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Union Veterans Council Newsletter

1 message

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UNION VETERANS

AFL-CIO

1. Honor Veterans by Fighting for Them Like They Fought for Us

by [James Parks](#), Nov 11, 2010

More than 2 million union members are veterans. On this day dedicated to those who have served their country in the military, it's appropriate to remember that we need to fight for them just as they fought to defend us.

Like all workers, veterans are suffering in this tough economy. But for many vets, the situation is dire. Nearly one in five veterans (18 percent) recently back from tours of duty is unemployed. Of those employed since leaving the military, 25 percent earn less than \$21,840 a year. On any given day, as many as 250,000 veterans (male and female) are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year.

So as we celebrate their service, let us also focus on ways to help veterans and all workers get out of this economic mess. In a statement, Mark Ayers, chairman of the AFL-CIO [Union Veterans Council](#) and president of the Building and Construction Trades Department ([BCTD](#)), says:

They way I see it—they served us, so now it's our turn to serve them. We owe our freedoms to the sacrifices of the brave men and women who have served in the military. For many, their fights on the battlefield are over; but now they must sadly endure other battles—such as finding meaningful employment, affordable housing and accessible health care—in their transition back into civilian life.

Speaking today at ceremonies at the [National Labor College](#), James Gilbert, director of the Union Veterans Council, said the best way to honor our veterans is by making sure they have the resources to succeed. He called on the audience to support programs such as [Helmets to Hardhats](#) and Veterans in Construction, which prepare veterans for jobs in the construction industry. He said we need to expand GI Bill benefits to include vocational training and apprenticeships that can ease the transition to civilian employment.

It is imperative to strengthen and enforce Veterans Preference Laws, which require the federal government to favor returning veterans for government jobs, Gilbert said. Also we must ensure that the Veterans Health Administration, which serves 8 million veterans, including 3 million in rural areas, is fully funded and staffed, he said. Meanwhile, Gordon Pavy, the Vets Council staff coordinator, represented the council at ceremonies at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.

According to Ayers:

... no United States military veteran should ever have to struggle to live a normal, healthy life after all they have sacrificed for us. On this Veterans Day, let us both take a moment to remember, honor and support those men and women in uniform who serve our nation today for the noble cause of freedom and liberty, and to also make sure that not one single American veteran loses his or her life, or struggles to make a life, because we, as a nation, did not do enough to help.

2. School In Washington State Recognized As Veteran-Friendly.

The [Vancouver \(WA\) Columbian](#) (12/1, Vogt, 37K) noted that on Tuesday, Washington State University (WSU) Vancouver was "recognized...as a veteran-friendly campus. In an afternoon ceremony, a memorandum of understanding was signed by Mike Gregoire, a veteran and the husband" of Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire; "John Lee, director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; and Hal Dengerink, chancellor of WSU Vancouver." The agreement "ensures that students get access to the state VA for reviews of their needs and assistance in obtaining benefits."

3. VA Assisting Homeless Vets In South Dakota. The [KELO-TV](#) Sioux Falls, SD (12/1, Wilson) website said Chris Nelson, a "decorated Vietnam vet who overcame his haunting memories from war moved on with his life," is now "helping other vets do the same as the manager of the Berakhah House." Nelson "is the Veterans Housing Coordinator for Volunteers of America Dakotas, who, along with the Veterans Administration, produced a program that's helping homeless vets get off the streets and back to work." KELO added, "Last year alone," VA "assisted nearly 250 homeless veterans in the Sioux Falls area."

4. VA Hospital To Cut Ribbon Next Week On New Clinic. The [Alexandria \(LA\) Town Talk](#) (12/2, 30K) notes that on Monday, the Veterans Affairs hospital in Alexandria "will cut the ribbon on its Natchitoches Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Natchitoches." According to the Town Talk, the "clinic will allow Natchitoches-area military veterans to receive primary care and mental health services at a place close to home."

5. Shinseki Speaks At Groundbreaking For Disabled Vets Memorial.

In a story submitted by Norris W. Preston, a past national vice commander of The American Legion, the [Moberly \(MO\) Monitor-Index](#) (11/16, 5K) reports, "On November 10th, the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial broke ground at its planned site, on 2.4 acres near" the US Botanic Garden "and the Capitol. The Department of Veteran Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki was the speaker, as well as

representatives of the memorial's foundation." The Monitor-Index adds, "Until now, no national memorial has focused on disabled veterans."

6. Veterans Contract Bill Moves Forward In New Jersey. The [Asbury Park \(NJ\) Press](#) (11/16, Bowman) reports, "A bill that would set aside 3 percent of all state contracts for businesses owned by veterans was released Monday by a state Assembly committee" in New Jersey. Voting "4-0 with one abstention, the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee sent the bill, A-3308, to the full Assembly for consideration. An identical bill, S-2314, awaits action by the state Senate's Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee, which is expected to take it up next month."

7. Pro Football Players Thank Vets At VA Hospital. On its team website, pro football's [Tennessee Titans](#) (11/16, Peters) note team "players, cheerleaders, team representatives and mascot T-Rac" recently made an annual Veterans Day to the "Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Nashville," where they "thanked American heroes." The "visit was extra special for fifth-year fullback Ahmard Hall, who served four years in the Marines, completing missions in Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2002), before attending the University of Texas" on the GI Bill.

8. Unemployment Rate Increases For Post-9/11 Vets. The current issue of the [Army Times](#) (11/22, 104K) reports, "Jobs remain elusive for new veterans, according to the October jobs report from the Labor Department." While the "national unemployment rate remains at 9.6 percent," it is 10.6 percent for post-9/11 veterans, an "increase of 0.3 percentage points over the September jobs report." The Times adds, "Transition assistance programs for separating service members are being beefed up to try to give veterans more help finding jobs, but the difficulty in converting a military-learned skill to a civilian occupations remains a major hurdle."

9. Paying New Agent Orange Claims A "Lengthy And Complex" Process For VA. In continuing coverage, syndicated "Military Update" columnist Tom Philpott writes in [Stars And Stripes](#) (11/5), "Many Vietnam veterans with ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease or B-cell leukemia expected" Veterans Affairs "compensation for their illnesses to begin soon after a 60-day congressional review period ended Oct. 30. Though the first batch of payments went out this week, the relatively small number - about 1300 claims worth \$8 million - reinforced the fact that the process for calculating retroactive payments is lengthy and complex." After noting that VA's "goal is to have all these claims processed and paid by October next year," Philpott adds, "More than 1,000 claim specialists in nine VA resource centers are working on 93,000 claims filed" for the three aforementioned "diseases between Sept. 25, 1985 and Oct. 13, 2009," when VA Secretary Eric Shinseki "announced his decision to add these diseases to the list of presumptive diseases for Agent Orange exposure."

VA Projecting 200,000 More Vets May Qualify For Assistance With Expanded Benefits. The [WJXX-TV](#) Jacksonville, FL (11/4) website also took note of VA's expanded Agent Orange benefits, saying VA "projects that by adding three more diseases, 200,000 more veterans may qualify for assistance."

10. Some Vets Having Trouble With For-Profit Colleges. [Bloomberg News](#) (11/2, Golden) says Keith Melvin, who after serving in Iraq became involved in a financial dispute with Kaplan University, and "thousands of returning veterans" have been "enticed by for-profit colleges through repeated phone calls and e-mails, advertising in military-oriented publications, and alliances with veterans' organizations eager for corporate contributions." And, while "some veterans succeed at these colleges, others are hindered by red tape in getting federal funding and the inability to complete degrees and find well-paying jobs after graduation." Bloomberg adds, "After being asked by Bloomberg News about Melvin's case, the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to pay his Kaplan bill retroactively through a vocational rehabilitation program for disabled veterans, department officials said."

11. VA Begins Questionnaire Streamlining Process. In its current issue, the [Army Times](#) (11/8, 104K) says that by releasing the "first three of what will be 79 questionnaires to guide physicians...through the evaluation that determines eligibility for disability compensation," the Veterans Affairs Department has "taken the first step in an overhaul" of such questionnaires. The Times adds, "VA Secretary Eric Shinseki has mandated a goal of processing new disability claims in 125 days with a 98 percent accuracy rate by 2015. Part of the plan to meet that goal is to streamline the flow of information and try to collect all essential data at the beginning of the process."

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