

CWA Local 4250 RMC
Steve Tisza, President



UNION VETERANS

AFL-CIO

1. The Union Veterans Council Enthusiastically Supports New GI Bill 2.0

The UVC has joined with many other Veterans Organizations, including the VFW, American Legion, DAV, IAVA, MOAA, AMVETS, Student Veterans of America, Helmets to Hardhats and the American Council on Education to form a solid coalition across generations of veterans to take this message to Congress, and we hope you will join us too. We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity and go talk to them where you live, or call their local offices and make sure they hear loud and clear:

Sign on to Senate Bill 3447 or House Bill 5933!

These bipartisan pieces of legislation will expand G.I. Bill benefits to more veterans around the country who were left out of the first version of the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. Valuable vocational training, OJT and apprenticeships will be eligible for coverage. It will also reimburse students taking multiple accreditation/certification tests.

The New GI Bill 2.0 will also simplify the benefit and establish a national tuition baseline for the Yellow Ribbon Program payment, instead of the confusing and unwieldy state-by-state rate. Not to mention over 30,000 full-time National Guardsmen will get G.I. Bill credit just like their Reservist counterparts.

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As we head into the fall, more than 330,000 student veterans around the country are going to use the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill; but thousands more are being left behind. It's up to YOU to take this message to your representative.

2. In New Video, President Obama Encourages Troops and Veterans to Claim 'Stop Loss' Pay

Deadline for application for special retroactive pay is October 21; Service members should submit applications to www.defense.gov/stoploss

WASHINGTON DC - Today, the White House, Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs jointly released a new web video in which President Obama encourages active duty troops and veterans whose service in Iraq or Afghanistan was involuntarily extended or retirement was suspended due to 'stop loss' to apply for the special retroactive pay to which they are entitled. Under legislation President Obama signed into law last year, servicemen and women who served between September 11, 2001 and September 30, 2009 and whose service was extended due to 'stop loss' are eligible for \$500 per month in retroactive pay for each month their service was extended.

"As your Commander in Chief, I'm here to tell you that this is no gimmick or trick," President Obama says in the video. "You worked hard. You earned this money. It doesn't matter whether you were Active or Reserve, whether you're a veteran who experienced 'stop loss' or the survivor of a service member who did-if your service was extended, you're eligible."

To see the full video, click here: [LINK](#)

Eligible servicemen and women should submit their applications for this retroactive pay

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to www.defense.gov/stoploss. While by law, service members who received a bonus for voluntarily reenlisting or extending their service are not eligible, it is strongly recommended that all who may be eligible submit an application before the deadline. The deadline to apply is October 21, 2010. The tens of thousands of veterans who have already been approved have received an average of nearly \$4,000.

Special retroactive pay for servicemen and women impacted by 'stop loss' is just one of the many ways the Obama Administration is working to serve the men and women who have served our country. Since President Obama took office, the Administration has:

- Provided one of the largest funding increases in decades to help create a 21st century VA that provides our veterans better health care, better services, and better support, including in rural communities.
- Eliminated inpatient, outpatient and prescription co-pays for the catastrophically disabled, which today account for a historically large percentage of our veterans coming home from war.
- Worked to break the back of benefit claims backlog so vets don't have to wait years for the benefits they need, and continues to work to improve and modernize VA's delivery of services.
- Helped our veterans transition back to civilian life by helping them get jobs and sending them to college through the post-9/11 GI Bill, which has already helped more than 300,000 veterans or their family members pursue their dream of a college education.
- Provided unprecedented resources to treat the wounds of today's wars --

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traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress disorder - and provided additional resources to help family members and caregivers who put their own lives on hold to care for their loved one.

- Made it easier for those suffering from PTSD to qualify for VA benefits. A veteran can now establish a claim based on his or her own testimony of events that caused PTSD without the requirement of corroborating evidence -- no matter which war they served in.
- Eliminated obstacles for about 200,000 Vietnam veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange to get the health care and benefits they need.

3. VA Publishes Final Regulation to Aid Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange

VA Health Care and Benefits Provided for Many Vietnam Veterans

WASHINGTON - Veterans exposed to herbicides while serving in Vietnam and other areas will have an easier path to access quality health care and qualify for disability compensation under a final regulation that was published on August 31, 2010 in the *Federal Register* by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The new rule expands the list of health problems VA will presume to be related to Agent Orange and other herbicide exposures to add two new conditions and expand one existing category of conditions.

"Last October, based on the requirements of the Agent Orange Act of 1991 and the Institute of Medicine's 2008 Update on Agent Orange, I determined that the evidence provided was sufficient to award presumptions of service connection for these three additional diseases," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "It was the right decision, and the President and I are proud to finally

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provide this group of Veterans the care and benefits they have long deserved."

The final regulation follows Shinseki's determination to expand the list of conditions for which service connection for Vietnam Veterans is presumed. VA is adding Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease and expanding chronic lymphocytic leukemia to include all chronic B cell leukemias, such as hairy cell leukemia.

In practical terms, Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a "presumed" illness don't have to prove an association between their medical problems and their military service. By helping Veterans overcome evidentiary requirements that might otherwise present significant challenges, this "presumption" simplifies and speeds up the application process and ensure that Veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

The Secretary's decision to add these presumptives is based on the latest evidence provided in a 2008 independent study by the Institute of Medicine concerning health problems caused by herbicides like Agent Orange.

Final Regulation 2/2/2

Veterans who served in Vietnam anytime during the period beginning January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides.

More than 150,000 Veterans are expected to submit Agent Orange claims in the next 12 to 18 months, many of whom are potentially eligible for retroactive disability payments based on past claims. Additionally, VA will review approximately 90,000 previously denied claims by Vietnam Veterans for service connection for these conditions. All those awarded service-connection who are not currently eligible for enrollment into the VA healthcare system will become eligible.

This historic regulation is subject to provisions of the Congressional Review Act that require a 60-day Congressional review period before implementation. After the review period, VA can begin paying benefits for new claims and may award benefits retroactively for earlier periods. For new claims, VA may pay

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benefits retroactive to the effective date of the regulation or to one year before the date VA receives the application, whichever is later. For pending claims and claims that were previously denied, VA may pay benefits retroactive to the date it received the claim.

VA encourages Vietnam Veterans with these three diseases to submit their applications for access to VA health care and compensation now so the agency can begin development of their claims.

Individuals can go to a website at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/AO/claimherbicide.htm> to get an understanding of how to file a claim for presumptive conditions related to herbicide exposure, as well as what evidence is needed by VA to make a decision about disability compensation or survivors benefits.

Additional information about Agent Orange and VA's services for Veterans exposed to the chemical is available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange.

The regulation is available on the Office of the Federal Register website at <http://www.ofr.gov/>.

4. Critics Seek Congressional Inquiry Into Use Of Seroquel As PTSD Treatment.

The [AP](#) (9/4, Perrone) reports, "Thousands of troops suffering from PTSD" have received Seroquel "over the past nine years, helping make Seroquel one of Veteran Affairs' top drug expenditures and the No. 5 best-selling drug in the nation. But several soldiers and veterans have died while taking the pills, raising concerns among some military families that the government is not being upfront about the drug's risks. They want Congress to investigate." Iraq veteran Andrew White, whose doctors "recommended progressively larger doses of Seroquel," was at one point "prescribed more than 1,600 milligrams per day -- more than double the maximum dose recommended for schizophrenia patients. A short time later, White died in his sleep." A VA investigation "concluded that White died of a rare drug interaction. He was also taking an antidepressant and an anti-anxiety pill, as well as a painkiller for which he did not have a prescription. Inspectors concluded he received the 'standard of care' for his condition. It's unclear how many soldiers have died while taking

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Seroquel, or if the drug definitely contributed to the deaths. White has confirmed at least a half-dozen deaths among soldiers on Seroquel, and he thinks there may be many others." Spending for Seroquel "by the government's military medical systems has increased more than sevenfold since the start of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, according to documents obtained by the Associated Press under the Freedom of Information Act. That by far outpaces the growth in personnel who have gone through the system in that time."

5. Soldiers Not Getting Purple Hearts For TBI.

On its website, PBS's [NewsHour](#) (9/9) reported on soldiers with traumatic brain injuries suffered in combat and Purple Hearts, basing it upon the reporting of ProPublica and National Public Radio, which appeared in yesterday's briefing. "Many commanders still don't believe that TBIs are really an injury." The mindset that giving the Purple Heart for TBI "was like giving the Purple Heart for minor scrapes" was the "official policy under General Joseph Carvalho," who ran the medical system in Iraq in 2008. In a memo, he said, "In many cases, soldiers wouldn't get Purple Hearts if they only got minimal medical treatment." Additionally, "soldiers say that fine print makes it almost impossible for them to get the Purple Hearts" for TBI, and "Army doctors didn't keep many of those records" needed for the applications. US Army vice chief of staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli "says, it's true, some commanders still don't award Purple Hearts for concussion, despite the regulations," but he added that "he's trying to change that."

6. Records: VA Did Not Inform Soldiers, Families About Life Insurance Benefits Agreement.

[Bloomberg News](#) (9/14, Evans) reports, "The US Department of Veterans Affairs failed to inform 6 million soldiers and their families of an agreement enabling Prudential Financial Inc. to withhold lump-sum payments of life insurance benefits for survivors of fallen service members, according to records made public through a Freedom of Information request. The amendment to Prudential's contract is the first document to show how VA officials sanctioned a payment practice that has spurred investigations by lawmakers and regulators." Bloomberg adds, "VA spokeswoman Katie Roberts declined to say when Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, who was appointed by President Barack Obama in January 2009, learned of the existence of

**CWA Local 4250 RMC
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the...amendment." A shortened version of this story is run by the [New York Times](#) (9/14, B2).

VA Announces Life Insurance Policy Reforms. [Bloomberg](#) (9/15, Plungis, Evans, 100K) also notes that on Tuesday, VA "said Prudential...will now send beneficiaries of VA life-insurance policies a check when they ask for a lump-sum benefit payment rather than keeping the money and mailing a checkbook. The veterans agency will continue to offer a money-market type account that lets the insurer withhold payments of benefits for survivors of fallen service members, while making clear the funds aren't insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the accounts aren't endorsed by the government, the VA said...in a statement on its website." While the "nonprofit advocacy group," Veterans for Common Sense, "called the government's action a positive first step," Paul Sullivan, the group's executive director, who said VA "reforms need to go further" so that, among others things, "Prudential repays families" who lost out on interest-earning opportunities while Prudential held their money.

7. Despite More Vets Hired By Government, VA Official Says Jobless Rate Still Too High.

According to the first "Federal Diary" column for the [Washington Post](#) (9/17, Davidson, 605K), the Obama Administration is "trumpeting the initial success of the president's Veterans Employment Initiative," which was launched in November to "increase the federal government's employment of veterans. During the first six months of fiscal 2010, 30.2 percent of Uncle Sam's hires were vets, compared with 26.8 percent last year." After stating those figures, which amount to an "increase of 2,600 jobs," were released by the Administration on Thursday, the Post adds, "Despite the increased hiring, 'the jobless rate among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan is unacceptably high,' said Deputy Veterans Affairs Secretary Scott Gould."

8. First Lady Urges Development Organizations To Utilize Vets' Skills.

The [AP](#) (9/24, Fouhy) reports, "First Lady Michelle Obama urged international development organizations to engage military veterans and spouses in their work,

CWA Local 4250 RMC
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telling her audience Thursday at the Clinton Global Initiative that the skills of service members are 'woefully underutilized.' Former President Bill Clinton hosts" the Clinton Global Initiative, an "annual summit of business, government and nonprofit leaders who make financial commitments to development projects around the world." The AP adds, "President Barack Obama introduced his wife to the group and praised her as a partner and advocate."

9. Book Recommendation: The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War by David Halberstam

Amazon.com Review

David Halberstam's magisterial and thrilling *The Best and the Brightest* was the defining book for the Vietnam War. More than three decades later, Halberstam used his unrivalled research and formidable journalistic skills to shed light on another dark corner in our history: the Korean War. *The Coldest Winter* is a successor to *The Best and the Brightest*, even though in historical terms it precedes it. Halberstam considered *The Coldest Winter* the best book he ever wrote, the culmination of forty-five years of writing about America's postwar foreign policy.

Up until now, the Korean War has been the black hole of modern American history. *The Coldest Winter* changes that. Halberstam gives us a masterful narrative of the political decisions and miscalculations on both sides. He charts the disastrous path that led to the massive entry of Chinese forces near the Yalu, and that caught Douglas MacArthur and his soldiers by surprise. He provides astonishingly vivid and nuanced portraits of all the major figures -- Eisenhower, Truman, Acheson, Kim, and Mao, and Generals MacArthur, Almond, and Ridgway. At the same time, Halberstam provides us with his trademark highly evocative narrative journalism, chronicling the crucial battles with reportage of the highest order.

At the heart of the book are the individual stories of the soldiers on the front lines who were left to deal with the consequences of the dangerous misjudgments and competing agendas of powerful men. We meet them, follow them, and see some of the most dreadful battles in history through their eyes. As ever, Halberstam was concerned with the extraordinary courage and resolve of people asked to bear an extraordinary burden.

The Coldest Winter is contemporary history in its most literary and luminescent form, and provides crucial perspective on the Vietnam War and the events of today. It was a book that Halberstam first decided to write more than thirty years ago and that took him nearly ten years to write. It stands as a lasting testament to one of the greatest journalists and historians of our time, and to the fighting men whose heroism it chronicles.

David Halberstam died at the age of 73 in a car accident in California on April 23, 2007, just after completing *The Coldest Winter*. Legendary for his work ethic, his kindness to young writers, and his unbending moral spine, Halberstam had friends and admirers throughout journalism, many of whom

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spoke at his memorial service and at readings across the country for the release of *The Coldest Winter*.

Review:

"I could hardly put this book down. Meticulously and thoroughly researched, it is splendidly compelling reading. *The Coldest Winter* is a superb conjoining of all the factors of this tragic war: the military tactics and strategy of both sides; the international diplomacy; the internal politics; the personalities of the various players. A great work." *Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore (Ret.), co-author of We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*