



## Vietnam Veterans of America Sammy L. Davis Chapter 295



# December 2015 Newsletter

### December Meeting

Reminder: December meeting will be 7:00pm instead of 7:30pm. It will be 7:00pm for the winter.

### Food Drive for HVAF

Bring non-perishable food to the next meeting for HVAF (Hoosier Veterans Assistance Foundation) for the Veterans they are helping. What they need the most is canned meats, pasta and noodles. You can visit their website to see what they do. <http://www.hvafofindiana.org/>

### Special Membership Offer

There is a one time special offer on VVA membership. Lifetime membership dues are \$100 until December 31, 2015. Membership is open to U.S. armed forces veterans who served on active duty (for other than training purposes) in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1978, or in any duty location between August 5, 1964 and May 7, 1978. The special membership application form for this offer is found on this website: <http://www.vva.org/documents/Membership/SpecialOffer.pdf> Make sure you bring it in or mail it to VVA Chapter 295.

AVVA is also offering a special life membership for \$100 until December 31, 2015. Special membership form found on this website:

[http://www.avva.org/forms/membership/sp\\_member\\_app\\_nov2015.pdf](http://www.avva.org/forms/membership/sp_member_app_nov2015.pdf) Make sure you bring it in or mail it to AVVA Chapter 295.

**Free Flu Shots:** You may opt to get a free flu shot at your local VA health care facility or you may choose to go to your neighborhood Walgreens. As an enrolled VA patient, you can get a no-cost flu shot at Walgreens until March 31, 2016. Simply go to any Walgreens, tell the pharmacist you receive care at a VA facility and show your Veterans Identification Card and another form of photo ID.

**Use Group Code # 5933XBAYV.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 269279, Indianapolis, IN 46226-9279 Phone: 317-547-4748

Physical Address: 9450 E. 59th Street, Indianapolis, IN Website: [www.vva295.com](http://www.vva295.com)

Meetings are the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm (7pm during winter months); Board Meeting 6:00

# VA Makes Changes to Veterans Choice Program

## *Changes Remove Barriers and Expands Access to Care*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a number of changes to make participation in the Veterans Choice Program easier and more convenient for Veterans who need to use it. The move, which streamlines eligibility requirements, follows feedback from Veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

“As we implement the Veterans Choice Program, we are learning from our stakeholders what works and what needs to be refined,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “It is our goal to do all that we can to remove barriers that separate Veterans from the care they deserve.” To date, more than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014.

### **Under the old policy, a Veteran was eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she met the following criteria:**

- Enrolled in VA health care by 8/1/14 or able to enroll as a combat Veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program;
- Experienced unusual or excessive burden eligibility determined by geographical challenges, environmental factors or a medical condition impacting the Veteran’s ability to travel;
- Determined eligible based on the Veteran’s current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.

### **Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:**

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran’s physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician;
- Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician;
- Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home;
- Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran’s local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons; or
- Lives in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes New Hampshire Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the United States Territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).

Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit: [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact).

\*\*\*\*\*

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.

~ Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S. President

## Veterans Affairs pays \$142 Million in Bonuses amid Scandals

VA employees have received millions of dollars in bonuses, even as the agency is buried deep in scandal.

According to documents obtained by our partners at USA Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs handed out more than \$142 million in bonuses for work during 2014. It is the same year the agency came under scrutiny for veterans' care.

Among recipients of the bonuses were claim processors dubbed the worst in the country, and managers who oversaw the over-prescription of opiates to patients. Sen. Claire McCaskill says the bonuses are evidence of a bigger problem.

"It almost is baked into the salary structure too many places in the federal government. So, I wish I could say I was shocked that these bonuses were given out even to some people who were working in departments that frankly had not done well during the year. But this is going to take a lot of oversight and clean up," said McCaskill, (D) Missouri.

Congress is considering legislation that would limit bonuses for VA executives. But, Sen. McCaskill says the most important thing lawmakers can do is increase oversight. That's because she says some bonuses will be necessary to attract employees, and points to the director turnover and vacancy at the John Cochran VA Hospital in St. Louis.

"The majority of the time it has been posted, no one has applied for the job, no one. So obviously we're not overpaying for director of that hospital because no one wants the job. So, we've got to find that sweet spot, not giving bonuses to people who don't deserve them, but make sure we're compensating adequately to get the very best employees because that's what veterans deserve," said McCaskill.

A VA spokesperson told USA Today the vast majority of agency employees are committed to serving veterans, and pointed out that no top senior executives received bonuses.

# VVA Call-In Day 2.0!

**Capitol Hill: December 9, 2015**



**Call (202) 224-3121**, give the operator your state or zip code, and he/she will connect you with your elected officials' office. Ask to speak to the LA for Veterans Affairs, **make it clear that you are calling as a constituent, asking for their support of H.R. 1769 and S.901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015.**

## **House Veterans Affairs Committee Chair Applauds Passage of Two Vets' Bills**

From HVAC November 16 press release: On November 16, the House passed two House Committee on Veterans' Affairs-originated bills: The first, H.R. 1338, the Dignified Interment of Our Veterans Act of 2015, would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study and report back to Congress on the problem of unclaimed remains of deceased veterans and also place a \$2 million cap on FY 2016 bonuses for VA senior executives. The second bill, H.R. 1384, the Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act, would honor as veterans retired National Guard and Reserve personnel who have served 20 years and do not meet the full requirements for veteran status under Title 38, United States Code. The bills now await consideration by the Senate.

Following House passage of the bills, HVAC Chairman Miller (R-FL) released the following statement: "Today the House took important steps toward ensuring deceased veterans are treated with respect and dignity, reining in VA's outrageous, everyone-gets-a-bonus culture, and honoring the service of National Guard and Reserve retirees. I applaud my House colleagues for supporting these important measures, and I call on the Senate to act on them as soon as possible."

## **National Desert Storm Veterans War Memorial**

Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield is the largest American war of the 20th Century without a memorial. More than a half million American servicemen and women took part.. The National Desert Storm War Memorial in Washington D.C. will be a tribute to those who served, those who stood behind them and more importantly, the 292 U.S. servicemen who gave the ultimate sacrifice. The memorial is set for completion in 2018. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) proudly donated \$100,000 toward the construction of this memorial. This donation marks the first payment of the VFW's pledged \$500000 to help build the memorial. For more information on this memorial or to make a donation, check out this website: <http://www.nationaldesertstormwarmemorial.org/>

## **Dates to Remember**

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| December 5  | Pearl Harbor Remembrance Event, 11am Noblesville City Hall, second floor, Speaker is Paul Kennedy, US Navy Veteran & Pearl Harbor Survivor   |
| December 7  | Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day   |
| December 9  | VVA meeting 7:00pm; Board meeting 6pm  |
| December 19 | VVA Christmas Party, doors open 5pm, dinner 6pm; This is a pitch-in meal. If your last name begins with A-G bring Salads, H-O bring Vegetables and P-Z bring desserts. Main entrée will be provided . More details at meeting. |

The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.

~ George Washington, 1789