



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear VVAW Supporter,

I'd like to thank you for your continued support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). Without you, we could not continue the important work that we began in 1967.

Over the last forty-seven years we have carried out the struggle for veterans, peace and justice. My name is Bill Branson and I am a member of the VVAW Board of Directors.

Since we came together in 1967, VVAW quickly took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we started the first rap groups to deal with traumatic after-effects of war. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA Hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover-up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange Victims. **We have been able to carry out this work because of the support of individuals like you.**

Our work to fight for the rights and needs of veterans continues today as veterans face a significant challenge in accessing care in the VA system in some parts of the country. But we must also recognize that veterans have a difficult time accessing the health care that they need outside of the VA system, when almost half the of the states turned down the expansion of Medicaid benefits, which prevented 250,000 veterans from gaining Medicaid coverage. Regardless of your veteran status, access to health care in our country is a challenge for most of us. Health care is a right, but our country all too often treats it as a privilege. But we cannot turn a blind eye to the systemic issues at the VA that allowed for secret waiting lists and excessive wait times to simply see a primary care doctor.

VVAW has always struggled to improve VA care and successfully done so. Thirty years ago, I would not have stepped into a VA hospital, except to protest the abysmal treatment of veterans, but things have improved since we served and I would, and do, go to the VA now. So VVAW needs to be part of the voice that continues to push for better services because veterans of all generations, regardless of discharge status, deserve quality and accessible health care.

The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, sponsored by Sen. Sanders and Rep. Miller, provides some immediate solutions to increase access to care. This legislation requires that the VA offer veterans a choice in seeking non-VA care, through the Veterans Choice Card, if they cannot get an appointment within 30 days or if they live further than 40 miles from a VA Center. It also provides funding for the VA to hire more medical staff, improve the physical infrastructure, and create more VA locations. This bill is a step forward towards creating immediate solutions to an overloaded system, but much more is needed for the long-term success and stability of the VA. For instance, the card is not a blank check for medical care. There are many choke points for the use of the card, where the VA must grant advance approval for it's use. We must keep advocating for the VA system's infrastructure to be built up so that this scandal does not become a pathway to VA privatization. We are absolutely opposed to the privatization of the VA!

The long-term solution must involve a bottom-up approach that provides the front line staff – office staff, medical assistants, nurses and other providers – with the resources they need so that they can continue day-in and day-out to be there to serve veterans in every way they can. Whistleblower protections must be increased, strengthened, and enforced so those dedicated staff can speak freely about the injustices they see without being threatened, harassed, or fear losing their job. In July, several Department of Veterans Affairs workers testified at a House panel hearing about the retaliations committed at the hands of the supervisors that they blew the whistle on. This is not acceptable.

The biggest, and most often underemphasized, way we can help the VA system is by not adding yet another generation of veterans to such an overloaded and overwhelmed system. Yet, the US continues to carry out a foreign policy agenda that is leading to escalating tensions in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East. The increasing sanctions on Russia have only strengthened their support of the rebels in Ukraine. "Humanitarian" bombings of ISIS in Iraq are deepening the crisis in Iraq. The US foreign policy under Secretary of State John Kerry is only creating more victims across the globe while increasing the chance of US troops being engaged in warfare. VVAW calls on Secretary Kerry to be an advocate for peace and justice, not global divisiveness and terror.

VVAW remains committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We invite you to join in. If you have had experiences at the VA that highlight ways to reform the VA system, consider submitting an article for VVAW's fall issue of *The Veteran* by email to vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW also maintains a group page on FaceBook where VVAW members and friends can share and discuss matters affecting veterans. Join the conversation and share your perspective at facebook.com/groups/vvawinc.

We need your continued support. We hope you can make a tax-deductible contribution to support VVAW's work, at whatever level. Every donation, no matter the size, enables us to carry on the struggle for veterans' rights by issuing our free semi-annual newspaper, sustaining our continued efforts to fight for the benefits for all veterans, and collaborating with other organizations to help homeless veterans. **Again, thank you for your continued support to further VVAW's mission of peace, justice, and the rights of all veterans.**

Sincerely,



Bill Branson, VVAW Board Member

I am sending Vietnam Veterans Against the War \$35 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other to support its work for peace, justice, and for decent benefits for all veterans. Donations to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at www.vvaw.org.

Name (print) _____

Address _____

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