



Veterans Affairs Media Summary and News Clips

2 November 2015

[1. Access to Benefits/Care](#)

1.1 - FOX News (Video): [Donald Trump releases plan to reform the VA](#) (1 November, 27.9M online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

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1.3 - The Washington Post (Fact Checker): [Hillary Clinton's misleading claim that 'numerous surveys' show veterans are satisfied with VA medical care](#) (2 November,

Michelle Ye Hee Lee, 20.3M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

Clinton was criticized immediately for downplaying the VA scandal, by saying it was not "as widespread as it has been made out to be." But her campaign later clarified that Clinton does believe there is a systemic problem of delays in veterans' access to health care and processing their disability claims.... Nonetheless, it's worth exploring her claim that a "number of surveys" show veterans "are satisfied with their treatment."

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1.4 - Baltimore Sun (AP): [Fayetteville Veterans Affairs Health Center set to open](#) (2 November, 3.6M online visitors/mo; Baltimore, MD)

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In this three-minute report, FOX News commentators play video of Donald Trump outlining the main points of his VA reform plan as well as segments of the earlier FOX and Friends interview with CVA CEO Pete Hegseth.

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1.6 - Inquisitr: [Trump VA plan to get healthcare for broken soldiers up to speed: Slackers beware](#) (1 November, Kenneth Lim, 848k online visitors/mo)

The Trump V.A. Plan was unveiled to a crowd of about 5,000 in front of the U.S.S. Wisconsin docked in Norfolk, Virginia, on Saturday, October 31, 2015. Standing on a platform to the starboard side of the warship, Republican presidential aspirant Donald Trump promised to fire top bureaucrats responsible for the malfunctions of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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1.7 - Military Times: [Deployment environmental reports not in military health records](#) (1 November, Patricia Kime, 540k online visitors/mo; Springfield, VA)

Some veterans have developed illnesses they believe may be related to exposure to pollutants released by open air burn pits, heavy metals found in fine dust, exposure to chemical weapons and parasites. Since at least 2012, however, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness waived that requirement, and a memo written in 2013 extended the waiver for another two years.

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1.8 - Providence Journal: [Veterans Journal: Elks pledge \\$4 million to end veteran homelessness](#) (1 November, George W. Reilly, 416k online visitors/mo; Providence, RI)

The Elks will work with VHA staff on pilot programs in Washington, Chicago and New York City, as well as calling on its 800,000 members nationwide to support efforts to assist homeless veterans in their communities... Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Allison Hickey resigned Oct. 19 as chief of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

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1.9 - Ocala Star-Banner: [Marion veterans office goes mobile with veterans briefings](#) (1 November, Andy Fillmore, 350k online visitors/mo; Ocala, FL)

Marion County Veterans Service Officer Jeffrey Askew, director of the office located on East Silver Springs Boulevard in Ocala, has announced Veterans Benefits Briefings in Marion Oaks, On Top Of the World, Silver Springs Shores and the Belleview and Forest public libraries to reach veterans who might otherwise not be able get to the office.

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1.10 - Sioux City Journal: [A 4th tour of duty opens at home for wounded veteran](#) (1 November, Tim Gallagher, 289k online visitors/mo; Sioux City, IA)

Todd Landen served three tours of duty overseas. He'd love to serve a fourth... The medical trek continued Tuesday at West High, as Todd Landen directed a question to Donald Trump, Republican candidate for president, the billionaire with all the answers. On this day, Trump stepped from the podium and walked to Landen. "These are our greatest people, the wounded warriors," Trump said.

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1.11 - Live Trading News: [Donald Trump's Policy Champions US Vets](#) (1 November, Paul Ebeling, 184k online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

Saturday, GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump released a plan to overhaul the Department of Veterans Affairs and improve veterans' health care and employment services. Under Donald Trump's plan, eligible Vets will be able to bring their veterans' identification cards

to any private doctor or facility that accepts Medicare and be able to receive immediate treatment.

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1.12 - InForum: [Letter: Acupuncture is another option to manage pain](#) (1 November, Rev. Terry R. Spath, 154k online visitors/mo; Fargo, ND)

The Forum front-page story, "Pain management hard to manage" by Robin Huebner, brought in the Drug Enforcement Administration's "crackdown" on chronic pain medications. There is hope for chronic pain patients who have had their prescriptions terminated or drastically reduced by the DEA "mandates" and related protocols in the use of acupuncture treatments.

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1.13 - The Courier: [Veterans get voice in Montgomery County community planning subcommittee](#) (1 November, Jay R. Jordan, 38k online visitors/mo; Houston, TX)

A new subcommittee for community planning in Montgomery County is looking into issues that plague veterans in the area. After kicking off annual community planning for the Houston-Galveston Area Council on Wednesday, officials revealed a new section added to the plan just for veterans. The existing committees focus on issues for courts, juveniles, victims, law enforcement and mental health.

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1.14 - Boothbay Register: [Presentation on VA Aid and Attendance Pension, November 10 at St. Andrews Village](#) (1 November, Alan Crowell, 26k online visitors/mo; Boothbay Harbor, ME)

Merchant, a financial services agent with Veterans Financial, Inc., will speak at St. Andrews Village Nov. 10 at 3 p.m. about benefits available for veterans and their dependents. Specifically, Merchant will focus on the VA's Aid and Attendance Pension, which can be used by qualifying veterans to pay for care in an assisted living community or services at home.

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2. Ending Veterans' Homelessness

2.1 - Daily Democrat: [Palo Alto: Summit highlights challenges of helping homeless veterans](#) (3 November, Jacqueline Lee, 47k online visitors/mo; Woodland, CA)

At the Summit on Ending Veterans Homelessness on Friday at the Mitchell Park Community Center, Rice talked about how others helped him so he could eventually help himself. The summit brought together representatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs and Santa Clara County, veterans, and nonprofit organizations that are working to improve access to health care and housing for the homeless.

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2.2 - Springville Journal: [Livingstone Masonic Lodge members to camp out for homeless veterans](#) (1 November, Max Borsuk, Springville, NY)

Homelessness among veterans continues to be a big problem both locally and nationally and the Livingstone Masonic Lodge #255 in Colden is doing their part to help raise awareness and money to help.

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3. Ending the Claims Backlog – No coverage

4. Veteran Opportunities for Education/GI Bill

4.1 - WND: Private for-profit colleges accused of swindling vets: Taxpayers foot bill for false promises, 'deceptive tactics' (1 November, 3.8M online visitors/mo; Medford, OR)
Are private, for-profit colleges unfairly targeting U.S. military veterans with deceptive, high-pressure sales tactics while bilking the American taxpayer in the process? That's what critics, including President Obama, are alleging.

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4.2 - KUTV-TV/CBS-2 (Sinclair Broadcast Group, Video): Full Measure: For-profit colleges allegedly prey on military members (1 November, 266k online visitors/mo; Salt Lake City, UT)
Some for-profit colleges are allegedly preying on military troops; veterans with benefits and a desire to build a new life become targets. They've even been given a name by some college recruiters: cash cows. About 300 thousand vets get up to \$21K a year in G.I. Bill money. In all, 1800 colleges - many of them for profits - have received more than \$20 billion G.I. Bill tax dollars.

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4.3 - Full Measure: Cash Cows: Military Colleges (1 November, 1k online visitors/day; Washington, DC)
In this nine-minute report: Full Measure brings you our investigation into how for-profit colleges allegedly preying on our military troops. Veterans with benefits and a desire to build a new life become targets, even given a name by some college recruiters: Cash Cows.

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5. Women Veterans

5.1 - KTNV-TV (ABC-13, Video): Women veterans hold meeting on benefits, assistance (31 October, 284k online visitors/mo; Las Vegas, NV)
A small group of female veterans held a meeting Friday to talk about their specific needs. The group gathered at the Veterans Administration Hospital in a first-of-its-kind event, according to officials with the Department of Veterans Services.

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[6. Other](#)

6.1 - ABC News (AP): [Police Adopt Drug Addict Program Pioneered in Massachusetts](#) (1 November, Philip Marcelo, 22.9M online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

A police program in northern Massachusetts that helps fast-track heroin addicts into treatment is catching on in other states and showing signs of reducing crimes associated with addiction. Gloucester police say dozens of departments in nine states have taken a page from their ANGEL program, which gives addicts a chance to make treatment rather than arrest the first response they get from police.

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6.2 - Examiner.com: [Hillary finally admits that VA's health care system is a mess](#) (1 November, Thomas Mangan, 18.4M online visitors/mo; Denver, CO)

Hillary Clinton has finally joined the rest of the world in realizing that the VA's health care system is an absolute disaster. Two weeks ago, when MSNBC's Rachel Maddow asked Clinton about the VA scandal and how she would fix the VA, Clinton replied that "It's not been as widespread as it has been made out to be."

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6.3 - The Washington Times (AP): [Interim director named for Cheyenne VA](#) (1 November, 3.5M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

Paul Roberts has been appointed the acting medical center director for the Cheyenne VA Medical Center and Clinics. The 51-year-old Roberts had been serving as the associate director of the Cheyenne VA since April 2013.

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6.4 - The Hill: [Veterans group pans Trump's 'unserious' VA plan](#) (1 November, Bradford Richardson, 2M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

A veterans advocacy group is criticizing the plan to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released by Donald Trump. Concerned Veterans for America (CVA) said the plan was "heavy of rhetoric, light on specifics" in a statement on Saturday.

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6.5 - Atlanta Journal-Constitution: [Actual Factual Georgia: VA hospital a product of 1960s](#) (2 November, 966k online visitors/mo; Atlanta, GA)

Q: When was the Veterans Administration Hospital on Clairmont Road built? —Donna Gensler, Atlanta. A: The Atlanta VA Medical Center's main building doesn't look much different now than when it opened in 1966, but it was more easily noticed at that time.

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6.6 - Las Vegas Review-Journal: [Editorial: Hillary minimizes VA problems for political gain](#) (1 November, 857k online visitors/mo; Las Vegas, NV)

On MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show" last month, Clinton said the problems at the VA are overblown and "not as widespread as it has been made out to be." She accused Republicans of unfairly targeting the VA as part of a bigger "ideological agenda."

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6.7 - CNN (Video): [New Day Sunday](#) (1 November, 413k broadcast viewers; Atlanta, GA)
In this six-minute video, CNN commentators discuss several aspects of Donald Trump's campaign, including his new VA reform plan. "Trump pledges to reform "corrupt" Veterans Affairs" is displayed at the bottom of the screen for the six minutes.

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6.8 - Wyoming Tribune-Eagle: [Paul Roberts takes over as the VA's interim leader](#) (1 November, Trevor Brown, 172k online visitors/mo; Cheyenne, WY)
Local veterans are hoping new leadership at the Cheyenne Veterans Affairs Medical Center will bring positive changes to the embattled facility. Cynthia McCormack retired Saturday after a 30-year career with the VA that included five years heading the local medical center. But her tenure here didn't come without controversy.

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6.9 - Sentinel & Enterprise: [Community Conversations Library sending sweet message to vets](#) (1 November, Cheryl A. Cuddahy, 121k online visitors/mo; Fitchburg, MA)
A generous person can do a lot when it comes to making a difference in the world, but a generous person with candy makes the difference that much sweeter. A candy drive for veterans will be held from Monday through Friday this week at Thayer Memorial Library, 717 Main St., Lancaster.

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6.10 - Star Beacon: [Hillary blames VA's problems on Republicans](#) (2 November, 41k online visitors/mo; Ashtabula, OH)
More than 300,000 American veterans dying while awaiting health care from the VA has "not been as widespread as it has been made out to be," according to Hillary Clinton. She truly believes the secret wait lists and lack of care is a Republican plot.

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6.11 - WHQR-FM (NPR-91.3, Audio): ["Invisible Wounds of War" Exhibit + Workshop, Lecture, Film This Month](#) (2 November, Gina Gambony, 600 online visitors/day; Wilmington, NC)
Jen Johnson and Dr. L. Kyle Horton are the founders of the Invisible Wounds of War project. Jen Johnson, MS, MFA, LPC is a writer, photographer, and mindfulness teacher and counselor. Dr. Horton is a Board Certified Internal Medicine Physician and former Primary Care Provider at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond.

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1.3 - The Washington Post (Fact Checker): [Hillary Clinton's misleading claim that 'numerous surveys' show veterans are satisfied with VA medical care](#) (2 November, Michelle Ye Hee Lee, 20.3M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

Rachel Maddow: The reason they [Republicans] are able to propose something that radical [privatizing the Department of Veterans Affairs] is because the problems at the VA seem so intractable. If I had been running Republican campaign against President Obama last year, I would have run it entirely on the VA — a bureaucracy, a bloated big government program that can't be fixed, and let's do right by our veterans. Do you have any new ideas for trying to fix it? You can't find a person in politics who doesn't say we shouldn't do right by our veterans. But for some reason, this can't get fixed fast enough.

Hillary Clinton: Yes, and I don't understand that. You know, I don't understand why we have such a problem, because there have been a number of surveys of veterans. And overall, veterans who do get treated are satisfied with their treatment. ... Now, nobody would believe that from the coverage that you see, and the constant berating of the VA that comes from the Republicans, in part in pursuit of this ideological agenda that they have.

Maddow: But in part because there has been real scandal.

Clinton: There has been. But it's not been as widespread as it has been made out to be.

– Exchange on MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show," Oct. 23, 2015

Several readers asked us to fact-check this claim, which drew sharp backlash from veterans groups and both Republican and Democratic lawmakers.

Clinton is referring to the VA scandal that unfolded in 2014 after whistleblowers alleged that dozens of veterans died at the Phoenix VA while waiting for medical care. The VA Office of Inspector General later acknowledged that wait lists may have contributed to the veterans' deaths. Patient and appointment record falsification and manipulations were then found to be a systemic, years-long problem.

In response to the scandal, Congress passed a bipartisan \$16.3 billion bill to overhaul the VA, setting aside \$10 billion to allow veterans to seek private medical care in certain circumstances. Some advocates called on Congress to expand this program to give veterans more options to get care from private doctors. A bipartisan task force commissioned by the conservative veterans group Concerned Veterans of America proposed drastic changes to the VA, including converting the Veterans Health Administration into an independent, government chartered nonprofit corporation.

Clinton was criticized immediately for downplaying the VA scandal, by saying it was not "as widespread as it has been made out to be." But her campaign later clarified that Clinton does believe there is a systemic problem of delays in veterans' access to health care and processing their disability claims. The campaign told The Fact Checker that she was "speaking with reference to Republicans who have sought to use the wait times scandal to suggest the VA is so incompetent as to be beyond fixing, such that the only fix is privatization."

Nonetheless, it's worth exploring her claim that a "number of surveys" show veterans "are satisfied with their treatment." What do the surveys show us?

The Facts

The Clinton campaign pointed to three surveys where the majority of veterans showed general satisfaction with the VA's health care.

A 2013 study commissioned by the VA used the American Customer Satisfaction Index to gauge veterans' satisfaction. The health system's inpatient care, based on veterans who had recently been discharged from a VHA acute medical center, rated 84 on a 0 to 100 scale — four points higher than the industry average. Outpatient care scored 82, within one point of industry average.

A VA-funded Rand Corporation study of veterans receiving mental health services from the Veterans Health Administration found 74 percent of patients reported being helped by the treatment they received, and 42 percent were "highly satisfied" with their VHA mental health care. But since the survey's results are several years old (they were completed in 2008 and 2009), the results may be used as a baseline to judge future satisfaction with the VA's services, according to the Rand Corporation.

The third report from the campaign was a September 2015 Veterans of Foreign Affairs survey of veteran attitudes and expectations of health care in the aftermath of the VA scandal. Using this study puts one on more solid ground when talking about veterans' experiences with the VA within the context of the wait time scandal.

Among the 1,847 veterans surveyed, 52 percent who said they were eligible for VA health care said they prefer the VA. But the VFW also found that veterans' preference for care changes based on the type of insurance they have. The VFW conducted the survey by sending out a Web survey link to its members and passing out physical surveys at a national conference. The

purpose is to get a pulse of the veteran community, rather than conduct a scientific survey, a spokesman said.

These three examples show the range of surveys of various veteran populations and their experience with the VA medical care. So, the veracity Clinton's statement really depends on the surveys used. The ones that she used were favorable toward the VA — plus, two out of three of them were funded by the VA. And the two VA studies of veteran satisfaction are of patients who actually received care. The crux of the VA scandal is with problems over access to care — over scheduling and manipulation of wait time data.

A campaign spokesman said that Clinton did not intend to “put too much weight on these surveys other than noting their existence.” So we decided to look at other surveys exist, that are conducted by independent sources using methodologies that meet The Washington Post's standards. These surveys show a spotty picture of veteran attitudes toward VA medical care.

A July 2014 Gallup survey of 1,268 veterans in the broader veteran population found 55 percent of veterans said it is somewhat difficult or very difficult to access care. “The common perception of most veterans about the difficulty of accessing VA care, many of whom have personally used the VA system, confirms that the department is failing to meet the medical needs of many of those it is designed to serve. At the same time, that is not the belief or experience of all veterans, with three in 10 saying it is easy to get access to medical care through the VA,” according to the Gallup report.

The Gallup survey is the most relevant to the VA scandal, as it relates specifically to access to care at the VA.

The 2011 Pew Research Center survey of veterans showed the best results for the VA. They found 52 percent rated the VA as excellent or good, and 38 percent rated it as only fair or poor, in meeting the needs of veterans. These results were similar among pre-9/11 and post-9/11 veterans.

Meanwhile, the December 2013 Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation survey of post-9/11 veterans found more negative views of the VA using the same question as Pew did: 58 percent rated the VA as only fair or poor in meeting veterans' needs, and 38 percent rated the VA as excellent or good. Among veterans who reported using VA health care when they were interviewed, 42 rated the VA positively and 57 percent rated it negatively.

Clinton campaign spokesman Brian Fallon said in a statement: “At this point, Republicans are trying to exploit the scandal to try to score partisan points and push an ideological agenda to privatize the VA. Hillary Clinton has said repeatedly that the systemic problem of excessive wait times at the VA is an outrage, but she refuses to believe the VA is beyond fixing. Republicans are trying to suggest the only solution to the VA's problems is to privatize it, but Hillary Clinton will not apologize for insisting on doing the hard work to reform the VA, rather than ending it altogether.”

A side note: Sen. Bernie Sanders used a similar talking point in a recent interview with Maddow. He said: “When I was chairman [of Senate veterans affairs committee], I had all of the major veterans organizations in front of me. American Legion, all of them. And I said, ‘Tell me, when veterans get into the VA, do you think the quality of care is good?’ And they said, ‘It's good to excellent. And that's how most veterans feel.’” But the difference with his statement is that he does not cite numerous surveys, and attributes the feedback to veterans groups he spoke with.

(Huge thanks to Scott Clement, who heads The Post's polling unit, for vetting and analyzing the polls cited in this article.)

The Pinocchio Test

Clinton makes a sweeping claim that a “number of studies” show that veterans who received medical care at the VA were satisfied with the treatment. She references these surveys to say that the VA's problems are not to the extent that Republicans make them seem. It's important to note that both Republicans and Democrats have heavily criticized the VA for mismanagement and lack of accountability.

Post-care satisfaction surveys do not necessarily reflect the population of veterans at the center of the VA scandal, which dealt particularly with patients' access to care. A large portion of veterans who received medical care may have had positive experiences, but this overlooks the hundreds of thousands of patients who experienced delays in care, or the dozens who died while waiting for care, as the inspector general found.

While she says numerous surveys show veterans' satisfaction, the examples her claim is based on are either funded by the VA or a non-scientific survey of veteran attitudes. Independent, scientific surveys show veteran attitudes toward medical care at the VA is mixed. And the Gallup poll that most directly relates to the issues unearthed by the scandal found that 55 percent of veterans found it somewhat difficult or very difficult to access VA care.

It's misleading to make a sweeping generalization about veterans attitudes on this topic and attribute it to “numerous surveys.”

Two Pinocchios

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1.4 - Baltimore Sun (AP): [Fayetteville Veterans Affairs Health Center set to open](#) (2 November, 3.6M online visitors/mo; Baltimore, MD)

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Fayetteville VA Director Elizabeth Goolsby says the center will be a big improvement over the Fayetteville Veterans Affairs Medical Center and will eventually lead to long-awaited relief to patient waits. The medical center will continue to house administrative offices, in-patient care and some specialty care.

Officials say the new center will treat 38,000 veterans and their families each year, providing primary care, specialty care, day surgery, audiology, pharmacy and radiology services.

Its opening clears the way for VA officials to eventually close three temporary clinics, including two in Fayetteville.

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1.6 - Inquisitr: [Trump VA plan to get healthcare for broken soldiers up to speed: Slackers beware](#) (1 November, Kenneth Lim, 848k online visitors/mo)

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Under the Trump V.A. Plan, the veteran's I.D. card could be used to access any health care center accepting Medicare, and secure immediate attention. Pilot Online flashed-back to former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki who resigned in 2014 after a scandal exposing employees in a conspiracy to conceal the long wait times for veterans needing health care.

Trump insisted that his V.A. plan would institute policies allowing Veterans Affairs facilities to compete with regular hospitals. The Hill quoted him making the following declaration.

"The plan will ensure our veterans get the care they need, wherever and whenever they need it...Think about me going to my doctor's office and waiting four days. If I wait 15 minutes, I'm angry as hell at the doctor."

During his speech running close to 90 minutes, Trump not only walked his audience through his V.A. Plan, but also reiterated his other campaign promises. He promised to use his negotiating skills and unpredictability to revamp U.S. relations with Iran and China, which have been taking advantage of "weak U.S. negotiators."

He restated his vow to construct a wall to stop illegal immigration and compel Mexico to foot the bill of the multi-billion dollar project. He attacked lopsided overseas trade deals and stressed his intention to bring jobs back to the United States. He expressed his determination to spend more on defense, and build a military so big and powerful that its very existence would serve as a deterrent to conflict.

According to International Business Times, the Trump V.A. Plan would attempt to improve the life of veterans returning from combat duty. It would entail more funding for post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide prevention services to “support the whole veteran.”

The Trump V.A. Plan unveiled to the Norfolk crowd and made available online to all interested parties, is organized in outline form for easy comprehension.

Urgency is emphasized in the opening sentences of the Trump V.A. Plan alluding to the fact that 300,000 veterans have died waiting for care.

What the Trump V.A. Plan proposes to deliver are: 1. no more long drives or waiting for backlogs as the affected veterans will get care whenever and wherever needed, 2. not just the physical care of veterans, but also their invisible wounds will be addressed, 3. the firing of corrupt and incompetent V.A. executives who have let injured soldiers down.

Trump expressed his determination to deliver his V.A. promises through an action plan. He broke down his agenda into the following focus points: 1. increase funding for post traumatic stress disorder and other invisible wounds, 2. increase funding for job training and placement services, 3. transform the V.A. operation to twenty-first century standards, cognizant of the younger, more diverse veterans, including female veterans, and 4. provide better support for women veterans, making the presence of O.B.G.Y.N. doctors in V.A. hospitals imperative.

In a recap by International Business Times of G.O.P. standings, a CBS/New York Times poll released on Tuesday, October 27, showed Trump’s lead faltering as fellow candidate Ben Carson pulled ahead in Iowa. However, an IBD/TIPP poll on Friday, October 30, had Trump, even before his much vaunted V.A. plan was made public, climbing back on top and leading Carson 28 percent to 23 percent.

Real Clear Politics now puts the author of the Trump V.A. Plan at 27 percent of the national average, besting Carson’s 22 percent.

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1.7 - Military Times: [Deployment environmental reports not in military health records](#) (1 November, Patricia Kime, 540k online visitors/mo; Springfield, VA)

For more than three years, the military services have been allowed to ignore a Defense Department order requiring the inclusion of environmental assessments of combat environments in troops’ medical records.

The Pentagon in 2006 published an instruction requiring the services add occupational and environmental risk assessments generated for locations during a certain period into medical records of troops who served in the affected place and time.

Some veterans have developed illnesses they believe may be related to exposure to pollutants released by open air burn pits, heavy metals found in fine dust, exposure to chemical weapons and parasites.

Since at least 2012, however, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness waived that requirement, and a memo written in 2013 extended the waiver for another two years, with acting Undersecretary of Defense (P&R) Jessica Wright saying the reports, known as Periodic Occupational and Environmental Monitoring Summaries — POEMS — are summaries of "population-level health risks," and not an indication of exposure to individual service members.

According to Wright, including the information in medical records could sway troops to link any illnesses they may have to their deployment environment, which may lead to "biased assessments of exposure and health risk" and possibly provide "support for disability claims for chronic illnesses that may not be due to exposure."

To troops and veterans sick with respiratory illnesses, cancers and unexplained diseases they think are related to pollution, chemicals or other environmental hazards in Iraq and Afghanistan, the memo, initially released online by the law firm Bergmann & Moore, is an outrage, a concerted effort to squelch the truth about deployment environmental hazards, from burn-pit pollution to dust laden with heavy metals.

"This is a rationale for denying not only patients, but also their physicians, ready access that DoD — and any reasonable American — should consider relevant to diagnosis and treatment," said Peter Sullivan, father of a Marine who died of an unexplained illness in 2009 following a deployment to Iraq. He is also director of the Sgt. Sullivan Center, a nonprofit that advocates for research on military environmental exposures.

"It feels like a slap in the face," said a retired Air Force master sergeant who suffers a debilitating lung disease and requested anonymity because she works for the federal government and fears retribution for discussing the subject. "We put our lives on the line over there and these are the people trying to deny me disability."

The original instruction required the services to file any applicable POEMS "in the medical records of each individual for which the exposure applies," or archive them so they are available to "health care providers and redeployed personnel."

Pentagon spokesman Air Force Maj. Ben Sakrisson said the information is available upon request and also is being published online in the Military Exposure Surveillance Library, with plans to post more "upon completion and after clearance for public release."

But the retired airman and others say few troops or medical personnel even know what a POEMS is, and even fewer know to ask for them.

"I never heard of them until I returned from Afghanistan the last time, and I was in the medical field," said the master sergeant, who said she began having respiratory problems after a deployment to Iraq in 2004.

Sakrisson said that since POEMS are not records of individual exposures, they do not provide confirmation of one.

DoD "initially directed placement of POEMS in the individual medical record as a means of having the data available to health care providers and others to provide greater knowledge of ambient environmental conditions and possible health concerns," he said.

"The department later determined not to place a copy of the POEMS in individual medical records because they are valid only on a population basis."

Retired Army Lt. Col. Rick Lamberth, who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan multiple times and worked near burn pits and in locations where chemical munitions were manufactured, disagreed, saying it would be helpful to have the deployment risk summaries in his medical records.

"It would substantiate what you are saying to your doctor and you wouldn't have to tell your background story over and over," said Lamberth, who says he has sleep apnea, unexplained rashes and respiratory inflammation that produces so much mucus that he chokes in his sleep.

Thousands of troops have reported medical problems they believe are related to living and working near burn pits used for waste disposal in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as exposure to dust, fine particulates, chemicals and parasites in the region.

The Veterans Affairs Department established a burn-pit registry to track the health of these individuals; as of Oct. 21, a total of 49,980 active-duty troops and veterans have begun the process of enrolling in the VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.

Many participants report health conditions ranging from asthma and emphysema to high blood pressure, insomnia and rare lung disorders.

"The pollution over there is so terrible. We knew that, and it seems like they should have been tracking it from the beginning," Lamberth said. "Now for them to deny including what little documentation they have in our medical records ... how fair is that? How is that justice?"

Sullivan, who has asked House lawmakers to initiate an investigation, noted that "not coincidentally," the same office responsible for the waiver "also has a record of minimizing the gravity and prevalence of deployment-related illnesses that appear to be connected to occupational and environmental exposures."

The services still must include any data on individual exposures collected through personal sampling monitoring or medical examination, according to the instruction, DoDI 6490.03.

But Sakrisson said not everyone is monitored during deployments and there may be no personal documentation for many.

DoD is moving to improve its capability to monitor exposures where warranted, Sakrisson added, but "the science and technology has not progressed to make individual environmental monitoring possible in some cases and practical in other cases."

The department is developing an initiative that would track environmental exposures for new accessions from recruitment through retirement, but that program, scheduled to begin within the next year, is of no use to veterans or those currently serving.

What exactly sickened many troops who served in the Middle East remains the topic of medical research. Burn pits were used to dispose of items ranging from medical and human waste to plastics, computers and items known to release cancer-causing agents into the air. Other studies have indicated that the fine dust particles in the region contain heavy metals that can cause diseases.

But data from the air quality monitoring for the region is scant.

A 2011 Institute of Medicine report said current literature and research lack conclusive evidence linking burn pits to poor health in troops and veterans.

Many of the POEMS available online state that little air sampling information is available to rate the long-term health risks for some locations.

Other POEMS indicate that levels of particulate matter in certain places during certain periods could potentially cause reduced lung function and asthma, but they do not mention the potential for more severe illnesses like constrictive bronchiolitis, a rare lung disease diagnosed in some troops, or cancer.

Sakrisson said DoD stands by its decision to post the POEMS online and not include the "lengthy summaries" in individual medical records.

"We agree [troops] have a clear right to know what the environment was like in their deployment locations, which is why we ensure the POEMS available and accessible," he said.

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1.8 - Providence Journal: [Veterans Journal: Elks pledge \\$4 million to end veteran homelessness](#) (1 November, George W. Reilly, 416k online visitors/mo; Providence, RI)

The Elks will work with VHA staff on pilot programs in Washington, Chicago and New York City, as well as calling on its 800,000 members nationwide to support efforts to assist homeless veterans in their communities.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is strengthening community and nonprofit partnerships to better serve veterans, and its latest partner is The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America, which has committed to raise \$4 million over a four-year period to work with the VA and help end veteran homelessness.

This partnership and pledge embody the mission of MyVA, launched last year to transform the VA by putting veterans in control of how, when and where they wish to be served. As a part of this partnership, the Elks will work with Veterans Health Administration staff on pilot programs in Washington, D.C., Chicago and New York City. In addition, the organization is calling on the BPOE's 800,000 members across the country to support efforts to assist homeless veterans in their communities.

The Elks have a strong tradition of service to VA. In this fiscal year alone, approximately 1,300 Elks members volunteered more than 117,000 hours of service at VA facilities nationwide.

"Our goal is to provide the tools and support necessary for homeless veterans to transition successfully into healthier and more stable lives," said Mary Morgan, director of the Elks National Veterans Service Commission. "Most Americans agree that veteran homelessness should not exist, but few people know how they can help."

For more information about VA's homeless initiatives, visit va.gov/homeless/. For more information about the Elks' service to veterans, visit elks.org/vets/.

Medal of Honor recipient

Retired Army Capt. Florent A. Groberg, of Bethesda, Md., will receive the Medal of Honor for heroism he demonstrated during combat operations in Afghanistan in August 2012. President Obama will present the award to Groberg during a Nov. 12 White House ceremony.

According to official records, Groberg was leading five soldiers on a security detail for senior leaders to meet with the provincial governor of Asadabad. Some 28 other coalition and Afghan security troops accompanied them when a man carrying a bomb emerged from a building, walking backwards, arousing suspicion from Groberg and Sgt. Andrew J. Mahoney, his radio operator.

Groberg and Mahoney jumped on the would-be attacker and pushed him to the ground. Then Groberg pulled the trigger to detonate the bomb, killing the attacker. A second suicide bomber then managed to detonate his bomb, killing five people on the mission, including Groberg's fellow service members and a volunteer.

Groberg was severely wounded, and medically retired from the Army as a result. He has since undergone 33 surgeries to prevent the loss of his leg. Mahoney earned a Silver Star for his role in the operation.

VA benefits chief resigns

Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Allison Hickey resigned Oct. 19 as chief of the Veterans Benefits Administration. She left under the shadow of another scandal touching the second-largest bureaucracy in the federal government. She is one of two administrators facing federal scrutiny for creating lucrative new jobs within the Department of Veterans Affairs, and then taking the jobs themselves. The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans service organization, had called for Hickey's removal in the aftermath of the latest sweetheart deal disclosures.

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1.9 - Ocala Star-Banner: [Marion veterans office goes mobile with veterans briefings](#) (1 November, Andy Fillmore, 350k online visitors/mo; Ocala, FL)

MARION OAKS — The Marion County Veterans Service Office has gone mobile to help better serve local veterans.

Marion County Veterans Service Officer Jeffrey Askew, director of the office located on East Silver Springs Boulevard in Ocala, has announced Veterans Benefits Briefings in Marion Oaks, On Top Of the World, Silver Springs Shores and the Belleview and Forest public libraries to reach veterans who might otherwise not be able get to the office.

"We know there are veterans who don't have transportation to get to our office or who may have mobility issues. They may not know what benefits are available to them from the Veterans Administration (VA)," Marion County Veterans Service Officer Jeffrey Askew stated in an earlier press release by the Marion County Board of County Commissioners.

"The VA provides many services to veterans including compensation, health care, pensions, education, death and burial benefits," Askew stated in the release.

The office typically assists about 7,000 veterans annually in securing benefits, from education to health care, for which they qualify.

Dr. Mark Knapp, primary care physician with the VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic in The Cascades in Ocala, said his clinic works closely with Askew and the local Veterans Service office.

"The Ocala VA clinic appreciates the support and help from Jeffrey Askew and his colleagues at the Veteran Service Office. We are on the phone weekly with his team referring veterans who need help with their benefits," Knapp said.

Askew said fiscal year figures for 2015 indicate that about \$123 million of veterans' benefits, in addition to pensions, flowed into Marion County, with about \$14 million of it being new benefits for this year.

The first Benefits Briefing was held Saturday at Marion Oaks Community Center, about 15 miles south of Ocala. The service of the veterans in attendance ranged from World War II to Afghanistan.

Askew told the veterans assembled for the meeting that the goal of his office is to make their lives better.

"Our mission is to improve the quality of life for veterans. (You) improved the quality of life for many Americans (and) some civilians may not appreciate what you did, but our office does," Askew told about the group of about 20 veterans.

Askew gave about a one-hour presentation that covered service-connected benefits, available health care, including glasses and hearing aids, loans, home-mobility upgrades such as ramps and other benefits that may be available to qualified veterans.

Askew said his office can assist veterans with obtaining military medical histories and military decorations. He also covered burial benefits for veterans at the National Cemetery in Bushnell.

Askew said World War II-era veterans were issued a "WD G-30" or War Department, Government Document 30 as a discharge, but from the Korean War-era to date, veterans have been issued a DD-214, or, when amended, a DD- 215, Department of Defense discharge.

Several times, Askew stressed the importance of veterans having their discharge papers and medical history readily available and available to their spouse or family members in an emergency.

Askew gave a slideshow tour of the Ocala-Marion County Veterans Memorial Park, located adjacent to the Veterans Service Office, which his office oversees.

The park features an event pavilion and about five acres of monuments and memorials, including a scale Statue of Liberty, a plaque honoring all U.S. presidents who served in the military, a Medal of Honor Monument honoring Marion County recipient Hammett Bowen Jr., a 911 Memorial and 5,000 service tribute bricks throughout the park.

A quarterly memorial ceremony is held at the pavilion in which the names of local veterans who died in the prior three months are read and honored.

“If you visit your park, I d like to give you a personal tour,” Askew told the veterans.

After the presentation, a veteran asked Askew why he had to travel to Gainesville for an eye procedure even though he thought he could get the procedure here, and another veteran asked about telephone scams directed at veterans.

Askew and Veterans Service Office supervisor Daisy Diaz, both U.S. Navy veterans, along with Lucy Docampo and Maria Vega with Marion County Community Services, met “one on one” with veteran attendees after the group session.

World War II veteran Bernard Walt, 91, a Marion Oaks resident, said the Veteran Benefit Briefing was “educational.” Walt worked in preparing invasion barges from 30 to 65 feet in length and was in France in July 1944.

Albert Padilla, a member of the National Guard who served in Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006, said the briefing was “great, informative.”

“This (type of meeting) is long overdue,” Padilla said.

Leo Shadeck, 78, of Marion Oaks, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1954 to 1962, stayed after the meeting to speak with Askew, as did Marvin Dooley, 69, a U.S. Air Force veteran who served from 1977 to 1999.

“The briefing today was very well organized. There is a health benefit I didn’t know I qualified for, but it looks like I do,” said Dooley, who indicated he now plans to visit the office in Ocala.

Staff at the Ocala office includes Veteran Service Officers Steve Jacobs and Amy Cuthen, Veteran Service Specialists Jackie Chin and Delia Frosolona, Staff Assistant II Rachel Wapinski and Staff Assistant III Esther Gomez.

Askew said his office is happy to help veterans and make house calls upon request to “navigate” what he said can sometimes be an “overwhelming” amount of red tape involved with VA benefit requests.

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1.10 - Sioux City Journal: [A 4th tour of duty opens at home for wounded veteran](#) (1 November, Tim Gallagher, 289k online visitors/mo; Sioux City, IA)

Todd Landen served three tours of duty overseas. He'd love to serve a fourth.

Landen, 46, is a soldier. It's what he wanted to do since listening to Vietnam War veterans talk about fighting their way through the jungles of Southeast Asia.

Landen hasn't waged war on an enemy since July 7, 2006, when an IED detonated beneath his Humvee, knocking him out and trapping him inside while a firefight raged at Kirkuk, Iraq, one of the war's hottest hot spots.

He came to enough to unlock the unit, allowing himself to be pulled from the blaze. He drifted in and out of consciousness -- in and out of the firefight -- for the next 40 minutes, suffering from a traumatic brain injury, broken ribs, two collapsed lungs and more.

As Landen's time on the battlefield ended, his long fight for health and security began.

Twenty-one surgeries and innumerable therapy sessions have followed since that blast nine years ago. Landen and his wife, Aprel Landen, and their daughter, Brianna, 9, have seen more hospitals, motels, doctors and medical pros than they dreamed possible, tracing a recovery path that stretches from a hospital in Kirkuk to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington, D.C., to Georgia, to Texas, to Sioux Falls, Dakota Dunes and Sioux City.

The medical trek continued Tuesday at West High, as Todd Landen directed a question to Donald Trump, Republican candidate for president, the billionaire with all the answers. On this day, Trump stepped from the podium and walked to Landen. "These are our greatest people, the wounded warriors," Trump said.

"I wanted to know what a Trump administration would do to support our wounded warriors," Landen said. "Trump turned it around by asking me a question," Landen said. "He asked if I was troubled by treatment with the VA (Department of Veterans Affairs)."

"We're having to drive 90 miles for routine appointments," Aprel Landen said in an interview Thursday. "Todd has had two surgeries done here locally and now we cannot see that doctor for follow-ups because it's not allowed under the VA. So, we have to drive."

Not all private providers are approved for care under the scope of the Veterans Administration. So, while the Landens continue to settle into a Sioux City home they purchased one year ago, they find themselves increasingly on the move, driving north on Interstate 29 as many as three times per week for services that, in many cases, are offered in Sioux City, or 10 minutes from home in Dakota Dunes.

Prior to his question for "The Donald," the Landens say several of Todd's medical records were not being shared between the VA and a neurosurgeon in Dakota Dunes. Things changed in a matter of 24 hours.

"We communicated all day on Wednesday with Trump's campaign manager," Aprel said. "They communicated with us, as did (U.S. Rep.) Steve King's office. The records are being shared today. Maybe that's a coincidence."

Aprel Landen hesitated while detailing their saga. She and Todd have been treated warmly and well by dozens of providers in the VA health-care network. Increasingly, she said, it has become difficult.

"We are stuck in a bureaucracy," she said. "People tell us their hands are tied. Well, that's not the answer."

Officials with the VA have also told the Landens that Todd's injuries qualify the family to have modifications made to their home through a vocational rehabilitation program. The split-level structure requires Todd, who walks with a cane, to use steps to access the home. There are times he has trouble moving down the home's narrow hallways. Electrical outlets and kitchen cabinets are difficult, nearly impossible, for him to access.

"The VA can help with changes, but it might take up to two years," Aprel said.

Fortunately, those costly challenges are being met privately through the Homebuilders Association of Greater Siouxland, a group of contractors, craftsmen and service providers that met the family and learned of their predicament, giving rise to both The Landen Project and a broader Project for Patriots, the primary reason Todd and Aprel Landen attended the Trump rally.

Jim Miller was summoned to the podium before Trump's appearance Tuesday. Miller, owner/operator of Scott's Lawn Service, detailed improvements planned for the Landen home, work that may ultimately require up to \$150,000. Miller got the effort going by offering to care for the family's lawn for one year, his thanks for Todd Landen's sacrifice.

"I didn't feel we needed the assistance, but after a few trips to the hospital it became evident this isn't just for my benefit, but for my family," Todd Landen said.

Steve Struthers, of Modern Kitchen Design and president of Projects for Patriots, said local contractors will lead efforts to equip the Landen home with a handicapped-accessible elevator. Ground will be broken Wednesday for a 700-square-foot master wing addition.

"Seventy percent of the materials and 100 percent of the labor are committed already," Struthers said.

Halls will be widened, new kitchen cabinets will be installed, the outlets will be raised and the kitchen sink will be lowered, allowing for easier access for Todd and Jake, his service dog, who will arrive as soon as the renovation is complete.

In many ways, this is a local/military "Extreme Home Makeover," during which the Landens will be relocated, allowing dozens of volunteers to work around the clock. If all goes well, the Landens could return to their "new" home by Feb. 1.

Breezy Struthers Drake, another member of the Projects for Patriots group, said the effort must have \$20,000 for work to continue full-speed. A fundraiser set for 5:30 p.m. Thursday involves a social hour and 7 p.m. movie screening of "The Hornet's Nest," a documentary that follows Landen's platoon within the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, detailing a story of survival on the front lines.

Landen, who served as a consultant for the project and is listed in the credits, will answer questions from the audience after the screening. Donations will be accepted for Projects for Patriots.

"We may have people who give \$5 and those who give \$100," said Struthers Drake, a Modern Kitchen Design principal who continues to spread the word about the effort.

Landen said he'd do the same. He sees this important work as his fourth tour of duty. There are other local veterans who are struggling in their home and having difficulty reaching out to those who can help.

"I was taken out of the fight early. I wish I was still there," he said. "This (Projects for Patriots) gives me a sense of purpose, even if it's asking one to humble himself to accept the help of others."

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1.11 - Live Trading News: [Donald Trump's Policy Champions US Vets](#) (1 November, Paul Ebeling, 184k online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

Saturday, GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump released a plan to overhaul the Department of Veterans Affairs and improve veterans' health care and employment services.

Under Donald Trump's plan, eligible Vets will be able to bring their veterans' identification cards to any private doctor or facility that accepts Medicare and be able to receive immediate treatment. The change will help improve wait times and services by adding competition.

"The plan will ensure our veterans get the care they need whenever and wherever they need it," said Donald Trump, who previewed the plan during a rally that drew thousands in front of the USS Wisconsin in Norfolk, Virginia.

The VA has become a frequent target of both Republicans and Democrats, having been plagued by scandal in recent years over long wait times for veterans seeking medical care and falsified records by VA employees to cover up delays.

The Congress approved a sweeping overhaul of the department last year, but the VA continues to draw scrutiny for management and budget troubles.

Donald Trump's plan would increase funding for treating post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide prevention as well as provide additional job training and placement.

"Politicians in Washington have tried to fix the VA by holding hearings and blindly throwing money at the problem. None of it has worked," according to the plan. "It's time we stop trusting Washington politicians to fix the problems and empower our veterans to vote with their feet."

Donald Trump has also released policy papers on immigration, the Second Amendment and tax reform.

Veterans groups have criticized Republican presidential contender, Dr. Ben Carson, for proposing to eliminate the Department of Veterans Affairs entirely.

Democratic front-runner Hillary Rodham Clinton's campaign has said she believes Vets have hit pretty good in this country as things are.

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1.12 - InForum: [Letter: Acupuncture is another option to manage pain](#) (1 November, Rev. Terry R. Spath, 154k online visitors/mo; Fargo, ND)

The Forum front-page story, "Pain management hard to manage" by Robin Huebner, brought in the Drug Enforcement Administration's "crackdown" on chronic pain medications. There is hope for chronic pain patients who have had their prescriptions terminated or drastically reduced by the DEA "mandates" and related protocols in the use of acupuncture treatments.

Even the Fargo Veterans Affairs Medical Center is now offering patients who are suffering from chronic pain acupuncture treatments as an alternative when faced with having their pain medications reduced or terminated as a result of the actions taken by the DEA within the VA medical system. The DEA "crackdown" has turned into a war against people suffering with chronic pain, and the DEA plans to escalate these actions in the coming year, 2016.

This deeply flawed and counterintuitive new policy has caused untold suffering, pain and suicides among people suffering from chronic pain. However, acupuncture offers us a new hope for a quality life in an effective alternative treatment for chronic pain; this in spite of the heavy hand of the DEA and their cooperating actors in the medical community.

I am getting acupuncture treatment at the Van Dam Clinic in Fargo, and it has made a world of difference with my chronic pain. This treatment used a viable alternative after having my medications drastically reduced due to the actions of the DEA mandates. Acupuncture is giving me back my life.

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1.13 - The Courier: [Veterans get voice in Montgomery County community planning subcommittee](#) (1 November, Jay R. Jordan, 38k online visitors/mo; Houston, TX)

A new subcommittee for community planning in Montgomery County is looking into issues that plague veterans in the area.

After kicking off annual community planning for the Houston-Galveston Area Council on Wednesday, officials revealed a new section added to the plan just for veterans. The existing committees focus on issues for courts, juveniles, victims, law enforcement and mental health.

"I've learned that it's not only criminal justice community planning, now it's focused on public safety," Ashley Taylor, veterans service liaison for Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare and subcommittee leader, said. "We've broadened it and brainstormed."

Taylor and her two-person counterpart, made up of a local veteran and a Veterans Affairs employee, already came up with three issues they believe need to be addressed in Montgomery County.

One was a re-entry program for incarcerated veterans in the Montgomery County Jail.

“We kind of want to just get a conversation going about what’s possible, what works in other areas, just talking about that,” Taylor said. “There has been some success with other jail facilities where they house veterans altogether.”

The group also thinks finding housing is an issue for some veterans, like those with criminal history or who are homeless.

“That’s one that’s kind of broad,” Taylor said. “We like to focus in on the justice involved part that it’s hard for people with records, but also connecting homeless veterans to housing. We’re working through that priority.”

The third initial priority the group thinks could be looked at for veterans in Montgomery County is transportation. With Conroe having one of only a handful of VA clinics in the area, many veterans have to travel to Conroe from rural parts of the county or even from outside the county.

Having a transportation grant could also help Montgomery County veterans with getting to the VA hospital in Houston, she said.

“I have had calls from veterans up in Huntsville saying I can’t get to my appointment,” Taylor said. “What do you tell them? There aren’t a lot of taxis, or they’re expensive.”

The HGAC hosts annual community planning events to gather information about what issues plague the county. Some of the issues on the existing community plan include truancy with juveniles, criminal victims advocacy and a need for legal assistance for pro-se defendants in the courts.

The full list of issues on the community plan can be found at www.h-gac.com.

“They go through the (existing) plan and ask if that’s an issue that can stay, what can they add, and they just categorize what’s most important,” Rebecca Ansley, grant coordinator for Montgomery County, said Wednesday. “They get together, have another meeting on their own. They have to get statistics and things to back up what they’re wanting to put in the plan, and that’s what they send to me after that.”

Plans for each of the now six subcommittees are due Nov. 25 for final approval by the council.

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1.14 - Boothbay Register: [Presentation on VA Aid and Attendance Pension, November 10 at St. Andrews Village](#) (1 November, Alan Crowell, 26k online visitors/mo; Boothbay Harbor, ME)

In 1996, Jim Merchant moved from Iowa, where he was a high school and college basketball coach back to his hometown in Fairhaven, Mass. to care for his mother.

It was the beginning of an education for Merchant on the cost of in-home care and care provided in nursing facilities. One thing he didn’t realize at the time was that his mother, as the

surviving spouse of a veteran, qualified for benefits through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Merchant, a financial services agent with Veterans Financial, Inc., will speak at St. Andrews Village Nov. 10 at 3 p.m. about benefits available for veterans and their dependents.

Specifically, Merchant will focus on the VA's Aid and Attendance Pension, which can be used by qualifying veterans to pay for care in an assisted living community or services at home.

Through that benefit, a married veteran and spouse can receive up to \$2,120 a month tax free. A single veteran can receive up to \$1,788 a month and the surviving spouse of a veteran can receive up to \$1,149 a month through the program.

To qualify, veterans must meet several conditions. They must have served at least 90 days of active duty with at least one of those days coming during a wartime period, have health concerns that affect their activities of daily living and meet income and asset guidelines.

Merchant said too many veterans and their families don't know what benefits they qualify for and others may be discouraged by the long and arduous application process.

During the presentation, Merchant will discuss how veterans, even those with significant family assets, can qualify and what they can expect during and after the application process.

Veterans Financial is a private financial service company that specializes in the Aid and Attendance benefit. Since 2004 Veterans Financial has helped over one hundred thousand people learn about this little known VA Pension. Merchant said that Veterans Financial does not receive reimbursement for helping veterans or their families navigate the VA system.

He said that most of his company's clientele are the grown children of veterans who are now caring for their veteran-parents and learning about VA benefits for the first time.

"We are problem solvers. If you can't find your discharge paperwork, we have the form and we know what to do," said Merchant.

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2. Ending Veterans' Homelessness

2.1 - Daily Democrat: [Palo Alto: Summit highlights challenges of helping homeless veterans](#) (3 November, Jacqueline Lee, 47k online visitors/mo; Woodland, CA)

PALO ALTO -- From 2007 to 2010, Army veteran David Rice lived in his car, a temporary house or on the street.

Like many others who served in the military, he was highly trained and accustomed to being self-sufficient. He didn't want to admit he was homeless or ask for help.

"Once I became homeless it was a daunting task to get myself out," Rice said.

At the Summit on Ending Veterans Homelessness on Friday at the Mitchell Park Community Center, Rice talked about how others helped him so he could eventually help himself.

The summit brought together representatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs and Santa Clara County, veterans, and nonprofit organizations that are working to improve access to health care and housing for the homeless. Panelists offered a snapshot of homelessness in the county, with an emphasis on the challenges of helping veterans.

According to a recent county survey, 683 of the county's 6,556 homeless are veterans.

That total combines "sheltered" people -- those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing and safe havens -- and "unsheltered" people -- those living on the street, in camps, or in abandoned buildings and cars.

The county has a high number of unsheltered homeless individuals in part because of its mild weather and lack of affordable housing, according to Jennifer Loving, executive director of Destination Home.

Loving said the county needs to get creative with developing housing options. She wants the county to get to the point where it's routine to evaluate "all available land" as potential housing for those who need it the most.

Rice didn't know where to go for help until a friend connected him with Veterans Affairs, which has a homeless relocation program.

Temporary housing allowed Rice to focus on getting a job and paying down debt. Through the program, he also got legal and financial help to clear his substance abuse criminal record. And, he learned coping mechanisms to address alcohol and anger issues.

Now he has a job with the Department of Veterans Affairs in Palo Alto.

The effort to get Rice back on his feet was highlighted by Air Force Col. Nicole Malachowski, the summit's keynote speaker.

Malachowski commended the panelists' work and said it was time for their respective groups to come together and identify the gaps that exist in providing care to homeless veterans.

She said there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution and pointed to the county's unique position -- its wealth and innovation can drive up housing prices, exacerbating homelessness, but also generate public-private partnerships and studies to solve the problem.

Malachowski, who flew combat missions in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, now serves as the executive director of Joining Forces, an initiative by Michelle Obama and Jill Biden to support military families.

Also at the summit, Palo Alto Mayor Karen Holman announced that she would sign on to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, which the first lady issued earlier this year.

So far, 629 mayors and nine governors have signed on, Malachowski said.

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2.2 - Springville Journal: [Livingstone Masonic Lodge members to camp out for homeless veterans](#) (1 November, Max Borsuk, Springville, NY)

COLDEN—Homelessness among veterans continues to be a big problem both locally and nationally and the Livingstone Masonic Lodge #255 in Colden is doing their part to help raise awareness and money to help.

Members of the Livingstone Masonic Lodge will be holding a fundraiser to collect donations for homeless veterans of Western New York. Event hosts Michael Willibey and David Peters, who are also both veterans, will be camping out at the Colden Veterans Memorial starting Nov. 6 at 4 p.m. until Nov. 8 to raise awareness for homeless veterans and collect donations.

“We saw a need and we like to be active, we like to be doing things and we like to be helping,” said Willibey. “One quarter of the homeless population right now are veterans throughout the country, so myself and another veteran decided how do we raise money for this and we decided to do the campout.”

This is the first year that the Masonic Lodge will be hosting a fundraiser in addition to their annual Veterans Day events. Since 2007, they have hosted an event to honor veterans the Sunday before Veterans Day so it does not conflict with other services held on Veterans Day. Starting at 10 a.m. on Nov. 8, there will be a veterans parade starting from LivingStone Masonic Lodge and ending at the Colden Veterans Memorial where there will be a short service. After the parade and service, people can come back to the lodge for a party to celebrate the veterans.

“This has become a community event in Colden,” said Willibey. “People can come down and visit, support the cause, come down and tell stories or they can just come down on Sunday and be part of the Veterans Day celebration.”

To help make sure the money goes directly to help homeless veterans in need, the Masonic Lodge partnered with Buffalo Veterans Affairs, who will make sure the money stays in Western New York to help homeless veterans. In future years, Willibey said they will continue to work with the VA to see where money is needed and focus the fundraiser around that issue.

“We will coordinate with the VA to determine where the needs are,” Willibey said. “It will always be a veterans event, but it may be a different avenue or a different place where the money needs to go.”

Cash and check donations will be accepted during the campout or checks can be mailed to Livingstone Lodge #255, 8798 Lower East Hill Road Colden, NY, 14033. Checks can be made payable to Living Stone Lodge #255.

For more information on the Campout for Homeless Veterans, visit townofcolden.com.

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3. Ending the Claims Backlog – No coverage

4. Veteran Opportunities for Education/GI Bill

4.1 - WND: [Private for-profit colleges accused of swindling vets: Taxpayers foot bill for false promises, 'deceptive tactics'](#) (1 November, 3.8M online visitors/mo; Medford, OR)

Are private, for-profit colleges unfairly targeting U.S. military veterans with deceptive, high-pressure sales tactics while bilking the American taxpayer in the process?

That's what critics, including President Obama, are alleging.

Obama's Justice Department as well as attorneys general in 18 states have opened investigations into the industry, reports independent journalist Sharyl Attkisson in her latest production of Full Measure.

More than 300,000 veterans get up to \$21,000 a year in federal GI bill money.

In all 1,800 colleges, many of them for profit, have received more than \$20 billion GI bill tax dollars, Attkisson reports.

"With so many billions in the mix it's easy to see why some colleges use high-pressure and allegedly dishonest tactics, and now taxpayers are about to be on the hook for alleged misconduct by the schools," she said.

U.S. Marine Brian Babcock is one veteran who feels he was cheated out of his GI Bill money by an overzealous and deceptive private university.

Babcock fought on the front lines of in Iraq, including the second battle of Fallujah.

After seeing a commercial on TV, he decided to use his GI bill grant to attend ITT Technical Institute with the goal of getting a criminal justice degree and becoming a police officer.

He told Attkisson that ITT promised his degree would be accepted practically everywhere.

The cost of the degree, \$70,000, would far exceed his GI grant at the time, but ITT made it easy for him to borrow, to the point of helping him fill out paperwork for student loans. Then, after his third year, he was presented with a stark reality.

He said he applied at 25 to 30 police agencies and every one of them said they did not acknowledge degrees from ITT Tech.

"I was angry I'd spent all this money on student loans, and it turned out that the degree, if I had finished there, would have been pretty much useless," he told Attkisson.

ITT Tech is a for-profit technical institute with more than 130 campuses in 38 states. ITT is owned and operated by ITT Educational Services Inc., a publicly traded company headquartered in Carmel, Indiana.

Babcock's complaint is all too familiar to thousands of vets, Attkisson reports, who attended for-profit colleges, where students are more likely to drop out, default on loans, or graduate with overwhelming debt that didn't produce a useful degree.

Of eight for-profits that get the most GI funds, seven have been targets of inquiries into possible violations, including deceptive or misleading recruiting, Attkisson reports.

Together they receive nearly \$1 billion in tax dollars over two school years.

One of those companies was DeVry University, where Chris Niway was hired to recruit vets under the new GI bill. Assigned to "Team Camo," Niway, a veteran himself, said he was urged by managers to use high-pressure sales tactics to sign up vets who often weren't cut out for college.

If Team Camo dared to let vets suspend class, even if assigned to active National Guard Duty, management balked, he told Attkisson.

"The company didn't care, they just wanted to make sure they stayed in their classes so the company would continue to be paid and they would continue to be on the enrollment rolls," he said. "Management's guiding wisdom was, to be frank, get their ass in class."

DeVry officials declined to be interviewed on camera but released the following statement: "DeVry has a long history of serving veterans and military personnel, dating back to the 1940s and we offer quality academics and student services with flexibility to meet their busy schedules."

The Department of Defense recently banned another for-profit, the University of Phoenix, from enrolling new service members, alleging a pattern of violating policies designed to protect military students.

Steve Gunderson, a former Republican congressman from Wisconsin who now heads up the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, says for-profits are under assault from opponents and competitors.

"If anybody has a bad outcome and certainly if a veteran has a bad outcome, that's a problem and we want to fix that," he told Attkisson. "But I have never before seen a situation where a sector is the target of attacks for ideological reasons. I mean, there simply are people who do not believe the private sector ought to be involved in the design and delivery of education."

He said there is no doubt in his mind there are schools in every sector of higher education – public or private, profit or nonprofit – that have engaged in inappropriate conduct, whether it be in the area of athletics or admissions.

Private for-profit schools have actually beat public colleges in one area, that being graduation rates, Attkisson reported.

With billions flowing to profits under investigation, Obama issued a warning at a Fort Steward Army base to any private colleges targeting the troops.

"They don't care about you, they care about the cash," he told them.

Sen. Dick Durban, D-Ill., has introduced bills to fight for-profit college fraud, “only to see the bills get watered down and voted down,” Attkisson said.

Durban said the for-profit schools can afford to take chances because they don’t “have any skin in the game.”

Attkisson said taxpayers have the most skin in the game.

Corinthian Colleges Inc., a large chain of for-profit schools in North America, was shut down in May amid fraud accusations, which the college denied. More than \$3.5 billion in student loans will be forgiven, putting taxpayers on the hook.

Gunderson said that if Babcock had not given up on his degree he would have had opportunities.

“There are many that would have hired him, maybe not the one that he wanted,” Gunderson said.

“I think it’s a shame that they prey on men and women who volunteered to protect this country and that earned a benefit with their service and then ITT and the other private schools are just trying to take that,” he told Attkisson.

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4.2 - KUTV-TV/CBS-2 (Sinclair Broadcast Group, Video): [Full Measure: For-profit colleges allegedly prey on military members](#) (1 November, 266k online visitors/mo; Salt Lake City, UT)

WASHINGTON (Sinclair Broadcast Group) — Some for-profit colleges are allegedly preying on military troops; veterans with benefits and a desire to build a new life become targets.

They've even been given a name by some college recruiters: cash cows.

About 300 thousand vets get up to \$21K a year in G.I. Bill money. In all, 1800 colleges - many of them for profits - have received more than \$20 billion G.I. Bill tax dollars.

With so many billions in the mix, it's easy to see why some colleges use high pressure and allegedly dishonest tactics. Now, taxpayers are about to be on the hook for alleged misconduct by the schools.

As a U.S. Marine, Bryan Babcock fought on the front lines in Iraq including the Second Battle of Fallujah in 2004. His post-military plan: police work. He used his GI Bill money to pursue a criminal justice degree at the for-profit college ITT Tech.

Attkisson: How did you hear about it?

Babcock: I saw a commercial on TV. That kind of got me interested in them.

Babcock says ITT promised that police agencies everywhere would accept the degree. The cost --\$70,000-- would far exceed his GI Bill grant at the time, but ITT made it easy for Babcock to

borrow. He says they even helped him fill out paperwork for student loans. Then, after his third year, he made a startling discovery.

Babcock: We applied to 22 or 23 police departments.

Attkisson: And what did they say?

Babcock: All of them said that they did not recognize ITT's degrees or their credits.

Attkisson: And what thoughts went through your head when you heard this?

Babcock: I was angry that I'd spent all this money in student loans and it turns out that the degree, if I would have finished there, would have been pretty much worthless.

It's a story told by thousands of vets who attended for-profit colleges where students are more likely to drop out, default on their loans, or graduate in dire debt without a useful degree.

Of eight for-profits that get the most GI bill funds, seven have been targets of inquiries for possible violations including deceptive or misleading recruiting.

Together, they received nearly a billion (\$939,086,610 million) tax dollars over two school years.

One of those companies is DeVry University where Chris Neiweem was hired as the school recruited vets under the new GI Bill.

A veteran himself, Neiweem was assigned to "Team Camo" where he says managers urged the sales team to use high-pressure tactics on troops who sometimes weren't suited for college.

"Working in the industry at that time truly reminded me of the film "Glengarry Glen Ross," he said.

"There is this scene where a corporate sales manager is brought in to improve the performance of the sales floor - played by Alec Baldwin."

In the scene, Baldwin says to a salesman "they're sitting out there waiting to give you their money, are you gonna take it?"

"And that was similar at the company," said Neiweem.

If "Team Camo" dared to let veterans suspend class while in combatlike those in the National Guard Neiweem says management called them on the carpet.

Neiweem: The company didn't care. They just wanted to make sure that they stayed in their classes and so the university could continue to be paid and they would continue to be on the enrollments books.

Attkisson: Even if they were in a combat zone that didn't make sense for them to try to go to college on the computer?

Neiweem: Yes. Management's guiding wisdom was, to be frank, "get their ass in class."

Neiweem showed Full Measure today's sales tactics at work.

In a chat on DeVry's website, he asks about costs and benefits--but can't get direct answers.

"I can have a representative from our military admissions team reach out to you," he said, reading the response of a recruiter.

"It's fairly frustrating that I asked these questions and I can't get answers. Rather, they're trying to sort of tie me in and get me closer so they can work towards selling the school."

DeVry officials declined an on camera interview but said "Devry has a long history of serving veterans and military personnel" dating back to the 1940's. And "[W]e offer quality academics and student services with flexibility to meet their busy schedules."

Former Congressman Steve Gunderson leads the main national for-profit college trade group called the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU).

"If anybody has a bad outcome, and certainly if a veteran has a bad outcome, that's a problem and we want to solve that," he said

He believes for-profits are under assault from opponents and competitors.

Gunderson: I have never before seen a situation where a sector is the target of attacks for ideological reasons. I mean, there simply are good people who do not believe the private sector oughta be involved in the design and delivery of education.

Attkisson: Fair enough, but is there any doubt in your mind that some schools have used unfair, unethical, or even dishonest tactics?

Gunderson: There is no doubt in my mind that there are bad schools in every sector of higher education who have engaged in inappropriate conduct for various reasons whether it be athletics or whether it be admissions or it be something else.

Gunderson said the industry is improving.

A Government Accountability Office report found for-profits catering to military students actually beat public schools in one area: higher graduation rates.

With billions flowing to for-profits under investigation, President Obama dispatched a warning at Ft. Stewart army base about any for profits that may be preying on the troops.

"It's not right. They're trying to swindle and hoodwink you. They don't care about you; they care about the cash," he said.

But as federal scrutiny surged, the industry has countered with Washington lobbyists and campaign cash.

Since 2010, for-profit colleges have poured nearly \$10 million (\$9,906,512) into campaign contributions and spent \$41 (\$41,924,452) million on lobbying, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Illinois): That's how you really win friends and influence people on Capitol Hill. The for-profit colleges and universities have friends in high places.

Attkisson: That implies some members in congress, you think, are bought and paid for on this issue.

Sen. Durbin: I would say this - they are influenced by it.

Senator Durbin has pushed one bill after another to fight for-profit college fraud, only to see the bills get watered down and voted down.

"If these schools that are enticing kids into loans for educations that are worthless had some 'skin in the game,' some responsibility for default, they'd think twice about it. But they don't. They could care less," he said.

It turns out taxpayers have the most skin in the game.

In June, the federal government said it will forgive loans for students at Corinthian College, putting taxpayers on the hook for up to \$3.5 billion. Corinthian shut down in May amid fraud accusations, which the company denied. And the feds may wipe out loans at other problematic colleges.

In May, the federal government charged Babcock's alma mater, ITT Tech, with fraud, alleging it concealed financial information from investors.

ITT is fighting the charges, but declined our interview request.

Gunderson says he doubts Babcock's ITT degree would have really been useless.

"I am willing to say, that if he graduated, from an accredited criminal justice program, there are many police agencies that would hire him. Maybe not the one he wanted to go to, but there are many that will, and evidence all across the country shows that" said Gunderson.

Babcock gave up on the ITT degree and his dream of police work. Instead, he's focused on warning other vets, and working to pay down his \$40 thousand student loan debt.

"I think it's a shame that they prey on men and women that volunteered to protect this country. And that earned a benefit with their service, and then ITT and the other for-profit schools are just trying to take that," he said.

The Defense Department recently banned the University of Phoenix from recruiting on military bases, alleging a pattern of violating policies designed to protect military students. Senator Durbin says ITT is now facing investigations by the Justice Department and 18 Attorneys General.

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4.3 - Full Measure: [Cash Cows: Military Colleges](#) (1 November, 1k online visitors/day; Washington, DC)

In this nine-minute report: Full Measure brings you our investigation into how for-profit colleges allegedly preying on our military troops. Veterans with benefits and a desire to build a new life become targets, even given a name by some college recruiters: Cash Cows.

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5. Women Veterans

5.1 - KTNV-TV (ABC-13, Video): [Women veterans hold meeting on benefits, assistance](#)

(31 October, 284k online visitors/mo; Las Vegas, NV)

A small group of female veterans held a meeting Friday to talk about their specific needs.

The group gathered at the Veterans Administration Hospital in a first-of-its-kind event, according to officials with the Department of Veterans Services.

Topics of discussion included financial assistance, military sexual trauma and group therapy. Women also talked about transitioning from military to civilian life.

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6. Other

6.1 - ABC News (AP): [Police Adopt Drug Addict Program Pioneered in Massachusetts](#) (1

November, Philip Marcelo, 22.9M online visitors/mo; New York, NY)

A police program in northern Massachusetts that helps fast-track heroin addicts into treatment is catching on in other states and showing signs of reducing crimes associated with addiction.

Gloucester police say dozens of departments in nine states have taken a page from their ANGEL program, which gives addicts a chance to make treatment rather than arrest the first response they get from police.

Addicts can come to the police station and be connected to a treatment program if they commit to getting clean. They are assigned a volunteer "angel" — sometimes a recovering addict — who works with them. They can turn in their drugs and drug paraphernalia, no questions asked.

Police Chief Leonard Campanello developed the program that started in June, and says statistics suggest it may also help reduce crime. This summer, shoplifting, breaking and entering, and larceny were down 23 percent in Gloucester compared to the same season last year.

"We are seeing real people get their lives back," Campanello said. "And if we see a reduction in crime and cost savings that is a great bonus."

The chief says the department has spent about \$13,750 so far on the program, all of it from money seized in drug arrests. The department has placed more than 260 addicts into treatment since the ANGEL program began.

John Rosenthal, co-founder of Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative, a nonprofit that helps police departments adopt Gloucester's program, said besides the nearly 40 departments in nine states that have adopted some aspects of the program, nearly 90 more want to get involved in some fashion.

Departments in Connecticut, Ohio, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont have joined Massachusetts departments in deploying the program.

Participating departments range from the Middlebury Police Department in Vermont to the Orlando Police Department in Florida, according to the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Police is also participating.

John Gill, a patrolman in Scarborough, Maine, which adopted the ANGEL program about a month ago, says making the police station a more welcoming place for addicts seeking help has been a profound change for the department.

"It was the Gloucester ANGEL project which showed us that a relatively modest-sized police agency could have a real impact," he said. "And like Gloucester, we couldn't afford to wait until the perfect solution came along.

"We put the best possible plan together and jumped off the cliff not knowing where we would land," he said. "Gloucester gave us the courage to do so."

Rosenthal says departments generally adopt some but not all of the ANGEL program. Some have adopted policies of distributing the drug-overdose antidote, naloxone, free of charge; others are using the program's network of more than 50 substance abuse treatment centers across the country. Those centers provide financial assistance to drug users who lack insurance or the resources to cover their care.

Still others have taken the approach in an altogether new direction.

In Arlington, Massachusetts, for example, the department has an in-house clinician who reaches out directly to addicts by using information gleaned from criminal investigations, community policing efforts and emergency response calls.

"We're absolutely, unequivocally thrilled by the reception of this program by law enforcement," Rosenthal said. "Police chiefs are recognizing we can't arrest our way out of this, that this is a disease and not a crime and that people suffering from this disease need treatment, not jail."

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6.2 - Examiner.com: [Hillary finally admits that VA's health care system is a mess](#) (1 November, Thomas Mangan, 18.4M online visitors/mo; Denver, CO)

Hillary Clinton has finally joined the rest of the world in realizing that the VA's health care system is an absolute disaster. Two weeks ago, when MSNBC's Rachel Maddow asked Clinton about the VA scandal and how she would fix the VA, Clinton replied that "It's not been as widespread as it has been made out to be."

That drew an immediate response from Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), who called her comments a "head-scratcher". On Twitter, Rieckhoff said, "That is not a winning argument -- or factually correct."

Senator John McCain, who spent five and a half years in a North Vietnamese Prisoner of War camp, said that Hillary Clinton's comments were "disgraceful" and called for her to apologize. "Secretary Clinton owes an apology to the families of the veterans who lost their loved ones due to mismanagement and corruption in the federal government."

What planet has Hillary Clinton been living on that she didn't hear about how widespread the health care scandal is at the Department of Veterans Affairs? There seems to be breaking news almost every day about a new scandal at the VA.

In April 2014 the media was flooded with reports that 40 veterans had died while awaiting treatment at the Phoenix VA medical center. At the time, it was reported that the veterans who died had been placed on a secret waiting list. A month later, VA employees at the VA outpatient clinic in Fort Collins, Colorado were caught falsifying appointment records to hide the fact that as many of the 6,300 veterans had waited months to be seen for treatment at the outpatient clinic. The VA's Office of Medical Inspector said that it was a deliberate attempt by supervisors at the Fort Collins outpatient clinic to make it appear that patients at the clinic did not have to wait longer than 14 days, before seeing a doctor.

Last November, USA Today reported that more than a half a million veterans had to wait at least a month for health care at VA medical centers across the country. But somehow Hillary Clinton missed that.

Two weeks ago, CNN reported that the VA's wait time scandal still hasn't been fixed. But somehow, Hillary missed that too. In August, the VA released data stating that the average wait time for completed mental health appointments at the Los Angeles VA medical center - the largest VA hospital in the country - was less than four days. But CNN obtained internal VA documents which clearly showed that the average wait time for new patients seeking mental health care at the Los Angeles VA medical center was actually 43 days. That's ten times longer than the VA said it was.

In September, the VA claimed that it had reduced the backlog of disability claims. But all they really did was change the way they look at the numbers. The VA is just robbing Peter to pay Paul. As Gerald Manar, deputy director of National Veterans Service at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) told the Stars and Stripes at the time, "All they've talked about is reducing that part of the workload and that part of the backlog. They've done that, at least in part, at the expense of other work."

But Hillary Clinton and her presidential campaign missed all that until last Tuesday when Brian Fallon, Clinton's press secretary, backed away from Hillary's claim that issues with the Veterans Health Administration weren't widespread. Fallon told CNN that the wait time scandals and the mismanagement of health care by the Department of Veterans Affairs were indeed "systemic" and that Clinton will roll out her plan to reform the VA in November. Better late than never.

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6.3 - The Washington Times (AP): [Interim director named for Cheyenne VA](#) (1 November, 3.5M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) - Paul Roberts has been appointed the acting medical center director for the Cheyenne VA Medical Center and Clinics.

The 51-year-old Roberts had been serving as the associate director of the Cheyenne VA since April 2013.

He was named to the position after the retirement of director Cynthia McCormack.

The Cheyenne VA Medical Center director oversees the medical center, as well as clinics in Ft. Collins, Sterling, and Greeley in Colorado; Sidney, Nebraska; and Rawlins, Laramie, Wheatland and Torrington.

The Cheyenne VA was linked to a nationwide scandal over the falsifying of records on how long veterans had to wait to get care.

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6.4 - The Hill: [Veterans group pans Trump's 'unserious' VA plan](#) (1 November, Bradford Richardson, 2M online visitors/mo; Washington, DC)

A veterans advocacy group is criticizing the plan to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released by Donald Trump.

Concerned Veterans for America (CVA) said the plan was “heavy of rhetoric, light on specifics” in a statement on Saturday.

“While Donald Trump rightly proposes more health care choices for veterans and long-overdue accountability for bad VA employees, his ‘plan’ is painfully thin on specifics about how he would implement those principles,” CVA CEO Pete Hegseth said in the statement.

The group said Trump’s plan to reduce protracted delays at VA clinics is “very similar to the same old song and dance of dumping more money into the VA” without “fundamentally restructuring” it.

“Just like the current VA secretary, Robert McDonald, Trump uses many of the right buzzwords around VA reform, but his actual plan largely doubles down on the failed VA health care system,” the statement continued.

CVA also criticized the GOP presidential hopeful for attacking Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a Navy veteran and Vietnam prisoner of war.

“It’s unfortunate that Donald Trump would release this unserious plan after spending months talking about the VA, even stooping to the level of attacking VA reform leaders like Senator John McCain – a man who has consistently taken the lead in reforming and fixing the VA,” the statement said.

Trump vowed to reform the VA on Tuesday in a speech directed America’s current and retired military personnel.

“What’s going on is incredible,” he said, standing in front of the USS Iowa battleship. “I am with the veterans 100 percent. They are our greatest people [and] they are being treated terribly.”

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6.5 - Atlanta Journal-Constitution: [Actual Factual Georgia: VA hospital a product of 1960s](#)
(2 November, 966k online visitors/mo; Atlanta, GA)

Q: When was the Veterans Administration Hospital on Clairmont Road built?

—Donna Gensler, Atlanta

A: The Atlanta VA Medical Center’s main building doesn’t look much different now than when it opened in 1966, but it was more easily noticed at that time.

The imposing gray building at 1670 Clairmont Road towered above the surrounding area, which was green fields and dense woods 50 years ago. None of the apartment buildings or businesses that now fill that stretch of Clairmont can be seen on a 1960s-era postcard of the new hospital at www.atlantatimemachine.com.

The only other noticeable landmarks were a tip of Candler Lake and part of South Fork Peachtree Creek, which are still there.

Apartments, commercial buildings, parking lots and decks now line the streets around the hospital, which was part of a construction boom for the VA in 1966. Several other VA hospitals across the country were built or renovated that year at a cost of \$121 million, according to VA Administrator W.J. Driver’s report to Congress in early 1967.

The price tag for Atlanta’s VA hospital was \$12.9 million.

The facility had 587 beds, outpatient services were rolled into the duties of the new hospital and approximately 100 to 125 local folks were hired to supplement the additional staff.

The Atlanta hospital included an innovation that Driver recorded in his report to Congress, a change that allowed nurses to focus more on patient care and less on logistics.

The processing and distribution of medical supplies was shifted to supply personnel.

“The experience gained at this hospital will be used to plan realignment of this function to an organizational element other than nursing, thereby freeing trained nursing personnel of responsibility for performing duties which do not require nursing skills,” Driver wrote.

The new hospital filled a need in the Atlanta area.

There were 440,000 veterans in the hospital's service area in the mid-1960s, including 373,000 wartime vets – 262,000 who served in World War II, 81,000 who served in Korea and even 30,000 from World War I.

The Atlanta VA Medical Center has grown to include 14 care sites, with 445 inpatient beds. There's a 120-bed community living center, a 40-bed domiciliary and a 12-bed residential treatment program.

The VA will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Atlanta's VA hospital in 2016, spokeswoman Susan Hansen said, but the plans are in the preliminary stage.

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6.6 - Las Vegas Review-Journal: [Editorial: Hillary minimizes VA problems for political gain](#) (1 November, 857k online visitors/mo; Las Vegas, NV)

The widespread incompetence and corruption within the Department of Veterans Affairs is irrefutable, uncovered by 138 separate nonpartisan investigations. This is important to remember during campaign season, when candidates will say anything — regardless of the facts — if they think it will help them raise money and win election.

No 2016 candidate is more dedicated to this approach than Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton.

Not only has the VA neglected our veterans through routine delays in processing their disability and compensation claims, it has also put them at risk by making them wait months for appointments and then covering up the excessive wait times they've had to endure. And the VA's record when it comes to building hospitals is just as bad, as the average VA construction project typically runs an average of 35 months late and \$360 million over budget.

None of these facts, however, stopped Mrs. Clinton from putting her political ambitions ahead of the plight of our veterans. On MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show" last month, Clinton said the problems at the VA are overblown and "not as widespread as it has been made out to be." She accused Republicans of unfairly targeting the VA as part of a bigger "ideological agenda." "Now nobody would believe that from the coverage you see, and the constant berating of the VA that comes from the Republicans, in — in part in pursuit of this ideological agenda that they have," she said.

"They try to create a downward spiral, don't fund it to the extent that it needs to be funded, because they want it to fail, so then we can argue for privatization."

This editorial page has argued — repeatedly — for the privatization of the VA because our veterans deserve better. And members of Mrs. Clinton's own party agree that the VA is failing veterans everywhere. President Barack Obama is on record as saying "the misconduct has not been limited to a few VA facilities, but many across the country," and Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., challenged Mrs. Clinton's comments last week, saying "the VA scandal has nothing to do

with partisan politics and everything to do with systemic failure, negligence and lack of accountability." In fact, legislation to increase VA funding, allow veterans to exit the VA system to obtain private care and more quickly fire problem workers had wide bipartisan support.

Mrs. Clinton is minimizing one of the greatest recent failures of the federal government when the Obama administration — which she was part of — for years did nothing to address it. That she prefers lobbying partisan attacks over holding the bureaucracy accountable says everything about what kind of president she would be.

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6.7 - CNN (Video): [New Day Sunday](#) (1 November, 413k broadcast viewers; Atlanta, GA)

In this six-minute video, CNN commentators discuss several aspects of Donald Trump's campaign, including his new VA reform plan. "Trump pledges to reform "corrupt" Veterans Affairs" is displayed at the bottom of the screen for the six minutes.

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6.8 - Wyoming Tribune-Eagle: [Paul Roberts takes over as the VA's interim leader](#) (1 November, Trevor Brown, 172k online visitors/mo; Cheyenne, WY)

Local veterans are hoping new leadership at the Cheyenne Veterans Affairs Medical Center will bring positive changes to the embattled facility.

Cynthia McCormack retired Saturday after a 30-year career with the VA that included five years heading the local medical center.

But her tenure here didn't come without controversy.

The VA announced last year that it was seeking disciplinary action against McCormack and five other supervisors at the local facility and the Fort Collins (Colorado) VA Clinic.

They were accused of falsifying records, instructing subordinates to falsify records and withholding accurate information in order to meet a requirement that patients be seen within 14 days of scheduling an appointment.

The VA later concluded "leadership did not direct the manipulation of wait time data, but did find that some in management exercised ineffective oversight with respect to insight of such data," according to federal documents.

The VA additionally substantiated whistleblowers' allegations that appointments at the Fort Collins clinic, which is overseen by the Cheyenne VA Medical Center, were not scheduled properly.

Citing personnel privacy rules, the VA has largely been mum on the details of the accusations or what came of the punishments.

But a U.S. Office of Special Counsel report from July stated that "all six employees received disciplinary actions varying from admonishment to suspension."

That report also couldn't rule out the possibility that patients died or were caused harm as a result of the improper scheduling practices.

However, Samuel House, spokesman for the Cheyenne VA Medical Center, said Thursday that McCormack's resignation was planned in advance and "had nothing to do" with the scheduling practices.

"The fact is she really stuck in there," House said. "And that is, in my opinion, a sign of a true leader. As a veteran myself with 27 years of military experience, it is great to see that this leader didn't leave the post."

But some other local veterans said they are glad to see a change in leadership at the medical center.

"Based on all the negative publicity we heard, and based on some of the things many veterans have experienced, including myself, I think it's good she decided to step down," said Ted Durante, a Cheyenne resident who served in the Vietnam War. "As hard as it may be, the government red tape needs to be set aside, and we need a person who can focus on the individuals."

Anita Urdiales, a health systems specialist with the VA, said the agency will advertise the opening for the director position in the "next few weeks."

Candidates will go through an intensive interview process that will end with VA Secretary Robert McDonald signing off on the eventual nominee.

In the meantime, Paul Roberts, the Cheyenne VA Medical Center's current associate director, will take over as the interim leader.

"I am honored and privileged to serve our veterans, our staff and our community as the acting director," he said Friday in a statement. "As a veteran myself, who receives medical care in our VA health-care system, I will continue to advance our core mission: To take care of our veterans and their families."

Federal law limits interim directors to serving a maximum of 240 days.

Travis Deti, the Laramie County representative on the Wyoming Veterans Commission, said he hopes the commission and other local veterans groups will be consulted before the new director is chosen.

"I think the first thing we would like to see is a transparent and open process," he said. "From the standpoint of the commission, we would like a chance to review the candidate and their track record assisting veterans."

John DeRouen, quartermaster at the local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1881, said the new leader will have an opportunity to "regain some of the trust" that has been lost recently.

"Our biggest issue is not getting seen fast enough because there is not enough doctors," he said.

DeRouen added the next director should embody the principals of "integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do."

"Those are the core values of the Air Force," he said. "And those should be the core values of anyone in that position."

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6.9 - Sentinel & Enterprise: [Community Conversations Library sending sweet message to vets](#) (1 November, Cheryl A. Cuddahy, 121k online visitors/mo; Fitchburg, MA)

A generous person can do a lot when it comes to making a difference in the world, but a generous person with candy makes the difference that much sweeter.

A candy drive for veterans will be held from Monday through Friday this week at Thayer Memorial Library, 717 Main St., Lancaster.

With Halloween this weekend and Veterans Day coming up on Nov. 11, the "Brush Your Fines Away" event couldn't be better timing.

Library patrons will have the chance to "pay" their overdue library fines with donations of new, wrapped and nonperishable candy.

"The community is invited to bring their unwanted candy to the library's circulation desk, where there will be a decorated bowl to be filled," said Susan Mello-Conroy, children's librarian.

Donors will be given a toothbrush and dental supplies, courtesy of Drs. Peter A. Garofoli, Myles Heffernan Jr. and Lindsay Brunea, and have their library fines waived.

The library is collecting candy for Veterans Inc., a local shelter for homeless veterans; the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford; and loved ones overseas.

The candy will be distributed to veterans in need of some sweet thoughts, Mello-Conroy said.

"I think it is really nice for veterans to know that people think of them all year long. ... Some veterans do not have family around. Some are older, and their family may live somewhere else, and some are still serving overseas."

Mello-Conroy noted that the original idea wasn't hers.

"Nancy Malek of Lancaster brought the idea of donating candy to veterans to me," she said. "She mentioned this to me maybe a month ago, so we put it into high gear and got the project up and going."

The idea fits Malek's caring nature, Mello-Conroy said.

"Nancy is the mother of a preschooler and an infant, a caretaker of a member of her family and takes care of her furry friends," Mello-Conroy said. "She is one of those people with everything going on, and you wouldn't even know it. She is quite amazing."

Malek, with Mello-Conroy's help, will package the candy boxes, and Malek will deliver the packages to the Bedford VA Medical Center.

"We don't think of our homeless veterans all that often," Mello-Conroy said. "So we want them to know that the children and the community are thinking of them."

She said her staff has already bought bags of candy to donate.

"And I am finding that the people who don't even have late materials will donate the most, just because they want to do something good," she said.

"The library will be hosting a Pajama Story Hour at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4, where we hope children will come to enjoy stories and refreshments, and donate some of their candy."

Along with the boxes of candy, the community is welcome to write "thank you" cards for the veterans.

"We will have extra thank you cards at the library for those in need of them," she said.

Donations of sugar-free candy are also encouraged for those veterans who may suffer from diabetes.

Do you know of someone or have a family member in the service overseas who would like a candy care package?

"Let the library know, provide us a name and their address and a candy care package will be sent to them," Mello-Conroy said.

"I think this is a great teaching moment for young children, and the community as a whole, to teach us all how to share to help others, especially to our veterans," she concludes.

For more information on this event, contact the Thayer Memorial Library at 978-368-8928, Ext. 2.

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6.10 - Star Beacon: [Hillary blames VA's problems on Republicans](#) (2 November, 41k online visitors/mo; Ashtabula, OH)

More than 300,000 American veterans dying while awaiting health care from the VA has “not been as widespread as it has been made out to be,” according to Hillary Clinton.

She truly believes the secret wait lists and lack of care is a Republican plot.

Last Friday on MSNBC’s “Rachel Maddow Show,” Hillary actually said, “You know, I don’t understand why we have such a problem, because there have been a number of surveys of veterans, and overall, veterans who do get treated are satisfied with their treatment. ... Now, nobody would believe that from the coverage that you see, and the constant berating of the VA that comes from the Republicans, in — in part in pursuit of this ideological agenda that they have.”

Yes, that ideological agenda of the Republicans is to ensure our veterans receive prompt, effective medical care.

It’s beyond amazing she also believes that as long as some veterans are getting care and they like it, then the problem is not “widespread.”

As usual with Hillary, the truth is the polar opposite.

The 4,000-page VA-commissioned study of veteran’s health care released in September of this year contradicts Hillary’s claim that most patients are satisfied with the care they receive.

As reported by the Washington Post, “on six of 10 patient-centered measures, patients in VA hospitals on average reported significantly less-favorable experiences with the care they received than did patients in non-VA hospitals.

It also includes quotes from employees highlighting the need for whistleblowers to be protected and to feel secure in shining the light on problems. VA employees’ fear of retaliation led to the wait-times scandal last year, veterans groups and VA employees say.”

Plus, VA facilities cost twice the normal amount for public facilities.

As for Hillary’s claim that Republicans are pushing for privatization of VA hospitals, that means she’s giving Republicans credit for supporting the 88 percent of veterans responding to a poll earlier this year who said they want access to private physicians paid for by the VA.

About 95 percent said veterans should be entitled to the best care possible, regardless of the provider.

That puts Hillary steadfastly against the wishes of American veterans, no matter how she may spin it.

Another stunning confession is that she blithely declares suffering veterans should just wait until “some of the reforms that were adopted last year should be given a chance to work.”

Republicans and veterans disagree.

The Associated Press reported in June of this year, “The number of veterans seeking health care but ending up on waiting lists of one month or more is 50 percent higher now than it was a

year ago when a scandal over false records and long wait times wracked the Department of Veterans Affairs.”

Hillary must know it's getting worse. She claims to read the news. She simply chooses partisan artifice over bipartisan solutions.

As for her deceit that the VA scandal is just another right-wing conspiracy not “as widespread as it has been made out to be” by Republicans, please know that the Veterans Administration’s Inspector General’s investigation found that over 300,000 veterans died while waiting for medical attention.

It’s good for voters to know Hillary Clinton’s paranoia that everyone is conspiring against her and her belief that the lives of 300,000 Americans isn’t a large enough sample for her to consider the problem “widespread.”

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6.11 - WHQR-FM (NPR-91.3, Audio): ["Invisible Wounds of War" Exhibit + Workshop, Lecture, Film This Month](#) (2 November, Gina Gambony, 600 online visitors/day; Wilmington, NC)

Jen Johnson and Dr. L. Kyle Horton are the founders of the Invisible Wounds of War project. Jen Johnson, MS, MFA, LPC is a writer, photographer, and mindfulness teacher and counselor. Dr. Horton is a Board Certified Internal Medicine Physician and former Primary Care Provider at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond.

The project explores the psychological, spiritual, and moral injuries of war through mindfulness and writing workshops, lectures, book readings, plus self-portrait photography sessions with veterans. The opening reception for the exhibit of the work accomplished this year is on Thursday, November 5 at Randall Library, UNCW from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

After the exhibit opens, additional events are scheduled this month:

A free Mindfulness Workshop on Saturday, November 7 for Veterans and their partners. UNCW Education Building at 10:00 am-11:30 am.

Author Kirsten Holmstedt will read from her forthcoming book, *Soul Survivors: Stories of Wounded Women Warriors and the Battles They Fight Long After They've Left the War Zone* on Friday, November 13, 6:30 pm-8:00 pm at the Azalea Coast Room in the Fisher Student Union at UNCW. Free.

On Tuesday, November 17, Jen Johnson presents the lecture *Healing the Invisible Wounds of War with Mindfulness, Writing and Photography*. Johnson will speak about the project. Also, Marion Gittings, MSW, LCSW will present *Holding Hope: Suicide Prevention as a Community and Public Health Concern*. Gittings is the Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the Wilmington VA. This free program runs 6:30 pm-8:00 pm in the Multipurpose Room in McNeill Hall, UNCW.

The film Ground Operations, exploring stories of combat men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and their struggles to return to civilian life through farming. Friday, November 20, 6:30 pm-8:00 pm in the Multipurpose Room in McNeill Hall, UNCW. Free.

The Invisible Wounds of War Project is able to provide these free events for the community through support from the North Carolina Humanities Council and other sponsors.

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