

Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

In Service to America



Meeting Notice

17 November, 2021

Elks Club

5555 W. Good Hope Rd.

Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

Future Meetings

15 December Christmas Party

RSVP to Pat Moore

Chapter Officers

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Newsletter: John Zutz john(at)zutz.org

John is listed in the phone book - good luck finding one

Milwaukee VA launching new website

Monday, November 15, 2021, VA News Release

On Wednesday, Nov. 17, the Milwaukee

VA Medical Center will launch a new website that will give you better service and an easier online experience.

Veterans, families and caregivers have told us that VA medical center websites are confusing to navigate, contain outdated or missing information and do not match their VA health care journey.

We listened. Find it at: <https://www.va.gov/milwaukee-health-care/>

To better meet the needs of Veterans, families and caregivers, VA is building all-new websites for medical centers and related health care facilities. We have used your feedback to develop a website that provides everything Veterans, families and caregivers need to prepare for a visit, get care and connect with your VA health care team:

- Directions to main VAMCs and associated clinics.
- Phone numbers .
- Parking and transportation information.
- Hospital and clinic hours.
- Patient registration.
- Making appointments and refilling prescriptions.

Find a new complete list of VA health services, social programs and care coordinators, including:

- Primary and specialty care.
- Mental health care.
- Caregiver support and care coordinators for women Veterans, LGBT Veterans, returning service members and more.

We have built a mobile-first user experience that gets you to all content and tools in just one or two clicks, including:

- Online scheduling, prescription refills and access to medical records.
- A new list of health services that uses Veteran-friendly names and descriptions.
- New social and health program pages that make it easier to connect Veterans and their caregivers with care coordinators to help them with their health care journey.

- Increased speed and mobile features that allow users to call VA or get driving directions with a single click.

To visit the Zablocki Health Care System's new website, no special action is needed. When we make the change, you'll automatically be directed to the new site. It's all part of our continuing work to improve our Veterans' VA experience.

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Milwaukee Chapter 324
October 20, 2021

Meeting called to Order by President Pat Ciofani
Attendance – John Zutz, John Morgan, Pat Ciofani,
Pat Moore, Dennis Szymanski

Minutes for the September 15, 2021 meeting
reviewed and accepted

Treasurer's Report – Pat Moore - \$4002. 46
balance in our checking account - \$166.00 paid to
the post office for our mail box

Communications – Thank you from the Honor
Flight for our donation

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Allied Veterans Meeting Update – Pat Ciofani
Website – Contact Pat Moore to post items of
interest to the chapter

OLD BUSINESS

Wisconsin State Council Update – Pat Ciofani – Dr.
Whittle from the VA gave a PTSD presentation –
National Convention Information

NEW BUSINESS

December Christmas Party – It was moved and
passed to return to our annual Christmas party
on our regular meeting night, December 15th –
Please let Pat Moore know if you are interested in
attending

Adjournment – 7:40

Veteran Discounts Available All Year Round

https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85765/veteran-discounts-available-year-round/?utm_source=VRfeature&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=VetResources

Remarriage Rules Relaxed For Surviving Spouses Seeking VA Benefits

By [Jim Absher](#), Military.com 30 Jun 2021

A little-noticed provision in Public Law 116-315, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020, makes it easier for surviving [spouses](#) to continue receiving Department of Veterans Affairs benefits if they remarry.

The law made changes to the remarriage rules for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Effective Jan. 5, 2021, a veteran's surviving spouse who remarries after the veteran's death will remain eligible for the benefit paid by the [VA](#) if the spouse is at least 55 years old. The remarriage must have occurred on or after that date.

Prior to this change in the law, surviving spouses who remarried before their 57th birthday lost eligibility for the benefit.

What Is Dependency and Indemnity Compensation? DIC is a monthly benefit paid to eligible survivors of certain deceased veterans, including survivors of:

Military members who died while on active duty

Veterans whose death was the result of a service-related injury or disease

Veterans whose death wasn't related to their

service but who received VA disability compensation

The monthly tax-free benefit is currently more than \$1,300.

To be eligible for DIC, the surviving spouse must have been married to a service member who died on active duty or married a veteran whose death was service-connected. There are other rules regarding when the marriage occurred, if there are children or if the marriage was terminated due to divorce.

If the spouse remarries after the veteran dies, they can remain eligible for the benefit if the date of remarriage is on or after Dec. 16, 2003, and they are at least 57 years old.

Effective Jan. 5, 2021, that age limit dropped to 55.

The surviving children of a qualifying veteran are also eligible for the DIC benefit if they are unmarried and under 18, or between the ages of 18 and 23 and attending school. Certain adult children who cannot provide for themselves due to physical or mental disabilities also can be entitled to DIC. Some surviving parents may be eligible for the benefit if they meet income limits.

Study: Pentagon reliance on contractors hurt US in 9/11 wars

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER September 13, 2021
<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-middle-east-business-afghanistan-taliban-3f66d407542879a95b26608eee08a07e?fbclid=IwAR20nTiHOf7E6SCiYHnWujCh3O910vZcx7fGeyh935CoXsLq9l2p5rPbmwE>

Up to half of the \$14 trillion spent by the Pentagon since 9/11 went to for-profit defense contractors, a study released Monday found. It's the latest work to argue the U.S. reliance on private corporations for war-zone duties that used to be done by troops contributed to mission failure in Afghanistan.

In the post-9/11 wars, U.S. corporations contracted by the Defense Department not only handled war-zone logistics like running fuel convoys and staffing chow lines but performed mission-crucial work like training and equipping Afghan security forces — security forces that collapsed last month as the Taliban swept the country.

Within weeks, and before the U.S. military had even completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban easily routed an Afghan government and military that Americans had spent 20 years and billions of dollars to stand up. President Joe Biden placed blame squarely on the Afghans themselves. “We gave them every chance,” he said. “What we could not provide them was the will to fight.”

But William Hartung, the author of [Monday's study](#) by Brown University's Costs of War project and the Center for International Policy, and others say it's essential that Americans examine what role the reliance on private contractors played in the post-9/11 wars. In Afghanistan, that included contractors allegedly paying protection money to warlords and the Taliban themselves, and the Defense Department insisting on equipping the Afghan air force with complex Blackhawk helicopters and other aircraft that few but U.S. contractors knew how to maintain.

“If it were only the money, that would be outrageous enough,” Hartung, the director of the arms and security program at the Center for International Policy, said of instances where the Pentagon's reliance on contractors backfired. “But the fact it undermined the mission and put troops at risk is even more outrageous.”

At the start of this year, before Biden began the final American withdrawal from Afghanistan, there were far more contractors in Afghanistan and also in Iraq than U.S. troops.

The U.S. saw about 7,000 military members die in all post-9/11 conflicts, and nearly 8,000 contractors, another Costs of War study estimates.

The Professional Services Council, an organization representing businesses contracting with the government, cited a lower figure from the U.S. Department of Labor saying nearly 4,000 federal contractors have been killed since 2001.

A spokeswoman pointed to a statement last month from the organization's president, David J. Berteau: “For almost two decades, government contractors have provided broad and essential support for U.S. and allied forces, for the Afghan military and other elements of the Afghan government, and for humanitarian and economic development assistance.”

U.S. officials after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks embraced private contractors as an essential part of the U.S. military response.

It started with then-Vice President Dick Cheney, the former CEO of Halliburton. Halliburton received more than \$30 billion to help set up and run bases, feed troops and carry out other work in Iraq and Afghanistan by 2008, the study says. Cheney and defense contractors argued that relying on private contractors for work that service members did in previous wars would allow for a trimmer U.S. military, and be more efficient and cost effective.

By 2010, Pentagon spending had surged by more than one-third, as the U.S. fought dual wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a post-9/11 American, politicians vied to show support for the military in a country grown far more security conscious.

“Any member of Congress who doesn't vote for the funds we need to defend this country will be looking for a new job,” the study notes Harry Stonecipher, then the vice president of Boeing, telling *The Wall Street Journal* the month after the attacks.

And up to a third of the Pentagon contracts went to just five weapons suppliers. Last fiscal year, for example, the money Lockheed Martin alone got from Pentagon contracts was one and a half times the entire budgets of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, according to the study.

The Pentagon pumped out more contracts than it could oversee, lawmakers and government special investigators said.

Continued next page

Study continued

For example, a Florida Republican Party official made millions on what lawmakers charged were excess profits when the U.S. granted a one-of-a-kind contract for fuel convoys from Jordan to Iraq, the study notes. The electrocution of at least 18 service members by bad wiring in bases in Iraq, some of it blamed on major contractor Kellogg, Brown and Root, was another of many instances where government investigations pointed to shoddy logistics and reconstruction work.

The stunning Taliban victory last month in Afghanistan is drawing attention now to even graver consequences: the extent to which the U.S. reliance on contractors may have heightened the difficulties of the Afghan security forces.

Jodi Vittori, a former Air Force lieutenant colonel and scholar of corruption and fragile states at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who was not involved in the study, points to the U.S. insistence that the Afghan air force use U.S.-made helicopters. Afghans preferred Russian helicopters, which were easier to fly, could be maintained by Afghans, and were suited to rugged Afghanistan.

When U.S. contractors pulled out with U.S. troops this spring and summer, taking their knowledge of how to maintain U.S.-provided aircraft with them, top Afghan leaders bitterly complained to the U.S. that it had deprived them of one essential advantage over the Taliban.

Hartung, like others, also points to the

Veterans with PTSD do better at the VA

BY SUZANNE GORDON, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 06/29/

[https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/560664-veterans-with-ptsd-do-better-at-the-va?](https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/560664-veterans-with-ptsd-do-better-at-the-va?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-veterans-ptsd#hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-veterans-ptsd)

The men sitting in the conference room at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinic in Mare Island, Calif., are all Vietnam veterans in their late 60s and early 70s. After suffering for decades from panic attacks, nightmares, flashbacks, anger and other assorted symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), they're now part of a weekly PTSD support group.

Throughout their two-hour session, led by a VA psychologist, versions of the same story are repeated over and over. "I waited way too long to get help," one confessed. "I lost family and friends and am socially isolated," says another. "If it weren't for the VA and this group, I'd be dead," a third veteran reports.

In a meeting with veterans from post-9/11

corruption engendered by the billions of loosely monitored dollars that the U.S. poured into Afghanistan as one central reason that Afghanistan's U.S.-backed government lost popular support, and Afghan fighters lost morale.

Hillary Clinton, while secretary of state under President Barack Obama, accused defense contractors at risk in war zones of resorting to payoffs to armed groups, making protection money one of the biggest sources of funding for the Taliban.

The United States also relied, in part, on defense contractors to carry out one of the tasks most central to its hopes of success in Afghanistan — helping to set up and train an Afghan military and other security forces that could stand up to extremist groups and to insurgents, including the Taliban.

Tellingly, Vittori said, it was Afghan commandos who had consistent training by U.S. special operations forces and others who did most of the fighting against the Taliban last month.

Relying less on private contractors, and more on the U.S. military as in past wars, might have given the U.S. better chances of victory in Afghanistan, Vittori noted. She said that would have meant U.S. presidents accepting the political risks of sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan, and getting more body bags of U.S. troops back.

"Using contractors allowed America to fight a war that a lot of Americans forgot we were fighting," Vittori said.

wars, I hear similar stories at the VA Medical Center in Milwaukee — with one important difference. Many patients there received mental health treatment much sooner because of the fact that the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has pioneered the integration of mental health care into primary care clinics and it also routinely screens veterans for PTSD and other emotional problems.

When they sought VA treatment for more visible wounds of war, like bodily injuries or burn pit-related respiratory problems, the VA spotted problems early and could overcome resistance to treatment. As VHA psychiatrist Andrew Pomerantz explained to me when I was researching my book "Wounds of War," if a veteran even hints at a problem, primary

Continued next page

PTSD continued

care providers can walk the patient down the hall to a mental health practitioner in what is called a “warm handoff.” After a brief meeting, the veteran would realize therapy isn’t so scary or invasive, which would allow a healing journey to begin.

As the nation nears the end of its annual PTSD Awareness Month, I hope the White House can learn from the decades of experience that the VHA has amassed after treating millions of veterans suffering from military related PTSD. These lessons teach us that the outsourcing of veterans’ health care, which began under President Obama and gained further traction under President Trump, is a huge mistake. In the area of mental health, this partial privatization of VA services has steered thousands of patients away from salaried experts, whose whole practice is “vet-centric,” to private sector providers who have little knowledge of how to deal with veterans’ complex problems yet are eager for federal reimbursement, on a lucrative “fee-for-service” basis.

Why is the VA a far better choice for vets suffering from PTSD?

Let’s first consider the scale of the problem — and the stubborn fact of veteran resistance to seeking any treatment at all. Over 30 percent of male Vietnam veterans are estimated to suffer from PTSD, compared to 6.8 percent for all American adults. Between 18.5 and 42.5 percent of service members involved in the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan returned with some sort of mental health problem, with over 18 percent suffering from PTSD.

Many veterans are slow to acknowledge such service-related conditions because military socialization has programmed them to downplay both physical and mental ailments. The Marines, for example, distribute a T-shirt to new recruits declaring that “pain is weakness leaving the body.” If an active duty service member displays symptoms of PTSD, depression or substance abuse, “it could ruin your career,” one former service member told me. According to a study by the Bush Institute, “over 80 percent of post-9/11 veterans thought that embarrassment or shame was a barrier to veterans seeking care for their injuries.”

Because it is determined to overcome this barrier to care, the VA has initiated outreach campaigns in which vets encourage other vets to get help for psychological problems. If they do, the VA has thousands of mental health professionals

who are rigorously trained in evidence-based treatments — like Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy — that are the gold standard in PTSD care. Psychologist Joseph Ruzek, who worked at the VA’s National Center for PTSD for decades, told me that this kind of care is rarely available in the private sector. Studies document that few private sector providers are trained in the kind of evidence-based care that is most effective in treating PTSD and most know little about military culture. In fact, few even ask patients about military service.

Over the past seven years, Congress has passed legislation like the MISSION Act of 2018, that requires the agency’s administrators and direct caregivers to refer many patients to private doctors and hospitals, regardless of their qualifications to treat veterans. Between 2017 and 2021, VA expenditures on private sector care increased by 223 percent while its budget for in-house care rose only 12 percent. In fiscal 2021, \$18 billion — 20 percent of the VA’s entire clinical care budget — was spent on reimbursement of non-VA providers.

This massive diversion of resources is costly, wasteful and results in less effective patient care. One way the Biden administration can demonstrate its own “PTSD awareness” is by reversing this trend and assuring that the VA is fully funded and staffed so veterans can get the care they deserve.

Suzanne Gordon is a senior policy analyst at the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute. She is the author of “Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing and Hope to the Nation’s Veterans.”

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