 13, said Air Force spokeswoman Laurel Tingley. Those approved claims have either been paid or will be paid at the next payday. A total of 3,224 claims had been submitted. Of the 3,174 approved claims, 1,994 are from enlisted and 1,180 from officers.

Tingley said officials encourage airmen to carefully read the procedures for submitting claims and to talk with their supervisor if they have any questions. Due to an email address change by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in October, some submissions for payment for October were delayed, but that has been resolved, Tingley said. “All personnel who had an approved request for the month of October 2021 received their allowance on 15 November payday, including back pay for October,” she said. Officials with the other services said they weren’t aware of any glitches with DFAS.

The Marine Corps, the smallest service, is next highest in claim numbers, with 506 claims paid — at a total cost of \$174,000 — as of Nov. 30, said Marine Corps spokesman Maj. Jordan R. Cochran. Of the 506 Marines paid, 55% are enlisted and 45% are officers. Marines are encouraged to read the procedures before they submit a request for the increase, Cochran said. Those procedures are outlined in Marine administrative message 511/21 and in the frequently asked questions section of the Manpower and Reserve Affairs website under the “2021 Temporary BAH Increase” banner. Marines should also contact their chain of command if they need additional guidance.

In the Army, 291 soldiers’ claims were approved out of 391 submitted, according to information provided by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, said Army spokeswoman Ellen Lovett. “There have been approximately 100 submissions returned due to missing information, discrepancies or ineligibility,” she said. Lovett said soldiers must submit completed packets to their unit personnel offices, including a properly completed DA Form 4187, Personnel Action, signed by the soldier and battalion commander or equivalent, along with supporting

documentation reflecting an increase in the normal monthly expenses associated with housing costs. “Ultimately, Soldiers’ total housing costs must be greater than their current BAH rate to receive the temporary BAH rate increase,” she said.

The Navy has had the fewest claims submitted, just 254, and it had approved and paid 169 of them as of Dec. 1. The remaining 85 are still being reviewed, said spokesman Navy Capt. Dave Hecht. The total amount paid as of December 1st is \$61,877.40. Sailors should work with their pay and personnel administrators and chains of command to correctly submit their applications for the program, Hecht said. Due to administrative errors, 14 claims were denied and returned to sailors, but all 14 were corrected, resubmitted and paid, he added. Service members eligible for the temporary Basic Allowance for Housing can receive payments retroactive to the first month when their qualifying extra costs are verified, but no earlier than Oct. 1. (Eric Pilgrim/Army)

Service members should check the qualifying criteria even if they think they may not be eligible. For example, service members living in privatized housing generally are not eligible for the temporary increase. However, if their lease agreement doesn’t include utilities and the member pays directly to a utility company, then increased costs, such as a rate increase imposed because of the pandemic, could potentially qualify the member for temporary BAH. Service members who own a house and can show a housing cost increase attributable to the pandemic, such as a utility fee imposed because of COVID-19 related costs, may be eligible for the temporary BAH.

For more information read the service-specific instructions, as well as DoD FAQs at [https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/QAs\\_Temporary\\_Increase\\_in\\_2021\\_BAH\\_Rates.pdf](https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/QAs_Temporary_Increase_in_2021_BAH_Rates.pdf) [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | December 14, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Fraud & Abuse**

### **Update 10: Former Sailor Sentenced for Selling Special Ops Gear to China**

A former U.S. Navy sailor was sentenced to 30 months’ confinement and a \$20,000 fine 21 DEC for conspiring with her husband to illegally export “sensitive military equipment” to China for their own profit, the U.S. Justice Department announced. Former Logistics Specialist 1st Class Ye Sang “Ivy” Wang, 37, was assigned to Naval Special Warfare Command and admitted to using her official position to buy military gear that her husband then sold to online buyers in China, according to the department. She pleaded guilty in July and received an other-than-honorable discharge from the Navy in September, according to court records.

Her husband, Shaohua “Eric” Wang, 38, ran an online store selling pilfered gear to customers in China, according to court records. In one instance, those records show that Shaohua Wang sold a ballistic helmet belonging to SEAL Team 5 to a Chinese customer in November 2018, netting him about \$2,300 in the process. One item Ye Sang Wang purchased in March 2018 using her

military email and mailing address identifies U.S. personnel in the field and was subject to federal export controls.

Wang was deployed to Iraq at the time and told her command the package she ordered to her San Diego-based command was for her husband's camping trip, according to the department. Later in 2018, she returned home and gave the device to her husband, but law enforcement had secretly disabled it beforehand. Wang told the Naval Criminal Investigative Service that her husband had sent her an Excel spreadsheet of military gear for her to purchase for buyers in China, according to the department. Her husband couldn't buy the gear with his personal email address, so he repeatedly pestered his wife to do so. "She grew so annoyed at his repeated requests that, after purchasing equipment for him through March 2018, she gave him her password to her military email address and told him to buy the export-controlled military equipment posing as her after she deployed," the Justice Department said.

Shaohua Wang's scheme began in September 2016, according to court records. Those records indicate that Ye Sang Wang kept providing military equipment to her husband through December 2018, even though she knew she was under investigation since at least October 2018, court records state. "Ms. Wang betrayed her oath to the U.S. Navy and ultimately threatened the operational readiness and safety of our nation's military by attempting to acquire and illegally export sensitive military equipment to China," Special Agent in Charge Joshua Flowers, of the NCIS Southwest Field Office, said in a statement.

Shaohua Wang pleaded guilty in September 2019 to selling export-controlled U.S. military equipment through his online business and admitted to enlisting his wife to use her Navy position to further the scheme, according to the department. "(Shaohua Wang) also admitted that he maintained a warehouse in China to house the military equipment, travelled back and forth frequently, and had connections to buyers in China," the Justice Department said. He was sentenced to 46 months in prison in February 2020. "Shaohua "Eric" Wang is currently serving the remainder of his sentence on home confinement at home with (Ye Sang Wang) and their two minor children," court records state.

Ye Sang Wang is originally from China and enlisted in the Navy in 2005, becoming a U.S. citizen two years later, according to court records. She later sponsored her husband to become a U.S. citizen. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Pay Floor**

### **\$15 Minimum Wage Gets More Congressional Support**

All service members would be guaranteed at least \$15 an hour in yearly salary under a plan being revived by a bipartisan group of House lawmakers ahead of next year's budget debate. Last week, a group of 14 Democrats and Republicans sent a letter to House Appropriations Committee

leaders urging them to set a “pay floor” of roughly \$31,000 a year for all troops as part of future budget discussions, saying that anything lower hurts “junior enlisted service members who are struggling to make ends meet.”

Under the current military pay table, enlisted troops with less than two years of military experience earn less than \$22,000 annually in base pay. It can take up to four years in service before that total goes above \$32,000 a year, roughly equivalent to \$15 an hour, the minimum wage that federal contractors are required to pay their workers.

- “As wages and salaries increase across many industries economy-wide, the military is now falling behind in the competition for quality recruits, in large part to the base pay issue,” wrote the group, led by Reps. Marilyn Strickland, D-Wash., and Don Young, R-Alaska.
- “As the number of qualified and willing people to serve continues to diminish, the ability of our military to recruit top talent is starting to become a national security issue. Congress must address this pay issue now before it becomes a more significant area of concern.”

Last summer, during budget debate in the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Calif., offered a similar proposal as part of the fiscal 2022 spending plan. At the time, he called service members getting paid less than the defense contractor minimum wage rates “an insult” to military families. That plan was scuttled because of technical issues, although appropriations committee leaders promised to raise the idea for debate in future budget discussions. But military base pay totals do not factor in other stipends such as housing allowances, specialty pays and subsistence (food) assistance. Depending on where troops are stationed, the housing and food payouts combined can effectively double younger troops’ total military compensation.

For example, an Army private 2nd class (E-2) without dependents at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is entitled to a housing allowance of \$16,488 a year, and \$20,988 a year if they have dependents. A Marine private first class (E-2) at Camp Pendleton, California, without dependents is entitled to a housing allowance of \$25,236 a year, and \$30,888 a year if they have dependents. The latest letter comes as lawmakers prepare to start their work on the fiscal 2023 federal budget in early spring, although Congress still has yet to finalize a full-year spending bill for fiscal 2022, which began on 1 OCT.

In addition, as part of the annual defense authorization bill passed by Congress last week, lawmakers approved plans for a new Basic Needs Allowance to give additional financial support to some low-income service members. An E-3 with a family of four and a single military income for his or her household would qualify for the allowance. But lawmakers lobbying for the salary boosts said those other offerings aren’t enough to make up for the low base pay. “Not everyone receives full [housing stipends] or [food stipends], which results in many service members having wildly different discretionary incomes,” they wrote. “Service members and their families make

an enormous sacrifice for our country, and inadequate compensation should not be one of these sacrifices.”

All service members are scheduled to see a 2.7 percent pay raise as of Jan. 1. For junior enlisted troops, that equals about \$790 more a year in pay over 2021 levels. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 20, 2021 ++]

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## **Discrimination Lawsuit**

### **Arkansas National Guard to Pay \$130,000+ for Promotion Passover**

The Arkansas National Guard has been ordered to pay more than \$130,000 to a woman after an eight-person jury found, following a five-day civil trial in federal court earlier this month that she had suffered discrimination by being passed over for promotion. Da'Vetta Flowers, a personnel manager with the Arkansas Military Department, filed the lawsuit in August 2018 against Maj. Gen. Mark Berry, adjutant general of the Arkansas National Guard from January 2015 until August 2019. In August 2019, Maj. Gen. Kendall Penn was substituted as the defendant when he took over as adjutant general.

In the complaint, Flowers said she had been subjected to discrimination and retaliation by a power structure within the Arkansas Military Department that favored white employees for promotion over equally or better-qualified Black employees, and that she had been subjected to a pattern of harassment and retaliation. Flowers, who was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army and Arkansas Army National Guard in 1989, went to work for the Arkansas Military Department in 2009. According to her complaint, she had earned a bachelor's degree in social work in 2000 and a master's degree in human resources management in 2003. She was hired by the department in 2009 as a full-time assistant personnel manager and was promoted to personnel manager in 2015.

Her complaint alleged that on a number of occasions, she and other Black employees were passed over for promotion in favor of lesser-qualified and lesser-educated white employees and that internal personnel decisions used an interview and promotion process by which "connected white AMD applicants and employees were pre-selected for open positions" to the detriment of qualified Black applicants and employees. Flowers also said that despite her position as personnel manager, she was often excluded from hiring, promotion, transfer and other staffing decisions inside her department, and that employees from her department were reassigned without her consent to cover for deficient employees in other departments.

On Aug. 23, 2017, the complaint said, Flowers filed a charge of workplace discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission outlining numerous instances in which she said she was bypassed regarding personnel decisions in her department and harassed because employees were reassigned without her input. She also alleged that staff members were

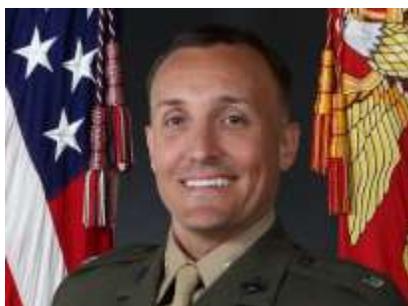
encouraged to write up complaints against her and memorandums were circulated under her name that she was not aware of, among other actions.

After four days of testimony, the jury returned a verdict in favor of Flowers on the question of race discrimination and awarded her \$105,804 in lost wages and benefits, and \$28,000 in other monetary damages. On the question of retaliation, the jury found that Flowers had not suffered retaliation. [Source: Arkansas Democrat Gazette | Dale Ellis | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Dischargees**

### **Lt. Col Stuart Scheller Wanted Accountability**



You can now call him “Mr. Scheller.” In a 23 DEC Facebook post, the now former Marine Lt. Col. Stuart Scheller Jr., who publicly called for accountability from the military and political leaders who led America’s longest war, announced he had been discharged from the Marine Corps, effective 23 DEC. An infantry officer with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, Scheller crashed into the national dialogue following a now-viral 26 AUG social media video of him speaking out in uniform. His demands for accountability from military and political leadership, both current and past, for the conduct of the war in Afghanistan eventually saw him jailed and court-martialed.

Scheller’s father, Stuart Scheller Sr., had taken to social media in November to lament how long the process of discharging his son from the Marine Corps had been taking. “Commandant David H. Berger talks about treating Marines as humans as opposed to inventory,” Scheller Sr. wrote. “But 5 weeks to sign a resignation? Seriously!? They should be ashamed of themselves.” More than a month later, and more than two months after accepting his resignation as part of a plea deal, the Marine Corps processed the resignation of the lieutenant colonel’s commission.

Scheller’s post also stated that he had received a general discharge under honorable conditions, the lowest allowed under the conditions of his plea deal. The Marine Corps has yet to respond to questions asked by the Marine Corps Times regarding both the timeline and nature of Scheller’s discharge. In his announcement, Scheller thanked the Marines who “all the Marines who served, led, bled, and suffered” alongside him over his 17-year career. Additionally, Scheller thanked the Marine Corps for “forging him into a man.” Scheller also compared his “defeats” in demanding

accountability from political and military leadership to early setbacks the U.S. faced during the Revolutionary War.

“But George Washington, undeterred, mobilized his force for a surprise attack over the holidays...as history shows, it was a turning point in the war,” Scheller wrote. Scheller went on to criticize his treatment by the Marine Corps. He stated that he had been “slandered” by the Marine Corps, “imprisoned under false pretense as a ‘flight risk,’” and “held illegally” in jail. “Was it worth it? Well... unfortunately for them... the war isn’t over,” Scheller wrote. “I think we just arrived at a turning point.” Scheller noted a “television media blitz” he is about to embark on, and his new website <https://authenticamericans.com>. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | James R. Webb | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang**

### **‘Alert Five’ thru ‘A-Gear’**

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say ‘tasteless’?) manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor’s language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: 'RN' denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

**Alert Five** - Aircraft on five-minute alert. This generally requires that the aircrew be seated in the aircraft at all times. There may also be aircraft/aircrews on alert fifteen, etc.

**Alpha Mike Foxtrot** - Acronym for "Adios, Motherfucker". Polite form: "Adios, My Friend." Also seen as initials, ‘AMF.’

**Amateur Night** – The day after payday, when nothing seems to go right, especially shipboard evolutions.

**Amp Tramp** - (RCN) Ship's electrician.

**Anchor-faced** - (RN) Anyone who is enthusiastic about the Navy.

**Anchor Clanker** - (1) Boatswain's Mate. (2) (RN) Ordinary seaman. See DECK APE.

**Anchor Pool** – The betting pool on the hour and minute the ship will drop anchor or tie up.

**Andrew (the)** - (UK) Nickname for the Royal Navy. Refers to pressgang leader Andrew Miller who, it was said, owned the Royal Navy.

**Angled Deck** - The landing area of a modern carrier, which is offset 10 degrees to port from the ship's centerline to provide for safe BOLTERS. Aka 'angle deck', 'the angle.'

**Angle of Attack** – The angle measured between the relative wind and the chord line of an airfoil. Essentially, the angle between the air movement (\*not\* the horizon!) and the aircraft's wing. Has a tremendous import in the handling and behavior of the aircraft. Abbreviated AOA. Aka 'Alpha', from the engineering notation for AOA. Primarily an aviation term, although it is applicable to other fluid environments such as a ship's propeller in water.

**Angles and Dangles** – Operating a submarine at steep angles of ascent and descent, and to perform rapid turns (a submarine in a tight turn will bank in the same fashion as an aircraft).

**Anti-Smash Light** - The rotating or flashing anti-collision beacon on an aircraft.

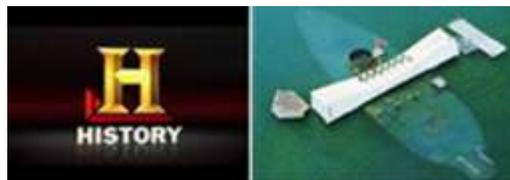
**AOW** - Auxiliaryman Of (the) Watch. Also called 'The Aux'.

**ARAB** - (UK) Arrogant Regular Army Bastard.

**Arresting Gear, A-Gear** - Mechanism used to rapidly bring an aircraft to a halt aboard ship or ashore. In field use (ashore), A-gear may be a device as simple as lengths of chain connected to a CROSS-DECK PENDANT (q.v.), though this type of installation is becoming less common. The chain device is usually referred to as 'overrun gear', as it acts to stop an aircraft which is about to run off of the end of the prepared runway surface. Other types of arresting gear, ashore and afloat, involve complicated braking mechanisms.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | December 31, 2021 ++]

## \* Military History \*



## WWI Christmas Truce

### The one and Only of the War

The US declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, nearly three years after WWI started. Before entering the war, the US had remained neutral, though it had been an important supplier to the United Kingdom, France, and the other powers of the Allies of WWI. And WWI had a Christmas

Truce. Starting on Christmas Eve 1914, many German and British troops fighting in World War I sang Christmas carols to each other across the lines, and at certain points the Allied soldiers even heard brass bands joining the Germans in their joyous singing. At the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no-man's-land, calling out "Merry Christmas" in their enemies' native tongues.



At first, the Allied soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and shook hands with the enemy soldiers. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and plum puddings and sang carols and songs. Some Germans lit Christmas trees around their trenches, and there was even a documented case of soldiers from opposing sides playing a good-natured game of soccer. German Lieutenant Kurt Zehmisch recalled: "How marvelously wonderful, yet how strange it was. The English officers felt the same way about it. Thus Christmas, the celebration of Love, managed to bring mortal enemies together as friends for a time." Some soldiers used this short-lived ceasefire for a more somber task: the retrieval of the bodies of fellow combatants who had fallen within the no-man's land between the lines.

The so-called Christmas Truce of 1914 came only five months after the outbreak of war in Europe and was one of the last examples of the outdated notion of chivalry between enemies in warfare. It was never repeated—future attempts at holiday ceasefires were quashed by officers' threats of disciplinary action—but it served as heartening proof, however brief, that beneath the brutal clash of weapons, the soldiers' essential humanity endured. [Source: <https://www.history.com> |December 20, 2021 ++]

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## **WWII Reindeer Use**

### **This Holiday Season, Thank Them For Their Service**

Everyone made sacrifices during World War II in order to defeat Nazi Germany — and it appears 'ol St. Nicholas was no exception. Roughly 1,000 indigenous reindeer herders and 6,000 reindeer

“were pressed into service” with the Soviet Army between 1941 and 1944 against Germany, according to the Anchorage Daily News.



**Finnish soldiers with their reindeer on March 28, 1940.**

“The majority of ground combat in Europe among the Axis — and certainly the Soviets — was done with infantry on the ground using horses and donkeys,” U.S. Naval Historian Tim Francis told NPR in 2011. “And in the north, it would be reindeer.” Reindeer herders’ skills were “highly valued” during World War II, a research article published by the Arctic Institute of North America said. The reindeer were primarily used to help transport war supplies through a “crucial supply route,” after they arrived in the Russian port city of Murmansk from North America, according to NPR.

Almost 25% of supplies made in North America were “shipped across the Arctic to America’s Soviet allies in the war,” NPR reported. The supply route was “under constant siege” from German planes flying out of Norway, battleships, or German U-boats. Still, if the supplies made it all the way to Murmansk, they needed to be transported to troops. “The reindeer were pack animals,” Francis said. “Anything that would work to get stuff to places where people could use it. It makes perfect sense.”

While Russia may have used reindeer in greater numbers than other countries and for the specific purpose of logistics, they were not alone in their use of the wartime animals; Finnish soldiers fielded them as well, and even used them against Russian forces during the Winter War — a bloody border fight between the neighboring countries that began in 1939 and ended in 1940. Indeed, there’s a wealth of photos showing Finnish soldiers alongside their reindeer, so many in fact that during a World War II Victory Day celebration in the Russian city of Usinsk, officials mistakenly used a photo of a Finnish soldier with a reindeer to celebrate their own troops.

Among Russia’s forces, the reindeer and their herders served a number of jobs during World War II, including acting as couriers, towing disabled equipment, and “even conducted covert missions behind enemy lines,” according to the Anchorage Daily News. It was “the world’s only reindeer transport battalion,” according to a report from the Barents Observer, an online news organization covering the Arctic. The reindeer were so critical, in fact, that the Russian town of

Naryan-Mar created a memorial in 2012 in honor of the reindeer herders who fought in the war, Barents Observer reported.

In fact, the reindeer were so prized as pack animals that a Russian admiral in the Arctic Circle once gifted one of them to a British submarine commander after hearing the latter complain that his wife was having trouble pushing their child’s stroller through the snow in England, according to the BBC. That reindeer was subsequently loaded onto the HMS Trident, a British T class submarine, via the torpedo tube, and travelled with the crew — sleeping in the captain’s cabin — on their journey back to the United Kingdom.

It wouldn’t be the first time a military used a specific animal for their unique skill set, lest we forget the U.S. Army Camel Corps. Created in the mid-19th century, the Camel Corps helped conquer the American West, but it didn’t last — some of the camels were mistreated, and others were set loose or sold at public auction. Reindeer did not fare so well either. Their wartime service during World War II led to the number of reindeer falling “dramatically” between 1939 and 1945, according to the Arctic Institute of North America’s research. Around 220,000 reindeer were killed in order to provide food alone.

“The combined effects of military operations, a labor shortage, an increased number of predators, and difficult weather and snow conditions led to losses of reindeer,” according to the research. All this is to say, if you come across Rudolph, Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, or Vixen this holiday season, please thank them for their service. [Source: Task & Purpose | Haley Britzky | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Uniform Flag**

### **The Real Reason Why it is Backwards on Uniforms**



For over 230 years, whenever our troops have marched, sailed, flown, swam, or paraded into battle, the American flag has been there. Between the Mexican and Civil Wars, it was carried out front by a flag bearer. In later conflicts, the standard was converted into a patch worn on the service member’s right shoulder. And it’s always “backwards.” Most Americans see the flag every day, flying outside government buildings, schools, and other institutions. We saluted it in

primary school, and we know what it looks like. The blue field of white stars is in the top left corner, with red and white stripes making up the rest of the right and bottom.

So, did someone make a mistake on these uniforms? Actually, the flag patch is worn backwards to give others the same impression it did when it was first carried into battle. The momentum of the flag bearer would leave the flag streaming behind, appearing backwards to enemies, or anyone else close enough to catch a glimpse. According to Army Regulation 670-1: “The American flag patch is to be worn, right or left shoulder, so that the star field faces forward, or to the flag’s own right. When worn in this manner, the flag is facing to the observer’s right, and gives the effect of the flag flying in the breeze as the wearer moves forward.”

This feature is unique to U.S. military uniforms. No other country in the world maintains this symbolic standard. The next time you see an American service member in uniform, show them your gratitude, and take pride in the fact that the flag is always on the advance, never retreating. [Source: The Veterans Site | Matthew Russell | December 2021 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Awardees

David B. Barkeley | WWI



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the  
MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously  
To*

**David B. Barkeley**

**Ranks and organizations:** U.S. Army Pvt. Company A, 356th Infantry,  
89th Division

**Places and dates:** Near Pouilly, France November 9, 1918

**Entered service:** 1917

**Born:** March 31, 1899, in Laredo, Texas



Army Pvt. David B. Barkeley likely didn't know that World War I would end just two days after he volunteered for a treacherous mission. What he did know was that his unit needed reconnaissance that he could provide, so he didn't hesitate. He lost his life during that mission, but the bravery he showed earned him the Medal of Honor.

Barkeley was born March 31, 1899, in Laredo, Texas, to parents Josef and Antonia. The family moved to San Antonio in 1904 after his sister, Amelia, was born. According to the Texas State Cemetery website, Barkeley's dad, who had once been a soldier, abandoned the family when he was young. This forced Barkeley to drop out of school at age 13 to find jobs to support his mother and sister. Barkeley's mother was the daughter of Mexican immigrants, so for much of his life he went by Barkeley-Cantu — which represented his father's surname and his mother's maiden name. But he changed it to just Barkeley when he joined the Texas National Guard in 1917.

The U.S. had joined World War I, and Barkeley wanted to fight on the front. However, he knew he couldn't if the Army was aware of his Hispanic heritage. At that time, Army policy relegated non-white soldiers to noncombat support battalions. So, Barkeley kept his heritage quiet. He even instructed his mom to not use her surname in letters for fear they would find out and move him out of a combat role. Barkeley was placed with Company A of the 356th Infantry, 89th Division, and sent to Europe with the American Expeditionary Forces in August of 1918.

On Nov. 9, 1918, Barkley's unit was stuck along the banks of the Meuse River near Pouilly, France. Across the river, a well-fortified German Army was bombarding them with artillery, as well as machine gun fire and bombs from airplanes. To break through the lines, they needed to find out the enemy's exact position, the depth of the river and where American troops could cross easiest to strike. To do that, someone would need to cross the frigid river to do reconnaissance. Barkeley, who was known as a strong swimmer as a child, immediately volunteered, even though the mission was treacherous and the chance of survival was slim.

He and another volunteer soldier, Army Private 1st Class Harold Johnson, prepared themselves as best they could before climbing into the icy river. Despite the cold and the threat of enemy patrol boats and gunfire, the pair made it across the Meuse. While on the opposite bank, they gleaned what they could about the enemy's position, then headed back across the river. Johnson completed the trek but just barely. He had to be pulled from the water after nearly freezing to death. Unfortunately, Barkeley didn't survive. Before he could make it back to the American side of the river, he was seized by cramps and drowned. He was 19. Two days later, the armistice went into effect and World War I was over.

Neither man's effort was in vain, though. Barkeley's family received notice in early February 1919 that he had earned the Medal of Honor. It was presented to Barkeley's mother during a ceremony in San Antonio on Feb. 17, 1919. Johnson also received the high honor for his effort in crossing the Meuse. Barkeley was initially buried in France, but his remains were returned to the U.S. in 1921. He became the second person to lie in state at the Alamo — the first was Army Maj. Gen. Frederick Funston, who earned the Medal of Honor during the Philippine Insurrection — before being buried at San Antonio National Cemetery.

Barkeley's state made sure to remember him and his sacrifice. In 1921, a San Antonio elementary school was named after him. Twenty years later, as the U.S. military began to prepare for its inevitable entry into World War II, Camp Barkeley near Wichita Falls, Texas, was named in his honor. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | November 8, 2021 ++]

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## **Medal of Honor Awardees**

**Charles Rogers | ROK & VN**



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the*

*MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously*

*To*

**Charles Calvin Rogers**

**Ranks and organizations:** Lieutenant Colonel 1st Bn, 5th Artillery,  
1st Infantry Division

**Places and dates:** Fishhook near Cambodian border, Republic of Vietnam November 1, 1968

**Entered service:** June 1951

**Born:** Sept. 6, 1929 in Claremont, West Virginia



From the 1950's to the 1980's, a lot changed in America and abroad, and Army Maj. Gen. Charles Calvin Rogers served through all of it. As a Black man, he worked for gender and race equality while in the service. But he's perhaps most well-known for his leadership during an intense battle in Vietnam, which earned him the Medal of Honor.

Rogers was born on Sept. 6, 1929, and grew up with his brother and three sisters outside of the coal-mining town of Claremont, West Virginia. Rogers' dad was a coal miner and World War I veteran, which could be what nurtured his desire to serve. Rogers, who attended the all-Black Dubois High School during the segregation era, excelled as a student. He was consistently on the honor roll, played quarterback for the football team and was elected the student body president. He graduated in 1947 and attended West Virginia State College (now University), where he earned a degree in mathematics. Rogers commissioned into the Army through ROTC after he graduated in June of 1951.

His first few years as a soldier were spent serving in artillery commands while the service was being desegregated. Rogers worked his way up the ranks and was sent to the Army Command and General Staff College when he was a major. After graduating in 1964, he was sent to Germany — his second stint in the country — to train an artillery unit. After that, he earned his first battalion command at Fort Lewis in Washington. Rogers was put in command of the 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery, 1st Infantry Division, and sent to Vietnam in July 1967. He spent the next two years on the battlefield.

On Oct. 31, 1968, then-Lt. Col. Rogers' artillery unit was positioned at Fire Support Base Rita in southern Vietnam. It was close to the Cambodian border and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a supply route that the North Vietnamese Army used to shuttle supplies and troops into South

Vietnam. That evening, Rogers noticed a lot of activity across the border, but the rules of engagement said he couldn't fire into Cambodia, so he waited. The NVA didn't follow such rules, though. Around 3:30 a.m. on Nov. 1, they bombarded FSB Rita with heavy mortars, rockets and rocket-propelled grenade fire. Soon enough, their soldiers breached the defensive perimeter of the base. Finally, Rogers' battalion could attack, and he made sure he was right at the forefront of the action.

Rogers ran through a hail of exploding shells to rally his dazed crewmen into firing their howitzers back at the much larger enemy. Despite being hit by an exploding round, he led some of those men in a ground battle against enemy soldiers who'd breached the howitzer's position. Rogers was again wounded during that foray, but he continued fighting, killing several enemy soldiers and driving the rest back. Rogers refused medical attention and instead worked to get the defensive perimeter set back up. When more enemy troops poured through a different section of the defensive line, Rogers directed that artillery fire, too, and led another successful counterattack on the charging forces, encouraging his men throughout the difficult endeavor.

At dawn, the enemy tried to overrun the base a third time, so Rogers continued directing his unit's fire. He even joined a struggling howitzer crew after several men were hit by enemy fire and the gun had been rendered inoperable. Rogers helped the crew get the massive gun operating again, but in doing so, he was hit a third time. He could no longer physically help his men, but he continued to direct and encourage them. Rogers' valor helped push back the enemy that day, which finally retreated for good. Twelve U.S. soldiers died and dozens more were wounded; however, Army records show that the casualties on the enemy's side were much higher. Rogers' wounds were eventually treated, and he returned to the U.S in August 1969. On May 14, 1970, he received the Medal of Honor from President Richard M. Nixon during a White House ceremony.

Rogers continued his career in the Army. He attended the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and graduated in 1971. He also earned a master's degree in vocational/educational guidance from nearby Shippensburg University. Rogers went on to command more units and take high-level leadership assignments, his last of which was in Germany. After 32 years of service, Rogers retired in 1984 as a major general. To this day, he is the highest-ranking Black Medal of Honor recipient. When he retired to civilian life, Rogers was ordained as a Baptist minister. He continued to live in Germany and serve troops in that capacity.

Rogers died Sept. 21, 1990, of prostate cancer at the age of 61. He was still living in Germany at the time, but he was interred at Arlington National Cemetery. He is survived by his wife, Margaret, and their three daughters: Jackie, Linda and Barbara. Rogers has been remembered not just as being a Medal of Honor recipient, but for championing gender and race equality during his long tenure in the Army. His home state has not forgotten him either. Prior to his death, Rogers was inducted into West Virginia State University's ROTC Hall of Fame. A bridge in Cotton Hill, West Virginia, was named the Charles C. Rogers Bridge in 1999; 14 years later, its name was

upgraded to the Army Maj. Gen. Charles C. Rogers Memorial Bridge. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | November 1, 2021 ++]

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## Every Picture Tells A Story

### Luftwaffe Heinkel He 111 Ditch



A Luftwaffe Heinkel He 111 attempts to ditch beside a ship at sea. According to reader Jean Claude Mermet of France, this took place off Dunkirk in 1940. I suspect, from the blur, that this is a still from a film.

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## WWII Bomber Nose Art

### [89] RUSSIAN Ta Get Ya!



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## Military History Anniversaries

01 thru 15 JAN

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 JAN**”. [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | December 2021 ++]

\* Health Care \*



## Medicare Basics

### Update 01: Understanding Medicare & TRICARE for Life | 65 and Beyond

The milestone of turning 65 signifies a turning point in your health care coverage: Your TRICARE Prime or Select program ends, by law. At 65, you enroll in Medicare, and Tricare for Life (TFL) begins as the supplement to Medicare. Here are steps to make the transition.

#### Plan Ahead for Medicare

Enrolling in Medicare Parts A and B takes place in a seven-month window: three months prior to your birthday month, your birthday month, and three months after your birthday month.

- Enroll in Medicare online at Medicare.gov, two to three months prior to your birthday month. Early enrollment ensures you receive your Medicare card in the mail, which gives you time to:
- Take the Medicare card to your closest military ID card office to update your ID card, and
- Enroll in TFL at the ID card office.

Your military ID card expires just before your 65th birthday to ensure you enroll in Medicare Parts A and B and enroll in TFL. You can delay if you work past 65. See more on that below.

#### Getting Started With Medicare

Do your current medical providers accept Medicare? If not, shop for new ones.

- Medicare Part B has a monthly premium based on income level, determined by the last reported tax filing two years before from the IRS.
- Original Medicare works like TRICARE Select or preferred provider organizations (PPOs): You can choose any providers, specialists included, if they accept Medicare.

### **Medicare and TFL**

- You must have Medicare Parts A and B before TFL is functional. TFL covers all residual Medicare costs — other than your Part B premium. Health care providers bill Medicare as the primary payer.
- Medicare and TFL are linked in-system, and residual costs from Medicare automatically flow to TFL for final payment. There is no need for any other Medicare supplement insurance.

### **Your Pharmacy Plan**

Pharmacy plans under Medicare are known as Part D. You do not want another pharmacy plan on top of your TRICARE pharmacy plan. Two things to beware of:

- If you want a Medicare Advantage plan, be careful because many come with a pharmacy plan, which must pay first before TFL does. You will have to file manual claims to the TRICARE pharmacy for reimbursement of what the other plan did not pay. TRICARE pharmacy copays still apply.
- You will lose your TRICARE home delivery option by having another pharmacy plan. You must be enrolled in TFL to have the TRICARE pharmacy.

### **Travel Overseas**

Medicare plans do not work overseas. In this case, your TFL converts to TRICARE Select Overseas, and you are covered by TRICARE Select at TRICARE Select rates. You pay for services overseas out of your pocket and will be reimbursed by TRICARE after you file a claim later.

### **Social Security Retirement Benefits**

If you are receiving Social Security retirement benefits at least four months prior to your 65th birthday month, you are automatically enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B on the first day of your 65th birthday month. If you are not receiving Social Security retirement benefits before age 65, you'll need to enroll in Medicare Parts A and B two to three months prior to your 65th birthday month.

### **Working Past Age 65**

If you work past age 65 and you are covered by your employer's health care plan, then you can delay Medicare enrollment until your employment ends or your employer's health plan stops. This is the only scenario that allows for delayed Medicare enrollment without the Medicare late enrollment premium penalty. Then, you have eight months to enroll in Medicare. Plan carefully to start Medicare to prevent a gap before your employer plan ends. Medicare cannot be delayed

by using a civilian retiree health plan, and TRICARE Prime and Select end at age 65. Your options while working:

- Continue your employer plan by itself, no Medicare or TFL and no TRICARE pharmacy.
- Drop employer health care; go Medicare/TFL.
- Enroll in Medicare/TFL and your employer plan — you'll pay for both.

### **Retired Civilian Workers**

- You do not have to enroll in Medicare/TFL if you have a retiree health care plan. You will not have TFL or TRICARE pharmacy. However, if you want to enroll in Medicare later, you will pay a premium penalty for delayed Part B enrollment for the rest of your life.
- TFL will start at enrollment in Parts A and B, and it is a supplement for Medicare Parts A and B only — it does not work with any other plans. Many civilian plans can be suspended rather than canceled.

### **What If You Use VA Health Care?**

Research how your VA health care works in your situation. It does not cover all VA-rated members, and for some, it only covers service-connected issues. Find out how VA health care will cover you if you are not able to get to a VA facility.

### **U.S. Family Health Plan (USFHP)**

If you were enrolled in USFHP as of Sept. 30, 2012, you can stay in it at age 65-plus. If you were not enrolled until Oct. 1, 2012, or after, you will be disenrolled in USFHP and must enroll in Medicare Parts A and B and TFL.

- TFL does not work with the USFHP, which strongly encourages enrollment in Medicare Parts A and B. So if you drop USFHP, you are covered by Medicare without the premium penalty due to delayed enrollment.
- If you are enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B with USFHP, you pay the Part B premium and USFHP fees and copays stop (except pharmacy copays). Staying with USFHP includes their pharmacy program.

### **When Spouses Turn 65**

The spouse who turns 65 first enrolls in Medicare/TFL, and the younger spouse stays in TRICARE Prime or Select until age 65. Change the younger spouse's Prime or Select fees to the single rate rather than the family rate.

### **Medicare/TFL in Retirement**

Once under the Medicare/TFL umbrella, it is easier to maintain coverage. Each year, the program you are in will automatically roll over to the next year. Keep your military ID card and all your personal data with DEERS and the Defense Finance Accounting Service (DFAS) up to speed. If you want to change your Medicare plan, do so during the appropriate Medicare open season:

- October through December (check exact dates for each year). This is for Original Medicare enrollees who want to switch to an Advantage plan or join Original Medicare from an Advantage plan. New plans start Jan. 1.
- Jan. 1 through March 31. This is for Advantage plan members who want to switch Advantage plans or join Original Medicare. The new plan starts the month after the company processes the request. If you have a drop in your current income due to a change in your life situation, such as divorce, retirement, or death, you can appeal your income and Part B premium amount to Medicare.

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | December 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Medicare Part B Premiums**

### **Update 12: Alzheimer’s Drug Aduhelm Impact**

A significant part of the large increase in the Medicare Part B premium for next year is because of the cost of the new Alzheimer’s drug Aduhelm, which was priced at \$56,000 a year. The premium increase came even though the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has not yet determined whether and how it will cover Aduhelm. But in order to pay for the drug treatment in case it does decide to cover it, CMS wanted to build up a reserve of funds. However, Biogen, the company that makes Aduhelm, has just announced it will cut the price of Aduhelm in half in an effort to increase sales which have been poor, in part because of its enormous cost.

It turns out that sales of the drug brought in only \$300,000 for Biogen between July and September after forecasts had predicted revenue to reach \$12 million. Since the cost has been halved, we wonder if CMS will now reduce the cost of the Medicare Part B premium hike. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is reviewing the evidence for a potential national policy for the drug. The drug has been controversial both for its price and because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved it despite doubts from experts about its effectiveness.

The FDA granted accelerated approval for the drug on 7 JUN. Aduhelm, was the first new Alzheimer's drug approved in nearly 20 years, but the approval came over the near-unanimous objections of the FDA's expert advisory committee. As a result of the FDA’s decision, three members of the advisory panel subsequently resigned. Additionally, the approval came after two large-scale trials to gauge the drug’s efficacy were halted early because they were deemed unlikely to work. The FDA had initially approved the drug for all Alzheimer's patients, but in July narrowed its intended use to only patients with mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia. [Source: TSCL Weekly Update | December 18, 2021 ++]

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## **TRICARE Urgent/Emergency Care**

### **Update 07: Access under TRICARE May Be in Danger**



Eliminating the requirement for a referral from TRICARE Prime to get urgent care was a major victory for military family access to care, but recent developments raise a concern that access to urgent care may be under threat. The increasing use of urgent care in the private sector is cited in the FY 2022 DoD budget request as a factor in rising TRICARE costs. MOAA is concerned this budget narrative may indicate a potential threat to referral-free urgent care for TRICARE Prime beneficiaries.

This may be an early warning sign of targeting referral-free urgent care in future cost savings efforts; such a move would be a significant step backward for access to timely, appropriate care. For many years, beneficiaries of TRICARE Prime were required to obtain a referral prior to visiting a civilian urgent care facility, a problem when medical professionals who make the referrals were inaccessible: evenings, weekends, holidays, or during family travel or PCS moves.

For many military families in a variety of circumstances, emergency department (ED) care became their only option — even for non-emergency medical issues such as an ear infection or strep throat. This was frustrating and inconvenient, and it meant families sometimes had to seek care in the ED when a venue with lower cost to DoD would have been more appropriate. It also meant that some families delayed necessary care or paid out of pocket to be seen at a civilian urgent care facility. The referral requirement led to suppressed demand for acute care that was not visible to the Military Health System. Now, readily available urgent care has led to increased demand for acute care that used to be deferred or delayed.

#### **Guidelines for TRICARE Urgent Care Visits**

- Make sure you are getting the best possible care and help the military community keep TRICARE Prime referral-free urgent care by using it as intended — when an acute appointment is not available with your primary care manager within 24 hours (the TRICARE access to care standard for urgent/acute care).
- Your PCM is always your best option for acute care that is not an emergency. Start by contacting your MTF for a same or next day appointment. “Seeing your PCM or PCM team for your urgent care needs is in any patient’s best interest,” said family physician Col. (Dr.) Thomas Cheatham, USAF. “Medically, it makes sense to be seen where your provider has access to your medical history, labs, X-rays, and can address your acute

issues while also taking into consideration your underlying health conditions and preventative care needs.”

- Not sure what level of care is most appropriate? The Military Health System Nurse Advice Line (NAL), at 1-800-TRICARE, is a valuable service intended to assess your condition and direct you to the most appropriate care. The global NAL is staffed by registered nurses to assist patients and will help with making an appointment in an MTF with the patient’s PCM or team, or if needed, direct patients to care within the network.

COVID-19 has led to disruptions across both military and civilian health care systems, and many are facing longer than normal wait times. If you have trouble making appointments, see the patient advocate at your MTF. It is important to report barriers to accessing care so MTF and DHA leadership have visibility to these problems. [Source: MOAA | Karen Ruedisueli | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## **TRICARE Pharmacy Tiers**

### **Update 01: NDAA Pharmacy Reform Will Improve Your Benefit**



The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) report for its version of the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes language directing DoD to establish an appeals process for TRICARE coverage of Tier 4/non-covered drugs – a change sought by MOAA to reduce beneficiaries’ financial risk and improve their access to effective drug treatments. MOAA greatly appreciates the SASC’s response; although directive report language is not legally binding, agency officials generally regard it as a congressional mandate and respond accordingly.

The SASC language directs the Defense Health Agency (DHA) to establish a medical necessity and prior authorization process to allow a beneficiary to request coverage of a Tier 4 drug at the same co-pay or cost-share as a non-formulary drug. It requests a briefing to the Senate and House Armed Services Committees on the appeals process no later than Feb. 1, 2022.

The FY 2018 NDAA authorized DoD to exclude from the TRICARE pharmacy program any prescription drug that provides little or no clinical effectiveness over other covered drugs. These drugs are known as Tier 4 (non-covered). Since the establishment of Tier 4, MOAA has advocated

for an appeals process on the basis of medical necessity. And because charges for drugs in this tier don't count against the catastrophic cap, beneficiaries can be exposed to significant costs if their prescription is moved to this tier.

MOAA has also have worked to get a specific drug, Dexilant, commonly used to treat stomach and esophagus problems, reinstated to the TRICARE formulary. Even with the pending appeals process, their efforts on Dexilant will continue given beneficiary feedback and their research on Dexilant coverage policies, which indicate TRICARE is out of step with commercial plans and other government payers. MOAA will request an implementation update from DHA and will provide more information as soon as it is available. Readers are encouraged to share their stories about the impact of Tier 4 on them by emailing [legis@moaa.org](mailto:legis@moaa.org). [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Karen Ruedisueli | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## Coronavirus

### Update 42: Can Spread to Heart, Brain Days after Infection

The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can spread to the heart and brain within days of infection and can survive for months in organs, according to a new study by the National Institutes of Health. The virus can spread to almost every organ system in the body, which could contribute to the ongoing symptoms seen in "long COVID" patients, the study authors wrote. The study is considered one of the most comprehensive reviews of how the virus replicates in human cells and persists in the human body. It is under review for publication in the journal Nature.

"This is remarkably important work," Ziyad Al-Aly, MD, director of the Clinical Epidemiology Center at the Veterans Affairs St. Louis Health Care System in Missouri, told Bloomberg News. Al-Aly wasn't involved with this study but has researched the long-term effects of COVID-19. "For a long time now, we have been scratching our heads and asking why long COVID seems to affect so many organ systems," he said. "This paper sheds some light and may help explain why long COVID can occur even in people who had mild or asymptomatic acute disease."

The NIH researchers sampled and analyzed tissues from autopsies on 44 patients who died after contracting the coronavirus during the first year of the pandemic. They found persistent virus particles in multiple parts of the body, including the heart and brain, for as long as 230 days after symptoms began. This could represent infection with defective virus particles, they said, which has also been seen in persistent infections among measles patients.

"We don't yet know what burden of chronic illness will result in years to come," Raina MacIntyre, PhD, a professor of global biosecurity at the University of New South Wales, told Bloomberg News. "Will we see young-onset cardiac failure in survivors or early-onset

dementia?" she said. "These are unanswered questions which call for a precautionary public health approach to mitigation of the spread of this virus."

Unlike other COVID-19 autopsy research, the NIH team had a more comprehensive post-mortem tissue collection process, which typically occurred within a day of the patient's death, Bloomberg News reported. The researchers also used a variety of ways to preserve tissue to figure out viral levels. They were able to grow the virus collected from several tissues, including the heart, lungs, small intestine, and adrenal glands. "Our results collectively show that while the highest burden of SARS-CoV-2 is in the airways and lung, the virus can disseminate early during infection and infect cells throughout the entire body, including widely throughout the brain," the study authors wrote. [Source: Medscape | Carolyn Crist | December 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Nurse Advise Line**

### **Need Health Advice at Home? Chat With a Nurse 24/7**

With the threat of flu season added to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, you might not want to go to the doctor's office for a minor health issue. And with the Military Health System (MHS) Nurse Advice Line, you may not have to. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one of the best ways to prevent flu and COVID-19 is to avoid contact with people who are sick. With the MHS Nurse Advice Line, you can get health advice 24/7 from a registered nurse from the comfort of your home. "Virtual care, such as the Military Health System Nurse Advice Line, has become an important tool in fighting infectious diseases," said U.S. Public Health Service Lt. Bobby Taylor, MHS Nurse Advice Line program manager. "This free resource allows TRICARE beneficiaries to practice social distancing measures while still receiving answers to their health questions no matter where they are." You may have some questions about this service. Here are some answers to get you started.

#### **Am I eligible to use the MHS Nurse Advice Line?**

Yes, if you're a TRICARE beneficiary living or traveling in the U.S. or in a country outside the U.S. with a military hospital or clinic. The nurse and care teams will provide advice based on the care available to you based on your status and health plan:

- TRICARE Prime
- TRICARE Plus
- TRICARE Prime Remote
- TRICARE Overseas Program Prime
- TRICARE Overseas Program Prime Remote
- TRICARE Select
- TRICARE Overseas Program Select
- TRICARE For Life

- TRICARE Reserve Select
- TRICARE Retired Reserve
- TRICARE Young Adult

You can't use the MHS Nurse Advice Line if you're enrolled in the US Family Health Plan, which has its own nurse advice line.

**What services does the MHS Nurse Advice Line offer?**

Sometimes you need a quick answer to a health question. Maybe your concern can't wait until you see your doctor. Specially trained registered nurses can help you navigate your family's health care needs anytime, day or night. Some of the services include:

- Answering your health care questions
- Assessing your symptoms and giving recommendations for the most appropriate steps to take
- Providing instructions to treat minor issues or self-care tips that you can use at home
- Helping locate an appropriate urgent care or emergency care facility, if necessary
- Helping you schedule an appointment at a military hospital or clinic if you're enrolled

If you call the MHS Nurse Advice Line about your child, you can speak to a nurse who has special pediatric training. Nurses also have experience in answering questions and providing advice on how and when to seek help for mental health issues. These services are available at no cost to you. If you reasonably believe you have an emergency, always call 911 or your international emergency number. Or, go to the nearest emergency room. The MHS Nurse Advice Line isn't for medical emergencies.

**How do I access the MHS Nurse Advice Line?**

You can call and speak to a nurse by phone. If you're in the U.S., Guam, or Puerto Rico, call 1-800-TRICARE (1-800-874-2273), then choose option 1. You can find all other country-specific phone numbers on the website. In addition to the phone, other options may include web chat and video chat. When you have a medical concern or an illness or injury occurs after hours, consider the MHS Nurse Advice Line. Registered nurses are available 24/7 to answer your health care questions and assess your symptoms from the convenience of your home.

[Source: TRICARE Newsroom | December 2021 ++]

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**Covid-19 Headgear**

**Update 19: Cloth Masks Might Be Knives in Omicron's Gunfight**

Omicron, which World Health Organization officials warned is spreading faster than any COVID-19 variant, is again calling into question the effectiveness of reusable cloth masks. Peter Jüni, MD, head of Ontario's Science Advisory Table in Canada, said in a Dec. 16 interview with CTV

that single-layer cloth masks offer minimal filtration. "The minimum would be a double-layered cloth mask that has been washed before so that it is denser and filters better and really fits well," Dr. Jüni said.

Trish Greenhalgh, professor of primary health care services at the University of Oxford, told Bloomberg that double- or triple-layer cloth masks made of a mix of materials can be more effective than single-layer masks, but most cloth masks are just "fashion accessories." While N95 respirator manufacturers have to make sure they filter out 95 percent of particles, Ms. Greenhalgh said cloth masks do not meet any kind of health standards. She added masks need to cover the mouth and nose properly, and the wearer needs to be able to breathe easily. Leana Wen, MD, CNN's medical analyst, urged people in a Dec. 20 segment to wear high-quality, three-ply surgical masks. "Cloth masks are little more than facial decorations," Dr. Wen said. "There's no place for them in light of omicron." [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Cailey Gleeson | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## Neck Pain

### Usually Nothing to Worry About

Acute neck pain is very common and usually nothing to worry about. Tense muscles are often to blame, for instance after working on the computer for a long time, being exposed to a cold draft, or sleeping in an awkward position. But in many cases there's no clear cause. Acute neck pain usually goes away within about one to two weeks. In some people it comes back again in certain situations, such as after work or intensive sports. If the symptoms last longer than three months, it's considered to be chronic neck pain. Psychological stress is frequently a factor if the pain becomes chronic. Some people who have neck pain avoid doing physical activities for fear of making things worse or injuring themselves. But there is no reason to worry as long as no warning signs of more serious problems arise. It's even a good idea to stay active and carry on as usual despite the pain. Exercises that target the neck can help to prevent neck pain.

### Symptoms

There are two basic types of neck pain:

- Axial pain is mostly felt in the part of the spine that belongs to the neck (cervical spine), and sometimes spreads to the shoulders.
- Radicular pain shoots ("radiates") along the nerves – for example, up the back of your head or down into one of your arms. This type of pain is usually caused by irritated nerves – for instance, because one of the spinal disks in the neck area has changed and is pushing against a nerve. That may also affect your arm reflexes and muscle strength or result in a tingling feeling ("pins and needles").

Neck pain is only very rarely a sign of a more serious condition or an emergency, but urgent medical attention is important if any of the following occur:

- The symptoms arise after an accident
- Stiff neck
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Headache together with nausea, vomiting, dizziness or sensitivity to light
- Pain that stays the same, whether you're at rest or moving
- Unexplained weight loss, fever or chills
- Nerve problems and signs of paralysis such as tingling or difficulties moving your arm or fingers

Other symptoms that require medical attention include persistent "pins and needles," frequent "falling asleep" of your hands or legs, leg weakness, and trouble keeping your balance when walking.

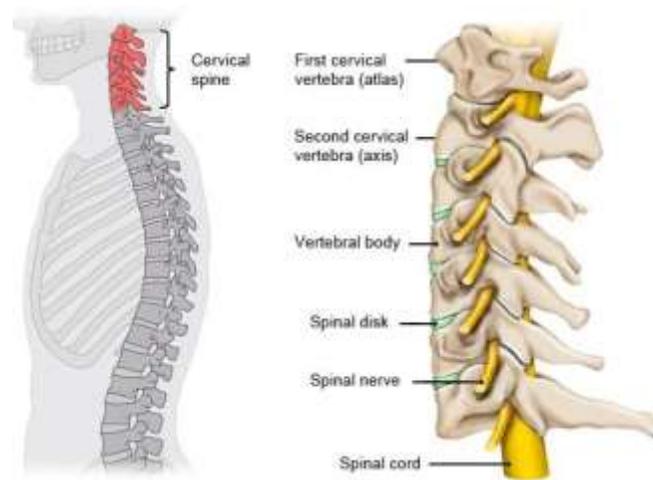
### **Causes**

Neck pain can be caused by many different things. These include:

- Weak and overused neck muscles: For instance, sitting at a desk for a long time – particularly in awkward positions with slightly tensed muscles – can cause pain and stiffness in the neck or shoulder areas, and sometimes headaches too. Activities that involve tilting your head back against your neck can also cause muscles problems in the neck area. These include things like painting a ceiling, or certain types of sports such as riding a racing bike or swimming breaststroke with your head in a fixed position.
- Wear and tear on the cervical spine: Over the course of a lifetime, various normal signs of wear and tear arise in the spine. The spinal disks become flatter, and small bone growths (spurs) may form along the edges of the vertebral bodies (the front part of the bones in the spine). This is called osteochondrosis. Osteoarthritis of the joints between the neck vertebrae is called cervical spondylosis. These changes can make it harder to move your neck, but they rarely cause neck pain on their own.
- Whiplash: This is an injury that can occur if someone drives into the back of your car in a road accident. The impact of the collision causes the head to rapidly jerk forwards and then back again. This usually causes small injuries in the muscle and connective tissue, painfully tense muscles, and difficulty moving your head for several days. The symptoms typically go away completely after a short time.
- Narrowing of the vertebral canal, or a slipped disk: If the vertebral canal is too narrow, or if spinal disk tissue bulges or leaks out and puts pressure on a nerve root, it can cause neck pain that radiates (shoots) into your shoulder or arm. A slipped disk may – but doesn't always – cause symptoms.

Neck pain also sometimes comes from inflammatory conditions of the spine, jaw joint problems or severe headaches. Often it's not possible to find a clear cause of neck pain: The bones, tendons, and nerves in the cervical spine are usually too close together to be able to determine

exactly what caused the symptoms in the first place. If no specific cause can be found, doctors refer to the pain as "non-specific neck pain." It's often particularly hard to determine the cause of the neck pain if it's chronic.



**Structure of the cervical spine: Bones, spinal disks and nerves**

### **Prevalence, Outlook & Diagnosis**

Neck pain is very common. It is estimated that about 1 in 3 people are affected once a year – women more often than men. The symptoms are usually harmless and go away on their own after a while. But they might keep coming back again, too. The risk of neck pain problems becoming chronic generally increases with age. Neck pain is also often more persistent in people who have already had back pain or a slipped disk. How long neck pain caused by whiplash will last depends on factors like the force of the collision. The problem often lasts longer and is more severe in people who have been psychologically traumatized by the accident or worry a lot about the consequences.

Your doctor will first ask you several questions, such as whether you have been in an accident, exactly where it hurts, and whether physical strain or mental stress might be playing a role. They will then perform a physical examination in order to first rule out any serious causes. This will include feeling ("palpating") your neck with their hands, checking how well you can move your head, as well as checking your reflexes and muscle strength in your arms and shoulders. X-ray, CT or MRI scans are usually only needed if there are signs of serious disease or if doctors believe there is a specific cause. These imaging techniques typically don't help if there are no such signs because it's not possible to draw any reliable conclusions from the images: One reason for this is because many people have visible signs of wear and tear on their cervical spine which don't cause any problems. Also, people who have neck pain often don't have any visible irregularities, or only have slight irregularities. So x-rays and other imaging techniques aren't helpful when trying to find the cause of non-specific neck pain.

### **Treatment**

There isn't enough research on the effectiveness of most treatments for non-specific neck pain. Applying heat with hot water bottles or cushions is one easy way to try to reduce the pain. Other treatments include stretching and strengthening exercises, massages and painkillers. Surgery is only considered if a clear cause has been found and the procedure might help. It may be an option, for instance, if spinal disk tissue is squashing or "pinching" a nerve. But slipped disks often improve on their own, so surgery usually doesn't have any major benefits. Spinal surgery in the neck area also carries risks, so it's important to carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of surgery before deciding.

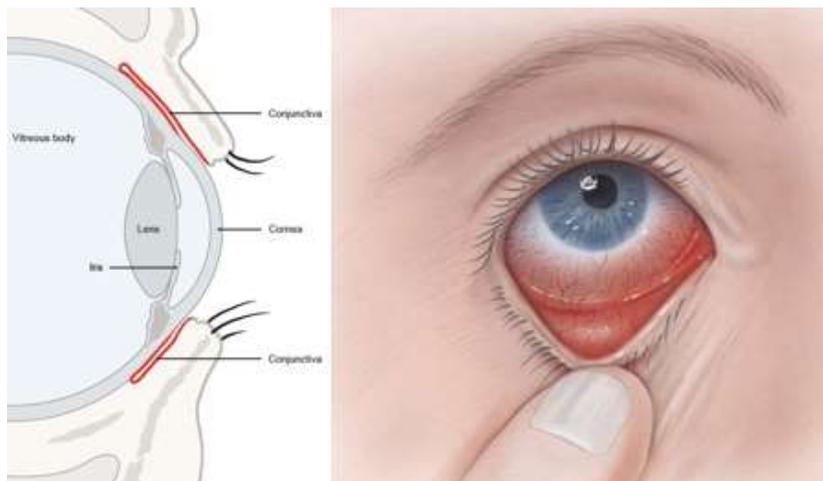
People who have severe chronic pain may benefit from pain management therapy. This is offered by doctors or psychotherapists who have specialized in helping people with long-lasting or severe pain. Pain management therapy can help you manage the pain in such a way that it no longer dominates your everyday life. [Source: [www.informedhealth.org](http://www.informedhealth.org) | December 2021 ++]

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## Conjunctivitis

### What to Do About Pink Eye

Conjunctivitis, also known as pink eye, is an inflammation of the conjunctiva. This is a protective membrane that covers the visible white part of the eye and the inner side of the eyelid. Conjunctivitis makes the affected eye(s) turn red. The inflammation is commonly caused by germs such as viruses or bacteria (infectious conjunctivitis). But it is also often caused by an allergy (allergic conjunctivitis). It often affects both eyes because the infection can easily spread from one eye to the other. To prevent this from happening, it's important to avoid touching an infected eye. If you do touch it, be sure to wash your hands right away. It is also a good idea to use your own towels and washcloths, and not share them with other people.



Side view of the eye showing the conjunctiva (in red) & Inflamed conjunctiva

## **Symptoms**

Bacterial conjunctivitis makes your eyes red and watery. The conjunctiva produces a yellowish-white discharge that makes your eyelids stick together. This is especially noticeable when you wake up in the morning. The conjunctiva can also become sore and hurt when you move your eye, and you may have an itching and burning sensation in your eyes. Viral conjunctivitis has similar symptoms, but the eyes typically secrete a more watery fluid. Itching is a typical sign of an allergy. Allergic conjunctivitis is often accompanied by other allergy symptoms such as a runny nose. Poor vision, increased sensitivity to light, the feeling that you have something in your eye, or a severe headache together with nausea are rare, but may be signs of a more serious problem. It is important to see a doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

## **Inflamed Conjunctiva Causes & Outlook**

Conjunctivitis is often caused by viruses or bacteria. Viral and bacterial conjunctivitis are both contagious. The germs are often transferred by touch, and the infection can spread from one eye to the other – for instance, if you touch both eyes with your fingers. But it can also spread through contact with objects such as eye drop bottles, tissues, washcloths or binoculars. Another common cause of conjunctivitis is allergic reactions – for instance, to pollen, animal fur or dust mites.

Conjunctivitis can also be caused by dust or dirt, dry air, irritating liquids or damage to the conjunctiva. Sometimes the eye isn't kept moist enough with tear fluid, and that can lead to conjunctivitis too. If conjunctivitis is caused by an allergy or another external factor, it is not contagious. Bacterial conjunctivitis usually doesn't have any serious consequences. In more than half of all people, it goes away without treatment within one to two weeks. Viral conjunctivitis often goes away on its own within a few weeks too. Conjunctivitis can also become chronic. It is considered to be chronic if it lasts longer than four weeks.

## **Effects & Diagnosis**

In rare cases the infection can spread to the cornea (the transparent front surface of the eye). This is more likely to happen if you wear contact lenses. But the risk of keratitis (inflammation of the cornea) is very small: Only about 3 out of 10,000 people who wear contact lenses develop keratitis after having conjunctivitis. If the doctor thinks you may have conjunctivitis, they will ask you about the typical symptoms (such as itching, the feeling that you have a foreign object in your eye, or sticky eyelids) and how long you have had these symptoms for. After that, your eyes and eyelids will be examined to find or rule out any possible injuries or external irritants. It usually isn't possible to say whether conjunctivitis is bacterial or viral based on the symptoms alone. In rare cases, a sample of the eye discharge is taken to find out what type of germs the infection is being caused by.

## **Treatment**

Although conjunctivitis is more commonly caused by viruses than bacteria, doctors often prescribe antibiotic eye drops or creams "just in case." But antibiotics are only effective against bacteria, and have no effect on viruses. If the infection is viral, only the symptoms can be treated. Some

people try out non-antibiotic eye drops. Cold or lukewarm compresses are also common. The effects of these treatments have not been properly studied, though. It is not clear if they are helpful, useless or possibly even harmful. If conjunctivitis is caused by an allergy, it can be treated with allergy medicines such as antihistamines or mast cell stabilizers. These are used in the form of eye drops.

People who usually wear contact lenses are advised to wear glasses instead when they have conjunctivitis. Previously worn contact lenses should be cleaned particularly thoroughly if you want to use them again after the infection has cleared up. The same is true for contact lens cases. This can prevent you from getting conjunctivitis again. [Source: [www.informedhealth.org](http://www.informedhealth.org) | December 2021 ++]

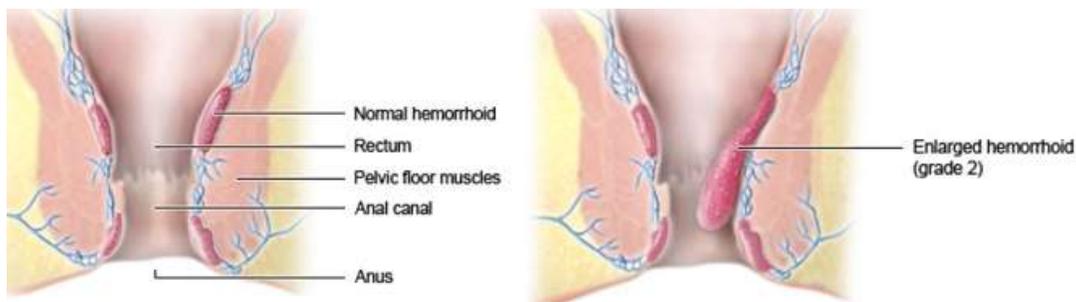
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## Hemorrhoids

### Update 02: Dealing With & Treating Yours

We all have hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids are normal ring-shaped “cushions” of blood vessels and supporting tissue, found at the end of the rectum, just inside the anus. Together with a circular muscle called the anal sphincter, they help to close the rectum to the outside. This ensures that, for instance, the body releases only gas and not any solid matter when we pass wind (fart). But when people talk about “having hemorrhoids,” they typically mean symptoms such as itching around their anus or bleeding during or after a bowel movement (“pooping”), which can be caused by enlarged hemorrhoids. This condition is also known as “piles.”

Many people are ashamed of having enlarged hemorrhoids: They don’t like to talk about their symptoms, and might be reluctant to go to the doctor. Some might be afraid of having a physical examination or finding out that they have a serious illness. But the symptoms are usually caused by something that is quite harmless. It is important to see a doctor about your symptoms if you want to have the right treatment.



### Symptoms

Hemorrhoid problems can cause various symptoms, but the main one is painless bleeding during or after a bowel movement. This can happen if hard stool or pushing too hard damages the thin walls of the blood vessels in the hemorrhoids. Bleeding from hemorrhoids can usually be seen as bright red or red blood, on toilet paper or in the stool. If you have blood in your stool, it's important to see a doctor rather than trying to diagnose the problem yourself. The other typical symptoms affecting the area around the anus include: Itching, Wetness, Burning, Unintentional release of small amounts of mucus and stool, the feeling that you haven't emptied your bowels completely after you go to the toilet, and/or a feeling of pressure or that a foreign object is there

Enlarged hemorrhoids might come out of the anus and can then be seen as soft lumps of tissue. This is called a protruding or prolapsed hemorrhoid. Sometimes hemorrhoids are confused with anal skin tags, which are harmless flaps of skin on the anus that usually don't cause any symptoms. Only very advanced hemorrhoids tend to cause pain. But the pain is often caused by other skin injuries near the anus, such as cracks in the skin. Hemorrhoids can be classified into four groups, according to how severe they are:

- Grade 1: Slightly enlarged hemorrhoids that can't be seen from outside the anus.
- Grade 2: Larger hemorrhoids that sometimes come out of the anus, for example while passing stool or – less commonly – during other physical activities. They then go back inside again on their own.
- Grade 3: Hemorrhoids that come out of the anus when you go to the toilet or do other physical activities, but don't go back inside on their own. They can be pushed back inside, though.
- Grade 4: Hemorrhoids that are always outside the anus and can no longer be pushed back inside. Usually, a small bit of the anal lining comes out of the anus too. This is also known as rectal prolapse.

### **Causes and risk factors**

There is not a lot of research on the causes and risk factors related to enlarged hemorrhoids. Studies have not led to any clear conclusions. Hemorrhoids probably arise because the tissue that supports them becomes weaker over time. And hemorrhoid problems are thought to run in families too. Other possible factors include: Chronic constipation, Hard stool, Straining during bowel movements, Pregnancy and birth, Frequent diarrhea, and Being overweight

### **Prevalence & Outlook**

Enlarged hemorrhoids are very common: It is estimated that more than half of all adults are affected by this problem at some point in their lives. But a lot of people don't seek medical help. Every year, about 4 out of 100 adults go to a doctor because of hemorrhoid problems. It is not possible to predict how hemorrhoids will continue to develop over time. They might get worse and cause more severe symptoms. But they might not get bigger, and the symptoms might improve again. Hemorrhoids that are already enlarged usually don't get smaller on their own again, though. If enlarged hemorrhoids start to leak fluid ("weep"), the skin in the anal region can also become

irritated, which sometimes results in anal eczema. In anal eczema, the skin around the anus is red and inflamed, accompanied by itching and weeping. Small blisters and scabs might form as well.

### **Diagnosis**

Some people are afraid of being examined in that part of their body, and worried that it will hurt. The examinations usually don't cause any pain, though. Some people find them uncomfortable or embarrassing. But they're a normal part of everyday life for medical professionals. When you go to see a doctor, you will probably first be asked about your symptoms and whether you have other medical conditions. The doctor will then look at your anus to see whether it is inflamed, and whether enlarged hemorrhoids come out of it when you push, or whether they are already outside. This is followed by a digital rectal examination, which involves gently inserting a finger into the anus, using gloves and a little lubricant. The doctor feels the inside of the anal canal. This allows him or her to examine the sphincter muscles and the texture of the membranes lining the anus. Grade 1 hemorrhoids generally can't be felt in this way. But digital rectal examinations can help to rule out other medical conditions. The procedure is usually not painful.

If the doctor thinks you might have enlarged hemorrhoids, a proctoscopy is normally carried out next. Here the membranes lining the rectum (the last part of the bowel) are examined using a short tube with a light and camera on it, known as a proctoscope. This allows the doctor to see whether you have enlarged hemorrhoids, and how big they are. The procedure takes a few minutes and is usually not painful. The rectum needs to be emptied before the procedure is carried out. This can be done using a laxative, suppository or enema. Depending on your symptoms, more examinations may follow. If there's blood on your stool, the doctor may suggest a colonoscopy (looking inside your bowel with a camera).

### **Treatment**

The choice of treatment will mainly depend on the size of the hemorrhoids and the severity of symptoms. If the hemorrhoids are only slightly enlarged, avoiding constipation and changing your behavior during bowel movements might be enough. There's a lot of advice out there about what you can do to relieve hemorrhoid symptoms yourself – like using creams or shallow warm baths (sitz baths), or changing your diet. Some of these treatments may relieve the symptoms for a while, but there isn't any good-quality research on many of them. So it's a good idea to see a doctor if your symptoms are bothersome. You could contact your family doctor or a proctologist. Proctologists are doctors who are specialized in medical conditions affecting the rectum and anus.

You can discuss other possible treatments with them, for instance. There are various treatment options, depending on the severity of the symptoms.

- Sclerotherapy (for grades 1 and 2): This involves injecting a chemical solution to reduce the blood supply to the hemorrhoids.
- Rubber band ligation (for grade 2): The hemorrhoids are tied off at the base, making them fall off after a while.

- Surgery (for grade 3 or 4): If someone has grade 3 or grade 4 hemorrhoids, it might be necessary to surgically remove them. Various surgical procedures are used, depending on where the hemorrhoids are located and how far they stick out.

Hemorrhoids can usually be treated without having to stay at the hospital. But some types of treatment and surgery can only be performed at a hospital. It is worth preparing for a hospital stay: You can find out about what to expect, what documents you'll need in order to be admitted, and which procedures involve extra costs, for example. [Source: [www.informedhealth.org](http://www.informedhealth.org) | December 2021 ++]

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## **Food Cures**

### **Update 01: What to Eat When You're Feeling Bad**

Chicken soup may be the ultimate comfort food when you're not feeling well, but there's plenty more to turn to when you're sick. Following is a pairing of 13 more recommended foods and drinks with common ailments and conditions to help get you on the proverbial road to recovery:

#### **Soda for Dizziness**

Feeling dizzy? The sugar jolt from soda can help. According to Livestrong, "When blood sugar drops dramatically, it may cause sudden, intense dizziness. Though such drops can affect most anyone, they are a common complication of diabetes and diabetes treatment. In addition to regular blood glucose monitoring and an overall healthy, doctor-approved diet, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends a snack containing 15 to 20 grams of carbohydrates as a means of remedying sudden blood sugar decline. Try four ounces of "regular" (sugared) soda, pure fruit juice, unsweetened raisins, or other dried fruits.

#### **Beef for Anemia**

Those suffering from anemia can experience fatigue, skin pallor, shortness of breath and a fast heartbeat. Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials offers a long list of options for an iron-rich diet to combat the symptoms, since, "Our bodies need iron to grow and develop. Iron can also help prevent anemia and protect your body from infection." Beef and other proteins top the list; for those who don't eat meat, you might want to try tuna, sardines, lentils, figs, or dates.

#### **Berries for High Blood Pressure**

Everyone knows a low-sodium diet is key to treating high blood pressure. There are also a number of other foods that Healthline says are part of a "heart-healthy diet" to help you combat the condition. "Berries have been associated with a variety of impressive health benefits, including their potential to reduce heart disease risk factors like high blood pressure." That means you can snack away on blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and more.

#### **Salmon for Diabetes**

If you struggle with diabetes and regulating your blood sugar, there is a whole regime to be followed. Salmon, WebMD notes, is a good choice as both a protein (one of the recommended fish and seafood options) and as a source of omega-3 fatty acids.

### **Almonds for High Cholesterol**

Those who want or need to lower their cholesterol have a number of dietary options that will aid the cause. As Harvard Health reports, one of those options is nuts. “A bushel of studies shows that eating almonds, walnuts, peanuts, and other nuts is good for the heart. Eating two ounces of nuts a day can slightly lower LDL, on the order of 5%. Nuts have additional nutrients that protect the heart in other ways.”

### **Low-Fat and Skim Milk for Menopause Discomfort**

Women going through menopause can have a variety of health complaints, but The Checkup notes that changes in diet can help ease discomfort during this transition. Lower estrogen levels can also impact metabolism, leading to weight gain. The plan? Count calories, but also eat more dairy products (low-fat or fat-free choices will complement the calorie counting) for optimal bone health.

### **Green Tea for Arthritis**

Those who struggle with arthritis know how challenging it can be. Along with the use of medications, a proper diet can curb the inflammatory responses from the body that cause pain. Eating the right foods also helps you maintain a healthy weight, helps reduce knee and hip issues. Among the recommendations from Penn Medicine is drinking green tea: “This mild-mannered drink contains a natural antioxidant called epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG). This ingredient has been shown to stop the production of certain inflammatory chemicals in the body, including those involved in arthritis.”

### **Dark Chocolate for Brain Fog**

Some days we simply feel a bit off. As Clean Eating reports, “Brain fog brings on symptoms like memory issues, a lack of mental clarity and difficulty focusing.” In addition to fine-tuning of your diet, try eating some dark chocolate and other cocoa-based foods. They’re rich in flavonoids, which aid proper body functioning.

### **Tomatoes for Asthma**

Those who deal with asthma know it can be a scary condition. An attack is what you definitely want to avoid, and studies have shown that certain foods can help. As WebMD reports, foods made with tomatoes seem to help. “Scientists think it may be the lycopene that helps most, but more research is needed. Some studies show they can keep you breathing better over the long term.”

### **Whole Foods for Surgery Recovery**

While every surgery and its after-effects will be different, there is one thing to keep in mind, according to VeryWellHealth: “One of the best things you can do to improve your nutritional status when you are recovering from surgery is to focus on whole foods.” Translation: an orange instead of orange juice, a baked potato instead of fries, and chicken breast instead of chicken nuggets.

### **Cherries for Sleepiness**

Those who are not getting the sleep they need are not only cranky but can have health issues that go beyond sleepiness. The Sleep Foundation has compiled a list of foods and beverages that just might make it easier to get “a great night’s sleep” and shares that several studies have shown that tart cherries, also known as sour cherries, offer sleep benefits. “Tart cherries have been found to

have above-average concentrations of melatonin, which is a hormone that helps regulate circadian rhythm and promote healthy sleep. Tart cherries may also have an antioxidant effect.”

### **Water for Tiredness**

If you’re constantly tired — and who isn’t these days? — you might want to know that you can perk things up a bit by drinking more water. As Healthline reports, “Drinking water is essential for optimal functioning of the body. Although water doesn’t provide energy in the form of calories, it helps facilitate the energetic processes in the body, which is an energy boost in itself.” Swap soda, coffee, and other drinks for a cool glass of water.

### **Avocados for Hangovers**

If your “under-the-weather” feeling is actually a hangover, there are foods you can eat to help you recover from that one drink too many. There’s a reason avocado toast is found on nearly every brunch menu these days— avocado is packed with potassium, which combats dizziness and muscle weakness, as well as B6 to replenish lost vitamins and fiber to move toxins out of your body.

[Source: Cheapism | Mary Shustack | December 9, 2021 ++]

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## **Human Body Facts**

### **Some You Most Likely Do Not Know**

The human body is one of the strangest and most fascinating machines out there. There is so much that we don’t know, and a plethora of facts that will surely give you a much better understanding of what our bodies are capable of. From being able to prevent cavities through kissing to human hair being virtually indestructible, read on to find out the weirdest facts about the human body.



### **Human Teeth Have the Same Strength as Shark Teeth**

This might come as a huge surprise to most of us, but it’s true. And even though shark teeth are in fact made of a harder mineral than the one that human teeth are made of, both are extremely similar in strength. This is mostly because the enamel coating on a shark's teeth is pretty comparable to the human one.

### **Whenever a Person Blushes So Does Their Stomach**

If you’re a blusher, then the next time you blush think about this one. It turns out that when you blush, your stomach also becomes red just like your face does. This happens because all of your capillaries widen whenever you feel a little bit shier or embarrassed, which in turn increases blood flow. This blood flow is what is responsible for the red blush color.

### **The Electricity Generated Through the Brain Could Power a Light Bulb**

Well, you heard it right, it seems like all of that electricity in our brain is more powerful than we know. The brain is regularly sending several electrical impulses and signals amongst billions of neurons. So it's safe to say that there is a lot going on up there! If we combine all of these signals and impulses, their electricity could power a light-bulb.

### **Breaking Your Heart Could Result In a Heart Condition**

Now, this one may anger some out there, since having our hearts broken appears to be enough suffering for one person. Yet, there is a condition out there called the heartbroken syndrome which is painfully real. Apparently, the chest pain, the shortness of breath, and the emotional stress one experiences during a heartbreak are similar to a heart attack but can usually be resolved within a couple of days or weeks

### **The Human Face Can Make Nearly 7,000 Different Expressions**

By now, humans have collected more facial muscles than any primate ancestors who were ever on this earth. Obviously, the fact that we have no (or less) hair on the face in comparison to our primate ancestors makes seeing these expressions much more easily than before. Researchers suggest thousands of possible expressions out there, which only increase as we evolve.

### **Some People Fall Asleep To the Sound of a Bomb**

We can't even begin to imagine what it must feel like to hear a bomb every time you want to fall asleep. Apparently, the strange experience is called exploding head syndrome. The sound basically resembles a really loud gunshot or explosion and either happens when one wakes up or falls asleep. It is suggested that about 10% of the population are affected by it.

### **It Is Almost Impossible To Destroy Human Hair**

This fact might not come as the biggest surprise on our list as many of us have previously heard that human hair is, in fact, incredibly strong. This part of our body is so strong that apparently, the only thing that could really destroy it is fire. Other than that, hair decays at an incredibly slow rate and can easily resist several types of acids and chemicals.

### **Some People Have a Syndrome Associated With Being Obsessed With Fine Dining**

At this point, we have probably understood that there are a plethora of conditions and syndromes out there, and some of them won't always make sense. This particular syndrome, called Gourmand Syndrome, takes place when someone suffers an injury in the right anterior cerebral hemisphere of their brain. From then on, the person will mostly show preference to eat only fine foods.

### **Your Stomach Acid Could Actually Burn a Hole In Your Skin**

Our bodies are so powerful that the number of things it is capable of doing is never-ending. For instance, while individual stomachs really vary when it comes to their level of acidity, this acidity is usually incredibly powerful. And while the hydrochloric acid that our body produces is strong enough to break down food, in several cases, it's strong enough to burn a hole in one's skin

### **By Putting Your Thumb Up To Your Mouth While Blowing, You May Reduce Stress**

Stress is one of the biggest challenges of modern society. So many of us struggle with it, and as much as we try, it's not always easy to get past it. And though it may sound strange, you could try to blow your thumb as an effective stress reliever. The mechanism works by cooling off the thumb and calming your pulse with it.

[Source: The Fun Post | Brenda Miller | November 2021 ++]

**\* Finances \***



## **COLA CONUS Stipend**

### **Thousands of Troops Will Lose 1 JAN**

Thousands of U.S. troops will lose a monthly [cost-of-living](#) stipend beginning Jan. 1 because fewer locations across the lower 48 states -- including the Washington D.C. metro area -- qualified as excessively expensive living areas, according to a Pentagon announcement 27 DEC. The Defense Department will pay out about \$8.5 million to some 6,000 service members living in six metro areas and 20 non-metropolitan counties within the Continental United States in 2022, the Pentagon said. Some 48,000 service members will drop from receiving the supplement after 15 metro areas and 21 non-metropolitan counties were removed from the list of qualifying locations.

The Pentagon, by law, relies on a contractor to provide cost data for each of its military housing areas, which is then compared to the national average, DOD said in its announcement. Areas qualify for the cost-of-living-adjustment, or COLA, subsidy if non-housing costs are determine to be at least 8% higher than the national average. Categories that determine cost data include transportation, goods and services, federal income taxes, sales taxes and miscellaneous expenses, according the Pentagon. Data is also adjusted based on access to commissaries and military exchange stores.

The metro areas which qualified for the COLA supplement next year are New York City, Long Island and Staten Island in New York; Nantucket, Mass.; Boulder, Colo.; and San Francisco, Calif. New York City's 6% COLA payment will be the largest in 2022, dropping from 7% this year. Long Island and San Francisco were the next highest, with troops in those locations set to receive a 3% adjustment next year. Among those locations dropped from last year's CONUS COLA list were Washington D.C. where service members had received a 1% COLA payment this year. Boston

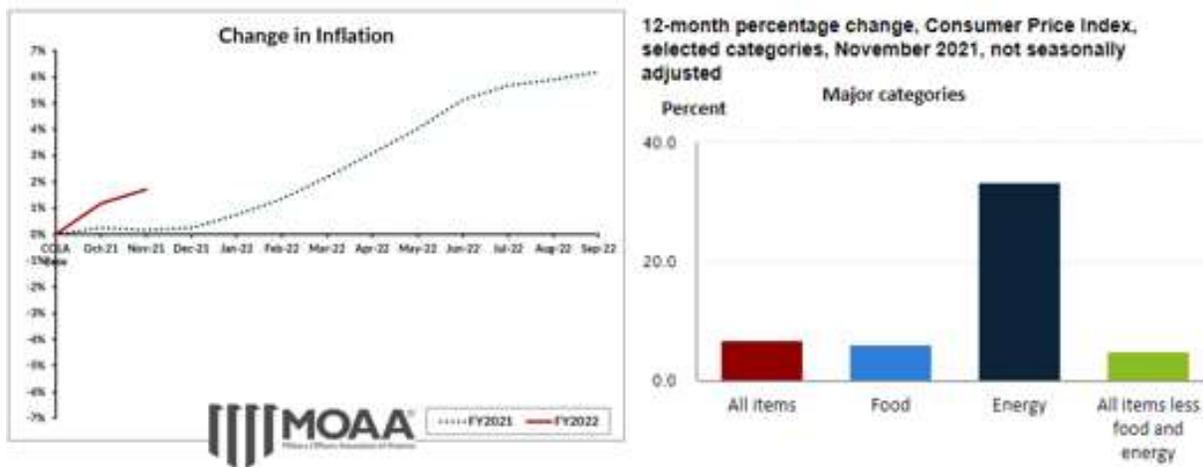
and Worcester, Mass.-based troops were also dropped after they received a 4% supplement in 2021.

The total amount of COLA that a service member receives varies based on geographic duty location, rank, years of service and dependency status. Monthly payments for each CONUS COLA percentage point range from \$33 to \$59 per month for troops with dependents, and from \$22 to \$45 per month for those without dependents, according to the Pentagon. For example, a typical service member at the rank of E-6 with dependents and 10 years of service would receive \$40 per month for each COLA index point -- amounting to a \$240 stipend if stationed in the New York City metro area in 2022. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | December 27, 2021 ++]

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## Cola Watch November 2021

The November 2021 CPI is 273.042, 1.7 percent above the FY 2022 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for December is scheduled to be released Jan. 12, 2022. The CPI baseline for FY 2022 is 268.421.



The calculation is made by comparing the average CPI from July through September of the current fiscal year to the average for the same months of the year prior. Remember, active duty pay raises are calculated differently.

This information is calculated from the non-seasonally adjusted Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). Calculation for monthly COLA change: (Monthly CPI-Yearly baseline CPI)/Yearly baseline CPI. Learn more about CPI on the BLS web page at <https://www.bls.gov/cpi>. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | December 16, 2021 ++]

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## **Streaming Service Scams**

### **Be Careful Activating Your Account**

If you've signed up for a streaming service, such as Netflix, Disney+, PBS Passport, or Hulu, be careful when activating your account. Unfortunately, scammers are trying to steal login information and other personal data with fake websites that appear to come from the streaming service provider.

#### **How the scam works**

- You purchased a subscription to a streaming service. To activate it, you need to log in on your web browser. A quick search brings up several links with the streaming service's official name. You click on the first result.
- However, the website doesn't look quite right. For example, as soon as you click the link, the site prompts you to update your web browser. Scammers have set up a lookalike website to trick you into downloading malware. If you click "Update" or any other button, you could download a virus that gives scammers access to your personal information. It's best to close the page immediately.
- Other times, when you click on the search result, you're directed to a website that features the official logo and branding of your streaming service. However, it looks a little (or sometimes a lot) different than what you remember. If you enter your user ID and password on a lookalike site, it goes into the hands of scammers. These con artists then have the information they need to access your real account on the official website—as well as anywhere else you use that username and password.

#### **How to avoid these scams:**

- Always double check that you are visiting an official website. Scammers can make fake websites look legitimate in search engine's results, but they can't copy a website's official URL. Before you click on a website, take a close look at the URL. Check to that it is spelled correctly. Scammers hope you'll overlook this and click without a second thought.
- Be wary of ads and sponsored links. Sometimes scammers use ads to get their lookalike website to appear first in the search results. Remember, just because a website is at the top of the list doesn't mean it's the official website.
- Be careful with your login information. Always make sure you are on an official website before entering your username and password. Never enter this information into third-party websites. Keep in mind, too, that legitimate customer service representatives generally do not ask for passwords over the phone or through an email.

#### **For more information**

Read more about [activation scams](#) where scammers ask you to pay unnecessary fees or provide your login information. To stay alert to similar tech scams, see [advice on tech support scams](#). Learn [how to spot a scam](#). If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>. Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/AvoidScams).  
[Source: BBB Scam Alerts | December 17, 2021 ++]

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## Hacked Account Scams

### Stolen Credit Card/Hacked Account Notices Could Be Scams

Want some advice about scams? Stay calm. Con artists use that feeling of alarm to trick victims into acting before they can think. BBB Scam Tracker is seeing reports of a con that claims that your Amazon, PayPal, or other account has been compromised. Scammers hope you'll panic and fall for their scheme.

#### How the scam works

- You receive an email, call, or text message informing you there's been suspicious activity in your bank or another account, such as Amazon, Netflix, or PayPal. You need to take immediate action to prevent your account from being compromised or to avoid being charged for a fraudulent purchase. Don't fall for it!
- The email version of this con uses the company's logo, colors, and language to make the message look just like an official alert. In some [examples](#), the emails are nearly indistinguishable from the real thing. A link in the message leads to website that asks for your account number, login, and password information. If you share this information, you give scammers access to that account—as well as anywhere else you use the same password.
- In the phone version, the caller claims to have noticed an expensive charge, which you didn't make, on your account. Some victims told BBB Scam Tracker that the caller pushed them to download phony "security software." This is really malware, which gave scammers access to sensitive information, such as passwords.
- Read more about this con in the full [Scam Alert on BBB.org](#).

#### How to avoid these scams:

- Be extra cautious with unsolicited calls, emails, and texts. Don't be quick to believe claims from unsolicited communications.
- Want to check on your account status? Go directly to the website. Don't click on links in suspicious emails. Instead, go directly to the website in question and log into your account. Or look up the company's official phone number (check your bill or welcome email) and

call them to confirm that there really is a case of suspicious activity associated with your account.

- Understand how businesses handle communications. If you know how disputes and suspicious activity is handled, it will be easier to spot a scam. For example, PayPal clearly states that they will never send you an email asking for your password or to download attachments or software.
- Don't panic and don't feel intimidated. Scammers want you to panic. They may use intimidation tactics to pressure you into acting before you have time to think. Stay calm and think things through. Legitimate businesses will not intimidate you in this way.
- Never give your personal information to strangers. If you aren't speaking or corresponding with someone you know and trust, don't give them sensitive information.

### **For more information**

Read more about scams impersonating [Amazon](#) and how to protect yourself from [phishing cons](#). If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | December 24, 2021 ++]

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## **CRDP/CRSC Open Season**

### **Update 01: Ends 31 January | What You Should Know**

Military retirees who are eligible for both Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) and Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) can choose which entitlement they prefer to receive during Open Season, which runs Jan. 1-31, 2022. If you are eligible to participate in Open Season, you should have received a letter detailing the benefits of each entitlement by mail earlier this month. Along with the letter, you'll receive an Open Season Election Form, which allows you to choose the type of payment you wish to receive. Federal law prohibits receiving both CRDP and CRSC.

You might base your decision on the difference in monetary value or on the effect each entitlement will have on your taxable income. You can read Frequently Asked Questions about the CRSC and CRDP programs to learn more at:

- <https://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/special-pay/combat-related-special-compensation-crsc-faqs.html>
- <https://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/concurrent-retirement-and-disability-pay-crdp-faqs.html>

In addition, you can view a chart which explains the differences between CRDP and CRSC at <https://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/special-pay/comparing-crsc-and-crdp.html>.

When you review the comparison table, you'll notice several differences between CRDP and

CRSC. Before making your decision, you may want to consider how these differences affect you. For instance:

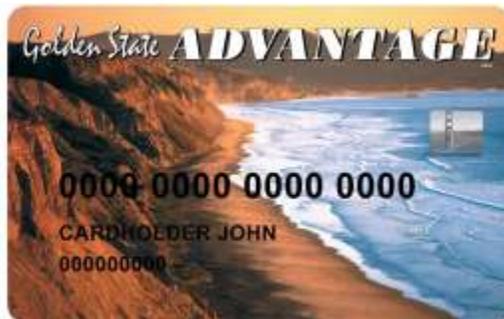
- CRDP is subject to federal taxes; CRSC is not.
- CRDP is subject to division with a former spouse; CRSC is not.
- SBP premiums can be deducted from CRDP, but not CRSC.

If you have questions about how your election will affect your taxes, you should contact your financial advisor or a tax professional. If you feel the information reflected on your form is incorrect, you may contact DFAS Customer Care Center at 800-321-1080 from 0800 to 1700 EST, M-F. Because Monday is the busiest day, we recommend calling Tuesday through Friday for quicker service. Forms should only be submitted if you are making a change, if you wish to keep receiving your current benefit you don't need to respond. Responses must be postmarked by Jan. 31, 2022. If postmarked after this date, the form will not be processed and the current payments will continue. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | December 30, 2021 ++]

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## **EBT Cards**

### **What They Are & How They Can Be Used**



To apply for an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card complete the form at <https://wicassistance.org/form>. Disability benefits might pay up to \$2,600 per month. Unemployment and food assistance could provide additional benefits. If approved you should be aware of the following:

#### **What is an EBT card?**

“What is an EBT card?” is a question you may be asking yourself because it is your first time receiving government assistance through the WIC program or another program. A WIC card is what allows you to use the food or cash assistance you collect from the government. You do not need to drive to an EBT office to obtain cash assistance. You will receive benefits electronically, which will go into your card. Additionally, the card is similar to a debit card. When you are attempting to purchase an item, you will need to enter a four-digit PIN. As with a debit card, having a PIN makes it difficult for another person to gain access to your benefits.

### **How do I check my EBT card balance?**

Knowing what your EBT card balance is before you begin shopping is beneficial. You will be able to create a budget and list of what to buy. It will also help you avoid the inconvenience of spending time at the grocery store picking groceries only to get to the cash register and find that you cannot pay for all the food you need. You can check the balance of your card by calling the WIC card phone number. You can locate the phone number on the back of your card. Simply call the number and follow the directions to check your card balance. Furthermore, you can check your balance online.

### **Where can I use my EBT Card?**

“Where can I use my EBT card?” is a question you may have if you have not made a purchase with your card before. If you are in a store and are unsure if that location accepts WIC cards, look for signs in front of the store or somewhere in the store stating that EBT, TANF or SNAP payments are accepted there. Also, the store may have a Quest logo near checkout or the store’s logo.

### **Where can I not use my EBT Card?**

Not all stores are EBT-approved vendors. There is a certain process stores must follow in order to accept payment through your new EBT card. Also, there are a variety of locations the program does not let you make purchases from, such as casinos, liquor stores and adult entertainment venues. If you attempt to make a purchase at any of these prohibited locations, your transaction may go through. There is no guarantee that the location will decline the transaction. However, if the payment does go through, you will need to pay back your local agency the amount of money you spent and may face the possibility of losing your benefits.

### **What purchases can I make with an EBT card?**

You cannot purchase all the items in a store that accepts EBT cards. The program has specific guidelines on what you can and cannot purchase. For example, you can purchase fruits, vegetables and bread at an approved grocery store with the government assistance you collect. However, you cannot purchase lottery tickets, alcohol or tobacco products. Additionally, if you collect financial assistance from the government you have the ability to purchase other products. For instance, you can buy housing supplies, furniture or pay housing bills. However, you cannot purchase firearms, piercings or tattoos.

### **How do you use an EBT card?**

“How do I use my EBT card?” may be a question you have if you have not made a transaction with your card before. To use your new EBT card to buy an item, you need to swipe your card like a debit or credit card at a point-of-sale (POS) terminal. You will need to enter the four-digit PIN you chose and ensure that the amount you are going to pay is accurate. Furthermore, you can use your new EBT card to pay for a portion of the total amount that is due. For instance, if the total of your transaction is \$50, you can pay \$30 using your EBT card and \$20 using a different form of payment, such as cash.

Also, you have the ability to withdraw the cash assistance you collect on your EBT card, as long as you do not attempt to withdraw food assistance. You can request to get cash back at a store that offers this, but only if you receive benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program or another cash assistance program that allows this. You just need to let the cashier know the amount you want or input the cash back you want on the terminal. Also, you can use a WIC-approved ATM machine to withdraw money. However, you cannot withdraw more than the total amount you have in remaining on your EBT card balance.

[Source: <https://wicassistance.org> | December 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Tax Burden on South Dakota Vets As of DEC 2021**

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales, excise, and property taxes can more than offset the lack of or a low state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you move to South Dakota in 2021:

### **Sales Taxes**

The South Dakota state sales tax rate is 4.5%, and the average SD sales tax after local surtaxes is 5.83%.

- South Dakota does not exempt any types of purchase from the state sales tax. In most states, necessities such as groceries, clothes, and drugs are exempted from the sales tax or charged at a lower sales tax rate. The sales tax applies to the gross receipts of all retail sales, including the sale, lease, or rental of personal property or any product transferred electronically, and the sale of services.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 2%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 6.5%
- South Dakota has 142 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax.
- South Dakota Tourism tax of 1.5% applies to certain lodging and amusement services
- South Dakota has a higher state sales tax than 76.9% of states

### **Excise Taxes**

Excise taxes are special fees collected by the government on the sale of certain products. Unlike a sales tax, an excise tax is usually a fixed amount (not a percentage of the purchase price), and excise taxes are only collected on the sale of specific taxable products rather than on all sales made within the state. Essential items like gasoline, automobiles (in the form of title fees), transportation tickets, and cell phones are often the target of excise taxes in order to generate steady income for government projects like highway and infrastructure funds. Other items, including most types of alcohol and packs of cigarettes, are subject to excise taxes commonly known as sin taxes or vice taxes.

Sin taxes exist not only to generate revenue for the government, but also to discourage certain behaviors or the overuse of certain products. Virtually all states collect sin taxes on alcohol and cigarettes, and many also levy excise taxes on purchases including gas guzzlers, firearms, entertainment tickets, soda, unhealthy food ("fat taxes"), and tanning salons. Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. The state collects an average of \$433 in yearly excise taxes per capita, one of the lowest average per capita excise taxes in the country.

- **Alcohol:** The tax is already added to the purchase price. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise tax on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from your alcohol taxes in the final purchase price.
  - The South Dakota excise tax on beer is \$0.27 per gallon, higher than 56% of the other 50 states. South Dakota's beer excise tax is ranked #22 out of the 50 states.
  - The South Dakota excise tax on Wine is \$1.27 per gallon, higher than 70% of the other 50 states. South Dakota's excise tax on wine is ranked #15 out of the 50 states. An additional 2% wholesale tax applies to the sale of wine in South Dakota. The South Dakota excise tax on liquor is \$4.63 per gallon, lower than 62% of the other 50 states. South Dakota's excise tax on Spirits is ranked #31 out of the 50 states. An additional 2% wholesale tax applies to the sale of spirits in South Dakota.
- **Cannabis:** The validity of recreational legalization bill Amendment A, which South Dakota voters passed in November, is currently being debated in the South Dakota courts. If the bill does go into effect, adult-use sales will be subject to a 15% marijuana excise tax, in addition to the statewide 4.5% sales tax. South Dakota voted to legalize medical marijuana in Nov. 2020. When the initiative is enacted, medical marijuana sales will not be taxed.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in South Dakota is \$12.02 per phone service plan, higher than 74% of the other 50 states. South Dakota's average cellphone tax is ranked #13 out of the 50 states. The South Dakota cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other

- **Cigarettes:** The South Dakota excise tax on cigarettes is \$1.53 per 20 cigarettes, higher than 54% of the other 50 states. South Dakota's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #23 out of the 50 states. The South Dakota cigarette tax of \$1.53 is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The South Dakota excise tax on gasoline and diesel is 30¢ per gallon, lower than 70% of the other 50 states. South Dakota's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #35 out of the 50 states. The South Dakota gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in in the state and is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020.
- **Vehicle:** South Dakota collects a registration fee and a title fee on the sale or transfer of cars and motorcycles, which are essentially renamed excise taxes. Unlike standard excise taxes, however, the end consumer must pay the tax directly to the South Dakota Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid. For the latest refer to <https://dor.sd.gov/individuals/motor-vehicle> & <https://dps.sd.gov>.

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**None.** South Dakota is one of seven states that do not collect a personal income tax. However, revenue lost to South Dakota by not having a personal income tax is made up through other state-level taxes, such as the South Dakota sales tax, property tax, and a corporate income tax on certain financial institutions.

### **Property Taxes**

The median property tax in South Dakota is \$1,629.00 per year for a home worth the median value of \$126,200.00. Counties in South Dakota collect an average of 1.28% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. South Dakota is ranked number twenty seven out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected. South Dakota's median income is \$56,323 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by South Dakota residents amounts to approximately % of their yearly income. South Dakota is ranked 23rd of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income. The exact property tax levied depends on the county the property is located in. For more localized property tax rates, find your county at [http://www.tax-rates.org/south\\_dakota/property-tax#Counties](http://www.tax-rates.org/south_dakota/property-tax#Counties)

- While the exact property tax rate you will pay will vary by county and is set by the local property tax assessor, you can use South Dakota Property Tax Estimator Tool at [http://www.tax-rates.org/south\\_dakota/property-tax#Counties](http://www.tax-rates.org/south_dakota/property-tax#Counties) to calculate your approximate yearly property tax based on median property tax rates across South Dakota.

- There is a Disabled Veteran Property Tax Exemption Program for lower taxation. Refer to <https://dor.sd.gov/media/jzbhdtzr/disabled-veteran-property-tax-exemption-brochure.pdf>
- There is a Paralegic Veterans Exemption. To apply refer to <https://dor.sd.gov/media/tg2frgdv/paralegic-tax-reduction-exemption-brochure.pdf>
- There is a Property Tax Homestead Exemption for homeowners age 70 and older. Refer to <https://dor.sd.gov/media/5lrpvndw/homestead-exemption-brochure.pdf>.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax and the estate tax is limited and related to federal estate tax collection. The federal estate tax is applied if an inherited estate is more than \$11.58 million in 2020. However, you are only taxed on the overage, not the entire estate. That tax rate can be as high as 40%.

### **Other State Tax Rates**

To compare the above sales, excise, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.
- Income Tax: <https://taxfoundation.org/state-individual-income-tax-rates-brackets-2019>
- State Tax Comparisons <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>

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For further information visit the South Dakota Department of Revenue site <http://dor.sd.gov> or call 800-829-9188. [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#SOUTHDAKOTA> | December 2021 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



## **Notes of Interest**

**DEC 16 thru 31 2021**

- **DFAS.** At <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx> you can now access and download your Military Retiree 1099-R for 2021.
- **B-2.** The U.S. DoD doled out \$2 billion apiece for a fleet of B-2 ‘Spirit’ bombers which are designed to be something of a ghost. Almost undetectable except from Google Earth. Check it out at <https://youtu.be/IQknAuX2LI8>.
- **USA.** The population of the United States grew in 1921 by 392,665, or 0.1%, the lowest rate since the nation’s founding. The slow rate of growth can be attributed to decreased net international migration, decreased fertility, and increased mortality due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Costco Tip.** If there’s an asterisk in the corner of the price card, that means the product is on its way out. Products, it may not be discounted, but it’s a safe bet that it won’t be restocked the next time you make a Costco run (at least not immediately). Seasonal items may return the following year,
- **Lifehacks.** For some unexpected ones that everybody should know check out <https://youtu.be/rtxDz-EgqVs>
- **Flu, Cold or COVID?** COVID if symptoms include headache and dry cough. Loss of taste and smell that has been the biggest warning sign of a Covid-19 infection is still a possible symptom. People who are feeling serious chest pain, particularly with a dry cough that has gotten worse really ought to seek medical attention.
- **Hotline.** China and Japan have agreed to create an emergency military hotline to avert potential crises over the Taiwan Strait and disputed islands.
- **Covid Cases.** U.S. Forces Korea counted 467 new COVID-19 cases in the week ending 27 DEC, the highest number of infections reported by the command since the pandemic began in March 2020. New cases of COVID-19 in the United States have soared to their highest level on record.
- **Home Depot.** All U.S. veterans now qualify for Home Depot's everyday military discount which is available for eligible purchases up to a \$400 maximum annual discount and can be used every day throughout the year.

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## **Taiwan-China Dispute**

### **Update 14: US, Japan Draw up Joint Military Plan for Possible Taiwan Emergency**

The U.S. and Japanese militaries have made a draft plan for a joint operation should an emergency with Taiwan arise, Japan's Kyodo news agency reported 23 DEC. The report cited unidentified Japanese government sources. Under the draft plan, the U.S. Marine Corps would deploy troops to and set up temporary bases on the Nansei island chain, an archipelago of Japan that stretches toward Taiwan, at the first sign of a Taiwan emergency, Kyodo said. Japanese armed forces, meanwhile, would provide logistical support with ammunition and fuel supplies.



Asked about the draft plan, a Defense Department spokesperson told The Hill that the United States and Japan "share a strong commitment to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" and are "committed to enhancing resiliency and interoperability between U.S. and Japanese forces and deepening operational cooperation during peacetime and various regional contingencies." They would not speak to the specific topics planned for discussion in the 2+2 meetings with Japan. Washington and Tokyo would likely reach an agreement to start creating an official version of such a plan at the 2+2 dialogue, a high-level security meeting between diplomatic and defense officials in January.

China in the past two years has increased its aggression toward Taiwan by sending hundreds of military aircraft into the air defense identification zone of the island it sees as a rogue state. Taiwan, in turn, maintains it is a sovereign country separate from Beijing and said it is preparing for potential invasion that could come in the next several years, though it wants peace. The tensions have grown so worrisome that the U.S. has called for China "to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure and coercion against Taiwan," and said Washington will assist Taipei "in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability."

The United States has a unique relationship with Taiwan in that it has provided military and other types of support since China's Nationalist government fled there in 1949 following the Chinese Civil War. But Washington has held back from creating official ties with Taipei as part of agreements established since 1979 with Beijing. It was revealed in October U.S. forces have been secretly training Taiwan's military forces in the country for at least a year. [Source: The Hill | Jordan Williams | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## **Tiananmen Massacre Statue**

### **Pillar of Shame Removed from Hong Kong University**

A monument at Hong Kong University that commemorates the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre was removed by workers early on 234 DEC despite objections by its creator from Denmark. The 26 foot tall Pillar of Shame, which depicts 50 torn and twisted bodies piled on top of each other,

was made by Danish sculptor Jens Galschiot to symbolize the lives lost during the bloody military crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.



But the statue became an issue of dispute in October, with the university demanding that it be removed, even as the decision drew backlash from activists and rights groups. Galschiot offered to take it back to Denmark, provided he was given legal immunity that he wouldn't be persecuted under Hong Kong's national security law, but has not succeeded thus far. Workers barricaded the monument at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) late on Wednesday night. Drilling sounds and loud clanging could be heard coming from the boarded-up site, which was patrolled by guards.

“The decision on the aged statue was based on external legal advice and risk assessment for the best interests of the University,” the university said in a statement. The statement said that no party had ever obtained approval to display the statue. It also cited the colonial-era crimes ordinance in justifying its removal. In October, the university informed the now-defunct candlelight vigil organizer, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China that it had to remove the statue following “the latest risk assessment and legal advice”.

In response, the organization said it was dissolving, citing a climate of oppression, and that it did not own the sculpture. The university was told to speak to its creator instead. When reached by The Associated Press news agency, sculptor Galschiot said he was only aware of what was happening to the sculpture on 22 DEC from social media and other reports. “We don't know exactly what happened, but I fear they destroy it,” he said. “This is my sculpture, and it is my property.” He had previously written to the university to assert his ownership of the monument, although his requests were largely ignored. He has also warned the university that he could seek damages if the statue was damaged during its removal.

Hong Kong authorities have cracked down on political dissent following the implementation of the national security law, which appeared to target much of the pro-democracy movement. The law, which outlaws secession, subversion, terrorism and foreign collusion to intervene in the city's affairs, was imposed by Beijing, following months of anti-government protests in 2019. [Source: [www.aljazeera.com/news](http://www.aljazeera.com/news) | December 23, 2021 ++]

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## Drone Warfare

### The Problem that Everyone Saw Coming



**Just because drone warfare is less dangerous for American soldiers does not mean it is more effective.**

A new trove of Pentagon documents revealed by the New York Times shows once again that drone warfare does the United States more harm than good. U.S. drone strikes, which have killed many hundreds of civilians in the greater Middle East, radicalize enemies, keep the United States involved in wars long past their expiration date, and cause post-traumatic stress for those running the drone program.

The general argument for using drones is that these uncrewed, generally precision-guided weapons can accomplish many of the desired effects of general conventional war at a far lower cost. Proponents argue that drones send a credible signal to adversaries that the U.S. can fight wars indefinitely, that they allow Washington to mostly withdraw from the Middle East, and the reusable nature of new drones keeps U.S. troops out of harm's way. This could not be further from the truth. Even if drones do send a credible signal to adversaries, that does not matter unless those adversaries stop fighting. The opposite is true. Because drone strikes kill families and innocent civilians, they lead to radicalization.

The New York Times reports show that 1,417 civilians have been killed in U.S. drone strikes in the Middle East. This means that the United States is playing right into the narrative anti-American terrorist organizations use to radicalize recruits. Reporting shows that the Islamic State has used footage from the aftermath of drone strikes in its propaganda videos. It is not difficult to convince someone that a far-off country hates them after you show them footage of what a drone strike did to a family in their country. The impact of this is stark. Recent research finds that, when attacks successfully kill a cell's leader in Pakistan, the resulting power vacuum typically leads to a nearly 30 percentage point-increase in attacks over the next three to six months. Other research finds similar effects in Yemen, Somalia, and the Middle East as a whole.

Beyond increasing the number of enemy troops, drones allow for primacy on the cheap. They are attractive to presidents because they demonstrate "doing something" to fight terrorism. In 2013, CIA Director-appointee John Brennan said drones are best at deterring future terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, successful drone strikes increase presidential approval ratings despite things like weak economies more than is seen with traditional uses of force. Thus, even if the president is unsure of drones' efficacy, the future benefits from this "cheap primacy" are undoubtedly attractive.

The problem is that this also means an extension of forever wars. The U.S. drone program fits well with the "over the horizon" operations Washington continues to conduct in Afghanistan, despite knowing that its partners have the perverse benefit of mandating Washington's involvement in the region. Beyond that, the United States is using drone warfare to aid Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen that has led to the largest manmade humanitarian crisis in history.

Finally, the cost to American soldiers from using drones is not cheap. A 2011 Pentagon study found that drone pilots experience post-traumatic stress at the same rate as pilots of manned aircraft, a cost that persists long after the fighting has stopped. Beyond the burden for taxpayers, these former drone pilots face a life of nightmares and flashbacks, which can reduce their ability to work and maintain relationships. Recent psychology research affirms this point, finding that drone operators have higher chances of having PTSD, emotional exhaustion, and burnout compared to manned aircraft pilots. Policymakers cannot justify drone warfare on the claim that it does not cause harm to American soldiers, just because they are physically far from harm.

It is attractive to focus on how drones allow for primacy on the cheap. Yet, by increasing the number of terrorists and psychologically damaging American soldiers – all while allowing forever wars to endure – drone warfare hurts the United States and target countries. Warfare on the cheap is still war, primacy on the cheap is still primacy, and Washington's policymakers should operate on this reality. [Source: DefenseOne | Jordan Cohen & Jonathan Ellis Allen | December 21, 2021 ++]

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## **Historical Hardship**

### **Years Worse than 2021**



It's fair to say 2021 was a lot of things: traumatic, stressful, challenging, and — for far too many — heartbreaking. The extended pandemic "has been the perfect storm of stress," says Seth Gillihan, a clinical psychologist, bestselling author, and head of therapy at the self-therapy app Bloom. "It's brought disease, deaths, lockdowns, job losses, and financial stress, plus culture wars and bitter political divisions. The only small consolation might be that we now have better tools

than we used to for dealing with it." But these might have been the worst years many of us can remember, history will likely prove them to be far from the worst years ever. Bloom consulted 28 American and British historians for their opinions on the most stressful years in history. The results, starting with the most recent, provide a lot of perspective

### **2001**

For Americans, 2001 ranks among the worst for being the year of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which caused nearly 3,000 fatalities, more than 25,000 injuries, substantial long-term health problems for many, and at least \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage.

### **1968**

A pivotal year for the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement, 1968 is remembered for unrest that resulted in riots and protests in many U.S. cities, including Washington, Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, and Cincinnati. It also saw the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy.

### **1962**

For more than a month in the fall of 1962, many collectively held their breath during the Cuban missile crisis. This confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was widely considered the closest the Cold War came to escalating into a full-scale nuclear war.

### **1944**

In world history, this year ranks among the worst. The Holocaust was at its height, and much of the world was engulfed in war. In a period spanning mid-May to early July of this year alone, about 437,000 Jews were deported from Hungary to concentration camps, mostly to Auschwitz, where a vast majority were murdered.

### **1929**

In the fall of this year, the worst stock market crash in U.S. history occurred, kicking off the Great Depression, which would last nearly a decade and fuel misery and hardship for many Americans for years.

### **1919**

The Spanish Flu gripped the world as it continued reeling from the trauma of World War I. Bloom's report noted that this year also saw "race riots, labor strikes, and the start of Prohibition." The pandemic would ultimately claim an estimated 20 million to 50 million lives around the world, including 675,000 Americans.

### **1862**

More than one historian consulted by Bloom named this the worst year in U.S. history. It included the Civil War's Battle of Antietam, the bloodiest single day in U.S. military history, which took a terrible toll of more than 3,500 killed and more than 17,000 wounded. "That was the darkest year in the Civil War, when it was clear that the price had already been high but the Union might still

break apart permanently," says Philip Parker, historian and author of "World History: From the Ancient World to the Information Age."

### **1838**

This year marks a dark stain on U.S. history: the Trail of Tears, resulting in the deaths of about 4,000 Cherokee. These only added to the many more Native American lives taken during the government's forced relocations following the 1830 passage of the Indian Removal Act.

### **1816**

This is often called "The Year Without a Summer" after the massive 1815 eruption of Indonesia's Mount Tambora. The millions of tons of dust, ash, and sulfur dioxide spewing into the air resulted in harsh climate abnormalities that caused the coldest summer on record between the years of 1766 and 2000. The outcome: major food shortages and starvation across the Northern Hemisphere, most acutely in New England, Atlantic Canada, China, and parts of western Europe.

### **1644**

This was a turbulent year for much of the world. The Thirty Years' War continued to rage in Europe (death estimates for that war range from 4.5 million to 8 million). In China the nearly 300-year-old Ming Dynasty collapsed, due to a number of factors that included natural disasters, economic crisis, peasant uprisings, and more.

### **1348**

COVID-19 is awful, but it doesn't hold a candle to the Black Death, which peaked in this year, killing a third of the European and Middle Eastern population, with a final tally of up to 200 million. This was the year that most of the historians consulted chose as the one "likely to have been the toughest, most difficult, and stressful individual year for those who lived through it," says Parker, who served as consultant historian on Bloom's study. "The devastation wrought by the Black Death in 1348 was so absolute that it was hard to choose any other year as the worst in world or British history."

### **410**

410 marked the first time in almost 800 years that Rome fell to a foreign enemy. Many believed that the sack of Rome by the Visigoths foretold the end of the world.

[Source: Cheapism | Kris Scott | December 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Tires**

### **Update 01: Signs Yours' Are Dangerously Worn**

Wear and tear on your tires are inevitable and are just a fact of life. However, it's important to know when your tires are starting to wear thin, as this can lead to dangerous driving conditions. It is vital to regularly check the tread on your tires and make sure they are in good condition. If you

notice that your tire has no tread, it could signify an underlying problem with the tire's structure or alignment. It is not safe for you to drive around on bald tires, so it's best to get them fixed as soon as possible before something serious happens!



### **Tread Depth**

When tires wear, the tread depth wears less and less. A common rule of thumb is that tread depth should not fall below 1/16 of an inch. Below this depth, the tires can start to skid on wet surfaces and lose traction. This could lead to a dangerous situation while driving.

Having safe tires is crucial for a safe drive. It is important to keep an eye on your tread depth, especially during the winter when rain and snow are more prevalent. If you notice that your tread depth has fallen below the recommended level, take your car in for a check-up! If the tire tread is too low, you need to buy new tires from any tire shop in your area.

### **Vibration When Driving**

Another important sign that your tires need to be changed is vibration when driving. If you feel vibrations in your car's steering wheel, seat or floorboard while driving, this may mean there's a problem with one or more tire(s).

When there is an imbalance between tires – such as if one tire has worn down faster than another because it was not rotated at appropriate intervals – you will experience these types of vibrations. This can lead to damage and could cause accidents on the road! It is best to get any imbalances fixed right away so that they do not become worse over time.

### **Sidewalls Are Cracked**

If you notice that your sidewalls are cracked, it is an indication that the tire is worn and needs to be replaced. Sidewall cracks can lead to several problems, including a loss in air pressure, leading to an accident. You don't want to risk driving on unsafe tires, especially when winter weather is right around the corner. Get new winter tires installed today and stay safe on the roads!

### **Poor Traction in Rain**

If your car is experiencing poor traction in the rain, it could be a sign that there's an underlying issue with your tires. It is important for all drivers to regularly check their tire tread and any other signs that might indicate wear and tear. If anything seems off or unusual about your tires, don't hesitate to get them checked by professionals at a local shop near you today!

### **Snowy Roads Can Be Slippery**

Winter driving can pose its own set of problems in maintaining safe and reliable cars. Snowy roads make slippery surfaces even more treacherous than usual, which means that even if your tires are

in good condition, you could still have a hard time getting around. If you find yourself struggling to drive on snowy roads, it might be time for a new set of winter tires! Snowy conditions can be difficult for any car, but with the right tires installed, you'll feel more confident while behind the wheel.

When buying or changing tires, always ensure that they match the requirements specified by your vehicle manufacturer. Tires that do not meet these criteria may impair driving performance and reduce fuel efficiency. Additionally, make sure to get them rotated at regular intervals as per your car's owner's manual – this will ensure even wear on all four tires.

### **Tires Fail the Penny Test**

If you see that your tire has failed the penny test, this is a clear sign that it's time to buy new winter tires. If too much metal shows in between Lincoln's head and his shoulders on a penny after being placed in between tread grooves of your tire, then it means there isn't enough traction left on the road for safe driving!

It may be difficult to notice when your tires are wearing down properly, but if one starts coming apart due to lack of use or other problems – don't wait until it becomes dangerous while driving! The sooner you get new winter tires installed, the safer everybody will be behind the wheel. Ensure everyone stays safe by getting them checked out today at any nearby shop near you.

### **There Are Bulges in the Tire**

If you notice that your tire has bulges in it, this is a clear sign that things are not right. It can indicate an underlying problem with the rubber or steel belts inside the tire – leading to all sorts of issues, including reduced fuel efficiency and, worse yet, dangerous car accidents! You don't want to risk driving on tires like these, so make sure to get them inspected by professionals at any local shop near you today.

### **Your Tires Are Older Than 7 Years**

Tires have a lifespan just like any other product, and if you're driving on tires that are older than seven years, it's time for a change. Tires lose their elasticity and grip with age, making them more susceptible to wear and tear. Additionally, they may not meet the safety requirements specified by your vehicle manufacturer – which could result in impaired performance while driving.

It is important to keep track of how old your tires are so you can replace them when necessary. Most tire manufacturers recommend replacing tires every six years, but this depends on various factors such as climate, driving habits, and type of car. Always consult your car's owner's manual for the best recommendations!

### **Conclusion**

As a result, it is crucial for all drivers to regularly check their tire tread and any other signs that might indicate wear and tear. If anything seems off or unusual about your tires, don't hesitate to get them checked by professionals at a local shop near you today! Ensure everyone's safety on the road by following these winter driving tips with family and friends today.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | December 20, 2021++]

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## Useless Cleaning Products

### Why They're A Waste & What To Try Instead

You might have started wiping everything in your house down multiple times a day during the pandemic, but beware what you're using to do it. Like so many other things you don't need to buy, many cleaning products simply don't work well, do more harm than good, or can be skipped in favor of a much cheaper do-it-yourself solution. Here are 10 that are better left on the shelves.



#### **Air Fresheners**

Why they're a waste: The air-freshener industry continues to rake in the cash, and it's no wonder: Scented-oil refills for an outlet freshener can cost \$2.50 a pop, and you'll often find yours running low after just a couple of weeks. Even worse, nearly 20% of people say air fresheners can trigger headaches, breathing issues or other health issues.

*Try this instead:* Open a window, or neutralize odors naturally with baking soda and a few drops of essential oils.

#### **Automatic Toilet Cleaners**

Why they're a waste: Automatic toilet cleaners, often sold in the form of drop-in tablets, have chemicals that can wear out the working parts inside your toilet tank, plumbers warn.

*Try this instead:* To help keep your toilet bowl from getting too gnarly between deep cleans, try distilled white vinegar. Pour a half cup inside the tank and a half cup inside the overflow pipe in the middle of the tank, Florida-based Hefner Plumbing recommends.

#### **Laundry Detergent Pods**

Why they're a waste: Safety concerns aside, we've never been fans of detergent pods. First, they're much pricier than regular detergent: a 72-load case of Tide Pods may run you around \$18, while the same \$18 could get you a large bottle of liquid Tide that would power through at least 96 loads. Second, experts have found that, as a group, they just don't clean as well as liquid detergent, sometimes even leaving stains and residue behind.

*Try this instead:* Stick with the store-brand liquid detergent from your local warehouse club to make your dollars go further. If you must have laundry pacs, Costco's Kirkland brand will clean better for less.

## **Swiffers**

Why they're a waste: Sure, they're convenient, but have you ever thought about how many of those wet or dry Swiffer cloths you're piling into the trash (and eventually, the landfill) every week? Even if the environmental angle doesn't sway you, the cost might. A pack of 32 Swiffer Dry refills might set you back about \$8, which means you're spending around a quarter for every little touch-up — and much more if you go through multiple cloths or use the pricier Swiffer Wet refills.

*Try this instead:* Invest upfront in a convenient cordless stick vacuum that you can use on carpet and hard floors. If you need to deep-clean dirty floors, use an old-fashioned mop. And if you just can't quit your Swiffer, consider our money-saving Swiffer hacks.

## **Ionic Air Purifiers**

Why they're a waste: No one likes the thought of breathing in dirty air, but filter-free air purifiers that rely on ionizers simply don't effectively trap and remove allergens, experts say. Worse than that, they release low levels of ozone that can be harmful to breathe in.

*Try this instead:* Steer clear of ionic air purifiers and use air purifiers that have a HEPA filter to grab allergens. While you will have to replace the filters periodically — yearly is typical — you can buy a decent model for under \$100.

## **Lint Rollers**

Why they're a waste: Lint rollers may seem like a must for anyone who needs to banish pet hair or lint from clothing and upholstery. But it usually takes a ton of those sticky little papers to do the job, and after a week or so you'll be shelling out a few bucks for yet another refill that will also end up in your garbage can.

*Try this instead:* Slap on a rubber glove and slide your hand over furniture or rugs that have stubborn pet hair or lint. Or try a convenient microbristle brush that can be cleaned easily and used over and over again.

## **Steam Mops**

Why they're a waste: The majority of steam mops tested by Consumer Reports failed to impress, simply pushing aside big messes and leaving floors looking dull. And steam mops can actually damage floors, especially hardwood and laminate, by leaving behind too much moisture. Some flooring manufacturers will even void your warranty if you've been using a steam mop to clean.

*Try this instead:* Use a regular ol' spin or squeeze mop to clean your floors more effectively and for less money. Since you control how much moisture stays on the mop, it's easier to ensure you aren't leaving too much water behind.

## **Laundry Scent Boosters**

Why they're a waste: You have to hand it to Downy, Gain, Arm & Hammer, and others trying to convince you to add another unnecessary product to your laundry routine. To be clear, scent boosters don't make your laundry any cleaner or softer; they simply make it smell nice. And the overpowering scent lingering on clothing can actually irritate some people, causing headaches or other issues.

*Try this instead:* Your detergent alone should be leaving your clothes either lightly scented or odor-free depending on the kind you choose. If a scent is a must, try adding a drop or two of essential oils to wool dryer balls.

### **Disinfecting Wipes**

Why they're a waste: While Clorox wipes were pretty great at killing the coronavirus, that's no longer considered necessary in most cases. Yet like Swiffers, disinfecting wipes (or really any kind of pre-moistened cleaning wipe) are a convenience product you'll pay dearly for. A \$5 can of 80 wipes will last only a couple of weeks if you're using a few a day. Over a year, you'd be using more than \$100 worth of wipes at that rate — ouch — and putting more than two dozen plastic canisters in the trash.

*Try this instead:* Assess whether you really need to use a disinfectant wipe. If spraying a reusable rag with a disinfectant is too much of a hassle, you can make your own wipes using old washcloths, water, rubbing alcohol, and dish soap.

### **Robotic Vacuums**

Why they're a waste: Under a specific set of circumstances, robotic vacuums may work for you. Those circumstances? You have a relatively open floor plan that the bot can navigate easily, a house that's relatively clutter-free, and preferably just one level to clean. Oh, and you have to be cool with spending double the money on a vacuum with much less suction than an upright.

*Try this instead:* Your non-robotic self can do a much better job in a much shorter time. We still think it's hard to beat the convenience of a lightweight, cordless stick vacuum.

[Source: Cheapism | Sandra Latham |December 15, 2021++]

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## **Teeth Myths**

### **Some Things We All Believed**



There are often things that individuals believe, regardless of if it is from a reliable source or not. These things can be from what other people say, or what they might read on the internet. In this article, we will aim at debunking some of the myths associated with teeth.

### **Clean Teeth Immediately After Each Meal**

This is a very common mistake and is even promoted by some dentists. Acid is from the sugar that derives from the foods that we consume. The acid softens the layer of enamel which safeguards the teeth. Specialists have documented that the enamel hardens in about forty to fifty minutes subsequent to eating a meal. In this case, this is the opportune time to brush teeth.

The enamel layer deteriorates if cleaning is completed prior to this time. Also, it is suggested that brushing should take place prior to eating meals. The reason being is that the saliva intake slows down as we sleep, therefore allowing plaque and bacteria to build up during the night. If the individual does not brush their teeth prior to having breakfast, all the bacteria ends up in the stomach.

### **The Main Enemy of Teeth Is Sugar**

As a matter of fact, bad bacteria are to blame. As this manufactures acid, that results in cavities. The residue of carbohydrates on the teeth becomes food for the bacteria. Obviously, sugar is considered a carbohydrate, however, several other products, including healthy ones, such as cereals and fruits, are included in this category.

### **Pregnant Females Cannot Visit Dentist**

This is false. If the individual is experiencing inflammation in the oral cavity, it should be quickly eliminated. The chief fear of pregnant females is associated with pain medicines. As they believe it could have an impact on the unborn child. Yet individuals do not have to endure any pain while at the dentist. Scientists have confirmed the safety of local anesthetics. Although, the dentist should also be informed that the female is indeed pregnant, prior to any appointment.

### **Toothaches Mean Cavities**

Not always whatsoever. There are many reasons that teeth could inflict pain, apart from cavities. It could be inflammation of the gum or dental pulp or even tooth sensitivity. The issue is not always present in the oral cavity. For instance, it could be sinusitis. It should be left up to the dentist to ascertain the cause of the pain.

### **Bleeding Gums Means Stop Cleaning Teeth**

Gums that are bleeding are a sure indicator that a visit to the dentist is an absolute necessity. Often situations like these signal that the individual is not properly taking care of their teeth. However, this is not a concrete diagnosis, as only the dentist is able to completely and accurately determine the cause. As in some uncommon cases, it could stem from gum disease.

### **Placing Aspirin on the Tooth Soothes Pain**

This is a very false statement. When an individual takes an aspirin, it typically reduces the pain felt by the tooth. However, when the aspirin is placed directly on or adjacent to the tooth, the medicine could irritate the gum tissue. It could also irritate the palate and could only result in harm to the individual.

### **Rinsing & Using Dental Floss Are Interchangeable**

This should be viewed in two parts. Rinsing the mouth out with special liquids decreases the effectiveness of the toothpaste. As individuals rinse, it removes the fluoride from the teeth, and the efficiency of the toothpaste declines. It is recommended that individuals rinse their mouths during the times they are not cleaning their teeth. The majority of mouthwashes safeguard the teeth from bacteria; however, they are unable to reach every crevice in the mouth. Cleaning with a toothbrush and then using dental floss assists in reaching the most difficult areas of the teeth.

### **Milk Teeth Do Not Require Dental Visits**

Milk teeth often have enamel that is thinner than normal. Therefore, the protection is less from bacteria. A cavity that is neglected in the milk tooth could result in oozing inflammation that could harm the permanent tooth in the future. Dentists of late, are recommending that one-year-old children should get their growing front teeth examined. Then a suitable dental plan will be provided.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | July 20, 2021 ++]

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## **Lies**

### **Update 04: Ten More Untruths You Learned in School**

Mark Twain famously said, "Don't let school interfere with your education." Although the famed author [who quit school](#) at age 12 had more meanings in mind than calling out specific educational untruths, it turns out plenty of the "facts" learned in school are actually myths, propaganda, misinformation, or downright lies.

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### **Ben Franklin Discovered Electricity with a Kite and a Key**

One of history's most brilliant and prolific inventors, Ben Franklin is arguably most famous for flying a kite fixed with a metal key during a thunderstorm to harness electricity. That almost certainly didn't happen. The popular legend probably comes from a key-on-kite-in-thunderstorm scenario Franklin wrote for a popular publication.

### **There's No Gravity in Space**

It's common knowledge that astronauts float because there is no gravity in space. Actually, there is gravity everywhere, including space, including the kind that keeps the moon in orbit around Earth. People and objects appear to float while in orbit because they are in a state of freefall.

### **Follow the Food Pyramid for a Healthy Diet**

The standard for healthy eating taught to children for decades, the classic food pyramid, has contributed to epidemic levels of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. The U.S. Department of Agriculture sets nutritional guidelines for schools and the military, but also represents the

agriculture industry — and has a vested interest in promoting diets based on things such as corn and meat, which have proven unhealthy in large quantities.

### **You Need Milk for Strong Bones**

Milk is absolutely necessary for a strong, healthy body — if you're a growing cow. A series of studies have found no evidence that cow's milk improves bone health, but have shown dairy has a negative effect on overall health, including on bones. The milk myth has been pushed by the dairy industry, which lobbies the USDA (a recent USDA chief took a cushy, high-paying job as CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council).

### **Blood Is Blue in the Body**

Generations of children managed to leave school believing blood is blue until it touches oxygen, when it turns red. Blood is always red. Veins appear blue only because of how light is filtered as it penetrates the skin.

### **Normandy Was the Beginning of the End for Germany**

The bravery displayed by Allied troops on D-Day is undeniable, as is the historic impact of the battle. But up to 80% of German troops were killed by Russian soldiers in the East, and most historians consider the epic battles of Stalingrad and Leningrad as the death blows to Hitler's Germany. Contributing at least 26 million corpses to the calamitous death toll of World War II, it is certainly the Russians who paid much of the tab to defeat fascism.

### **You'll Need Advanced Math in Life**

Year after year, legions of kids — many of whom aren't mathematically inclined — are forced to suffer through the chores of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry with the presumption multiplying numbers against letters in parentheses is necessary to hack it in the adult world. In reality, fewer than 1 in 4 Americans performs anything above basic math regularly at work.

### **Abraham Lincoln Was an Abolitionist**

History teachers are quick to remind students that Lincoln was the "Great Emancipator." In reality, however, Lincoln's views evolved over time and he came to anti-slavery movement late in the game. He said publicly and repeatedly that he would tolerate slavery to preserve the Union. His anti-slavery sentiments, at least early on, seemed more pragmatic than moral, as revealed in his famous "house divided" speech.

### **The Emancipation Proclamation Freed the Slaves**

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was limited in effect — first limited to slaves in rebel states, and then not universally known. The holiday of Juneteenth, celebrates the moment June 19, 1865, in which Union soldiers rode into Galveston, Texas, to tell America's last remaining slaves they were free. This was news to the slaves, who had never heard of the proclamation, signed 2½ years earlier.

### **Slavery Ended With the Civil War**

The 13th Amendment supposedly ending slavery still allowed forced labor as punishment for a crime. Convict leasing existed in every Southern state for decades after the Civil War. Tens of thousands of black Americans who committed no real crime were kidnapped off the streets by corrupt local sheriffs, convicted in informal local courts for vague "crimes" such as vagrancy, issued fines they couldn't pay, and sold to businesses to work in mines, timber yards, farms and railroads in conditions often worse than slavery.

[Source: Cheapism | Andrew Lisa | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **News of the Weird**

**DEC 16 thru 31, 2021**

**The Christmas Spirit** – Fritz Turner, 23, returned to his hometown of Newport, Washington, to find the city's Christmas tree "embarrassing." The scant trimming comprised a series of vertical rope lights dangling from the top of the tree down the sides, The News Tribune reported. "This is not gonna do," he said. So he set up a GoFundMe page on Dec. 2, hoping to raise \$5,000 for better lights and more decorations. "We can do better. Even Charlie Brown's Christmas tree looked better than this sad spruce," he wrote. The page raised more than \$2,700 for the lights, and the local utility company hung them on the tree. And middle- and high school students donated handmade ornaments for it. For the first time in many years, the chamber of commerce organized a tree-lighting ceremony on Dec. 11. Turner said he's been "inspired" by the support. "Together, we're really powerful." [The News Tribune, 12/12/2021]

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**Chutzpah** – On Dec. 6, Laura Oglesby, 48, pleaded guilty to one count of intentionally providing false information to the Social Security Administration, The New York Times reported. Her story is much more complicated than that one charge. In 2016, Oglesby used her estranged daughter's identity to create another life for herself as Lauren Hays, a 22-year-old college student in Mountain View, Missouri. She obtained a Social Security card and driver's license, then racked up more than \$25,000 in debt with student loans and other expenses. She also worked at Southwest Baptist University and rented a room from Wendy and Avery Parker. "Everybody believed it," said Mountain View Police Chief Jamie Perkins. "She even had boyfriends that believed that she was that age: 22 years old." Oglesby may face up to five years in prison and will have to pay restitution to her daughter and SBU. [New York Times, 12/8/2021]

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**The Way the World Works** -- Those large inflatable Christmas decorations may fill the hearts of children with holiday cheer, but one young ursid saw a sparring partner and went on the attack in Monrovia, California, on Dec. 8. Donna Hargett captured video of a bear cub wrestling with her

neighbor's inflatable reindeer as the mama bear looked on, United Press International reported. "I looked up and there it was, jumping on the reindeer," Hargett said. "We see these two around all the time. They're trouble," she said. In fact, Hargett said they once broke into her home and left paw prints on the bed. No word on Rudolph's condition. [UPI, 12/10/2021]

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**Least Competent Criminal Justice System** -- Lauras Matiusovas, 30, was suddenly (and mistakenly) released from the Pentonville Prison in North London on Nov. 26 after serving only 48 hours of a four-year sentence. After he called the probation officer, who told him that everything was in order, Matiusovas did what any grateful con would do: He embarked on a 10-day boozing binge with his friends. "It's mad," one buddy said, according to the Daily Star. "He could have jumped on a flight and left the U.K. Instead, he chilled with us and had a great time." But it all came to an end on Dec. 6, when he was hauled back to his cell. The Ministry of Justice commented: "Releases in error are incredibly rare, but we take them extremely seriously." [Daily Star, 12/14/2021]

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**Sign of the Times** -- Working at home? Stubbed your toe while making the commute from the bedroom to your desk? In Germany, you can now sue for worker's comp insurance for injuries suffered while working at home. Germany's Federal Social Court ruled that an unnamed man who slipped on a spiral staircase and broke his back was entitled to coverage, saying it viewed the "first morning journey from bed to the home office as an insured work route," NBC Washington reported. [NBC Washington, 12/13/2021]

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**It's a Living** -- Hasan Riza Gunay, known as Turkey's one and only stress coach, has a unique method for easing his clients' angst: He lets them hit him (and doesn't hit back), Oddity Central reported. After a decade in the business, though, Gunay is ready to train someone to take his place. "Most of my clients suffer from depression or panic attacks," he said. "I would like to train other potentially interested people ... and hand over my gloves to the new generation." Gunay said around 70% of his clients are women whose strength is equivalent to that of boys 12 to 14 years old, so he doesn't worry about getting hurt. And he wears protective gear, sometimes accompanied by a photo of the person the client is unhappy with. [Oddity Central, 12/10/2021]

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**Bright Idea** -- Mark Rogers, 38, Joseph Way, 36, and Tashara Levans, 37, each pleaded guilty on Dec. 14 to one count of kidnapping a federal employee, which could get them nine years to life in federal prison, The Washington Post reported. It all started on Nov. 16, 2019, in Rochester, New York, when the three were anxiously awaiting a postal delivery of \$70,000 worth of cocaine. The mail carrier delivered several other packages to the home that day, but as she stepped off the porch, the trio accused her of stealing the drug package. They ransacked her mail truck, "then told

her she was coming with them," prosecutor Robert Marangola said during a hearing. In Levans' SUV, they told the postal employee that they were going to kill her, her children and her mother. They searched her personal vehicle, then continued driving her around while threatening her. But eventually they stopped and got out to talk. That's when the mail carrier used her smartwatch to text her supervisor and the Rochester Police Department. As the suspects finally dropped her off at her car, police swarmed the SUV and arrested them. Sentencing is scheduled for April. [Washington Post, 12/16/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | December 31, 2021 ++]

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## Vocabulary

### Some Words to Enhance Yours | 211231

Which word best matches these example sentences?

- (a) Medieval knights had to be \_\_\_\_\_ as they charged into the battlefield.  
(b) *emollient* – *winebibber* – *valorous* - *ocher*
- (a) Dave's wife became frustrated at him for being so \_\_\_\_\_ when she asked to go on a luxurious vacation  
(b) *parsimonious* – *erudite* – *desultory* - *hamartia*
- (a) After getting his MBA, Mike \_\_\_\_\_ed into a very successful businessman.  
(b) *audacious* – *facetious* – *burgeon* - *intrepid*
- (a) Emily was \_\_\_\_\_ in making sure that Friday night dinners began at 7 PM.  
(b) *inveigle* – *punctilious* – *cravat* - *voracious*
- (a) The politician's public scandal was an \_\_\_\_\_ failure.  
(b) *tryst* – *vitiate* – *ignominious* - *borborygmus*
- (a) The film reviewer was shockingly \_\_\_\_\_ in his review of the popular new film.  
(b) *beleaguer* – *audacious* – *miasma* - *ensorious*
- (a) No one can quite comprehend the \_\_\_\_\_ of time.  
(b) *troglydyte* – *abyss* – *redoubtable* - *embellish*
- (a) The audience fell in love with the comedian's \_\_\_\_\_ humor..  
(b) *etui* – *Lucrative* – *salubrious* - *scintillating*
- (a) The comedian's reputation rose as their \_\_\_\_\_ style gained prominence.  
(b) *Triskaidekaphobia* – *snickersnee* – *suborn* - *risible*
- (a) The \_\_\_\_\_ of certain taxes for small businesses during the global pandemic was key to their survival in times of economic hardshi  
(b) *Ascribe* – *exoneration* – *orotund* - *tyro*

**Answers**

1. Valorous [ val-er-uhs ] - showing great courage in the face of danger, especially in battle.
2. Parsimonious [ pahr-suh-moh-nee-uhs ] - unwilling to spend money or use resources.
3. Burgeon [ bur-juhn ] - begin to grow or increase rapidly; flourish.
4. Punctilious [ puhngk-til-ee-uhs ] - showing great attention to detail or correct behavior.
5. Ignominious [ ig-nuh-min-ee-uhs ] - discreditable, humiliating.
6. Censorious [ sen-sawr-ee-uhs ] - severely critical; fault-finding; carping.
7. Abyss [ uh-bis ] - anything profoundly unfathomable or eternal.
8. Scintillating [ sin-tl-ey-ting ] - witty; brilliantly clever.
9. Rsible [ riz-uh-buhl ] - causing or capable of causing laughter; laughable; ludicrous.
10. Exoneration [ ig-zon-uh-rey-shuhn ] - the act of relieving someone of an obligation or duty

[Source: <https://www.wordthirst.com> | December 31, 2021 ++]

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## Recipes

### Soup Up Your Menu

Whether you're stuck inside for health or weather reasons or just need some comfort food, these are good times for soup. You'll find a bunch of ideas in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Soup Up Your Menu**" that are a bargain and easy to make. Soups offer easy, tasty ways to [stretch a meal budget](#). Anything edible can be transformed into soup by simply boiling it in water, broth, or stock, so making soup is an excellent way to use leftovers and avoid food waste. These easy-to-make versions of popular recipes use canned stock and other convenient ingredients, but replacing them with [homemade versions](#) can save even more money. [Source: Cheapism | Jennifer Abel | December 29, 2021 ++]

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## Have You Heard or Seen?

### Potpourri #7 | Think Toons | Ambiguous Signage from Around the World

#### Potpourri #7

- Donald Trump has announced that he now has all the necessary materials to build "the wall" along the Mexican border. You should have known this when Trump won the election; 60 million Democrats each shit a brick.
- An old Marine Pilot sat down at the Starbucks, still wearing his old USMC flight jacket and ordered a cup of coffee. As he sat sipping his coffee, a young woman sat down next to him. She turned to the pilot and asked, 'Are you a real pilot?' He replied, 'Well, I've spent my whole life flying planes, first Stearmans, then the early Grummans... flew a Wildcat and Corsair in WWII, and later in the Korean conflict, Banshees and Cougars. I've taught more than 260 people to fly and given rides to hundreds,

so yeah, I guess I am a pilot, and you, what are you? She said, 'I'm a lesbian. I spend my whole day thinking about naked women. As soon as I get up in the morning, I think about naked women. When I shower, I think about naked women. When I watch TV, I think about naked women. It seems everything makes me think of naked women.' The two sat sipping in silence. A little while later, a young man sat down on the other side of the old pilot and asked: "Are you a real pilot?" He replied, 'I always thought I was, but I just found out I'm a lesbian.

- A husband, for their 10 year anniversary, bought his wife a map of the world. He wrapped it up in a box and attached a card. On the card it said, "Throw his dart at this map and wherever it lands is where I am taking you". He'd been saving up money for close to 2 years now because they had never been on a honeymoon. He then put a dart in his wife's hand. She was so excited and nervous. She said I hope it lands on Ireland. She finally threw the dart. He was happy to announce this October they will be spending 2 wonderful weeks beside the baseboard in the kitchen.
- A couple was having dinner one evening when the husband reached across the table, took his wife's hand, and said, "Beth, soon we will be married for 30 years, and there's something I have to know. In all these 30 years have you ever been unfaithful to me?"

Beth replied, "Well Charles, I have to be honest with you. Yes, I've been unfaithful to you three times these 30 years, but always for a good reason." Charles was obviously hurt by his wife's confession but said, "I never suspected. Can you tell me what you mean by good reasons?"

Beth said, "The very first time was shortly after we married, and we were about to lose our little house because we couldn't pay the mortgage. Do you remember that one evening I went to see the banker and the next day he notified you that the loan would be extended? Well I did what I had to do." Charles recalled the visit to the banker and said, "I can forgive you for that. You saved our home, but what about the second time?"

Beth answered, "And do you remember when you were so sick, but we didn't have the money to pay for the heart surgery you needed?" Well, I went to see you doctor one night and, if you recall, he did the surgery at no charge. I did what I had to do." "I recall that", he said. "And you did it to save my life so of course I can forgive you for that. Now tell me about the third time."

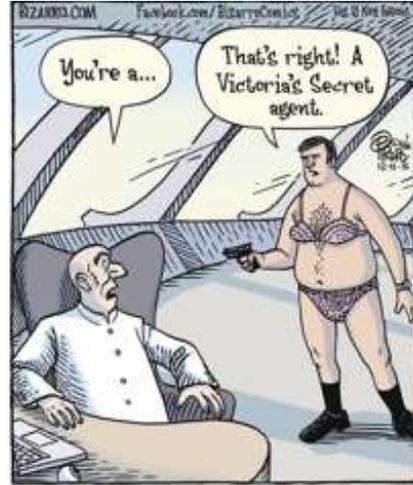
"All Right, Beth said. "So do you remember when you ran for President of the golf club, and you needed 73 more votes?"

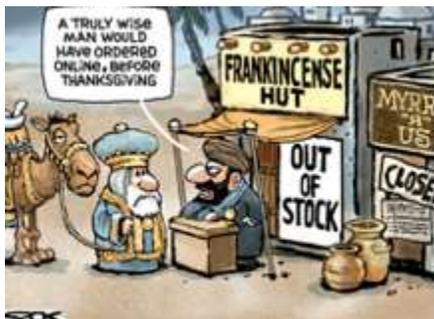
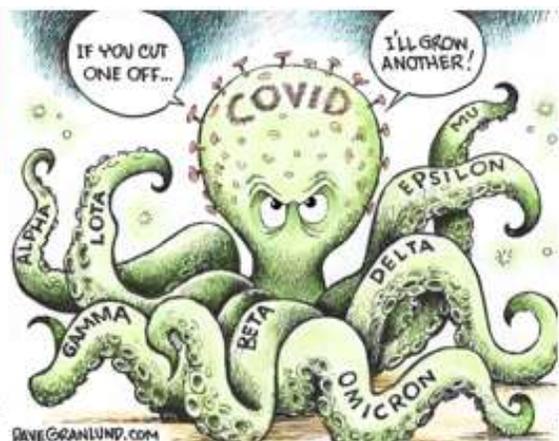
- One Christmas, a mother decided she was no longer going to remind her kids to send thank you notes. Consequently, the kids' grandmother never received any thanks for the Christmas checks she sent to the kids.

However, the very next Christmas, all the kids stopped by in person to thank their grandmother for their checks. When asked by a friend what caused this change in behavior, the grandmother replied,

"Simple. This year I didn't sign the checks."

## **Think Toons**





**Ambiguous Signage from Around the World**

- **In a Bangkok Temple:** IT IS FORBIDDEN TO ENTER A WOMAN, EVEN A FOREIGNER, IF DRESSED AS A MAN.
- **Cocktail Lounge, Norway:** LADIES ARE REQUESTED NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN IN THE BAR.
- **Doctor's Office, Rome:** SPECIALIST IN WOMEN AND OTHER DISEASES.

- **Dry Cleaners, Bangkok:** DROP YOUR TROUSERS HERE FOR THE BEST RESULTS.
- **A Nairobi Restaurant:** CUSTOMERS WHO FIND OUR WAITRESSES RUDE, OUGHT TO SEE THE MANAGER.
- **On the main road to Mombasa, leaving Nairobi:** TAKE NOTICE: WHEN THIS SIGN IS UNDER WATER, THIS ROAD IS IMPASSABLE.
- **On a poster at Kencom:** ARE YOU AN ADULT THAT CANNOT READ? IF SO, WE CAN HELP.
- **In a City restaurant:** OPEN SEVEN DAYS A WEEK AND WEEKENDS.
- **In a Cemetery:** PERSONS ARE PROHIBITED FROM PICKING FLOWERS, FROM ANY BUT THEIR OWN GRAVES.
- **Tokyo hotel's rules and regulations:** GUESTS ARE REQUESTED NOT TO SMOKE, OR DO OTHER DISGUSTING BEHAVIOURS IN BED.
- **On the menu of a Swiss Restaurant:** OUR WINES LEAVE YOU NOTHING TO HOPE FOR.
- **In a Tokyo Bar:** SPECIAL COCKTAILS FOR THE LADIES WITH NUTS.
- **Hotel, Yugoslavia:** THE FLATTENING OF UNDERWEAR WITH PLEASURE, IS THE JOB OF THE CHAMBERMAID.
- **Hotel, Japan:** YOU ARE INVITED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CHAMBERMAID.
- **In the lobby of a Moscow Hotel, across from a Russian Orthodox Monastery:** YOU ARE WELCOME TO VISIT THE CEMETERY, WHERE FAMOUS RUSSIAN AND SOVIET COMPOSERS, ARTISTS and WRITERS ARE BURIED DAILY, EXCEPT THURSDAY.
- **A sign posted in Germany's Black Forest:** IT IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN ON OUR BLACK FOREST CAMPING SITE, THAT PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT SEX, FOR INSTANCE, MEN AND WOMEN, LIVE TOGETHER IN ONE TENT, UNLESS THEY ARE MARRIED WITH EACH OTHER FOR THIS PURPOSE.

- **Hotel, Zurich:** BECAUSE OF THE IMPROPRIETY OF ENTERTAINING GUESTS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX IN THE BEDROOM, IT IS SUGGESTED THAT THE LOBBY BE USED FOR THIS PURPOSE.
- **Advertisement for donkey rides, Thailand:** WOULD YOU LIKE TO RIDE ON YOUR OWN ASS?
- **Airline ticket office, Copenhagen:** WE TAKE YOUR BAGS AND SEND THEM IN ALL DIRECTIONS.
- **A Laundry in Rome:** LADIES, LEAVE YOUR CLOTHES HERE AND THEN SPEND THE AFTERNOON HAVING A GOOD TIME.

And finally, the all-time classic, Seen in an **Abu Dhabi Souk shop window:**

- IF THE FRONT IS CLOSED, PLEASE ENTER THROUGH MY BACKSIDE.

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## Thought of the Day

Just remember whatever you put up with, you end up with.

-- Anonymous

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