A group of lawmakers introduced legislation that would add nine more diseases to a list of conditions presumed to be caused by the chemical herbicide Agent Orange, giving veterans who suffer from them a fast-track to Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation and health care. The Keeping Our Promises Act, introduced last week, adds prostate cancer, bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, hypertension, stroke, early-onset peripheral neuropathy, AL amyloidosis, ischemic heart disease and Parkinson-like syndromes to a list of diseases presumed to be caused by Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War.

Researchers with the National Academy of Medicine released findings in November that there was “suggestive” evidence that eight of the diseases could be caused by Agent Orange. For hypertension, researchers found that “sufficient” evidence exists. “American heroes affected by Agent Orange deserve the peace of mind knowing that the federal government recognizes the existing link between their exposure and illness,” said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) one of eight lawmakers who banded together to introduce the legislation.

VA experts have begun a “formal, deliberative review” of the National Academy of Medicine’s latest report, VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour said 16 APR. The review is expected to be complete in the summer, at which time the agency will make recommendations about presumptive conditions, he said. During a Senate hearing 26 MAR, Richard Stone, the executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, guessed the review would be complete within 90 days. “We’re working our way through that right now,” Stone said of the national academy report. Recommendations would be sent to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, who would choose when – and whether – to act on them.

The VA previously recommended that some of the conditions be added. After the last National Academy of Medicine report in 2016, the VA took 20 months before it sent recommendations to the White House that bladder cancer, hypertension, hyperthyroidism and Parkinson’s-like tremors be added to the list. The recommendation hasn’t made it past the White House’s Office of Management and Budget. Last year, VA officials told the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs that the Office of Management and Budget is waiting for results of ongoing mortality and morbidity studies, which could provide more evidence of a connection between the diseases and Agent Orange. On Tuesday, Cashour said some of those results will be published as early as mid-2019.

But some lawmakers don’t want to wait on the executive process. Fitzpatrick, along with Reps. Annie Kuster (D-NH), Bruce Westerman (R-AR), Scott Tipton (R-CO), Elise Stefanik (R-NY), Joe Cunningham (D-SC), Brendan Boyle (D-PA), and Mike Thompson (D-CA) are trying to use a legislative route. Boyle estimated it would help tens of thousands of Vietnam War veterans. “This bipartisan legislation makes good on that promise by ensuring all service members exposed to these herbicides and chemicals as a part of their military
service get the health care they need,” Boyle said in a statement. “Not one more service member should be forced to suffer in this way without the best care our federal government has to offer.”

**NEW ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA UNDER MISSION ACT**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has stated the first steps of the Mission Act are scheduled to take effect “on-time” meaning the new eligibility criteria is to be in place on 6 Jun 2019. I am listing the new eligibility criteria below, however these are still “guidelines” at this point as the final rules have not been adopted as of yet.

Key aspects of community care eligibility include the following:
- Veterans must receive approval from VA prior to obtaining care from a community provider in most circumstances.
- Veterans must either be enrolled in VA health care or be eligible for VA care without needing to enroll to be eligible for community care.
- Eligibility for community care will continue to be dependent upon a Veteran’s individual health care needs or circumstances.
- VA staff members generally make all eligibility determinations.
- Veterans will usually have the option to receive care at a VA medical facility regardless of their eligibility for community care.

Meeting any one of the six eligibility criteria is sufficient to be referred to a community provider—a Veteran does not have to meet all of them to be eligible.

**Eligibility Criteria**
1. **Veteran Needs a Service Not Available at a VA Medical Facility.**
2. **Veteran Lives in a U.S. State or Territory Without a Full-Service VA Medical Facility.**
3. **Veteran Qualifies under the “Grandfather” Provision Related to Distance Eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program.** -- For this element, there are a few different ways that a Veteran could be eligible for community care. Initially, the following two requirements must be met in every case:
   - Veteran was eligible under the 40-mile criterion under the Veterans Choice Program on the day before the VA MISSION Act was enacted into law (June 6, 2018), and
   - Veteran continues to reside in a location that would qualify them under that criterion.

   If both of these requirements have been met, a Veteran may be eligible if one of the following is also true:
   - Veteran lives in one of the five States with the lowest population density from the 2010 Census: North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Alaska, and Wyoming, or
   - Veteran lives in another State, received care between June 6, 2017, and June 6, 2018, and requires care before June 6, 2020.

4. **VA Cannot Furnish Care within Certain Designated Access Standards** -- To be eligible under this criterion, VA would have to be unable to schedule a VA appointment for a Veteran at a facility within a specific average drive time to a VA medical facility and within a certain number of days (wait-time). If VA could not schedule an appointment that is within both the average driving time standards and the wait-time standard, then the Veteran would be eligible for community care. The specific access standards are described below.

   (Important: Access standards are proposed and not yet final).
   - Average drive time to a specific VA medical facility.
     - 30-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services (including adult day health care).
     - 60-minute average drive time for specialty care
   - Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility
• 20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services.
• 28 days for specialty care from the date of request.

5. It is in the Veteran’s Best Medical Interest.
6. A VA Medical Service Line Does Not Meet Certain Quality Standards.

MILWAUKEE COUNTY “3-DAY PASS” EVENTS

Some Milwaukee County attractions are offering special active duty/veteran admission during the weekend leading up to Independence Day. This is the sixth time the “3-day pass” has been offered by the attractions listed below. You will have to provide proof of service; acceptable forms of service proof are DD-214, NGB22, VA Healthcare ID, WI driver license with VETERAN identifier, veterans’ organization membership card or the Purple Heart Pass.

• June 28 – Mitchell Park Domes, free admission, Vet +5
• June 29 – Milwaukee Public Museum, free admission, Vet +5
• June 30 – Milwaukee County Zoo, tickets required, limit of ten for immediate family only.

June 30th at the Milwaukee County Zoo is the annual Military/Veterans Family Day. The zoo offers free admission for military/veterans and their families. Admission tickets will be available at the end of May at the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO).

MILWAUKEE BREWERS OFFER FREE TICKETS TO VETERANS FOR SUNDAY HOME GAMES

The Milwaukee Brewers organization is again offering free Terrace Level seats for veterans for Sunday home games. The tickets are available by presenting proof of military service at windows 7-11 at the box office on the day of the game. These tickets cannot be reserved in advance. In addition, the Brewers organization is offering 50% off of up to four tickets elsewhere in the park on these same days.

MILITARY APPRECIATION DAY AT THE “DUCK POND”

The Madison Mallards have scheduled their annual “Military Appreciation Day” for July 7th. Game time is 1:05 p.m. and the gates open at 12:05 p.m. In addition to ticket discounts, they will have a pre-game tribute to and recognition of veterans and Presentation of the Colors. Contact Erik Katz at (608)246-4277 with questions or to purchase tickets in advance.

PTSD PEER SUPPORT GROUP

A community support group for veterans, first responders and their families meets at Cobblestone Coffee House on the 3rd Thursday of every month from 8 to 9:30 a.m. The meetings are being facilitated by the Iowa County Veterans Service Officer. For more information, you can contact the Iowa County Veterans Service Office at (608)930-9865.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Are you looking to make a couple extra bucks or need an excuse to get out of the house? The US Census Bureau is looking for help in the lead up and through the 2020 census. The current opportunity involves driving around the area and confirming addresses. The US Census Bureau is willing to compensate workers in this role $15.00 per hour plus the current IRS mileage reimbursement rate (0.58 per mile). If hired you are able to work as much, though no overtime will be allowed or as little as you would like. If you are interested, you may apply online at 2020census.gov/jobs or call 1-855-562-2020 for more information.

THAT OLD, TATTERED FLAG

It is time again to retire the flags that have become too worn and faded to remain in service. The Mineral Point American Legion provides the location for the county-wide flag retirement ceremony. This year’s ceremony will be on June 18th at 7:00 p.m. If you have flags you would like to have retired, you can drop them off at several locations around the county as well as at the Veterans Service Office.
Iowa County Veterans Service Office
303 W. Chapel Street – Suite 1300
Dodgeville, WI 53533

**Veterans Newsletter**

**IMPORTANT DATES**

May 18th  Armed Forces Day
May 27th  Memorial Day
June 14th  Flag Day
June 18th  Flag Retirement – Mineral Point American Legion - 7:00 p.m.
June 30th  Free Admission for Active Military and Veterans at Milwaukee Co. Zoo
July 4th  Independence Day

**VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS IN 2019**

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