

Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

In Service to America



Meeting Notice

18 April, 2018

Elks Lodge 5555 W. Good Hope Rd.

Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

Future Meetings: 2018

16 May, 20 June, 18 July, 15 August, 19 September,
17 October, 21 November, 19 December

Chapter web page: www.vietnamvetschapter324.com
National web page: www.vva.org

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**ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD AT THE APRIL MEETING
PLEASE...
CONSIDER RUNNING FOR A LEADERSHIP POSITION**

Donald Trump Is Determined to Privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs

By [Bryce Covert](#), [In These Times](#), March 18, 2018

Aaron Hughes, who was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in 2003 and 2004, now has a serious, very rare lung condition. But he told *In These Times* he gets “really outstanding care” at the nearby Jesse Brown VA Medical Center. “The doctors are at the top of their class,” he said.

Because his condition is so rare, Hughes has been sent to a hospital outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for specific tests. And his taste of the private healthcare system has been sour. “As soon as I went there, all hell broke loose,” he said, explaining there were problems with sharing records between the two institutions. “With the VA system, when you do tests, it’s all integrated.” Every doctor Hughes sees is aware of all the other treatment he gets, from vision to mental health. The private hospitals, on the other hand, often refuse to send the records back to the VA. “The private sector isn’t about sharing

your information,” Hughes explained. “It’s not about healthcare, it’s about ownership of care.”

Hughes thinks these problems could get worse if efforts to fully privatize the VA are successful. President Donald Trump has [supported](#) privatizing the system, and has called to make permanent the Veterans Choice Program, an experiment Congress launched in 2014 that gives vouchers to veterans to see private doctors, while cutting other parts of the agency. These developments have provoked concerns that Trump will usher in a full private sector takeover.

“I worry that my care will become a profit motive,” Hughes said. “And that means it’s not about me anymore, it’s about making money.”

Now Hughes’ organization, About Face: Veterans Against the War, has joined other veterans’ groups, unions and healthcare advocates to launch a

See Trump, pg 4

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Milwaukee Chapter 324
March 21, 2018

Meeting called to Order at 7:00 pm by President Pat Ciofani

A Moment of Silence was observed for our brothers and sisters no longer with us, for all POW/MIA's and their families and for all serving our country

Pledge of Allegiance

Attendance – Dennis Szymanski, Patrick Moore, David Titter, John Morgan, Oliver Williams, Joe Herbert, Pat Ciofani

Minutes of the February 21, 2018 meeting reviewed and accepted

Treasurer's Report – Pat Moore - \$4995.34 balance in our checking account

COMMITTEE REPORTS

VVA/AVVA Membership – Joe Herbert

Allied Veterans Meeting Update – We will supply the April meal

Education Outreach – Pat Ciofani will give a presentation at Whitefish Bay HS in April

Website – Contact Pat Moore to post items of interest to the Chapter

OLD BUSINESS

State Council Meeting – Pat Ciofani – Highlights of meeting and update on the Household Goods funds being held by National - 2 Chapters yet unsigned before State can proceed with issue

NEW BUSINESS

April Elections – President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary will be up for election in April – Please consider stepping forward and taking a leadership role in your Chapter

Adjournment – 7:50 pm

New Air Campaign Expands to the North

NEWS RELEASE, USFOR-A Public Affairs Office, Feb. 6, 2018

KABUL, Afghanistan– United States Forces-Afghanistan launched a series of precision strikes in Northern Afghanistan in a direct effort to destroy insurgent revenue sources, training facilities, and support networks.

Over the past 96 hours, U.S. forces conducted air operations to strike Taliban training facilities in Badakhshan province, preventing the planning and rehearsal of terrorist acts near the border with China and Tajikistan. The strikes also destroyed stolen Afghan National Army vehicles that were in the process of being converted to vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices.

During these strikes, a U.S. Air Force B-52 Stratofortress dropped 24 precision guided munitions on Taliban fighting positions, setting a record of the most guided munitions ever dropped from a B-52. The aircraft has played a leading role in Air Force operations for decades, and was recently reconfigured with a conventional rotary launcher to increase its reach and lethality.

Continued U.S. strikes disrupt Taliban support networks in Helmand province, as well as destroy their sources of revenue such as illegal narcotics.

Ongoing strikes in Helmand continue to degrade Taliban revenue sources and safe havens. U.S. strikes and ASSF raids have resulted in the removal of more than \$30 million of Taliban revenue since the campaign began in November, 2017.

“The Taliban have nowhere to hide,” said General John Nicholson, commander, USFOR-A. “There will be no safe haven for any terrorist group bent on bringing harm and destruction to this country.”

Over the past year, U.S. precision strikes and the efforts of the Afghan Air Force and Afghan Special Security Forces have prevented Taliban fighters from capturing Kunduz City. The Taliban continue to fail in their attempts to recapture lost territory in other areas. In 2017, the Taliban did not capture a single provincial capital, despite repeated boasts and attempts. Faced with failure on the battlefield, they have turned to targeting civilians as the only tactic they have left.

Private-sector medical providers in New York unprepared to treat veterans

By NIKKI WENTLING, STARS AND STRIPES, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON – Most civilian medical providers in New York state are ill-equipped to treat veterans, according to a new Rand Corp. study that found many aren't well-versed in health issues specific to that population.

The study, released Thursday, lends context to an ongoing debate in Congress about how aggressively veterans' medical care should be outsourced to the private sector.

Two-thirds of medical providers who participated in the study were unfamiliar with military culture, researchers said. Less than half of the medical providers (43 percent) said they regularly screen for conditions common among veterans, such as depressive disorders, substance abuse, respiratory and neurological conditions, chronic pain and traumatic brain injury.

Only 2.3 percent met all seven criteria that researchers looked for when deciding whether private-sector providers were equipped to treat veterans. Besides military knowledge and the ability to screen for – and treat -- conditions common to veterans, researchers checked whether providers had the capacity to treat new patients and if they screened patients for military experience. They also reviewed whether facilities used clinical-practice guidelines and could accommodate patients with disabilities.

“These findings reveal significant gaps and variations in the readiness of community-based health care providers to provide high-quality care to veterans,” Terri Tanielian, the study's lead author, said in a statement. “It appears that more work needs to be done to prepare the civilian health care workforce to care for the unique needs of veterans.”

The study, 57 pages long and based on a survey of 746 health care providers, is titled, “Ready or Not? Assessing the Capacity of New York State Health Care Providers to Meet the Needs of Veterans.”

Rand researchers conducted their study because of the push to get more veterans into the private sector.

“As VA and Congress continue discussions about the potential expansion of care in the community for veterans, it will be essential to consider these findings to determine whether veterans will receive the same level of care they have been provided within VA facilities,” they wrote.

Lawmakers are negotiating legislation to

overhaul the Veterans Choice program, which was created following the 2014 VA wait-time scandal and allows vets to receive medical care in the private sector. Congress, the VA and veterans agree that rules governing the program are arbitrary and confusing.

Many major veterans organizations are weary that an expansion of Choice would erode VA resources and eventually dismantle the VA health care system. Those concerns have been front-and-center this week, as veterans groups are taking to Capitol Hill for their annual legislative presentations to Congress.

Verna Jones, the American Legion executive director, told reporters this week that a “real movement” exists to privatize the VA.

“Everyone here understands we oppose the slippery slope of privatization,” American Legion Commander Denise Rohan said Wednesday to a joint committee of senators and representatives. “Our first priority is to get veterans the care they need, where they need it and when they need it. We still believe that more often than not, the right choice is within the VA.”

At least \$89 million skimmed from veterans choice program

Dennis Wagner The Republic November. 13, 2017

A company that oversees about half of the private medical care for America's veterans is looking to extend its contract even as documents reveal it overbilled the government by tens of millions of dollars. In addition: It's the target of a federal grand jury investigation. The company, TriWest Healthcare Alliance, has multi-billion-dollar contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs to administer private health-care appointments for ex-military personnel in Arizona and 27 other states.

The VA Office of Inspector General recently reported to Congress that TriWest and another company, Health Net Federal Services — which oversees private VA care for the remainder of the nation — collected at least \$89 million more than they should have, sometimes by billing the government at improper rates or collecting twice for the same treatment. That, lawmakers allege, means money that could have been spent on veterans' health care was instead taken by the two companies. The total amount is not yet known because audits are ongoing.

Trump from pg 1

campaign to stop the privatization of the VA.

After several months of building the coalition, the mobilization now includes Veterans for Peace, Service Employees International Union, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and National Nurses United. Healthcare advocacy groups including the Illinois Single Payer Coalition and the Democratic Socialists of America Healthcare Working Group have also joined the campaign. The organizations came together on March 1 to hold a panel event in Chicago, and more than 100 people showed up.

The combination of unions and veterans' groups is potent. "We as veterans can argue and demand things and raise issues that the unions can't, and the unions can inform us about issues that we don't understand," Hughes said.

"We're seeing outside, and they're seeing inside of the system. We're able to have this inside/outside strategy that I think is really a winning strategy."

Organizers believe the time is right to invest in that teamwork now. "It came to our attention last fall that things under the Trump administration have been getting really bad," Roberto Clack, an organizer with the Right to Heal VA Campaign, told *In These Times*.

"There are problems with the VA, but the VA works," Clack said. "It provides quality care for the people that use it, and it saves lives." A 2016 RAND Corporation [analysis](#) found that the VA provides good quality care compared with other health systems, usually in a timely manner. Private providers, on the other hand, could expose veterans to lower-quality care, longer wait times and doctors who aren't familiar with military service.

"We agree that it could be better," Clack said, "but the way to make healthcare better is to have a fully supported VA, funded VA, and staffed VA."

Privatizing the VA wouldn't just risk veteran's healthcare, however. It could also threaten the unionized public sector employees who work for it. AFGE represents more than 700,000 federal workers, 250,000 of whom work at the VA. It would be "a serious death knell for unionization in this country," said Anne Lindgren, president of AFGE Local 789.

Privatization is "absolutely the wrong response," Clack said. "Privatization's not going to

make anyone's healthcare better."

But the idea that the VA doesn't work has become embedded in many media reports and the general public. "What we're really up against is debunking the narrative that it's just this broken system," Clack said.

So while the long-term goal is to block the privatization of the agency, the short-term goal is to raise more awareness. "We recognize that [stopping privatization] is a big elephant, and you can't eat an elephant in one bite, you need to eat it in small bites," Lindgren said. "For that to happen we need to educate and organize the public."

After the launch event, the groups held a call-in day to have people contact their members of Congress and urge them to oppose a currently bill that would expand the Choice program. Next will be actually visiting members of Congress. "Frankly we're

**"There are problems with the VA,
but the VA works."**

going to take this to the streets and let not only Republicans know, but also Democrats who are vacillating on this issue, you have to have a firm 'no' on privatization efforts," Clack said.

Participants also hope to create an organizing model that can be replicated in other cities and communities across the country. "We're not going to win this fight if it's just a Chicago fight," Clack said. "We definitely want to see this organizing spread to other parts of the country."

The goal is also to move their efforts beyond just saving the VA from privatization to making a proactive argument that the VA should be expanded and itself serve as a model for the whole country. "I believe our community of veterans organized has the potential to not just fight for our healthcare, but healthcare for everyone in this country," Hughes said.

That's why the launch event included activists who are focused on universal healthcare and a single-payer system. "The VA really resembles the closest thing there is to a single payer system in our country," Clack said. It's not just the largest hospital system and healthcare provider in the nation, but it's also the only system that negotiates directly with pharmaceutical companies over drug prices, and it's also a one-stop-shop for veterans seeking all kinds of care, from mental health to physical issues to social work.

"We really want to make a case that the public sector provides quality services," Clack said. "The VA's a great example of the public sector working."

The VA Chief Faked an Award to Get a Taxpayer-Funded European Vacation for His Wife

By [Adam K. Raymond](#), New York Magazine, February 14, 2018

http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/02/va-chief-the-latest-trump-official-to-join-the-kleptocracy.html?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=s3&utm_campaign=sharebutton-t

Last summer, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and his wife enjoyed a ten-day “work” trip to Europe that included a match at Wimbledon, a tour of Westminster Abbey, and a jaunt through a Danish castle, among other non-work excursions. Months later, the trip drew criticism when it was revealed that Shulkin’s wife, Merle Bari, flew on the taxpayer dime and received a per diem for meals and other expenses.

Bari, a VA spokesman told the Washington Post last September, was traveling on “approved invitational orders,” which is why taxpayers footed the bill.

But now the VA’s inspector general says that was a lie. In a new report released Wednesday, Inspector General Michael J. Missal says Shulkin’s chief of staff doctored an email to make it appear that Shulkin was receiving an award in Denmark and then used this nonexistent honor to justify taxpayer funding of his wife’s travel.

According to the report, Vivieca Wright Simpson altered the text of an email to make it sound as if Shulkin was being honored at the U.S. ambassador’s residence in Copenhagen. She then took this email to ethics officials, who had previously denied a request to pay for Bari’s travel, and received approval to cover her \$4,300 plane ticket with taxpayer funds.

“Secretary Shulkin did not receive an award or special recognition during this Europe trip,” Missal writes in the report. In his investigation, the IG found several other problems with the trip, including Shulkin’s use of a VA aide as a “de facto personal travel concierge.”

There was also the issue of the Wimbledon tickets, which were unethically obtained, Missal found. The report says Shulkin asked for and received the tickets from Victoria Gosling, an executive with the 2016 Invictus Games, a sporting competition for wounded vets. Shulkin explained to VA ethics officials that Gosling was friends with his wife, allowing him to accept them based on a “personal

friendship.”

But when the inspector general interviewed Gosling about the issue, she was unable to remember Bari’s first name. After a long pause, Ms. Gosling was unable to recall Dr. Bari’s name, stating, “You actually – I think that kept throwing me. I’m actually having a genuine blank here.” Ms. Gosling was unable to recall Dr. Bari’s name before the interview concluded.

In a statement provided by Shulkin’s lawyers, Gosling said the investigators caught her in busy moment and accused them of “trying to put words into my mouth.”

The lawyers took issue with the rest of the report too, telling CNN, “Secretary Shulkin has not done anything improper.”

In a letter to Missal published as part of the report, Shulkin also denied all wrongdoing. “It is outrageous that you would portray my wife and me as attempting to take advantage of the government,” he wrote. By Wednesday, he’d changed his tune. In an interview with USA Today, Shulkin said he never intended to act unethically. He also cut a check to the Treasury Department for the price of his wife’s airfare and said he planned to reimburse Gosling for the tennis tickets. The he blamed everything on this staffers: “I relied upon my staff to do this, and in retrospect, I wish that I had asked more questions.”



JOHN COLE, THE [SCRANTON PA.] TIMES-TRIBUNE



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