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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS



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## **News of the Week**

### ***Congressman Miller Announces Veterans Assistance Days***

Released from Congressman Jeff Miller's Office

PENSACOLA, Fla., Feb. 27 - Congressman Jeff Miller (R-FL-01) announced additional office hours for veterans. In order to better serve the needs of veterans who are not close to the Congressman's Pensacola or Ft. Walton offices, special "mobile office" days have been established. Congressman Miller's Veterans' Affairs specialist, Retired Master Chief Bill Cooper, will be manning the office answering questions about Veterans' benefits, casework, or health care service.

"This is just another way we can better serve our growing veterans population in Northwest Florida," Miller said. "We tried the mobile office concept earlier, and we had such an outstanding turnout that we decided to add more dates and locations to the program.

Florida's First District is one of the highest concentrations of any Congressional District in the nation, with more than 100,000 veterans.

The dates and times of the veterans' mobile office days are listed below.

#### **Wednesday, March 7**

8:00 - 9:00 a.m. Milton Vet Center 6491, Caroline St., Suite 2  
9:30 - 10:30 a.m. Jay City Hall, 3695 Highway 4, Jay  
11:00 a.m. - noon Century City Hall, 7995 N. Century Blvd.  
2:00 - 3:00 p.m. Pensacola Vet Center, 4501 Twin Oaks Drive, Suite 104

#### **Tuesday, March 13**

8:00 - 9:00 a.m. Laurel Hill Grill, 8196 Highway 85 N.  
9:30 - 10:30 a.m. Crestview Vet Center, 601A N. Pearl St., Suite 100  
11:00 a.m. - noon Shalimar Vet Center, 11th St., Suite G3  
1:00 - 3:00 p.m. Congressman's FWB Office, 348 SW. Miracle Strip Parkway

#### **Thursday, March 22**

8:00 - 9:00 a.m. Paxton City Hall, 21872 Highway 331 North  
10:30 - 11:30 a.m. DeFuniak Springs Vet Center, 312 College Ave., Unit 1A  
1:30 - 2:30 p.m. Bonifay Chambers of Commerce, S. Waokesha St.  
3:00 - 4:00 p.m. Chipley Vet Center, 1331 S. Blvd., Suite 702

### ***Commission to Host Town Hall Meeting in Tampa***

News from the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., March 1 - The Commission on the Future for America's Veterans will host "Conversations on the Future for America's Veterans," a national Town Hall Meeting on Wednesday, March 14 at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute, in Tampa, Fla. A pre-event reception will begin at 6 p.m. with the Town Hall Meeting beginning at 7 p.m. The commission has already visited West Virginia and met with its governor and key staff, and is heading to California, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas (all states with large veteran populations) following their town hall meeting in Florida.

Florida Governor Charlie Crist and FDVA Executive Director LeRoy Collins Jr. have been invited to participate.

Veterans Service Organizations wishing to set up informational booths outside the auditorium are encouraged to e-mail Tamar Shealy at [TShealy@hsrnet.com](mailto:TShealy@hsrnet.com)

The commission's Web site can be found at: [www.future4vets.org](http://www.future4vets.org).

### ***Florida Housing Offers First-Time Homebuyer Program to Veterans***

From the Florida Housing and Finance Corporation

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., Feb. 26 - Federal law has recently waived the requirement for veterans to be first-time homebuyers in order to be eligible for the First Time Homebuyer' Program, which is made available through the Florida Housing and Finance Corporation. Special incentives to this program includes down payment assistance up to \$10,000 and low 30-year and 40-year fixed interest rates.

#### **Who's eligible?**

Honorably Discharged U.S. Servicemembers:

- Army
- Navy
- Air Force
- Marine Corps
- Reserves
- National Guard
- U.S. Coast Guard

#### **What type of housing?**

Single family, owner occupied, principal residences including:

- New and Existing Homes
- Condominium Units
- Manufactured Housing
- Duplexes

To determine if you are eligible for this program and for more information about this program, contact Florida Housing by calling 1-888-447-2977 or visit Florida Housing online at [www.floridahousing.org](http://www.floridahousing.org).

### ***Pilot Receives Medal of Honor for Heroism in Vietnam***

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26 – President Bush presented the Medal of Honor to retired Army Lt. Col. Bruce Crandall, 41 years after heroic actions in Vietnam the president said demonstrate the best of America and its military members.

Bush praised Crandall's heroism during the Battle of Ia Drang Valley in November 1965, when he repeatedly flew into intensive enemy fire to rescue and resupply besieged 1st Cavalry Division ground troops.

Crandall proved himself "a daring pilot, a devoted soldier and a self-less leader" during the first major

ground battle of the war at Landing Zone X-Ray near the Ia Drang River, he said.

The story of the mission is captured in the bestselling book and movie, “We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young.”

Early on Nov. 14, 1965, Crandall, then a major commanding A Company, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), was transporting a battalion of soldiers into Landing Zone X-ray, Bush recounted. After several routine lifts into the area, the ground troops came under a massive attack from the North Vietnamese Army.

During Crandall’s next flight – a flight that left three soldiers on his helicopter killed and three more wounded – he remained at the landing zone in direct line of enemy fire so four wounded troops could be loaded aboard, the president said.

After returning the wounded troops to base for treatment, Crandall knew his mission was finished, Bush said, but couldn’t bring himself to abandon the ground troops who were outnumbered and low on ammunition. Crandall asked for volunteers to fly back to LZ X-ray, and Capt. Ed Freeman stepped forward.

“In their unarmed choppers, they flew through a cloud of smoke and a wave of bullets to deliver desperately needed supplies,” the president said. “They carried out more of the wounded, even though medical evacuation was really not their mission.”

Crandall would have been a hero if he had stopped there, Bush said. “But he didn’t stop. He flew back into X-ray again and again--14 times he flew into what they called the ‘Valley of Death.’” He made those flights recognizing the extreme risk to his own life, he said.

Over the course of the day, Crandall flew three different choppers, with two of them damaged so badly they would no longer fly. “But he kept flying until every wounded man had been evacuated and every need of the battalion had been met,” Bush said.

By the day’s end, Crandall and Freeman had spent more than 14 hours in the air, evacuating 70 wounded men and providing a lifeline that allowed the battalion to survive, Bush said.

“To the men of Ia Drang, the image of Major Crandall’s helicopter coming to their rescue is one they will never forget,” Bush said. He noted that one officer who witnessed the actions called them “without question, the most valorous I’ve observed of any helicopter pilot in Vietnam,” The battalion commander said that without Crandall, his battalion would have been overrun, Bush said, and another officer said, “I will always be in awe of Major Bruce Crandall.”

Bush noted that while others have praised Crandall, he never thought of himself as a hero. “There was never a consideration we would not go into those landing zones,” Bush said, quoting Crandall. “They were my people down there and they trusted in me to come and get them.”

Crandall’s character and leadership have grown clearer over the years, Bush said. He went on to make more rescue flights, served a second tour in Vietnam, retired from the military and worked in his local government in Washington state.

Perhaps most telling, Bush said, was Crandall’s decision to withdraw his own name from consideration for the Medal of Honor to ensure that Freeman would receive his. Bush presented Freeman the honor in

July 2001.

“Today, the story comes to its rightful conclusion” as Crandall finally receives his Medal of Honor, Bush said.

“In men like Bruce Crandall, we really see the best of America,” he said. “He and his fellow soldiers were brave, brave folks. They were as noble and selfless as any who have ever worn our nation’s uniform.”

A major motion picture based on the book featured actor Greg Kinnear as Crandall.

Read complete article by clicking <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=3186>.

*\*Note: Retired Army Lt. Col. Bruce Crandall was admitted into the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes the day after he received the Medal of Honor.*

### **Walter Reed Chief Relieved of Command**

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 1 – Army Maj. Gen. George W. Weightman was relieved of command as a result of failures in care for outpatient soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Army officials announced.

Army Secretary Francis J. Harvey announced the decision. Weightman was informed "that the senior Army leadership had lost trust and confidence in the commander's leadership abilities to address needed solutions for soldier-outpatient care" at Walter Reed, according to an Army release.

"I endorse the decision by Secretary of the Army Fran Harvey to relieve the Commander of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center," Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said in a written statement released by the Pentagon. "The care and welfare of our wounded men and women in uniform demand the highest standard of excellence and commitment that we can muster as a government. When this standard is not met, I will insist on swift and direct corrective action and, where appropriate, accountability up the chain of command."

Gates toured the facility Feb. 23. He said at a news conference following the visit that no wounded servicemembers should have inadequate care.

"They should not have to recuperate in substandard housing, nor should they be expected to tackle mountains of paperwork and bureaucratic processes during this difficult period for themselves and their families," he said. "They battled our foreign enemies; they should not have to battle American bureaucracy."

Lt. Gen. Kevin C. Kiley, the Army surgeon general and commander of U.S. Army Medical Command, will assume command until the service names a new commander. Kiley was commander at Walter Reed before assuming his current position.

The failures at Walter Reed - the Army's flagship hospital - became known following series of stories in the Washington Post beginning Feb. 18. The series spoke of soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan who are outpatients at the hospital and are living in a substandard housing facility.

Gates appointed an independent review group to look into care at Walter Reed and at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. That group had its first meeting at the Pentagon today. The group will submit its findings within 45 days.

The Army is not waiting to see those results. "We'll fix as we go; we'll fix as we find things wrong," Harvey said recently. "Soldiers are the heart of our Army, and the quality of their medical care is non-negotiable."

Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Richard A. Cody developed an Army Action Plan to address shortcomings at Walter Reed and Army-wide. The plan will focus on soldier accountability, health and welfare. It also will focus on infrastructure problems, the medical administrative process and information dissemination.

### ***DOD Overhauling Disability Evaluation System***

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 - The Defense Department is putting in place reforms to its disability evaluation system and working to ensure the decisions of the Disability Advisory Council are fast and fair, Pentagon officials said today.

The system is used to evaluate servicemembers' disabilities and separate or retain them, as appropriate. Servicemembers who are separated with at least a 30 percent disability rating receive disability retirement pay, medical benefits and commissary privileges. With a rating below 30 percent, veterans receive severance pay, but no benefits.

In the past, each service had its own disability evaluation system. Now DOD has put in place an overarching DOD-level framework with a single information system, Pentagon officials said. Each service manages its caseload under that framework.

The war on terrorism has taxed the system, officials said. Medical and transportation advances have allowed more servicemembers to survive more serious wounds than in previous wars. In fiscal 2006, service eligibility board caseloads were 13,162 for the Army, 5,684 for the naval services, and 4,139 for the Air Force. In 2001, the numbers were: 7,218 for the Army, 4,999 for the naval services and 2,816 in the Air Force.

DOD officials acknowledge that servicemembers have complaints about the system. According to recent media reports, servicemembers have complained that the military services are not consistent in evaluations and do not follow the Department of Veterans Affairs schedule of rating disabilities. They say it takes too long for evaluations to be processed, the process is unnecessarily complicated, and personnel running the system are inadequately trained in its nuances.

DOD is aware of these problems and is working to address them, said Marine Maj. Stewart Upton, a Pentagon spokesman. "We are in the midst of a business-process review that will generate improvements to program effectiveness," he said. "We are especially concerned with a balance of what constitutes prompt adjudication, while maintaining reasonable flexibility within the system to ensure recoveries are not inappropriately rushed."

He said the services have increased the number of people involved in the process.

DOD is committed to providing quality health care to servicemembers and a "full and fair due process" for disability evaluation and compensation, he said.

To read complete article, click <http://www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=3151>.

### ***Sen. Craig Renews Commitment to Disabled Veterans***

*Discusses veterans' right to hire attorneys*

News from the Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

WASHINGTON, Feb. 28 – At a joint hearing held Tuesday with members of both the U.S. Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senator Larry Craig praised DAV National Commander Bradley Barton and thanked members of the Disabled American Veterans for their service in uniform and as advocates for America's disabled veterans.

"Those members of the military who are harmed while in the service of their nation are our nation's heroes. I am committed, as is every member of these two committees, to seeing that our nation's disabled veterans receive the finest care," said Craig, the top Republican on the Senate committee.

The Senator from Idaho noted that since 2001, federal spending on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system has increased 70 percent. In addition, President Bush has proposed a nearly eight percent increase for next year's VA budget.

"I know we share common goals of ensuring that our nation's veterans are cared for by a quality health care system, compensated by a fair and accurate adjudication process, and honored at the end of their lives," said Craig.

During his comments, Craig also discussed whether veterans should have the right to legal counsel when confronting the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In December the U.S. Senate passed and President Bush signed into law legislation Sen. Craig crafted which will enable veterans to hire an attorney during their appeals process with the VA.

Although a wide array of organizations supported changing the old policy, including the Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project, Gold Star Wives, and Non Commissioned Officers Association, the new law is opposed by the DAV.

"This law would simply provide veterans with the option of hiring lawyers, if they so choose. If quality, free representation is available from a veterans service organization, such as the DAV, I fully expect most veterans would decide that is a better option than paying a lawyer," said Craig, who also noted that he is not a lawyer – a point which drew a round of appreciative laughter from the audience.

"I believe that veterans – who the President has accurately called 'our nation's finest citizens' – are mature, responsible, and capable enough to decide for themselves whether to hire legal representation." The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is now working on regulations to implement the law. The right to representation for veterans will become effective in June.

## **'Gyrenes' Honor Chairman at University Gala in Florida**

By Linda D. Kozaryn

American Forces Press Service

NAPLES, Fla., Feb. 25 - More than 350 former and retired Marines turned out to honor Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the Ave Maria University Gyrene Gala.

The Gyrene Gala raises scholarship funds for young men and women who serve or have served in the United States Armed Forces to attend Ave Maria University.

The term "gyrene" goes back to around 1900, according to Mariion F. Sturkey in her 2001 book, "Warrior Culture of the U.S. Marines." Sailors began using the term as a jocular derogatory reference to Marines. Instead of being insulted, the Marines loved it. The term became common by World War I and has been extensively used ever since.

Retired Marine Gen. Charles C. Krulak, 31st commandant of the Marine Corps, introduced the chairman, noting that he has watched Pace's career grow and flourish over the years. Krulak said Pace cut his teeth as a lieutenant in Vietnam and followed that up with a difficult fight in Somalia as a brigadier general.

"From that tour as a one-star general, Pete began his remarkable rise to become the highest ranking officer in the United States armed forces," Krulak said. "Pete personifies, in every aspect of his service, the type of Marine who fought on Iwo Jima so many years ago."

The chairman is "a superb leader, a great thinker, a true warrior, a solid family man," Krulak continued. "Pete epitomizes today, what I would call, the modern soldier statesman."

Taking the podium, Pace thanked Krulak, who was his first commandant and his boss multiple times during his 40-year career.

"If I stand before you as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it's because I truly stand on the shoulders of some giants of our corps," Pace said. "It didn't just happen that all of a sudden a United States Marine could be chairman."

Recapping history, Pace recalled Marine Gen. Luis H. Wilson Jr., who fought in the mid 1970s to become a full-fledged member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986 which allowed Marines to compete to be regional combatant commanders.

During the event, university supporters inducted Pace to their Gallery of Gyrene Greats. He received a plaque in his likeness which will be mounted on the wall of a campus building.

The university created the Gallery of Gyrene Greats to publicly recognize individuals who have achieved success through their embodiment of the Marine Corps ethos. The gallery presents them as positive role models for students, underscoring the Marine Corps' and the university's shared values of honor, courage and commitment.

Pace was one of five men inducted at the gala. Thomas S. Monaghan, a former Marine who went on to start Domino's Pizza and who now serves as chancellor at Ave Maria University was inducted, as were three civilian honorees who are founders of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. They are Arthur L. Allen, president and CEO, Allen Systems Group; Mr. William J. Schoen, chairman, Health Management Associates and Carlton O. Tronvold, retired.

To read complete article, click <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=3168>.

### ***Photos Worth 1,000 Patriotic Words for Group***

By Samantha L. Quigley  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 27 – Two nonprofit groups that support servicemembers are inviting amateur and professional photographers to look through their viewfinders with a patriotic eye for the 2007 "I Love America Day Photo Contest."

The organizations -- "Flags Across the Nation" and the "Military Family Network" - both are members of America Supports You, a Defense Department program highlighting the ways Americans and the corporate sector support the nation's servicemembers.

The organization will be displaying Flags Across the Nation artwork, as well as promoting this year's photo contest, she added.

Eileen Schwartz founded Flags Across the Nation with the goal of encouraging patriotism through the arts. She created "I Love America Day," first observed March 19, 2006, and later, the photo contest in celebration of that day, she said.

"I thought it was really important that we look at the really positive things about America and appreciate our freedom and really show respect for the American flag," she said. "There's no holiday at that time, and I wanted to bring recognition to the spirit of American and support for the troops."

This year marks the first photo contest, which coincides with Flags Across the Nation's second annual art contest of the same theme. So far the group has received about 100 photos for consideration.

"We wanted thousands," Schwartz said. "We just really, really encourage people to send us a photo." Those who would like to enter the photo contest must submit via e-mail one unpublished photo that fits into one of five categories. The categories are: patriotism, liberty and freedom, military, Americana scenes of landscape culture, and images of the American flag.

All entries must be received no later than midnight Eastern Time on March 19. Thirteen entries will be selected to be included in a photo quilt that will become part of Flags Across the Nation's traveling exhibit, Schwartz said. Of those 13, three top photos will receive prizes.

"The top prize is \$300 ... and every selected winner is going receive a 'Made in America' American flag," she said. "We picked 13 to honor the American flag and pay respect to the 13 original colonies and the 13 original states."

### ***AARP Announces New State Director***

*New AARP Florida State Director Brings In-Depth Knowledge of Senior Issues to Leadership of Florida's Largest Senior Organization*

Released by the American Association of Retired Persons

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., Feb. 20 – AARP has named Dr. Lori Parham as its new Florida state director, effective Feb. 26. Parham, who formerly served as AARP's chief legislative advocate, succeeds longtime state director Bentley Lipscomb, who was named to a national advisory role to senior AARP leaders in late 2006.

“Thanks to the support and involvement of our 2.8 million members and our thousands of volunteers, AARP has built a strong tradition of working for Floridians 50+,” said Parham. “I am honored to take up this challenge on their behalf.”

As millions of Baby Boomers grow older, the state will face significant challenges, she said. One of the first items on AARP Florida’s to-do list in 2007: Engage state leaders and residents in a discussion about how to improve long-term care in Florida. “Families give 80 percent of the care provided to frail elders,” Parham said. “It’s essential that our state create a long-term care system that supports older people and those who love them.” Learn more about AARP Florida’s 2007 legislative priorities at [www.aarp.org/fl](http://www.aarp.org/fl).

Parham, 33, received her Ph.D. in sociology with a concentration in gerontology in 2002 from Florida State University, publishing repeatedly in professional journals while at FSU’s Claude Pepper Institute for Aging and Public Policy. Her policy analyses as state Senate staff, and earlier at the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, played an important role in shaping Florida long-term care policy. Parham serves on the board and chairs the Health Care Consumer Advisory Committee of the Florida Patient Safety Corporation, is a member of the Florida At-Risk Driver Council, serves on the Aging and Disability Resource Center Advisory Council at the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, and was recently appointed to the board of the Florida Council of Aging.

With 2.8 million members in Florida -- and 38 million nationwide -- AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole.

### ***Gov. Crist Launches Two Web Sites for Citizens’ Access to Information***

*Office of Open Government and Plain Language initiative enhance transparency in state government*  
Released by the Executive Office of the Governor

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., Feb. 26 – Governor Charlie Crist announced the launch of two new Web sites that will help Floridians access information about state government and ensure that government’s actions are always transparent and accountable to taxpayers.

The Office of Open Government Web site contains information for state and local government officials, as well as the public, about Florida’s open government and public records laws. The Plain Language Initiative Web site is designed to help state government build stronger relationships with the public through clear communication.

“Government’s business is public service, and we can provide better service more efficiently if our customers understand what we are trying to do,” said Governor Crist. “The tools available on these new Web sites will help the people of Florida become true participants in the democratic process.”

Governor Crist created the Office of Open Government and the Plain Language Initiative in one of his first official acts as Governor when he issued [Executive Order 07-01](#) on Jan. 3, 2007.

### **Office of Open Government Web Site**

The Open Government Web site features a video clip from Governor Crist’s inaugural speech, in which he announced the office’s establishment. Useful information regarding Florida’s unique open government and public record laws for consumers is available as well. In addition, the Web site provides links to other organizations that provide public record resources. Visitors to the site can also access the Attorney General’s Open Government Mediation Program and the First Amendment Foundation.

Visit the Office of Open Government Web site at [www.flgov.com/og\\_home](http://www.flgov.com/og_home).

**Plain Language Initiative**

The Plain Language Web site explains the purpose of the initiative and answers commonly asked questions with examples of correspondence before and after plain-language editing. Citizens may request a translation of a state government document either online or by fax. Individuals submitting requests should receive a response within seven days.

Governor Crist encourages state and local officials, as well as consumers, to visit the Web sites. Visit the Plain Language Initiative Web site at [http://www.flgov.com/pl\\_home](http://www.flgov.com/pl_home).

**2007 Legislative Session Report**

**Bill Action List:**

The 2007 Regular Legislative Session is approaching. Below is the Bill Action List of key bills the department is tracking and their recent activity. If you wish to view all the legislation the department is following, please visit our tracking Web page at <http://www.floridavets.org/information/legislink.asp>.

Bill	Title	Sponsor	Actions
0903	Relating to Specialty License Plates/Gold Star	Cretul	2/23/2007 HOUSE Referred to Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council; Policy & Budget Council
0909	Relating to State Constitution/Ad Valorem Taxes	Needelman	2/26/2007 HOUSE Referred to Government Efficiency & Accountability Council; Policy & Budget Council
0935	Relating to U.S. Marine Corps License Plate/Fee	Patronis	2/27/2007 HOUSE Referred to Committee on Infrastructure by Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council
0975	Relating to Specialty License Plates	Hays	2/27/2007 HOUSE Referred to Committee on Infrastructure by Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council
1119	Relating to Service Members/Dependent Assistance	Kreegel	2/26/2007 HOUSE Filed
1159	Relating to Armed Forces Member/Use of Name	Grimsley	2/27/2007 HOUSE Filed
1195	Relating to FRS/Military Wartime Service	Kriseman	2/28/2007 HOUSE Filed
2006	Relating to Veterans' Tuition Assistance Act	Crist	2/23/2007 SENATE Filed
2042	Relating to Specialty License Plates/Troops	Baker	2/23/2007 SENATE Filed

## **Calendar of Key Legislative Dates:**

March 6	First Day of Regular Session – 109 <sup>th</sup> since statehood
March 6, 10 a.m.	Leaders of Veterans' Groups in Florida to lead Legislature in Pledge of Allegiance on Chamber Floor of Florida House of Representatives
March 6, noon	Final Bill Filing Deadline
May 4	Final Day of Regular Session

## **News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

### ***VA Chooses Lake Nona Boulevard Site for New Orlando Hospital***

*Nicholson Approves Modern Facility to Open in 2012*

WASHINGTON, March 2 – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson today announced final plans to build a new hospital for the Department of Veterans Affairs on Lake Nona Boulevard in the city of Orlando, ending speculation about the facility's location and clearing the way for purchase and site development.

"This will be a fabulous state-of-the-art health care facility, improving access to VA's world-class services and offering reduced travel time for many veterans of the Sunshine State and their families," said Nicholson, who toured the Lake Nona site and other potential medical center sites during a visit to Orlando in mid February.

For the first time, VA acute care, complex specialty care and advanced diagnostic services will be available for inpatients in east central Florida. More than 90,000 veterans already enrolled in VA health care will directly benefit from the location.

The complex will include a 134-bed hospital, a 120-bed nursing home, a 60-bed domiciliary, an outpatient clinic, a veterans benefits office to help veterans with financial benefits and generous parking.

Nicholson weighed public hearing testimony from veterans and other stakeholders, plus input from expert advisors in making the final location decision. Six sites originally were viewed as options, subsequently narrowed to Lake Nona and another site that was not chosen, a tract at International Corporate Park on Bee Line Expressway.

The new Orlando VA Medical Center will be located in a health care and research district that includes the planned University of Central Florida medical school and a research institute, providing important clinical and research opportunities for VA.

Scheduled to open in 2012, veterans can expect to see construction activity next year as grading and site preparation begins.

VA has not yet received appropriations to allow it to close on the property, though funds were requested in the fiscal year 2008 budget currently being deliberated on Capitol Hill. The purchase price for the Lake Nona Boulevard tract is not yet firm, since VA has not finalized negotiations with the owner.

## ***VA Leading the Way in Care for Traumatic Brain Injury***

*Nicholson: Another Example of VA Adapting to Needs of Newest Vets*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 27 -- The Department of Veterans Affairs, long a leader in the treatment and rehabilitation of veterans with brain injuries, is continuing to adapt its programs to meet the needs of veterans from the Global War on Terror, with a variety of new services in place or underway.

The latest innovations for treating traumatic brain injury in the newest generation of combat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan includes mandatory TBI training for all VA health care professionals, screening all recent combat vets for TBI and creating an outside panel of experts to review VA's TBI services.

"VA has adapted -- and will continue to adapt -- its world-class health care system to the unique medical issues facing our newest combat veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "VA is a nationally recognized leader in health care, and our system is dynamic. We are constantly striving to improve the care we provide to our veterans."

Traumatic brain injury can be caused without any visible injuries when explosives jar the brain inside the skull. Symptoms can range from headaches, irritability, and sleep disorders to memory problems and depression.

VA has developed a TBI course that is mandatory for all health care professionals. The course teaches primary care providers ways to diagnose TBI in patients who might not otherwise be aware they suffer from it.

Also starting this spring is a program to screen all patients who served in the combat theaters of Iraq or Afghanistan for TBI. The new screening will be offered at all 155 VA medical centers.

To ensure VA is taking advantage of the latest technology, treatment innovations and diagnostic insights, the department will establish a panel of outside experts to review VA's complete polytrauma system of care, including its TBI programs.

"Polytrauma" is a term that includes TBI and encompasses the other injuries typically found in blast victims, including amputations, burns, hearing and vision problems and psychological trauma.

VA operates four major polytrauma centers -- one of which is in Tampa, Fla. -- that have interdisciplinary teams of specialists working together on the complex medical needs of each patient. VA also has 17 regionally-based polytrauma facilities that provide specialized care closer to veterans' homes.

Each of VA's 21 regional health care networks is establishing polytrauma support clinic teams to further improve case management for veterans with TBI as they return home from the hospital, and to help them in their transition to their communities.

VA's innovations in the diagnosis and treatment of TBI patients began in 1992, when four VA medical centers dedicated special facilities to treatment, rehabilitation, professional education and research regarding brain injuries. In March 2003, those facilities received their first patients from the Global War on Terror, and in April 2005, they were officially designated as polytrauma centers, featuring teams of specialists in various medical disciplines and case managers working together to help veterans overcome severe injuries.

“Inpatient care in one of our four polytrauma centers is the beginning of a long road to recovery,” said Dr. Michael J. Kussman, VA’s Acting Under Secretary for Health. “We are establishing an extensive continuum of care that will enable our patients to achieve the highest level of function and ability.”

Among the special adaptations VA is providing for the care of TBI and polytrauma patients are case managers assigned to each patient, a greater emphasis and understanding of the problems of families during the initial care and long-term recovery, and state-of-the-art video-conferencing that permits top specialists to take an active role in the treatment of remote patients.

VA treated more than 5.4 million patients last year, accounting for about 55 million outpatient visits and 600,000 hospitalizations. About 205,000 of the 630,000 veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have come to VA for health care, with fewer than 7,000 being hospitalized.

All combat veterans have access to free health care from VA for two years after their separation from service, bypassing rules that require determinations of service-connected injuries or income levels.

### ***Gainesville Teen Makes Valentines Boxes for Homebound Vets***

WASHINGTON, March 1 – High school junior Sarah Thomas organized a service project to make special Valentines Day boxes for Gainesville, Fla. area veterans who are homebound because of physical disability. Sarah began her project by contacting Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner Cindy Stacey, director of the Home Based Primary Care program at the Gainesville VA Medical Center. The HBPC program teaches physically disabled veterans who are homebound, along with their caregivers, how to provide their own care at home.

Sarah coordinated with HBPC to find out what items would be most useful to include in the boxes. Suggestions included nail care items, reading glasses, small flashlights, postage stamps, toiletry items, playing cards, food snacks, and pet treats for their beloved cat and dog friends. Sarah asked members of her church to donate the items, and they responded generously. With help from her friends, Sarah decorated and filled 50 boxes of “goodies” during the winter school break. Sarah made a Valentine card for each box thanking the veterans for their service. She also helped deliver them to some of the homebound veterans in the Gainesville area.

“I just wanted to let these veterans know that they haven’t been forgotten,” she said. “This time of year it’s good to know that someone cares about you, and I hope that the veterans who receive my boxes will feel appreciated.”

Sarah hopes to expand the program in the future and will keep volunteering to help the veterans.

### ***VA Marks 20th Anniversary of Service to Homeless Veterans***

*Nicholson Announces \$24 Million for Homeless Programs*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 - On the eve of the 20th anniversary of its first program targeted specifically at the needs and problems of homeless veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs has announced a \$24 million spending package -- the largest one-time designation in its history -- for programs benefiting homeless veterans.

"Over the past two decades, we have worked hard to construct bridges leading from the darkened alleys of homelessness to the bright avenues of mainstream society," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim

Nicholson. "This would not be possible without the efforts from faith-based and community service providers who have partnered with VA throughout the years."

In events at Veterans Village in San Diego marking VA's first homeless program, Nicholson announced the Department was committing \$10 million to support about 1,000 new transitional housing beds nationwide, \$12 million for seriously mentally ill veterans, terminally ill veterans and similarly vulnerable groups, and \$2 million for other programs.

Twenty years ago, VA began its national effort to eradicate chronic homelessness by providing \$5 million for a pilot program to support contract residential care and to create domiciliary care for homeless veterans.

Today, VA supports more than 15,000 beds in transitional housing facilities or on VA residential treatment programs. The department has become the largest federal provider of direct assistance to the homeless, including outreach and case management, treatment, rehabilitation, transitional residential care, therapeutic work and assistance with permanent housing. VA supports special programs for the treatment and rehabilitation of those suffering from mental illness and addictive disorders.

Since 1988, VA has supported more than 1,500 Stand Downs across the nation. Stand Downs give homeless veterans a temporary refuge where they can obtain food, shelter, clothing and a range of community and VA assistance.

"Our goal is to return to communities sober citizens, gainfully employed, living independently with restored dignity," said Nicholson. "But the tremendous work done across the nation, as great as it is, is not enough as long as one veteran is homeless."

VA proposes to spend more than \$265 million on specialized homeless assistance in Fiscal Year 2007.

VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system, with 155 hospitals, more than 800 clinics, about 130 nursing homes and 45 domiciliaries, treating about one million patients each week.

### ***VA Strengthens Partnership with U.S. Olympic Committee***

*Secretary Nicholson: Veteran-Athletes to Get Olympic-Caliber Training*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 – To improve competitive sporting opportunities for physically disabled veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs is strengthening its partnership with the U.S. Olympic Committee.

"America's veterans deserve the best," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "For physically disabled veterans interested in representing the United States in Paralympic sports competition, that means receiving world-class training in facilities operated by the U.S. Olympic Committee."

Nicholson, joined by Norman Bellingham, USOC chief operating officer, announced that VA is working with the Olympic Committee to give qualified physically disabled veterans the chance to train in facilities maintained for Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

"The Paralympic program, elite sport competition for persons with physical disabilities, is an integral part of the USOC," said Bellingham. "Our commitment to grow Paralympic activity ensures that veterans and other persons with physical disabilities have opportunities to participate in physical fitness at the local level and pursue their dreams of representing America at the Paralympic Games."

“This partnership builds upon VA’s long-standing sponsorship of annual national games for wheelchair athletes and physically disabled veterans interested in winter sports,” Nicholson said. “This partnership also builds upon the character, dedication and skill of physically disabled veterans who are more interested in their abilities than their disabilities.”

Additionally, the new Veterans Paralympic Performance Program would provide full-time training and support for qualified physically disabled veterans pursuing spots on a future U.S. Paralympic team at six different Olympic and Paralympic Training facilities including: U.S. Olympic Training Centers in Chula Vista, Calif. and Colorado Springs, Colo.; Olympic and Paralympic training facilities in Birmingham, Ala., Marquette, Mich. and Edmond, Okla. and alpine ski training in collaboration with Challenge Aspen in Aspen, Colo.

More than 400 physically disabled veterans are scheduled to take part in a wide range of winter sports during the 21<sup>st</sup> National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass, Colo., from April 1-6. Another 500 disabled veterans are expected to show up in Milwaukee from June 19-23 for the 27<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games. These programs and others being developed by the VA and USOC promote daily physical activity and participation in sport to all disabled veterans.

## **2007 Veteran Organization Convention Schedule and Events**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Lakeland Area Multiple Sclerosis Support Group	Support group meeting for vets, family and friends of people with MS	March 10 1 p.m.	DAV Chapter 28 303 Veterans Ave. S. Lakeland	Lisa Garcia 863-644-0239 <a href="http://home.earthlink.net/~tbl5142">http://home.earthlink.net/~tbl5142</a>
AMVETS Dept. of Florida	State Executive Committee Meeting	March 16-18	Rosen Centre, Orlando	Bill McRoberts 352-669-8490
Marine Corps League, Dept. of Florida	Spring Conference (All Marine Corps veterans invited)	March 29- April 1	Hawthorn Suites, 7450 Augusta National Dr., Orlando	John Ring <a href="mailto:ringjh@earthlink.net">ringjh@earthlink.net</a>
Florida Council, Fleet Reserve Association - First Coast Branch 91 and Unit 91	Florida Meeting	April 13-15	5391 Collins Rd. Jacksonville	Jim Robbins 904-269-2136
Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard	20 <sup>th</sup> Annual VVB Reunion	April 26-29	Wickham Park, Melbourne	Greg Welsh <a href="mailto:vets2gether@cfl.rr.com">vets2gether@cfl.rr.com</a>
Italian-American War Veterans of the U.S.	National Ladies Auxiliary Testimonial	April 27-29	Hawthorn Suites, 7450 Augusta National Dr., Orlando	Vito M. Rao <a href="mailto:vrao@broward.org">vrao@broward.org</a>
Korean War Veterans Association, Dept of Florida	2007 Annual State Convention	May 11-13	Kenilworth Lodge Sebring	Joan Arcand <a href="mailto:Richard.arcand@verizon.net">Richard.arcand@verizon.net</a>

Editor's Note: Veteran Service Organizations in Florida provided the information in the table above. If you would like to submit event information to include in the *e-floridavetsNews*, please e-mail the editor, Courtney Heidelberg, at [heidelbergc@fdva.state.fl.us](mailto:heidelbergc@fdva.state.fl.us).

## **Florida Job Fair Information**

### ***Career Fair for Veteran Job Seekers Coming to Jacksonville this Month***

Released from RecruitMilitary

RecruitMilitary, LLC, in cooperation with a unit of the United States Department of Labor, will produce a hiring event for veteran job seekers in Jacksonville on March 14. This RecruitMilitary Career Fair will take place from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. at the Veteran's Memorial Arena, 300 A. Philip Randolph Blvd.

Companies attending will include Lowes, Military Sealift Command, DeVry University, Denny's, Wackenhut, Priority Solutions, OldCastle, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and many others.

In addition to participation in career fairs, RecruitMilitary offers subscriptions to its database of registered candidates, currently numbering more than 140,000; job postings on its Web site, [www.recruitmilitary.com](http://www.recruitmilitary.com); advertising in online and print media; and contingency and retained hiring services. The company mails more than 53,000 copies of a quarterly, print newsletter called *Incoming!* to 230 military bases throughout the world for distribution to transitioning personnel. RecruitMilitary is headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio, and has field offices in eight states. The company was founded in 1998.

Additional job fair information from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation is available online at: [http://www.floridajobs.org/onestop/os\\_job\\_fairs.html](http://www.floridajobs.org/onestop/os_job_fairs.html).

## **Supporting Veterans**

### ***License Plates Support Florida Veterans' Homes***

Your purchase of the "**Florida Salutes Veterans**" or one of the **approved Army, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard Military Service license plates** helps people who need it most, when they need it most.

The entire \$15 surcharge goes into a Trust Fund for the operation and maintenance of critically needed Veterans' Homes in Florida. A portion of the Marine Corps License Plate also supports the State Veterans' Homes Program.

### ***Headstones and Markers***

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) furnishes upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For all deaths occurring before Sept. 11, 2001, the VA may provide a headstone or marker only for graves that are not marked with a private headstone.

Spouses and dependents buried in a private cemetery are not eligible for a government-provided headstone or marker.

Flat markers in granite, marble, and bronze and upright headstones in granite and marble are available. The style chosen must be consistent with existing monuments at the place of burial. Niche markers are also available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

When burial or memorialization is in a national cemetery, a headstone or marker will be ordered by the cemetery officials based on inscription information provided by the next of kin. When burial is in a private cemetery, [VA Form 40-1330, Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker](#) (PDF), must be submitted by the next of kin or a representative, such as funeral director, cemetery official or veterans counselor, along with [veterans military discharge documents](#), to request a Government-provided headstone or marker. Do not send original documents, as they will not be returned.

To learn more information regarding headstones and markers including eligibility criteria, placing orders, inscriptions, replacements and more, click on [http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm\\_hm.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm_hm.asp).

### ***Orlando Retiree Appreciation Day***

ORLANDO, Fla. – Retirees from all branches of service -- and military members contemplating retirement -- are invited to attend Fort Stewart's Retiree Appreciation Day activities at the Rosen Plaza Hotel, 9700 International Drive.

A morning speaker's program starts at 9:15 a.m., and a "county fair" begins immediately following the morning program. Representatives will be available to provide assistance, answer questions and issue identification cards.

For more information contact the Army Retirement Services office at (912) 767-5013.

### ***View Artist's Painting of 'High Flight' at Open House***

Released from Banyan Air Service

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., March 1 -- Aviation Artist, Edward Ash, has recently completed a major painting to mark the 65th anniversary of the death of World War II pilot, John Gillespie Magee, author of the famous poem *High Flight*. This artwork will be on display in Hanger 63 (new Aviation Store) in celebration of Banyan Air Service's New Terminal, Maintenance Facility and Aviation Store at the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport.

The poem's original manuscript is displayed at the U.S. Library of Congress. In 1971, James Irwin, pilot of the Apollo 15 Lunar Module, carried a copy of the poem with him to the moon. President Reagan quoted from the poem following the Challenger disaster in 1986, and in 1998 it was included in the eulogy to America's first man in space, Alan Shephard.

The painting will be one of many displays and events that Banyan Air Service will showcase at its weekend event, which will be held Friday, March 2, 6 – 10 p.m. and Saturday, March 3, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Families and guests are invited for a casual day featuring tours, music, sponsor's activities, children's events, product demos, and aircraft display. Barbecue will be served.

You can RSVP online at [http://www.banyanair.com/rsvp\\_openhouse.aspx](http://www.banyanair.com/rsvp_openhouse.aspx) or by calling (954) 492-4379.

#### Address of the event:

Ft. Lauderdale Executive Airport  
5360 NW 20th Terrace  
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

## ***Vietnam Memorial Traveling Wall 2007 Schedule***

Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard (VVB) is hosting a Vietnam Traveling Wall. The wall is a 3/5 scale replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., and is based in Brevard County, Fla. VVB is currently developing this year's schedule, which is slated to visit two cities in Florida to date. The current schedule is listed below. For more information on the Traveling Memorial Wall, visit the Traveling Wall Web site at [www.TravelingWall.us](http://www.TravelingWall.us)

Florida Showings:

April 5-8        Ocala  
April 22-29     Melbourne

## ***The Wall That Heals Visits Florida this Spring***

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is hosting a traveling half-scale replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall. *The Wall That Heals* and accompanying museum will visit more than 20 cities and towns throughout the nation this year, including two stops in Florida. See information below for details:

March 2-4        Port St. Joe, Fla.  
March 8-11      Cape Coral, Fla.

\*More information can be found by navigating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Web site at <http://www.vvmf.org/>.

## **State of Florida Veterans' Homes**

Take a [virtual tour](#) of a **State Veterans' Nursing or Domiciliary Home**. The tour includes ten 360-degree fully interactive pictures. No additional software is required to view these images. Simply click on the desired picture and the tour begins.

## **Links and References for Veterans**

[Click here](#) for a copy of **Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide**.

[Ask Benefits Questions Via E-MAIL](#): For specific Compensation and Pension benefits questions and local regional office issues, the contact list is by state and geographical area of jurisdiction.

[Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents](#) (Current Edition) - The current edition of this booklet lists the variety of federal benefits available to veterans and their dependents. Selecting the link above will allow you to download the booklet as a [PDF](#) file in English or Spanish.

La versión en Español de el folleto "Beneficios Federales para los Veteranos y sus Dependientes", el cual explica la variedad de beneficios disponibles para los veteranos y sus dependientes, se encuentra disponible en versión PDF al presionar [aquí](#).

[VA State Summary for Florida](#) – As of December 2006.

[Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center](#) - The Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center uses a state of the art 40-foot van equipped with two exam rooms, as well as facilities for dental care, to travel the state

performing intervention with homeless veterans who live in rural encampments. This mobile unit offers a unique opportunity to provide homeless veterans immediate assistance of food and clothing, health screening and assessment, VA benefit determination and counseling, as well as assessment of housing, mental health, substance abuse, employment, educational and vocational needs.

The Mobile Service Center will host the following events in Florida soon:

March 3-4	Tampa Community Event
March 7	Charlotte Stand Down
March 16	Jacksonville Stand Down
March 24	Cocoa Stand Down

[Federal Government's Newly Renamed and Updated Web site](#)

[Library of Congress, Veterans History Project](#)

[Issues and Action: Federal Veterans Issues](#)

[Find your member of Congress](#)

[United States Senate](#)

[U.S. House of Representatives](#)

[Combat Veterans Information](#)

[Transition Assistance Program](#)

[Survivors Benefits](#)

[Women Veterans Information](#)

(Some links require [Adobe Acrobat Reader, which can be downloaded here.](#))

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## **Editor's Note**

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