



## AGENT ORANGE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN



RICH WEST

# PRESSING THE ISSUE

## VVA Launches Agent Orange Education Campaign

In the January issue of *The VVA Veteran*, President James L. Brazee, Jr., spoke about important recent events concerning benefits for veterans suffering from disabilities as a result of Agent Orange exposure and for their families. Most importantly, he stated that although the Agent Orange Veteran Payment Program has expired, veterans can still get Agent Orange benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He urged VVA members and chapters to get this message out through their local media.

Vietnam Veterans of America took several steps recently to help educate Vietnam veterans and survivors about VA benefits for Agent Orange. First, VVA general counsel John Catterson contacted the federal court judge overseeing the Agent Orange Veteran Payment Program and asked that VVA be allowed to mail its new *Guide on Agent Orange* to everyone who applied to the program over the years. He also asked that the judge extend the program's application deadline from January 17 to January 31

because many people were having difficulty meeting the deadline.

Unfortunately, the judge denied both requests. In response to the VVA mailing, the judge said he wanted to protect the "privacy" of the applicants and did not want to show favoritism to one veterans organization over another; to the deadline request, the judge replied the program had to end sometime.

VVA was extremely disappointed by the judge's decision, and because these issues affect so many vet-

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GATIE O. GARMISE

At the press conference (clockwise from above): Brazee opens the press conference by noting "that literally thousands of Vietnam veterans are still suffering from exposure to Agent Orange"; Catterson relates that "as this payment program drew to a close, we saw from our membership an uprising of people who suddenly realized they were entitled to benefits but hadn't asked for them"; Stout displays VVA's *Guide on Agent Orange*



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"[T]he maximum payment a veteran could receive from [the Agent Orange Payment] program was \$12,800 as a lump sum. That same totally disabled veteran will get over \$22,000 per year from VA."

erans and survivors, they decided to press the matter further. On January 18, VVA held a press conference in Washington, DC, and announced it would file a formal appeal of the judge's decision to deny VVA's requests.

During the press conference, Brazee, John Catterson, Carl Stout, and Bill Russo spoke about VVA's long struggle on behalf of veterans exposed to Agent Orange. They noted that VVA's class-action lawsuit, *Nehmer v. Department of Veterans Affairs*, forced the VA to start paying Agent Orange compensation benefits to veterans and survivors during the late 1980s. They announced the formation of VVA's Agent Orange Education Campaign and urged the press to let veterans know that VA benefits are still available.

As a result of this press conference and of VVA's other publicity efforts, the press did get the word out to veterans and survivors. VVA's work on the Agent Orange issue was mentioned in several major newspapers, including *USA Today* and *Stars and Stripes*. VVA leaders discussed the issue on several widely syndicated radio programs. Carl Stout appeared with Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, Jr., on the Fox Morning News in Washington, DC. VVA helped let the public know that Agent Orange has not disappeared as an important issue. In the coming months and years, VVA will continue to work for fair compensation for those suffering as a result of Agent Orange exposure and for their families. ■



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GAYLE O. GARNISE

Top to bottom: Brazee launches the Agent Orange Education Campaign "to reach Vietnam veterans and their families and to let them know about the benefits they can obtain from the Department of Veterans Affairs"; Russo urges "all Vietnam veterans to go to VA for a free Agent Orange medical examination"; Catterson takes the judge to task for "protecting [veterans] from information about the availability of VA benefits

# GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

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## Gulf War Illness Compensation

The Gulf War veterans provisions of PL 103-446 authorize compensation on a presumptive basis for those suffering chronic disability as a result of undiagnosed illness. The Department of Veterans Affairs also will be required to develop and to implement a uniform case-assessment protocol and case definition(s); to evaluate the health of spouses and children of Gulf War veterans and to conduct an informational survey of them; to set up a comprehensive outreach program; and to contract with the National Academy of Sciences for epidemiological research.

## VA Home-loan Program

The Veterans Housing Amendments of 1994, also incorporated into PL 103-446, authorize VA to include an additional amount for energy efficiency improvements in interest-rate reduction refinancing and to liberalize conditions under which adjustable-rate mortgages can be converted into fixed-rate mortgages. Other provisions waive the six-year minimum service requirement for reservists discharged for a service-connected disability and provide loan guaranty eligibility for surviving spouses of reservists who died on active duty or from service-connected disabilities. VA also will be able to waive the two-year minimum service requirement for loan guarantees to service members released from active duty through reductions in force.

## Employment

Two provisions of PL 103-446 reflect the growth of new classes of veterans since the Vietnam era. The bill mandates the Bureau of Labor Statistics to include veterans who served after Vietnam, veterans who are recently discharged, and veterans who are women in its biennial surveys to determine unemployment among veterans. VVA is con-

cerned that, because these veterans do not suffer combat-related problems that have led to lower employment rates among Vietnam-era veterans, their inclusion may appear to show that veterans employment problems have faded and that the Veterans' Employment and Training Service and its state counterparts are no longer needed.

Another provision expands the list of veterans covered by affirmative action in federal contracts to include disabled veterans, Vietnam-era veterans, and veterans who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign for which Congress has authorized a campaign badge.

The Veterans' Employment and Training Act portion of PL 103-446 made minor improvements in the Montgomery GI Bill (increased funding, flight training, alternative teacher certification, and study abroad), and it eliminated the 18-month cap on job-training programs under the Service Members Occupational Conversion and Training Act. Previous issues of *The VVA Veteran* have detailed VVA's success in saving funding for this veterans employment program.

## VHA Staffing Levels

Rep. G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-MS) introduced a bill, incorporated into PL 103-446, establishing a minimum full-time personnel level for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) at 224,377, which is below the actual 1993 level by 10,051. Aimed at protecting veterans health care, the law could shift budget cuts to the backlogged Veterans Benefits Administration.

## EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT OF 1994

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, PL

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# SENATE

Senate committee assignments are now complete. The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee maintains a ratio seven majority members to five minority members. It is anticipated the committee will continue to operate without subcommittees. The committee membership roster is:

### Majority members

Alan K. Simpson (WY), Chair	Frank H. Murkowski (AK)
James M. Jeffords (VT)	Strom Thurmond (SC)
Arlen Specter (PA)	Hank Brown (CO)
Larry E. Craig (ID)	

### Minority members

John D. "Jay" Rockefeller IV (WV), Ranking Minority Member	Daniel K. Akaka (HI)
Bob Graham (FL)	Byron L. Dorgan (ND)
Ben Nighthorse Campbell (CO)	

Among the 103rd Congress members not returning to the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ) and George J. Mitchell (D-ME) retired. Thomas A. Daschle (D-SD) has become Senate minority leader. Craig, Brown, and Dorgan are new to the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Craig served in the National Guard from 1970-71. Brown is a Vietnam veteran (Navy, 1962-66) and served on the Select Committee on POW/MIA.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has completed subcommittee assignments. The VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies Subcommittee roster is:

### Majority members

Christopher "Kit" Bond (MO), Chair	Conrad Burns (MT)
Phil Gramm (TX)	Richard C. Shelby (AL)
Ted Stevens (AK)	
Robert F. Bennett (UT)	

### Minority members

Barbara A. Mikulski (MD), Ranking Minority Member	J. Bennett Johnston (LA)
Patrick J. Leahy (VT)	J. Robert Kerrey (NE)
Frank R. Lautenberg (NJ)	

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee was reduced from five to three subcommittees. Subcommittee assignments are now complete. Full committee and subcommittee rosters are:

### Majority Members

Bob Stump (AZ), Chair	Christopher H. Smith (NJ), Vice Chair
Michael Bilirakis (FL)	Floyd D. Spence (SC)
Tim Hutchinson (AR)	Terry Everett (AL)
Steve Buyer (IN)	Jack Quinn (NY)
Spencer Bachus (AL)	Cliff Stearns (FL)
Robert Ney (OH)	Jon D. Fox (PA)
Michael Patrick Flanagan (IL)	Bob Barr (GA)
Steve Stockman (TX)	Gerald C. "Jerry" Weller (IL)
J.D. Hayworth (AZ)	Wes Cooley (OR)

### Minority Members

G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery (MS), Ranking Minority Member	Joseph P. Kennedy II (MA)
Lane Evans (IL)	Maxine Waters (CA)
Chet Edwards (TX)	Bob Filner (CA)
Bob Clement (TN)	Luis V. Gutierrez (IL)
Frank Tejeda (TX)	Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (GA)
Scotty Baesler (KY)	Corrine Brown (FL)
James E. Clyburn (SC)	Frank R. Mascara (PA)
Mike Doyle (PA)	

## HOSPITALS AND HEALTH CARE SUBCOMMITTEE

### Majority Members

Tim Hutchinson (AR), Chair	Christopher H. Smith (NJ)
Bob Stump (AZ)	Floyd D. Spence (SC)
Michael Bilirakis (FL)	Spencer Bachus (AL)
Jack Quinn (NY)	Robert Ney (OH)
Cliff Stearns (FL)	Michael Patrick Flanagan (IL)
Jon D. Fox (PA)	

### Minority Members

Chet Edwards (TX), Ranking Minority Member	Bob Clement (TN)
Joseph P. Kennedy II (MA)	Luis V. Gutierrez (IL)
Frank Tejeda (TX)	Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (GA)
Scotty Baesler (KY)	Mike Doyle (PA)
Corrine Brown (FL)	

## COMPENSATION, PENSION, INSURANCE, & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

### Majority members

Terry Everett (AL), Chair	J.D. Hayworth (AZ)
Gerald C. "Jerry" Weller (IL)	Robert Ney (OH)
Bob Barr (GA)	
Vacancy	

### Minority Members

Lane Evans (IL), Ranking Minority Member	Bob Filner (CA)
G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery (MS)	
Joseph P. Kennedy II (MA)	

## EDUCATION, TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT, AND HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE

### Majority members

Steve Buyer (IN), Chair	Wes Cooley (OR)
Bob Barr (GA)	Vacancy
Tim Hutchinson (AR)	
Vacancy	

### Minority Members

Maxine Waters (CA), Ranking Minority Member	Frank R. Mascara (PA)
James E. Clyburn (SC)	
Lane Evans (IL)	

The House Appropriations Committee has completed subcommittee assignments. The VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies Subcommittee roster is:

### Majority members

Jerry Lewis (CA), Chair	Barbara F. Vucanovich (NV)
Tom DeLay (TX)	David L. Hobson (OH)
James T. Walsh (NY)	Rodney Frelinghuysen (NJ)
Joe Knollenberg (MI)	
Mark W. Neumann (WI)	

### Minority members

Louis Stokes (OH), Ranking Minority Member	Jim Chapman (TX)
Alan B. Mollohan (WV)	
Marcy Kaptur (OH)	