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Presenter: Dwight Winkler

1. **CONTACTS:** To help you obtain information about claims or other needs:

VETERANS CRISIS LINE: Veterans and loved ones can call (800) 273-8255 24/7 and then press 1 with total anonymity to speak to a professional counselor. A Houston Vet Center counselor, James Bailey, is available in Don Montoya's office on Thursdays for veterans and their families. Call Don's office at (979) 532-1311 for an appointment to see James Bailey. See forms on my desk for information.

Dwight Winkler, 2254 CR 291, East Bernard, TX 77435; (979) 335-4464; lerwinkdd@aol.com

Don Montoya, Wharton County Veterans Service Officer, 1017 N. Alabama Road, Wharton, TX 77488; (979) 532-1311, don.montoya@co.wharton.tx.us; **NEW OFFICE HOURS:** M, TUES, THUR (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-12:00 noon & 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.; FRI (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-12:00 noon by appointment only & 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. (Administrative time); On WED (El Campo library), 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Vanessa Hicks-Callaway, (Congressman Blake Farenthold's Veteran Advocate), (361) 894-6446, Vanessa.Hicks-Callaway@mail.house.gov

Matt Minor, (Texas State Representative Phil Stephenson's Veteran Advocate), (281) 232-7900, Matt.Minor@house.state.tx.us

VA INQUIRY ROUTING & INFORMATION SYSTEM (IRIS), <https://iris.custhelp.com>

NEW VA PHONE NUMBER TO CALL 1-844-698-2311; This new national toll-free number is a go to source for Veterans and their families who do not know what number to call at the VA. It is identified at the VA as **myVA311.**

2. **JOKES #1 & #2:** Communication Breakdown & Golf Humor. *Source: June/July VFW MAGAZINE, page 59.*

3. **DISABILITY COMPENSATION:** The VA offers monthly tax-free disability compensation to veterans who qualify with a disability as a result of an injury or disease that occurred or got worse during active service. Following are 3 qualifying questions.

- Do you have a physical or mental disability?
- Did your injury or disease occur while in the service?
- Is there a connection between your current disability and military service?

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If you answered "yes" to all three questions, you may be eligible for disability compensation. Go to www.Explore.VA.gov to learn more and contact Don Montoya and then go see him for assistance in filing a claim. **Source: An email from veteransaffairs@public.govdelivery.com.**

4. MEDICARE CARD UPDATE: Changes are coming to your Medicare card so keep your mailing address updated. By April 2019, your card will be replaced with one that no longer shows your Social security number. Instead, your card will have a new Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) that you will use for billing and for checking your eligibility and claim status. It will happen automatically. Having your Social Security number removed from your Medicare card helps fight medical identity theft and protects your medical and financial information. For more information, go to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services home page. Click on Medicare and then General Information and click on Social Security Number Removal Initiative (SSNRI). **Source: Retiree Activities Office Bulletin, 1 June, 2017, page 97.**

5. VA HOTLINE: In July, 2016, President Trump promised to set up a hotline for veterans to call to complain about "wrong doing at the VA and ensure no complaints fall through the cracks." The President's long promised hotline for veteran complaints was launched on June 1. The number is (855) 948-2311. It is designed to "collect, process, and respond to the complaints of individual veterans in a responsive, timely, and accountable manner." **Source: webweekly@vva.org. June 9, 2017.**

6. PRESIDENT TRUMP'S BUDGET CALLS FOR CUTS TO VA PROGRAMS AS TRADEOFF FOR EXTENDING THE CHOICE PROGRAM:

President Trump's 2018 budget, released May 23, 2017, **PROPOSES** cutting monthly stipends to veterans receiving compensation through the Individual Unemployability (IU) program. Up to 225,000 veterans over the age of 60, with at least 7,000 of who are over 80, could be impacted by the change. Administration officials want to stop the higher of the IU payouts or social security payments once veterans are eligible for Social Security retirement benefits. Veterans who already receive both Social Security and IU would again receive the lower of the two but not both, **IF** Congress approves the proposal. The "TRADEOFF" is \$3.2 billion and would be shifted to the CHOICE PROGRAM to "extend it and thus enable eligible veterans to receive timely care, close to home." Also, disability compensation benefits will be "rounded down" as they were prior to 2014. Savings: \$20 million for 2018. **Source: Retiree Activities Office Bulletin, June, 2017, pages 31 and 32 and**

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/05/23/budget-calls-cuts-va-programs-tradeoff-extending-choice.html>.

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7. FRAUDULENT VA CHOICE PROGRAM PHONE NUMBER: The VA has identified a fraudulent phone number that mimics the Veterans choice Program (VCP) phone line. The FALSE NUMBER is 1-800-606-8198 and it directs callers to enter their credit card information under the pretense of receiving a \$100 rebate. Veterans may check their eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program by calling 1-866-606-8198, the correct phone number. **Source: Texas Veterans Commission via an email to Don Montoya, Wharton County Veterans Service Officer.**

8. VA LAUNCHES PHYSICIAN AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: The VA announced 6/6/2017 that it has launched the **Physician Ambassador Program**, an effort to recruit volunteer medical providers, at the more than 1,700 VA health-care facilities across the nation. The physician and clinician "ambassadors" are qualified, trained and licensed health providers who will meet the same requirements as VA professionals in terms of credentials, supervision, and evaluation. The VA is some 35,000 to 40,000 doctors, nurses, and other health-care professionals short in the VA facilities across the United States. Physicians or health-care providers interested in volunteering as part of the Physician Ambassador Program should contact their local VA medical center. **Source: veteransaffairs@public.govdelivery.com.**

9. OTHER BENEFITS: SAM'S CLUB MILITARY MEMBERSHIP- Join or renew as a Sam's Plus Member or Sam's Savings or Sam's Business member and get a \$10 gift card. Proof of service is required. **Source:**
<https://www.samsclub.com/sams/pagedetails/content.jsp?pageName=military-membership>

10. SOURCES:

- **VVA WEB WEEKLY:** To sign up (free) for the VVA WEB WEEKLY, go to <https://vva.org/category/web-weekly/>. Go to the menu on the right that says "Receive the Latest VVA News." Put your full name and e-mail address in the blocks and click on "Sign Up" and you will receive the weekly VVA news.
- **RETIRED ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN:** Send a request via email to raoemo@sbcglobal.net to add your name with our chapter name and number to be added to the subscriber list. It is free.

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11. HOW TO CONTACT U.S. SENATORS AND CONGRESSMAN FARENTHOLD:

Below is an example of some text to call in, mail in, or email to United States Senators Cornyn and Cruz and Congressman Farenthold, if you wish to express your opinion about various issues that are taking place in Washinton, D. C.

Date: mm/dd/yyyy

Senator Cornyn or Cruz or Congressman Farenthold,

I am a veteran of the United States military and therefore I am opposed to ANY cuts or "TRADEOFFS" in benefits and/or services to our veterans, family members, or survivors of veterans and members of the active military that are proposed in President Trump's 2018 Budget.

I am especially opposed to the "TRADEOFFS" from the VA Individual Unemployability (IU) Program to the VA Choice Program. The President and Congress should fund the VA Choice Program without cutting other programs.

*Respectfully,
Your Name Here*

- **U.S. Senator John Cornyn:** Address- 517 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D. C. 20510; (202) 224-2934 or go to www.cornyn.senate.gov/contact and send him a message by email. By phone, you get prompts and press 2 to leave a message and your zip code.
- **U. S. Senator Ted Cruz:** SW Texas Region, (713) 718-3057, 808 Travis St. Suite 1420, Houston, TX 77002; or www.cruz.senate.gov/. Contact Sen. Cruz at "Share your opinion or comments on bills or other issues" by clicking on the SW Region icon at the bottom of the home page and "email" under the icon. By phone, a real person answered to accept your message and leave your zip code.
- **U. S. Congressman Blake Farenthold, 27th District of Texas:** Victoria address is 5606 N. Navarro St., Ste. 203, Victoria, TX 77904, (361) 894-6446, www.blakefarenthold.com. Click on "CONTACT" at the MENU at the top. Click on EMAIL: hdq@blake.com and send your message. Real person answered, leave your name and zip code.

VVA Chapter 1069 Website:

<http://www.vva1069.org> OR <http://www.vva1069.com>