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January 28, 2010

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1. Committee To Mark Up Legislation, Vote On

Nomination. The second half of the "Today at a Glance" section for [CQ](#) (1/28) notes that on Thursday, at 9:30 a.m. in 418 Russell, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee is scheduled to mark "up a bill on drugs in public housing (S 1327) and a draft bill on exposure to environmental hazards during military service." The committee is also scheduled to vote "on a nomination."

2. Efforts To Fight Veteran Homelessness Praised.

In continuing coverage, an editorial in the [Orlando Sentinel](#) (1/28, 222K) notes that Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki recently "outlined his department's new plans to discharge veterans from the ranks of the homeless." The VA "push is promising," says the Sentinel, as is "last week's groundbreaking" for a shelter in Cocoa, Florida, "that will provide...services" for homeless women vets and their children.

3. VA Under "Intense Pressure" To Improve GI Bill

Processing. After "admittedly being overwhelmed by a deluge of new veterans seeking" Post-911 GI Bill benefits, [Inside Higher Ed](#) (1/28, Stripling) reports, "VA officials now say they have -- for the most part -- at least paid veterans their full benefits for the fall semester." The spring semester, however, "will provide a true test for the VA, which -- after months of public scrutiny and the occasional tongue lashing from Congress -- is under intense pressure to get it right this time." Inside Higher Ed notes that VA "has 'committed' to paying benefits 'no later' than Feb. 1 for any veteran whose college submitted the appropriate materials" by January 19th, although materials coming later than that date "will be paid at the VA's 'earliest opportunity,' according" to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

4. Lavery: Housing Project In West Virginia Is For Vets.

The [Martinsburg \(WV\) Journal](#) (1/28, McVey, 17K) notes that on Tuesday, Jim Lavery with the US Department of Veterans Affairs "was quick to emphasize that a proposed transitional housing project for homeless veterans at the VA Medical Center in Martinsburg is not an emergency shelter." Lavery made his comments while speaking to a "sparse audience gathered for a public hearing regarding the proposal." Tim Cooke, "acting associate director of the VAMC-Martinsburg," also spoke at the hearing, stating, "(Secretary Eric K. Shinseki) wants to eliminate veteran homelessness across the country."

5. VA Pharmacist Gives Presentation On Effectiveness Of New Mental Health Drugs.

The [Salisbury \(NC\) Post](#) (1/27, 21K) reported, "Dr. Joseph LaMotte, clinical pharmacy specialist and board certified psychiatric pharmacist" at the Hefner Veterans Affairs Medical Center, "presented an update on medications titled, 'New Drugs in Mental Health: Are They Better?,' at the Jan. 19 education meeting of the local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, NAMI Rowan." LaMotte is also working with NAMI and Piedmont Behavioral Healthcare to provide education about psychiatric medication to the area police officers attending the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College."

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6. VA Doctor Leads Study On Impact Of Rising Copays For Elderly Patients. In its "White Coat Notes" blog, the [Boston Globe](#) (1/28, Cooney, 325K) reports, "Faced with rising copayments, elderly people visited their doctors less but ended up in the hospital more often and for longer stays, according to a new study assessing the impact of cost-sharing both on patients' health and their health plans' bottom line." The lead author of the study, which appears "in this week's *New England Journal of Medicine*," is Dr. Amal Trivedi, a general internist at the Providence Veterans Affairs Medical Center, who said the "main policy implication" from the research "is that increasing outpatient copayments among the elderly is probably a lose-lose proposition for most Medicare health plans in that it's likely to increase total health care spending and adversely impact health for elderly pats."

7. Davidson: Freeze Proposal Unlikely To Cost Jobs. In continuing coverage, Joe Davidson says in his "Federal Diary" column for the [Washington Post](#) (1/28, 684K) that the "budget freeze proposed by boss-in-chief Barack Obama isn't likely to cost" Federal employees their jobs. In fact, "federal employment probably will continue to grow. The reason: The departments exempted from the freeze -- Defense, State, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs -- are growth areas in the government."

[Government Executive](#) (1/27, Newell) reported, "The freeze will affect the 'top line' of the budget, but some programs that do not fall under exemptions for international affairs and for the Defense, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs departments still will see increases, said Rob Nabors, deputy director" of the Office of Management and Budget during comments made Tuesday.

8. Despite Noise Concerns, Council Approves Plan For Tennessee Vets Cemetery. In continuing coverage, the [Knoxville \(TN\) News Sentinel](#) (1/27, Ferrar) noted that on Tuesday, the Knoxville City Council unanimously "approved a plan to create a new veterans cemetery in Southeast Knox County, but not without some vocal opposition from local veterans" who "had questions about the...site because it sits across" from a "gravel quarry where blasting occurs weekly."

The [WBIR-TV](#) Knoxville, TN (1/27) website said Knoxville "will pay \$1.4 million for 68 acres off East John Sevier Highway in Knox County and trade it with the State of Tennessee for state-owned land in Northshore Park." On Tuesday night, the "Knoxville City Council unanimously approved both the land purchase and land swap." The "state is now waiting for the title and deed for the 68 acres of land before designing the new East Tennessee Veterans Cemetery on the site." The [WVLT-TV](#) (1/27, Bona) website published a similar story.

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9. Arbitration Panel Sides With Louisiana On Replacement Hospital. The [New York Times](#) (1/28, A14, Sack, 1.09M) reports, "Ending one of the longest-running disputes left by Hurricane Katrina, a federal arbitration panel ruled Wednesday that Louisiana would receive \$474.8 million -- nearly all it had requested -- to pay for the replacement of Charity Hospital in New Orleans, which has been closed since the storm. The ruling...gives a major boost to plans to replace Charity, a state-owned hospital for the indigent, with a new \$1.2 billion academic medical center." The Times notes that the center "would be built adjacent to a Veterans Affairs hospital."

10. Heineman Stresses Importance Of Gold Star License Plates. The [Lincoln \(NE\) Journal Star](#) (1/28, Hicks) reports, "The newly released Gold Star license plates honor American heroes -- the men and women who died in service to their country --- parents of two heroes said during a Wednesday news conference." The Journal Star adds, "In addition to the tribute, income from the plates will support the Nebraska State Veterans Cemetery System, said Gov. Dave Heineman, who gave the first plates" to parents of sons killed in Iraq. The [Scottsbluff \(NE\) Star-Herald](#) (1/28, Holsinger) and the [KETV-TV Omaha, NE](#) (1/27) website also cover this story.

11. Two World War II Vets Honored In Ohio. The [Dayton \(OH\) Daily News](#) (1/28, Levingston) reports, "Two Riverside World War II veterans were honored by City Council and a state representative for their years of service." Glenn Strawn, "84, and Raymond Horn, 83, were recognized" at a recent council meeting and given "two flags that flew in Columbus."

12. Lebanon VAMC Opening New Clinic. The [Harrisburg \(PA\) Patriot-News](#) (1/28, Miller) notes that on Friday, the Lebanon Veterans Affairs Medical Center "is opening a new outreach clinic at Fort Indiantown Gap to better serve returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan."

13. First Lady Announces Record Budget Request For Military Family Support Initiatives. In continuing coverage, the [American Forces Press Service](#) (1/28, Adams) reports, "First Lady Michelle Obama was the featured speaker at the Joint Armed Forces Officers' Wives Club's 32nd annual luncheon Jan. 26" the at the Bolling Air Force Base. Approximately "400 spouses from all branches of the military gathered to hear Mrs. Obama...announce a record budget request for military family support initiatives in her husband's forthcoming budget." The President's first budget ""included the largest percentage increase in the Veterans Administration budget in more than 30 years and money to improve care and treatment of wounded warriors."

Program Aims To Help Wounded Warriors Gain Closure. In the second item from its "Sgt. Shaft" column, the [Washington Times](#) (1/27, Fales, 77K) reported, "Five wounded warriors recently returned from the third 'Operation Proper Exit' tour of Iraq. The visits are designed to help bring closure to wounded

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service members who have been injured in combat." The Times adds, "From its beginning in the summer of 2009," the United Service Organizations "has partnered with the Troops First Foundation to bring wounded warriors to Iraq."

Conference Seeks To Find Employment For Disabled Vets. The [San Jose \(CA\) Mercury News](#) (1/28, Newman) notes that on Thursday, "Project Hired, a San Jose nonprofit devoted to helping the disabled find jobs," will host a "watershed event" called the Wounded Warrior Workforce initiative. Silicon Valley "companies such as Cisco and Google lined up to attend" the conference, which is aimed at putting such "veterans back to work."

14. Veterans On Guest List For State Of The Union Address. In continuing coverage, the [AP](#) (1/28, Elliott) notes that the guest list for President Barack Obama's "first State of the Union address" included veterans Scott Vycital, "who was partially paralyzed and now works for the Federal Highway Administration after Obama signed an executive order making employing veterans a priority," Andrew Rubin, "who has served four combat tours in Iraq and two in Afghanistan," and Julia Frost, a "former Marine trumpeter studying to become a teacher at Coastal Carolina Community College with the help of the GI Bill." In a similar story for his [Washington Post](#) (1/28, 684K) blog, Ezra Klein says Vycital "was medically retired due to injuries received in defense of Operation Iraqi Freedom." The [Fort Collins Coloradoan](#) (1/28, 25K) also points out that Vycital, Frost, and Rubin were on the guest list.

15. VA, Board Chairman Differ On Agency's Plans For Housing Project In Texas. The [Houston Chronicle](#) (1/28, Snyder, 427K) notes that in a recent statement, the Department of Veterans Affairs "says it does not plan to participate in the Harris County Housing Authority's proposed mixed-use development for veterans, leaving the future of the \$400 million project in doubt." On Wednesday, however, Casey Wallace, "who chairs the Housing Authority's board, insisted...that talks with the VA are continuing, and said he is confident the agency will secure a lease agreement for facilities the federal agency would operate on the site. Casey could not explain the discrepancy between his assertion and the VA's statement to the Houston Chronicle that the project 'does not fit into our priorities at this time.'"

16. Four Minnesota Sites In Running For New VA Clinic. The [Minneapolis Star Tribune](#) (1/28, Levy, 347K) reports, "Two Elk River and two Ramsey sites have emerged as finalists" for a new Veterans Affairs "clinic in the northwestern suburbs. 'The VA...said it wants to turn this around as soon as possible,' said Ramsey developer Jim Deal, one of four developers asked to make presentations before the VA earlier this month." The clinic, which a VA contracting officer "has said will open this year, will serve as an alternative for veterans who travel to VA hospitals in Minneapolis and St. Cloud."

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17. Cheyenne VAMC To Hold Open House For New Clinic. The [Platte County \(WY\) Record Times](#) (1/28) reports the Cheyenne Veterans Affairs Medical Center "is holding an 'open house' with the newest VA clinic in Wheatland at 9 am on Wednesday, February 3, 2010." The "clinic on wheels, Cheyenne VAMC's Mobile Telehealth Clinic, will be open for anyone interested in learning more about the VA Telehealth Program."

18. Children Make Valentines For Veterans At North Chicago VAMC. According to the [Wilmette \(IL\) Life](#) (1/27), "About 35 children made valentines at the Wilmette Public Library last week for the veterans at the North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center. It's the third year the library has hosted the activity, Valentines for Vets, said Lisa Chellman, youth services librarian." The Life added, "The children do not know who specifically will receive their valentines, but in the past, the hospital sent them 'a general note of thanks' on behalf of all the veterans, Chellman said."

19. H1N1 Vaccine Available At Black Hills VA Clinics. The [Rapid City \(SD\) Journal](#) (1/28).

20. Montana Airmen To Assist In Haiti Relief. The [Helena \(MT\) Independent Record](#) (1/27, Myers, 14K) reported, "Helen Nuss was working" for Veterans Affairs "in Helena Monday morning when she got a phone call" telling her she had been activated as a member of the Montana Air National Guard. By "Wednesday morning, Staff Sgt. Helen Nuss was on a plane headed to South Carolina, where for the next four months or so she will be helping with the logistics of getting water, medical supplies and 'Meals Ready to Eat' to earthquake victims in Haiti."

21. 15 Young Haiti Earthquake Survivors Settle Into Tampa Bay Area Hospitals. In continuing coverage, the [St. Petersburg \(FL\) Times](#) (1/28, Stein) notes that this week, two injured US service members flew into Tampa on a plane that also carried some Haitians who had been hurt when an earthquake struck their country. According to the Times, the service members went to the James A. Haley Veterans Affairs Medical Center, a point which was also noted by the [Tampa Tribune](#) (1/28, Reyes) and the [WTVT-TV](#) Tampa, FL (1/27) website.

22. Museum To Honor Shuttle Commander. The [Carteret County \(NC\) News-Times](#) (1/28, Burke) reports, "The opening ceremony" for the Michael J. Smith Mini-Museum, "located in Beaufort Elementary School" and "dedicated to the late Space Shuttle Challenger pilot Cmdr. Michael J. Smith, a Beaufort native, is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Thursday, which marks the 24th anniversary of the Challenger disaster." Smith "served as a fighter pilot during the Vietnam War, earning numerous decorations for combat including the Distinguished Flying Cross."

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23. On the Hill for the Week of January 28, 2010:

The Senate continues debate on a measure to increase the federal debt limit. Votes on amendments as well as adoption of the measure are expected.

The Senate will hold a procedural vote on the nomination of Ben S. Bernanke to a second term as Federal Reserve chairman.

The House is not in session as the Republicans attend their annual retreat on Thursday and Friday.

House: Republican Issues Conference; no votes scheduled.

Senate: Convenes 9:30 a.m.

Roll call votes expected.

[H J Res 45](#) — Debt limit increase

Nomination — Ben S. Bernanke to continue as Federal Reserve chairman

Markups

Senate Veterans' Affairs marks up a bill on drugs in public housing ([S 1327](#)) and a draft bill on exposure to environmental hazards during military service; also votes on a nomination. 9:30 a.m., 418 Russell

Senate Judiciary marks up bills on medical bankruptcy ([S 1624](#)), hate crimes against the homeless ([S 1765](#)), maltreated infants ([S 1554](#)), cocaine sentencing disparities ([S 1789](#)), witness protection grants ([HR1741](#)), Boys & Girls Clubs reauthorization ([S 2924](#)) and cell phones in prisons ([S 1749](#)); also votes on pending nominations. 10 a.m., 226 Dirksen

Hearing Highlights

Senate Budget hearing on the budget and economic outlook, with Congressional Budget Office Director Douglas Elmendorf. 9 a.m., 608 Dirksen

Senate Foreign Relations hearing on recovery and reconstruction efforts in Haiti. 9a.m., 419 Dirksen

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24. Today in History:

- [1547](#) – [Henry VIII](#) dies. His nine year old son, [Edward VI](#) becomes King, and the first [Protestant](#) ruler of [England](#).
- [1624](#) – [Sir Thomas Warner](#) founds the first [British](#) colony in the Caribbean, on the island of [Saint Kitts](#).
- [1754](#) – [Horace Walpole](#), in a letter to Horace Mann, coins the word [serendipity](#).
- [1820](#) – [Russian](#) expedition led by [Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen](#) and [Mikhail Petrovich Lazarev](#) discovers the [Antarctic](#) continent approaching the Antarctic coast.
- [1846](#) – [Battle of Aliwal](#), [India](#) is won by British troops commanded by [Sir Harry Smith](#).
- [1855](#) – The first [locomotive](#) runs from the [Atlantic Ocean](#) to the [Pacific Ocean](#) on the [Panama Railway](#).
- [1871](#) – [Franco-Prussian War](#): the [Siege of Paris](#) ends in French defeat and an armistice.
- [1878](#) – [Yale Daily News](#) becomes the first daily college [newspaper](#) in the [United States](#).
- [1887](#) – In a [snowstorm](#) at [Fort Keogh](#), [Montana](#), the world's largest [snowflakes](#) are reported, being 15 inches (38 cm) wide and 8 inches (20 cm) thick.
- [1896](#) – Walter Arnold of [East Peckham](#), Kent became the first person to be convicted of [speeding](#). He was fined 1 shilling plus costs for speeding at 8 mph (13 km/h), thus exceeding the contemporary speed limit of 2 mph (3.2 km/h).
- [1902](#) – The [Carnegie Institution](#) is founded in [Washington, D.C.](#) with a \$10 million gift from [Andrew Carnegie](#).
- [1909](#) – [United States](#) troops leave [Cuba](#) with the exception of [Guantanamo Bay Naval Base](#) after being there since the [Spanish-American War](#).
- [1915](#) – An act of the [U.S. Congress](#) creates the [United States Coast Guard](#).
- [1916](#) – [Louis D. Brandeis](#) becomes the first [Jew](#) appointed to the [United States Supreme Court](#).
- [1917](#) – Municipally owned [streetcars](#) take to the streets of [San Francisco, California](#).
- [1918](#) – [Finnish Civil War](#): [Rebels](#) seized control of the capital, [Helsinki](#), and members of the [Senate of Finland](#) go underground.
- [1921](#) – A symbolic [Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#) is installed beneath the [Arc de Triomphe](#) in [Paris](#) to honor the unknown dead of [World War I](#).
- [1922](#) – [Knickerbocker Storm](#), Washington D.C.'s biggest snowfall, causes the city's greatest loss of life when the roof of the Knickerbocker Theater collapses.
- [1932](#) – [Japanese](#) forces [attack Shanghai](#).
- [1933](#) – The name [Pakistan](#) is [coined](#) by [Choudhary Rehmat Ali](#) Khan and is accepted by the [Indian Muslims](#) who then thereby adopted it further for the [Pakistan Movement](#) seeking independence.
- [1934](#) – The first [ski tow](#) in the United States begins operation in [Vermont](#).
- [1935](#) – [Iceland](#) becomes the first Western country to legalize therapeutic [abortion](#).
- [1938](#) – The [World Land Speed Record](#) on a [public road](#) is broken by driver [Rudolf Caracciola](#) in the [Mercedes-Benz W195](#) at a speed of 432.7 kilometres per hour (268.9 mph).

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- [1941](#) – [French-Thai War](#): Final air battle of the conflict. [Japanese](#)-mediated [armistice](#) goes into effect later in the day.
- [1945](#) – [World War II](#): Supplies begin to reach the [Republic of China](#) over the newly reopened [Burma Road](#).
- [1958](#) – The [Lego](#) company patented their design of Lego bricks, still compatible with bricks produced today.
- [1964](#) – A U.S. Air Force jet training plane that strays into [East Germany](#) is shot down by Soviet fighters near [Erfurt](#); all 3 crew men are killed.
- [1965](#) – The current design of the [Flag of Canada](#) is chosen by an act of [Parliament](#).
- [1977](#) – The first day of the [Great Lakes Blizzard of 1977](#), which severely affected and crippled much of [Upstate New York](#), but [Buffalo, NY](#), [Syracuse, NY](#), [Watertown, NY](#), and surrounding areas are most affected, each area accumulating close to 10 feet of snow on this one day.
- [1980](#) – [USCGC Blackthorn \(WLB-391\)](#) collides with the tanker Capricorn while leaving Tampa Florida and capsizes killing 23 Coast Guard crewmembers.
- [1981](#) – [Ronald Reagan](#) lifts remaining domestic petroleum price and allocation controls in the United States helping to end the [1979 energy crisis](#) and begin the [1980s oil glut](#).
- [1982](#) – [US Army](#) general [James L. Dozier](#) is rescued by [Italian](#) anti-[terrorism](#) forces from captivity under the [Red Brigades](#).
- [1985](#) – Supergroup [USA for Africa](#) (United Support of Artists for Africa) records the hit single [We Are the World](#), to help raise funds for [Ethiopian famine relief](#).
- [1986](#) – [Space Shuttle program](#): [STS-51-L](#) mission ([Space Shuttle Challenger disaster](#)) – [Space Shuttle Challenger](#) breaks apart after liftoff killing all seven [astronauts](#) on board.



Disintegration of the [Space Shuttle Challenger](#).