

DEOMI News Highlights

DEOMI News Highlights is a weekly compilation of published items and commentary with focus on equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, culture, and human relations issues. The DEOMI News Highlights is also a management tool intended to serve the informational needs of equity professionals and senior DOD officials in the continuing assessment of defense policies, programs, and actions. Further reproduction or redistribution for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.

Newest Michigan museum showcases racist artifacts [Mike Householder, *Associated Press*, 19 April 2012]

- The article reports on the opening of the [Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia](#) that “has amassed the nation's largest public collection of artifacts spanning the segregation era, from Reconstruction until the civil rights movement, and beyond.”
- The museum in a gleaming new exhibit hall at Ferris State University “is all about teaching, not a shrine to racism,” said David Pilgrim, the founder and curator who started building the collection as a teenager... Today, the school has 9,000 pieces that depict African-Americans in stereotypical ways and, in some cases, glorify violence against them.
- Pilgrim, who is black, makes no apologies for the provocative exhibits. The goal of the \$1.3 million gallery, he explained, is “to get people to think deeply.”

[Newest Michigan museum showcases racist artifacts](#)

Panetta, Dempsey Announce Initiatives to Stop Sexual Assault [Lisa Daniel, *Defense.gov*, 16 April 2012]

- The Pentagon’s top civilian and military leaders took their campaign to stop sexual assault in the military to Capitol Hill today, where they announced new initiatives to combat the problem.
- The initiatives build on others announced in the past year that include appointing a two-star general to head the department’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, and expanding legal assistance to military spouses and adult military dependents.
- Panetta called the changes “a strong package,” but he added that “there is no silver bullet.” All military leaders at every level must understand that they have a responsibility to stop sexual assault, he said.

[Panetta, Dempsey Announce Initiatives to Stop Sexual Assault](#)

USMC 4-star: Women to attend infantry school [James K. Sanborn, *The Marine Corps Times*, 18 April 2012]

- The Marine Corps school that produces infantry combat officers will enroll its first-ever female students this year. As part of the service’s extensive research campaign to determine what additional jobs could be opened to women, an undetermined number of volunteers will attend the Infantry Officers Course in Quantico, Va.
- The Corps has been studying this issue for more than a year. In February, officials announced that company-grade officers and staff noncommissioned officers would be assigned for the first time to select jobs previously open only to men, though not in the infantry or any billets for which ground combat is a primary mission.
- This past winter, the Defense Department published a report saying that nonlinear combat against a shadowy enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan has negated the notion of a frontline behind which women can be kept safe.

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Diversity

<http://fortstewart.patch.com/articles/fort-benning-prepares-for-female-trainees>

Fort Benning Prepares for Female Trainees

After a DoD review of women's roles in the military, some formerly all-male training is about to go co-ed.

Vince Little

Army News Service, April 12, 2012



Maj. Henry Delacruz, 194th Armored Brigade operations officer, points to where a wall will be built in an upstairs bay to separate the male and female living space. Credit U.S.Army

FORT BENNING, Ga. -- Officials at the 194th Armored Brigade said they could begin training female Soldiers right now, if necessary. It's just a matter of when the Army decides to send them here.

After a Defense Department review of women's roles in the military, the Army is expanding access to some combat-arms positions on the battlefield traditionally reserved for men. In February, it announced plans to open six military occupational specialties, or MOSs, and more than 13,000 positions to female Soldiers.

At Fort Benning, it means advanced individual training for Bradley and tank mechanics is about to go co-ed. Specifically, it affects the 91A M1 Abrams Tank System Maintainer and 91M Bradley Fighting Vehicle System Maintainer courses under the Armor School on Harmony Church. The other four specialties are in artillery.

"This is another subtle change to our culture, just like the Armor School coming here from Fort Knox," said Lt. Col. William Nuckols, commander of 3rd Battalion, 81st Armor Regiment. "We started working on this a year ago, when we got a hint this might happen, and began doing our prep and planning. But it's going to impact more than just the brigade. It will have an effect on many agencies and units across the Maneuver Center of Excellence."

Armor officials said it's unclear how soon Human Resources Command will start placing women in the two courses, but they plan to be fully prepared with a minor barracks overhaul and other infrastructure modifications by Sept. 1. When they do arrive, it'll be the first class with female Soldiers ever to go through training at Fort Benning for a combat role.

The 1994 DOD policy known as the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule had prohibited women from serving in combat units below the brigade level. An exception has now been granted allowing them to serve in some positions at the battalion tier.

The six MOSs had been closed to female Soldiers because they were normally collocated with direct combat units.

"There's been outstanding teamwork across the Maneuver Center of Excellence, or MCoE from multiple organizations to come up with a plan and get the necessary steps in place to make sure we're ready to assume this mission," said Lt. Col. Samuel Welch, the 194th Armored Brigade's deputy commander.

A \$42,000 project to set up a company operations facility inside the trainee barracks at E Company, 3-81 Armor, begins Monday, said Maj. Henry Delacruz, the brigade operations officer. The blueprint calls for a wall to be built in an existing bay upstairs to divide the male and female living space in half. Plumbing in the adjacent latrine is designed for an easy conversion of three urinals to toilets and partition installation, he said.

<http://fortstewart.patch.com/articles/fort-benning-prepares-for-female-trainees>

To meet the Army's separate and secure standards, the facility must include a video surveillance system in common areas and fire barrier wall with door alarms, the brigade said. Video will be linked to monitors at the charge-of-quarters desk and battalion headquarters.

"It's a preventive measure," Delacruz said. "We think we've gone above and beyond the regulation and what's required to make sure everybody is protected."

Brigade Command Sgt. Maj. James Daniels said the unit won't be able to put a female cadre member on duty at the command post every day. That's where the cameras come into play.

"They will ensure that we protect the Soldiers, cadre and command in case something happens," he said.

Collectively, the AIT courses will have two female instructors, who'll double as squad leaders, and two women assigned as platoon sergeants, the equivalent of a drill sergeant, Nuckols said. The four cadre members are expected on post by late summer. In addition, E Company will bring in a female executive officer.

He said there will be no more than 21 female Soldiers going through the courses at any given time based on the model of three per class and unit's capacity to conduct seven sessions simultaneously.

If women arrived for training sooner than anticipated, the battalion could accommodate them by consolidating Soldiers on the second floor, Delacruz said. Vacant living space is available due to training-load reductions within the 194th. But all the conditions and infrastructure will be arranged by early September.

Depending on how female Soldiers perform in tank and Bradley maintainer training, they'll also become eligible for the Armor School's Heavy Vehicle Recovery Course, Welch said. The top students in AIT get selected.

"Our female trainees won't be treated any differently than the male trainees," he said.

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2012/04/marine-corps-women-infantry-combat-dunford-amos-041812/>

USMC 4-star: Women to attend infantry school

By James K. Sanborn - Staff writer

Marine Times, 18 April 2012 15:36:36 EDT

The Marine Corps school that produces infantry combat officers will enroll its first-ever female students this year, Marine Corps Times has learned.

As part of the service's extensive research campaign to determine what additional jobs could be opened to women, an undetermined number of volunteers will attend the Infantry Officers Course in Quantico, Va., said Gen. Joseph Dunford, the Corps' assistant commandant. There, Marine officers are groomed to serve in direct combat roles and lead troops into battle.

"We are in the process right now of soliciting volunteers," Dunford said on Wednesday.

It's a monumental — if controversial — move for the Marine Corps, which until now barred female Marines from the program and required instead that they attend other courses aimed at preparing them for assignments in support roles such as logistics, personnel administration and aircraft maintenance, among others.

Soon, enlisted women also will have an opportunity to attend infantry training, Dunford said. Marine officials are developing plans to assign female Marines to the Corps' Infantry Training Battalions, which fall under the Schools of the Infantry.

Officials don't yet know how many women — officer or enlisted — will be put into the academic pipeline for the Corps' "03" infantry occupational code, Dunford said. All will be volunteers — and it remains to be seen how many will answer the call, he said.

It's not immediately clear either what the next steps will be for those women who successfully complete the Corps' infantry training programs. Marine officials at Quantico, who have led the service's effort to explore lifting restrictions on women in combat, said these details are finalized, but declined to discuss them pending an official unveiling in the coming days.

The Marine Corps' top general, Commandant Gen. Jim Amos, traveled Wednesday to Camp Lejeune, N.C., where among other business he was expected to meet with Marines and explain the service's plans for expanding women's career opportunities, Dunford said. Amos was joined by his senior enlisted adviser, Sgt. Maj. Mike Barrett.

"I think the important thing for us is to articulate the commandant's intent, and to explain what he is doing and why he is doing it," Dunford said. "The best way to do that is face-to-face, and he, with the sergeant major ... is doing that right now."

The Corps has been studying this issue for more than a year. In February, officials announced that company-grade officers and staff noncommissioned officers would be assigned for the first time to select jobs previously open only to men, though not in the infantry or any billets for which ground combat is a primary mission. Starting in May, women will be considered for about 400 positions within six types of battalions:

- Amphibious assault
- Artillery
- Combat assault
- Combat engineer
- Low-altitude air defense
- Tank.

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2012/04/marine-corps-women-infantry-combat-dunford-amos-041812/>

Additionally, new functional fitness tests are being developed to help Marine Corps leaders determine how women and men perform in, and cope with, various combat tasks. The goal is to establish “gender-neutral” physical fitness standards. Details are scant, but the Marine Corps’ Training and Education Command is looking to purchase a variety of new equipment specifically for these tests, suggesting the tasks associated with them will closely mimic combat-essential duties such as operating and moving heavy weaponry, and carrying casualties from the battlefield.

The Marine Corps defines gender-neutral physical standards as being identical for men and women, rather than weighted — or “gender-normed” — like those applied in the service’s annual Physical Fitness Test. During the PFT, women can earn a minimum or maximum score with fewer repetitions and a slower run times than their male counterparts.

This suggests that women wanting to serve in ground combat units will be given the shot to do so only if they can keep pace with their male counterparts. Standards would likely evaluate Marines not as women and men, but simply as infantrymen, tank crewmen or artillerymen, for example.

“There is a plan to ... evaluate males and females against those standards and, potentially, a downstream plan to put women through other training that actually will be informed by our experience” with infantry training, Dunford said. “I think you will hear more from the commandant on that coming up.”

The data gleaned from all these efforts, Dunford said, will be used to inform a recommendation from the Marine Corps to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. That’s expected to be done by mid-November.

This past winter, the Defense Department published a report saying that nonlinear combat against a shadowy enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan has negated the notion of a frontline behind which women can be kept safe. Working in support roles, 144 women have been killed in action and 865 injured since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, according to Defense Department data. As such, old prohibitions have become irrelevant, according to the report.

Human Relations



DEOMI

DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE



NEWS ADVISORY

DEOMI ANNOUNCES CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 8, 2012

**Release No. 12-04-12
April 19, 2012**

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Navy Captain Yolanda Y. Reagans, Vice Commandant of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), is set to become the 14th Commandant of DEOMI during a 10 a.m. change of command ceremony here June 8, 2012.

Captain Reagans will assume command from Mr. Ronald M. Joe, DEOMI's first civilian Principal Director and member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), as he completes his appointment term at the helm of DEOMI. Mr. Joe previously served for five years as DEOMI's 10th Commandant from 1991-1996 as an Army Colonel, at which time he retired after 30 years of service.

A native of Union, N.J., Captain Reagans entered the Navy in 1983 after graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy and receiving her commission. In November 1996, she graduated from the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, earning a Master's Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies. She then graduated in 1997 from the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia.

Prior to arriving at DEOMI, Captain Reagans served from May 2009 to June 2011 as Commander, Navy Recruiting Region WEST, leading half of the Navy's total force recruiting mission. For Captain Reagans' complete biography, please click her photo.



DEOMI, established in 1971, enhances leadership and readiness by fostering positive human relations through education, training, and research. With a staff of approximately 150 civilian and military personnel, DEOMI now trains nearly 1,500 students per year. Since its inception in 1971, more than 40,000 DEOMI graduates from the Armed Forces, in the active and Reserve Components, as well as DOD civilian employees have attended DEOMI resident and non-resident courses while maintaining the DOD reputation as a place where all individuals have infinite dignity and worth.

Additional details regarding the change of command ceremony are forthcoming.

For more information about DEOMI, please visit our public website at www.deomi.org.

NEWS MEDIA ADVISORY: All media interested in attending the ceremony must contact Mr. Bryan Ripple, DEOMI Public Affairs Officer, at 321-494-6208 no later than June 6, 2012 to arrange clearance onto Patrick Air Force Base to cover the event.

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http://www.deomi.org/PublicAffairs/documents/12-04-12_DEOMI_Change_of_Command.pdf

<http://news.yahoo.com/newest-michigan-museum-showcases-racist-artifacts-070835385.html>

Newest Michigan museum showcases racist artifacts

By Mike Householder, Associated Press

Yahoo.com, 19 April 2012

BIG RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — The objects displayed in Michigan's newest museum range from the ordinary, such as simple ashtrays and fishing lures, to the grotesque — a full-size replica of a lynching tree. But all are united by a common theme: They are steeped in racism so intense that it makes visitors cringe.

That's the idea behind the [Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia](#), which says it has amassed the nation's largest public [collection](#) of artifacts spanning the segregation era, from Reconstruction until the civil rights movement, and beyond.

The museum in a gleaming new exhibit hall at [Ferris State University](#) "is all about teaching, not a shrine to racism," said [David Pilgrim](#), the founder and curator who started building the collection as a teenager.

Pilgrim, who is black, makes no apologies for the provocative exhibits. The goal of the \$1.3 million gallery, he explained, is "to get people to think deeply."

The displays are startling. The n-word is prevalent throughout, and many items portray black men as lazy, violent or inarticulate. Black women are shown as kerchief-wearing mummies, sexually charged Jezebels or other stereotypes.

The shocking images exact an emotional cost.

"There's parts in that room — the main room — where it's quite gut-wrenching," said Nancy Mettlach, a student conduct specialist at Ferris. "And the thought that was going through my mind was: 'How can one human being do this to another human being?'"

Pilgrim, a former sociology professor at Ferris State, started the collection in the 1970s in Alabama. Along the way, he "spent more time in antique and flea markets than the people who work there." His quest for more examples was boundless.

"At some point, the collecting becomes the thing," he said. "It became the way I relaxed." He spent most of his free time and money on acquisitions.

In 1996, Pilgrim donated his 2,000-piece collection to the school after concluding that it "needed a real home."

The collection spent the next 15 years housed in a single room and could be seen only by appointment. Thanks to the financial support of the university and donors — notably from the charitable arm of Detroit utility DTE Energy — Pilgrim's collection now has a permanent home, which will have a grand opening ceremony April 26. Admission is free.

Today, the school has 9,000 pieces that depict African-Americans in stereotypical ways and, in some cases, glorify violence against them.

Not all of the museum's holdings are on display, but the 3,500-square-foot space in the lower level of the university library is packed with items that demonstrate how racist ideas and anti-black images dominated American culture for decades.

Visitors can forget about touring the exhibits and retiring untroubled to a cafe or gift shop. Some leave angry or offended. Most feel a kind of "reflective sadness," Pilgrim said.

But that's not enough. If the museum "stayed at that, then we failed," he said. "The only real value of the museum has ever been to really engage people in a dialogue."

<http://news.yahoo.com/newest-michigan-museum-showcases-racist-artifacts-070835385.html>
So Pilgrim designed the tour to give visitors a last stop in a "room of dialogue," where they're encouraged to discuss what they've seen and how the objects might be used to promote tolerance and social justice.

Some of the objects in the museum are a century old. Others were made as recently as this year.

Ferris State sophomore Nehemiah Israel was particularly troubled by a series of items about [President Barack Obama](#).

One T-shirt on display reads: "Any White Guy 2012." Another shirt that says "Obama '08" is accompanied by a cartoon monkey holding a banana. A mouse pad shows robe-wearing Ku Klux Klan members chasing an Obama caricature above the words, "Run Obama Run."

"I was like, 'Wow. People still think this. This is crazy,'" Israel said.

One of the first rooms in the museum features a full-size replica of a tree with a lynching noose hanging from it. Several feet away, a television screen shows a video of racist images through the years.

The location of the museum — in the shadow of university founder Woodbridge Ferris' statue — also catches some by surprise. The mostly white college town of Big Rapids is 150 miles from Detroit, the state's largest predominantly black city.

Ferris, who later served as Michigan governor and as a U.S. senator, founded the school more than a century ago. He once said Americans should work to provide an "education for all children, all men and all women."

Pilgrim, who is also Ferris State's vice president for diversity and inclusion, initially considered giving his collection to a historically black college, but he wanted to be "near it enough to make sure it was taken care of."

Most of the objects "are anti-black caricatures, everyday objects or they are segregationist memorabilia," he said. Because they represent a cruel, inflammatory past, they "should either be in a garbage can or a museum."

If You Go...

JIM CROW MUSEUM OF RACIST MEMORABILIA: Located in Ferris Library for Information, Technology and Education, 1010 Campus Drive, Big Rapids, Mich.; <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow> or 231-591-3500. Monday-Friday, noon-5 p.m. or by appointment. Free admission.

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120416882007.html> or

<http://www.star-telegram.com/2012/04/15/3885825/texas-army-national-guards-family.html>

Texas Army National Guard's family readiness adviser knows what she's talking about

By Chris Vaughn

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 16, 2012

GRAND PRAIRIE -- Christine Gilbreath holds one of the most important jobs in the Texas Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment.

Don't let the salary -- \$0 -- fool you. No commander who hopes to hold his unit together in times like the past decade would ignore someone like Gilbreath, who serves as the family readiness adviser for the battalion, meaning she is the main liaison and problem solver for families of troops.

"This is not the wives club of the old days," Gilbreath said of her role. "We are taken so much more seriously and utilized so much more by commanders. The military realizes that meeting the needs of families makes a difference in recruiting and retention."

Gilbreath, 41, a former soldier herself and wife of a National Guardsman who lives in Crowley, earned some major recognition recently when Military Spouse magazine named her its National Guard Spouse of the Year. The magazine had never made the award to a National Guard spouse, but that changed this year when the head of the National Guard became a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

She will find out if she gets to carry the overall Military Spouse of the Year title in May at a ceremony at the Marine Corps' historic base, Eighth and & I streets in Washington, D.C. Five other people including a husband are in the running.

Gilbreath isn't bashful about saying she wants to win.

The reason goes well beyond the personal recognition it would provide her. More important is the entree it would give her to military and civilian leaders at the highest levels of the Defense Department, Congress and the White House. The 2011 recipient, Marine wife Bianca Strzalkowski, met with first lady Michelle Obama, congressional representatives and senior defense leaders.

"There is a lot of credibility that comes with an award like this," said Babette Maxwell, the founder and executive editor of Military Spouse and the wife of a Navy F/A-18 pilot assigned to Naval Air Station Fort Worth.

"When officials in the Defense Department or congressional caucus members are looking for an expert to talk to them about issues or programs to support, this is where they start to find someone to speak on behalf of the military spouse community."

More to do

The military may be doing more than ever to support families, but it could always do more in Gilbreath's eyes.

She would like to see a comprehensive program established to help new military spouses navigate how to get or change benefits, how to pursue education, how to transfer job licensing from one state to another and more, all of which is done now by word of mouth, spouse to spouse.

Gaining knowledge is all the more difficult because of the frequent moves made by military spouses, who have to start all over in a new state every few years.

"All the things I wish I would have known 20 years ago, now I have an opportunity to show spouses," she said.

Gilbreath met her husband in a peculiarly Army way -- working on helicopters together. She was a helicopter maintainer assigned to keep an eye on the new mechanics assigned to the unit in Germany, one of whom was Scott Gilbreath.

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120416882007.html> or

<http://www.star-telegram.com/2012/04/15/3885825/texas-army-national-guards-family.html>

They married on Veterans Day 1993, at which time she ended her enlistment in the Army and her husband continued to serve. He joined the aviation battalion in Grand Prairie in 1999 and now works as a technical inspector on Chinook helicopters.

As the family readiness adviser, she organizes fundraisers that pay for holiday parties and deployment ceremonies, then turns around and plans the parties and ceremonies. She also helps spouses and other relatives connect to the right resources, should they have marital, financial, psychological or children issues. On average, she puts in between 1,000 and 1,200 hours a year for the unit, or a minimum of 20 a week.

She does all this, despite two children at home and trials from multiple sclerosis, which she was diagnosed with several years ago when her husband was in Iraq.

"I'm not a counselor, and I don't give advice," she said. "But I know where to go for help."

A year of honors

It has already been a remarkable year for Gilbreath.

A few weeks ago, the National Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C., named her a Gold Star recipient for her volunteer work, and the Texas National Guard recognized her family readiness group as the best in the state.

The former commander of the aviation battalion, Lt. Col. James Nugent Jr., praised Gilbreath for the way she surged family readiness efforts when the battalion was being deployed more often and for her abilities to connect the National Guard with local communities.

"Quite simply put, I have never encountered a more committed or selfless volunteer in my 20-year active and National Guard career, nor one who consistently drives meaningful results at so broad a level, while exhibiting grace, warmth, class and humility in the process," Nugent wrote in a letter of recommendation.

Miscellaneous

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/nyregion/lawyers-find-obstacles-to-the-disabled-then-find-plaintiffs.html>

Disabilities Act Prompts Flood of Suits Some Cite as Unfair

By Mosi Secret

The New York Times, 16 April 2012

A small cadre of lawyers, some from out of state, are using New York City's age and architectural quirkiness as the foundation for a flood of lawsuits citing violations of the [Americans With Disabilities Act](#). The lawyers are generally not acting on existing complaints from people with disabilities. Instead, they identify local businesses, like bagel shops and delis, that are not in compliance with the law, and then aggressively recruit plaintiffs from advocacy groups for people with disabilities.

The plaintiffs typically collect \$500 for each suit, and each plaintiff can be used several times over. The lawyers, meanwhile, make several thousands of dollars, because the civil rights law entitles them to legal fees from the noncompliant businesses. The practice has set off a debate about whether the lawsuits are a laudable effort, because they force businesses to make physical improvements to comply with the disabilities act, or simply a form of ambulance-chasing, with no one actually having been injured.

The suits may claim a host of problems: at a deli grocery in West Harlem, an overly steep ramp without guardrails, high shelves and a narrowing pathway near the refrigerators; at a yogurt shop in the theater district, no ramp, no bathroom doorknob that can be opened with a closed fist and exposed hot water drains under the bathroom sink; at a flower shop on the Upper East Side, no ramp and shelves that are too high.

All of those suits were filed by Ben-Zion Bradley Weitz, a lawyer based in Florida, who has a regular group of people with disabilities from whom he selects plaintiffs. One of them, Todd Kreisler, a man in a wheelchair who lives on the East Side of Manhattan, sued 19 businesses over 16 months — a Chinese restaurant, a liquor store and a sandwich shop among them.

The results of the suits were almost immediate: workers grabbed their hammers, installing new ramps, lowering counters and shelves and making businesses more accessible to people with disabilities. And as a product of the litigation, the businesses had to pay thousands of dollars in legal fees to Mr. Weitz and his associates.

Mr. Weitz is leading the charge into New York's courtrooms. Since October 2009, he has sued almost 200 businesses in the state, mostly in Federal District Court in Manhattan. He has eight years of experience filing these suits in Florida, where his practice does not seem to be lagging. Two weeks ago, he brought claims against four Tampa businesses — a strip mall, a convenience store, a bar and a print shop.

Another lawyer with a thriving practice, Martin J. Coleman of Long Island, has filed almost 130 cases in the Eastern District of New York. Mr. Coleman said he was aware the lawsuits had drawn criticism. "Folks go out there and say, 'I'm mad at the plaintiffs,' and 'I see the same names,' and 'Let's go bash the plaintiffs' attorneys,'" Mr. Coleman said. "I don't mind that, but the law has been there, don't kid yourself." "As a private attorney, every lawsuit that I file is to make money, because that's how I make a living," he added. "And in that regard, I'm no different than any other private attorney."

Few, if any, cases have gone to trial, according to a review of electronic court records; the defendants usually agree to settle, often in less than six months, closing the cases at a breakneck pace for federal court. Suit by suit, the lawyers are forcing this tough and intensely pedestrian city, so resistant to change, to meet standards for accessibility that are more than 20 years old. In doing so, they are part of a nationwide trend: In the last year, 3,000 similar suits, including more than 300 in New York, were brought under the Americans With Disabilities Act, more than double the number five years ago. Most of the cases involve claims against businesses filed by nonemployees.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/nyregion/lawyers-find-obstacles-to-the-disabled-then-find-plaintiffs.html>

Lawmakers and federal judges have questioned the practice, contending that the lawyers are only interested in generating legal fees; they say the lawyers typically do not give the businesses a chance to remedy the problem before filing suit. Those who defend the lawsuits say the means are justified to bring more businesses into compliance.

Because the settlements are invariably bound by confidentiality agreements, it is impossible to calculate the precise amount lawyers earn in total. One defense lawyer said his client had paid Mr. Weitz and the lawyers who worked with him \$6,000 in legal fees. At that rate, Mr. Weitz would take in more than \$600,000 for the 106 cases he has closed in New York.

The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination by private entities that are open to the public. When Congress was considering the law, advocates for people with disabilities wanted to be able to sue for damages. But Congress allowed litigants to sue only for injunctive relief, or court-ordered remedies to the problems that were raised in lawsuits. As a compromise for disabled plaintiffs, Congress also awarded fees to the lawyers that bring their discrimination cases.

Ruth Colker, a law professor at The Ohio State University, who specializes in disability law, said the lawsuits were an effective enforcement strategy. "It would be really be impossible for people to find a lawyer if there was no way for lawyers to get paid," she said.

In Florida, editorial boards, lawmakers and federal judges have long argued against the practice. In 2004, Judge Gregory A. Presnell of Federal District Court in Orlando said in a written opinion in favor of a business owner: "Plaintiff's testimony left the distinct impression that he is merely a professional pawn in an ongoing scheme to bilk attorney's fees from defendant."

Former Representative Mark Foley of Florida regularly introduced legislation to amend the Americans With Disabilities Act to require that business owners receive 90 days notice before being sued. Similar legislation is pending now.

Mr. Weitz, described on his [firm's Web site](#) as an "advocate for the disabled community," filed cases in New York with a local lawyer at first, but then on his own after his admission to the state bar in 2010. He did not return calls seeking comment.

Mr. Weitz's use of Mr. Kreisler was not unique. Zoltan Hirsch, a double leg amputee, was represented by Mr. Weitz in [143 suits](#), filing as many as nine suits on a single day. Maryann Santiago filed six suits. Carr Massi, who uses a wheelchair, sued five businesses in Manhattan.

Ms. Massi said she learned about Mr. Weitz's efforts at a meeting of [Disabled in Action](#), an advocacy group in New York. "He gave a presentation about access and stuff," she recalled. "Let's give it a shot," she said she thought to herself. "Stop complaining and do something about it." Asked if she ever patronized the businesses she sued after they made improvements, Ms. Massi said, "Unfortunately, no."

While the disabled plaintiffs cannot collect damages under the disabilities act, they are entitled to receive awards as long as they also sue under city or state human rights law. Local business owners, who say they are often sued without warning, call the suits shakedowns, invariably signing settlement agreements with strict confidentiality requirements.

"All they want is money; they get the money, and they move on to the next target," said Ming Hai, a Queens lawyer who has defended businesses from the suits. "It has become a profession to go out and look for a little problem here and there."

Ms. Massi did not agree with critics of the aggressive litigation by Mr. Weitz. "He is fighting for something he believes in, and if he gets a few bucks, why not?" she said. "I feel like whatever he is doing I am benefiting from it and other wheelchair users are benefiting from it."

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120415881865.html> or
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/us/bay-area-veterans-disability-claims-are-buried-under-paperwork.html>

Paperwork Buries Veterans' Disability Claims

By Aaron Glantz

New York Times, April 15, 2012

Even after Ian Rodriguez left the Marine Corps in 2006, he still felt like he was in Iraq.

The burly veteran, who played defensive end on the College of San Mateo football team before joining the military, would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night at home in San Bruno and grab his girlfriend, putting both hands around her neck.

“I had no ill will toward her,” Mr. Rodriguez, 28, said in an interview, “but while I was asleep I felt like I was still back there, and I acted it out.” He said he slept with a .40-caliber Glock pistol under his pillow and drank a bottle of whiskey every night to help him forget the war and fall asleep.

In December 2006, Mr. Rodriguez filed a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs, arguing that he deserved a monthly disability check and priority mental health care from the agency because of post-traumatic stress disorder. More than five years later, he is still waiting for a final determination on his case.

Mr. Rodriguez is one of 870,000 veterans nationwide who are waiting for a decision on a disability claim from the V.A. The waiting list has more than doubled since President Obama took office, despite the appropriation of more than \$300 million for a new computer system and the hiring of thousands of claims professionals nationwide.

The problem is particularly acute in the Bay Area, where, according to figures provided by the V.A., returning soldiers wait an average of 313 days for a decision. Eighty percent must wait at least 125 days. Of the nearly 60 V.A. offices around the country, the Oakland office is the slowest.

“The place is filled with paper, piles of it, everywhere,” said Representative Jackie Speier, a Democrat from San Mateo who toured the Oakland office last month as part of a meeting with the agency’s regional director on behalf of a group of constituents with claims dating as far back as six years.

According to Ms. Speier, the backlog in Oakland has grown so severe that all new claims are immediately sent to V.A. offices in Lincoln, Neb., and Muskogee, Okla., where the backlog is less serious.

“It is an epidemic of delay,” Ms. Speier said. “I did not exactly leave invigorated.”

The Bay Citizen was denied a request to tour and photograph the department’s Oakland office and interview its director, Douglas Bragg. Mr. Bragg was unavailable for comment, according to Jessica Arifianto, an agency spokeswoman, but she released a statement from the office.

“We are continuously working to improve our timeliness and performance in our service to our veterans,” it said, citing “ongoing efforts” to improve the quality and timeliness of ratings decisions, including hiring additional staff members, using simpler forms and forming quality control teams.

The statement said the office was “taking steps” to meet a goal set by Eric Shinseki, the secretary of Veterans Affairs, to process all disability claims in fewer than 125 days with 98 percent accuracy by 2015.

On a tour of a V.A. facility in New Hampshire on Tuesday, Mr. Shineski said that, nationally, he expected waiting times to be cut in half over the next year as the new strategies are implemented.

So far, however, there is little evidence of progress. According to government records, the number of V.A. disability claims, and the resulting backlog, has grown every year since Mr. Obama took office.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/mar/18/same-sex-benefits-a-powder-keg-in-pentagon/?page=all>

Same-sex benefits a powder keg in Pentagon

Rights fight pits Holder vs. Panetta

By Rowan Scarborough

The Washington Times, 18 April 2012

The [Obama administration](#) is withholding medical and other benefits from same-sex spouses of military members, but Attorney General [Eric H. Holder Jr.](#) says he can no longer defend the law that authorizes the practice.

Conservatives are charging that [Mr. Holder](#) is going back on [Pentagon](#) promises to adhere to the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in the September repeal of the ban on open gays in the military.

Military promises to enforce DOMA, which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman, induced some fence-sitting members of [Congress](#) to support the [administration](#)'s push to repeal the ban: The [Pentagon](#) would not recognize same-sex marriages, thus would not extend an array of military benefits to same-sex spouses.

However, [Mr. Holder](#)'s [Justice Department](#) stopped defending DOMA in court challenges in February 2011.

What's more, the attorney general last month sided with gay-rights activists in a lawsuit against Defense Secretary [Leon E. Panetta](#) demanding benefits for spouses of legally married gay service members.

[Elaine Donnelly](#), who runs the [Center for Military Readiness](#), sees the action as a calculated bait-and-switch.

"[Congress](#) voted for [a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] law that [[Defense Department](#)] officials successfully disguised with fake promises before the lame-duck vote," [Mrs. Donnelly](#) said.

"Had there been sufficient time to challenge contradictions in their testimony, the 1993 [ban] still would be in place. But [President] Obama would have failed to deliver on his promises to [LGBT](#) activist groups. That's what it's all about, then and now."

Benefits fight

[Robert Maginnis](#), an analyst with the [Family Research Council](#), said [Mr. Holder](#)'s abandonment of DOMA, as it applies to the military, sends the wrong signal to "our all-volunteer armed forces of mostly conservative Americans."

"Our troops mostly come from middle America, where marriage is between a man and a woman," said [Mr. Maginnis](#), a retired Army officer. "Mr. Obama's failure to defend traditional marriage in the ranks may please his leftist friends at [Harvard](#) or [Columbia](#), but it will disgust the core of our military and their families.

"It is past time for the elected commander-in-chief to abandon his radical agenda and treat our armed forces with the dignity they deserve."

Lawmakers in eight states and the District of Columbia have approved issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, creating the situation of legally married military gays whose spouses cannot receive medical, dental and other benefits.

With the repeal of the ban, the new legal battle about gays in the military centers on the array of benefits afforded heterosexual married couples.

Gay-rights activists stepped up the battle in October when a group of gay veterans and active-duty personnel sued [Mr. Panetta](#), claiming discrimination. They want the same benefits of straight couples: medical and dental care, housing and transportation allowances, military identification cards, survivor benefits and the right to be buried together in military cemeteries.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/mar/18/same-sex-benefits-a-powder-keg-in-pentagon/?page=all>

[Mr. Holder](#) agreed. He told [House](#) Speaker [John A. Boehner](#), Ohio Republican, in a Feb. 17 letter that he sided with gay-rights activists in the case known as [McLaughlin v. Panetta](#).

The attorney general said that DOMA “cannot be constitutionally applied to same-sex couples who are legally married under state law.”

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, which announced the lawsuit, called [Mr. Holder](#)’s shift a big boost.

“We are pleased that the attorney general has decided not to defend the constitutionality of DOMA in the military context, just as he has declined to defend it in other contexts,” said Aubrey Sarvis, network director. “We are also delighted that, for the first time, he has said that separate definitions that apply to military veterans are also unconstitutional. This is an important step for the [McLaughlin](#) plaintiffs.”

[Mrs. Donnelly](#) sees the letter as an attempt to create legal confusion.

“The [administration](#) has done more than muddle the situation,” she said. “They have sabotaged it in order to circumvent the intent of [Congress](#) and to advance the agenda of gay activist groups.

“In 2010, [Defense Department](#) officials promised [Congress](#) that the [administration](#) would enforce the Defense of Marriage Act, particularly with regard to military family benefits.”

Republicans’ point man

A [Pentagon](#) spokeswoman told The Washington Times: “We will continue to follow the law. Eligibility for a number of benefits is restricted by the application of several statutes, including the Defense of Marriage Act.”

[Pentagon](#) officials also said they would not create a special benefit category for unmarried gay partners because that would discriminate against unmarried straight couples.

Said the [Pentagon](#)’s November report on the repeal a month before [Congress](#) voted: “If, simultaneous with repeal, the [Department of Defense](#) creates a new category of unmarried dependent or family member reserved only for same-sex relationships, the [Department of Defense](#) itself would be creating a new inequity — between unmarried, committed same-sex couples and unmarried, committed opposite-sex couples. This new inequity, or the perception of it, runs counter to the military ethic of fair and equal treatment, and resentment at perceived inequities runs deep in military families.”

The report added that the [Pentagon](#) would continue to review national trends in employer benefits to married and unmarried gays and their partners.

With [Mr. Holder](#) refusing to defend DOMA in a second lawsuit, as it relates to the military, that job now falls to the [House](#) Republican majority to argue for [Mr. Panetta](#), as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs. The [McLaughlin](#) lawsuit also targets a federal law that limits veteran benefits to spouses of the opposite sex.

“The notification to [Congress](#) allows them to defend the statute,” said [Justice Department](#) spokeswoman Nanda Chitre.

Republicans hired lawyer [Paul Clement](#) in April to defend DOMA in federal court after [Mr. Holder](#) abandoned its legal defense. [Mr. Clement](#) was solicitor general, the [Justice Department](#)’s No. 4 position, in the George W. Bush administration, and argued cases before the Supreme Court.

[Mr. Clement](#) has become conservatives’ preferred attorney. States opposed to Mr. Obama’s health care overhaul law have hired him to carry their battle to the Supreme Court, where oral arguments begin March 26.

Large majorities in the [House](#) and the Senate approved DOMA in 1996. President Clinton signed it into law, saying marriage is between one man and one woman.

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120415881865.html> or <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/us/bay-area-veterans-disability-claims-are-buried-under-paperwork.html>

While the agency has modestly increased the number of claims processed each year, the number of new claims filed has increased by 48 percent over the last four years as a flood of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans return home and file disability claims seeking compensation for wounds suffered in the line of duty (677,000 as of October 2011).

At the same time, 231,000 Vietnam veterans have filed fresh disability claims related to diseases that the government only recently acknowledged stemmed from the spraying of the toxic defoliant Agent Orange.

“They build a technology infrastructure but haven’t pulled the trigger,” said Tom Tarantino, a former Army captain who works as a deputy policy director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “So all the extra money and full-time employees have done is prevent the problem from going way into the red. If they hadn’t been doing what they were doing, it would be a total disaster.”

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of veterans wait. “The V.A. is this monster paperwork machine,” said Mike Grabski, 32, an Army veteran of the war in Afghanistan who has been waiting since December 2009 for his disability paperwork to go through.

Mr. Grabski, who lives in Napa, is unemployed and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. In 2007, Mr. Grabski’s friend, Staff Sgt. Larry Rougle, was killed by Taliban fighters. “Seeing your best friend full of holes is not fun,” he said.

Mr. Grabski said that in addition to post-traumatic stress disorder, he sustained a mild traumatic brain injury, shoulder and knee injuries and hearing loss related to bomb blasts during his tours as a paratrooper in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also suffers from asthma, which he said worsened as a result of his service.

“It’s been a constant heartache,” Mr. Grabski said of the disability claims process. “The money would be nice, but it’s not about the money. It’s about the care. I’ve got issues that need attending to.”

For Mr. Rodriguez, the Marine Corps veteran from San Bruno, the money is important. He filed his initial disability claim for post-traumatic stress disorder in December 2006 and received a 30 percent rating from the V.A. 403 days later, in January 2008.

Mr. Rodriguez said the rating, which entitles him to \$389 a month in disability payments, is not generous enough to allow him to take off from work to attend counseling and group therapy sessions that the V.A. offers during business hours. He said he wants the department to give him a 70 percent disability rating, which would entitle him to \$1,272 in compensation monthly.

In an interview, Mr. Rodriguez said he still experiences frequent flashbacks and intrusive feelings of guilt and grief, prompted by his experiences conducting house-to-house searches during his deployment in Iraq in 2004, as well as by a stint in New Orleans, where he deployed to collect bodies after Hurricane Katrina.

“If they upgraded my claim, I would be able to go to group therapy every day,” Mr. Rodriguez said, “and I hope I would get better.”

In handing down its initial 30 percent rating in 2008, the agency did not dispute Mr. Rodriguez’s description of his condition, but wrote that “to assign a greater evaluation, there must be reduced reliability and productivity.”

Michael Blecker, the executive director of Swords to Plowshares, a nonprofit veterans services organization that is helping Mr. Rodriguez with his appeal, said disability is not only about the ability to work. “It’s about somebody’s quality of life and making them whole from what they lost in the war,” he said.

The State of Communities of Color in the U.S. Economy

Still Feeling the Pain Three Years Into the Recovery

By Christian E. Weller, Julie Ajinkya, Jane Farrell

Center for American Progress, 12 April 2012

We are currently in the third year of economic recovery following the Great Recession and the financial crisis that upended domestic and world markets and decimated the global economy from December 2007 to June 2009. Three years into the recovery, the economic outlook is improving as economic growth is stabilizing and job creation gradually accelerating. That said, America's families, which have suffered for years from high and long-term unemployment, remain in desperate need of stronger economic growth for a prolonged period in the foreseeable future.



SOURCE: AP Photo/LM Otero

Dennis Allen, center, hugs and kisses his daughters in Tulia, Texas. Many families in communities of color have been particularly hard hit by the Great Recession and have had a harder time in the recovery, as well.

Stable economic growth in the future, however, will depend on having a strong, broad-based middle class. While economic growth in the United States is on the mend, the data show that the benefits of this growth

have not been equitably shared. Many middle-class families, regardless of race or ethnicity, do not enjoy the opportunities needed for them and their children to get ahead.

More disturbingly, the data we summarize in this report shows that communities of color are substantially less likely than their white fellow citizens to enjoy the opportunities that come from having a good job, owning a home, and having a financial safety cushion in the form of health insurance, retirement benefits, and private savings. This difference exists because economic opportunities eroded faster for communities of color than for whites during the Great Recession—and those opportunities have been coming back much more slowly for communities of color than for whites during the economic recovery. Our report specifically shows:

African Americans and Latinos persistently suffer from high unemployment rates. The unemployment rate of African Americans is typically twice as high as that of white Americans, while the Latino unemployment rate is about 50 percent greater than the rate for whites.

Slower job growth during the recovery leaves communities of color in a deep economic hole. Employment in the fourth quarter of 2011 was 88.9 percent of African American employment in December 2007 and 91.4 percent of Latino employment, compared to 93.6 percent for whites and 92.9 percent for Asian Americans.

African Americans enjoy fewer job opportunities than other groups. The employed share of the population was 52.1 percent for African Americans and 59.3 percent for Latinos, compared to 59.4 percent for whites and 59.9 percent for Asian Americans in the fourth quarter of 2011.

African Americans and Latinos earn less than others. African Americans' median weekly earnings were \$674 (in constant 2011 dollars), and Latinos' earnings were \$549. In comparison, whites earned \$744 each week, and Asian Americans earned \$866 in the fourth quarter of 2011.

African Americans and Latinos swell the ranks of minimum wage earners. From 2009 to 2011—two years into the recovery—the number of African American minimum wage workers increased by 16.6 percent, and that of Latino minimum wage workers increased by 15.8 percent, while Asian

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2012/04/communities_of_color.html

Americans in minimum wage positions decreased by 15.4 percent, and whites only increased by 5.2 percent.

Household incomes have fallen drastically for African Americans since the recession. Inflation-adjusted median incomes for African Americans fell by 7.1 percent from 2007 to 2009, faster than for any other population group. Further, inflation-adjusted median household incomes dropped another 3.2 percent from 2009 to 2010, which was as fast or faster than comparable income drops for any other population group.

Poverty rates, already much higher for communities of color, rose faster in recession and recovery than for whites. African Americans and Latinos showed poverty rates of 24.2 percent and 24 percent, respectively, in 2010, compared to poverty rates of 9.3 percent for Asian Americans and 7.3 percent for whites. Poverty rates rose faster from 2007 to 2009 for African Americans—by 2.4 percentage points—for Latinos by 3.5 percentage points, and for Asian Americans by 2.2 percentage points, compared to whites, whose poverty rate increased by 1.6 percentage points during the same time period.

Communities of color have substantially less health insurance coverage than whites. The share of African Americans without health insurance in 2010 was 20.8 percent, and the respective share of Latinos without insurance coverage was 30.7 percent. This compares to 18.1 percent of Asian Americans without health insurance and 11.7 percent of whites without health insurance at the same time.

The wealth gap between communities of color and whites widened sharply due to housing market weaknesses. The median nonwhite or Latino household had \$23,300 in wealth in 2009 dollars, less than one-sixth of the wealth of white non-Latino households, which had \$149,900 in wealth. This reflects a substantial widening of an already very large wealth gap between communities of color and whites at the start of the recession in 2007, when nonwhites or Latino households owned about one-fifth of the typical wealth of white non-Latino households.

Homeownership disappears fastest for African Americans during the recession and recovery. At the beginning of the recession in 2007, the African American homeownership rate was 47.7 percent, Latino homeownership was 48.5 percent, and the homeownership rate for other races was 58.6 percent, compared to the white homeownership rate of 74.9 percent. By the end of 2011, 45.1 percent of African Americans owned their homes, 46.6 percent of Latinos owned their homes, and 56.5 percent of all other races owned homes, compared to a home-ownership rate of 73.7 percent for whites.

Communities of color are at a higher risk of losing their homes to foreclosure than whites. In 2011 the foreclosure rate for African Americans was 9.8 percent, for Latinos was 11.9 percent, and for Asians was 6.6 percent, while the foreclosure rate for whites was 5.0 percent in 2011.

Retirement plan coverage is lower for communities of color than it is for whites and continues to decline for African Americans. In 2010—one year into the recovery—the percentage of African American private-sector workers who had a retirement plan at work was 34.4—for Latinos that number was 21.4 percent, while it was 44.3 percent for whites.

According to all these indicators, the economic recovery is well into its third year. Parsing the data along racial and ethnic lines, however, shows that varying storylines are emerging for different population groups. African Americans and Latinos, for example, typically have substantially fewer economic opportunities than whites. The same can be said for Asian Americans, who also show higher poverty rates along with lower rates of health insurance coverage when compared to whites. This suggests that Asian Americans also have less access to well-paying jobs than whites.

Moreover, while economic opportunities are beginning to improve somewhat for Latinos, Asian Americans, and whites, African Americans are the clear exception—their economic fortunes continued to decline in 2011. The fact that the benefits of the economic recovery are slowly spreading to all groups except to African Americans, at least through the end of 2011, is reminiscent of the African

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2012/04/communities_of_color.html

American experience following the previous recession in 2001. During that time period African Americans' economic fortunes—employment, income, wealth, and homeownership—grew much slower than those of Latinos and declined in relation to those of Asian Americans and whites.

This is why it is important for policymakers to take notice of the disparities and start to undertake serious efforts to both close the economic opportunity gaps between communities of color and whites and to address in a substantive way the lagging experience of African Americans.

Focusing on these concerns, we lay out a series of policy recommendations at the end of this paper that we believe will go a long way in addressing some of the fallout of the Great Recession on communities of color. Specifically, we recommend the following:

Accelerate job creation

Expand, extend, and improve unemployment insurance

Raise the federal minimum wage

Increase access to affordable health insurance

Implement comprehensive immigration reform to protect workers' rights

We see these recommendations as important steps to ensure that communities of color can also enjoy the benefits of the recovery and begin to regain some of the economic security that they lost during the Great Recession.

Christian E. Weller is a Senior Fellow, Julie Ajinkya is a Policy Analyst for the Progress 2050 project, and Jane Farrell is a Special Assistant for the Economic Policy team at the Center for American Progress.

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Study shows how broad pay disparities are between sexes

By Marina Villeneuve, Gannett Washington Bureau

USA Today, 17 April 2012

Women of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds and education levels — and in almost every line of work — earned less than men, according to a report issued Tuesday by the American Association of University Women.

Women in the USA earned 77% of what men earned in 2010, says the report from AAUW, which has advocated for pay equity since 1913. Tuesday was Equal Pay Day, which was started in 1996 by the National Committee on Pay Equity to call attention to the gap between men's and women's wages.

The report says that in 2010, women's annual median earnings were \$36,931, compared with \$47,715 for men.

"Women and people of color don't choose to earn less," said Dana Schultz, Wisconsin state director of the 9to5 women's advocacy group. "Many factors contribute to the over-representation of women in undervalued, underpaid occupations."

The American Association of University Women used national and state Census data to determine 2010 annual median earnings for full-time workers older than 16.

According to the report:

- The gender pay gap was smallest in Washington, [D.C.](#), where full-time working women earned 91% of what men earned. Vermont and California tied for second, where women earned 84% of what men did.
- The largest disparities were in Wyoming, where women earned 64% of what men did, and Louisiana, where they earned 67%.
- The gap in median weekly income was largest for Hispanic and Latina women, who earned only 61% of what white men earn, on average.
- Median weekly income for black women was 70% of what it was for white men.
- The pay gap was smallest for Asian-American women, whose weekly median income was 88% of the weekly median income for white men.
- The weekly gender pay gap was smaller within racial and ethnic groups than it was when comparing minority women to white men. That's because "African-American, Hispanic and Latino men, on average, earned substantially less than white men in 2011," the report says.

One-third of working women are their family's breadwinner, which the report says makes equal pay a family issue.

"Now, it's often that it's women's work holding families together," Schultz said.

"Now is the worst time in a tight economy to cut women's pay and deny them the kind of fairness they deserve," she said.

Misconduct

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120417882218.html>

<http://news.yahoo.com/dempsey-military-embarrassed-colombia-scandal-192345010.html>

Dempsey: Military embarrassed by Colombia scandal

By Robert Burns, Associated Press

Yahoo.com, April 16, 2012

WASHINGTON -- The top U.S. military officer said Monday the nation's military leadership is embarrassed by allegations of misconduct against at least 10 U.S. military members at a Colombia hotel on the eve of President Barack Obama's visit over the weekend.

"We let the boss down," Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Pentagon news conference. He said he regretted that the scandal, which also involved 11 Secret Service agents accused of cavorting with prostitutes at the hotel, diverted attention from Obama's diplomacy at a Latin America summit.

"I can speak for myself and my fellow chiefs: We're embarrassed by what occurred in Colombia, though we're not sure exactly what it is," Dempsey added.

Pentagon officials said earlier Monday that the number of military members involved in the scandal appears to be greater than the five originally cited. One senior defense official said that at least 10 military members may have been involved. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the matter is under investigation.

Pentagon press secretary George Little said that military members who are being investigated were assigned to support the Secret Service in preparation for Obama's official visit to Cartagena. He said they were not directly involved in presidential security.

The Secret Service sent 11 of its members, a group including agents and uniformed officers, home from Colombia amid allegations that they had hired prostitutes at a Cartagena hotel. The military members being investigated were staying at the same hotel, Little said.

The Secret Service personnel were placed on administrative leave and on Monday the Secret Service announced that the agency had also revoked their security clearances. That means they cannot enter Secret Service facilities or facilities guarded by the Secret Service, said agency spokesman Brian Leary.

Though on leave, the agents and officers will continue to be paid.

Appearing with Dempsey at the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said U.S. troops are expected to abide by "the highest standards" of behavior whether they are at home or abroad. He noted that a military investigation is under way and promised that if wrongdoing is confirmed, "these individuals will be held accountable."

Army Col. Scott Malcom, chief spokesman for U.S. Southern Command, which organized the military team that was assigned to support the Secret Service's mission in Cartagena, declined to say how many additional service members are under investigation. He also would not say which branch of the military they were from.

"We are still putting together all the facts," Malcom said.

A defense official in Washington said at least some of those under investigation are members of the Army. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the matter is under active investigation.

Malcom said a colonel from the Southern Command staff, whom he would not identify by name, had been sent to Cartagena to gather facts. He said at least five military members under investigation were being flown to Miami on Monday.

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120417882218.html>

<http://news.yahoo.com/dempsey-military-embarrassed-colombia-scandal-192345010.html>

The U.S. Southern Command had announced on Saturday that five service members assigned to the presidential mission in Colombia had violated curfew and may have been involved in "inappropriate conduct."

In a statement Saturday, Air Force Gen. Douglas Fraser, commander of Southern Command, said he was "disappointed by the entire incident" and that "this behavior is not in keeping with the professional standards expected of members of the United States military."

The Secret Service placed the 11 agents on leave while the agency reviews what happened.

"I expect that investigation to be thorough, and I expect it to be rigorous," Obama said Sunday. "If it turns out that some of the allegations that have been made in the press are confirmed, then of course I'll be angry. ... We are representing the people of the United States, and when we travel to another country, I expect us to observe the highest standards."

California Rep. Darrell Issa, chairman of a House investigative panel, said he wasn't certain whether Congress would hold hearings on the alleged misconduct. But lawmakers will be looking "over the shoulder" of the Secret Service, he said, to make sure that the agency's methods for training and screening agents aren't endangering the nation's VIPs.

Associated Press writers Pauline Jelinek and Jim Kuhnhenn contributed to this report.

<http://news.yahoo.com/photos-revealed-us-troops-posing-corpse-135643902.html>

Photos revealed of US troops posing with corpses

By Pauline Jelinek, Associated Press

Yahoo News, 18 April 9:56 AM EDT

WASHINGTON (AP) -- In another embarrassment to the Pentagon, newly published photographs purport to show U.S. troops posing with the bodies of dead insurgents in Afghanistan.

Top U.S. military and civilian officials rushed to condemn the soldiers' actions Wednesday, calling them repugnant and a dishonor to others who have served in the conflict. The Army said an investigation is under way.

The photos were published in Wednesday's Los Angeles Times. It said one of the photos shows members of the 82nd Airborne Division posing in 2010 with Afghan police and the severed legs of a suicide bomber. The same platoon a few months later was sent to investigate the remains of three insurgents reported to have accidentally blown themselves up - and soldiers again posed and mugged for photographs with the remains, the newspaper said. A photo from that incident appears to show the hand of a dead insurgent resting on a U.S. soldier's shoulder as the soldier smiles.

The photos are the latest in a series of blows to the U.S. military image in Afghanistan. In January, U.S. Marines were found to have made a video of them urinating on Afghan corpses. In February, what the military said was the accidental burning of Qurans triggered violent protests and revenge killings of six Americans. And last month, a U.S. soldier left his base and allegedly killed 17 civilian villagers, mainly women and children.

The Times said that a soldier provided the newspaper with a series of 18 photos of soldiers posing with corpses. The soldier served in Afghanistan with the 82nd Airborne's 4th Brigade Combat Team from Ft. Bragg, N.C., and said the photos point to a breakdown in leadership and discipline that he believed compromised the safety of the troops, the newspaper reported.

Even before the photos were published online, Pentagon press secretary George Little said Defense Secretary Leon Panetta "rejects the conduct depicted in these 2-year-old photographs."

["Anyone found responsible for this inhuman conduct will be held accountable in accordance with our military justice system,"](#) Little said.

The U.S. commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, U.S. Marine Gen. John R. Allen, also criticized the troops. He said there is a strict policy for the handling of enemy remains and it dictates they be processed as humanely as possible.

"The incident depicted in the LA Times' photographs represents a serious error in judgment by several soldiers who have acted out of ignorance and unfamiliarity with U.S. Army values," Allen said, adding that commanders "will collaborate with Afghan authorities and carefully examine the facts and circumstances shown in these photos."

A statement by U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan C. Crocker also condemned the behavior.

"Such actions are morally repugnant, dishonor the sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers and civilians who have served with distinction in Afghanistan, and do not represent the core values of the United States or our military," Crocker said.

Little said the military had asked the Los Angeles Times not to publish the photographs. "The danger is that this material could be used by the enemy to incite violence against U.S. and Afghan service members in Afghanistan," he said.

In its story, the newspaper quoted editor Davan Maharaj saying: "After careful consideration, we decided that publishing a small but representative selection of the photos would fulfill our obligation to readers to report vigorously and impartially on all aspects of the American mission in Afghanistan, including the allegation that the images reflect a breakdown in unit discipline that was endangering U.S. troops."

Religion

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20120416/NEWS01/304160022/Air-Force-Chaplain-honored-being-someone-they-trust-?odyssey=mod|newswell|text|Home|s>

Air Force Chaplain honored for being 'someone they trust'

Maj. Matthew Simpson named Chaplain Reservist of the Year, commended for the spiritual guidance he gives airmen and their families

By R. Norman Moody

Florida Today, 15 April 2012

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE — Maj. Matthew Simpson says he simply fills a need within the Air Force Reserve. When combat leaves airmen with post-traumatic stress or otherwise affected by what they see and experience, the chaplain brings them comfort. Simpson's efforts to calm and counsel have earned him recognition as the Air Force Chaplain Corps' Chaplain Reservist of the Year. "I was excited I got it, but I also had a sense of humbleness," he said. "Part of the reason I do it is because of the tremendous need."

Air Force chaplains provide spiritual guidance and counseling to airmen and their families who request it. But the mission of the Air Force Reserve 920th Rescue Wing based at Patrick Air Force Base — rescuing sometimes severely injured troops and retrieving bodies on the battlefield — creates unique situations.

"These guys are seeing that all the time," Simpson said. "They get shot at when they go in. They get shot at when they land. It's an unnatural thing to see somebody with missing limbs or dead." And with almost constant deployment since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, airmen from the unit have experienced things that could create traumatic stress. Part of Simpson's job is to help them deal with their emotions so that they don't develop a disorder.

He said airmen don't have to carry the burden that comes with thinking they could not save someone's life. "I can come in as a chaplain bringing the Bible and share God's perspective on combat rescue," he said. "I bring that encouraging word, assurance from the Bible and encouragement from someone they trust." Simpson came to the 920th Rescue Wing about two years ago through a pilot program that placed chaplains in reserve units. He is the only full-time chaplain in the unit of about 1,200 airmen that also has one part-time chaplain.

"As busy as this unit is and as heavily deployed as we are, it's been a real blessing to have a chaplain here," said Col. Jeffrey Macrander, commander of the 920th. "Having the chaplain there to say, 'Hey, let me help you with the stress,' that's a good thing." Simpson holds a Bible study about twice a month for those in the unit who want to attend, as well as short devotions emphasizing principle, morality and encouragement.

"The important thing is I'm still able to share out of the Bible," he said. He offers guidance to airmen before and after deployment and sometimes during deployment. He counsels families, some who encounter emotional difficulties while their loved ones are serving overseas. Simpson often works out in the gymnasium at the same time as pararescuemen, who must exercise two hours a day. He also visits different work sites so that airmen know he is available. Many times the visits result in counseling sessions or just moments for airmen to share a concern.

"I feel it an honor to serve my rescue family as a chaplain in the 920th Rescue Wing," Simpson said. "These heroes of the Air Force Reserve truly live the pararescue motto, 'These Things We Do That Others May Live,' when they put their lives at risk or support those who put their lives at risk to rescue those in need."

Master Sgt. John Shiman, a pararescue jumper, or PJ, said airmen appreciate having Simpson as their chaplain. He is always there to counsel and to listen. "The chaplain is very uplifting," Shiman said. "He is always upbeat. He always finds the positive. If we are deployed, he will do what he can to support our families."

Sexual Assault / Harassment



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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DOD Releases Annual Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Report

The Department of Defense today released the fiscal 2011 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, as required by the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2011. To date, this is the eighth report DoD has released.

The report finds that in fiscal 2011, there were a total of 3,192 reports of sexual assault involving service members as either victims or subjects. This represents a one percent increase in reports of sexual assault compared to fiscal 2010.

“Sexual assault has no place in this department. It is an affront to the basic American values we defend, and to the good honor of our service members and their families,” said Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta. “Since taking this office, I’ve made it one of my top priorities to do everything we can to reduce and prevent sexual assault, to make victims of sexual assault feel secure enough to report this crime without fear of retribution or harm to their career, and to hold the perpetrators appropriately accountable. I will be announcing the next series of steps the department will be taking early next week during consultations with Congress.”

The report also details actions taken against the subjects investigated as a result of these reports. In fiscal 2011, the department had jurisdiction and sufficient evidence to take disciplinary action against 791 subjects for a sexual assault offense. Of these subjects, 489, or 62 percent had courts-martial charges preferred against them. That represents a 10 percentage point increase in the rate of courts-martial charges preferred compared to fiscal 2010. The proportion of military subjects against whom commanders decided to take disciplinary action for sexual assault offenses by preferring court-martial charges has increased steadily since fiscal 2007, when only 30 percent of subjects had charges initiated against them.

Since August 2011, a two star general has overseen the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office and under the leadership of the secretary of defense, several new victim-focused policies have been implemented since the end of fiscal 2011. These included expanded legal assistance, expedited transfers for victims of sexual assault, and extended retention of forensic examination and investigative reports.

Other new initiatives to enhance how the department prevents and responds to sexual assault include:

- Establishment of a sexual assault advocate credentialing and certification program;
- Expansion of sexual assault support services to military spouses and adult military dependents;
- Expansion of emergency care and support services to DoD civilians stationed abroad and DoD U.S. citizen contractors in combat areas;
- Increased funding for investigators and judge advocates to receive additional specialized

training;

- Implementation of an integrated data system for tracking sexual assault reports and managing cases; and

- Assessment of how the department trains commanding officers and senior enlisted leaders on sexual assault prevention and response.

“As this report makes clear, we have more work to do to confront this problem. There are no easy answers, but that makes it all the more essential for us to devote our energy and our attention to trying to confront this challenging crime,” Panetta said.

The complete report is available at <http://www.sapr.mil> and you can view a fact sheet of the report at <http://www.defense.gov/news/sexualassaultannualreportfactsheet.pdf> . For specific information regarding the military departments, contact the Army at 703-697-2564, the Navy at 703-697-5342, and the Air Force at 703-695-0640.

Panetta, Dempsey Announce Initiatives to Stop Sexual Assault

By Lisa Daniel

American Forces Press Service, 16 April 2012

WASHINGTON, April 16, 2012 – The Pentagon’s top civilian and military leaders took their campaign to stop sexual assault in the military to Capitol Hill today, where they announced new initiatives to combat the problem.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke with reporters after meeting with three members of the House of Representatives who are working on the issue.

Left to right: U.S. Rep. Niki Tsongas of Massachusetts, U.S. Rep. Michael Turner of Ohio, Defense

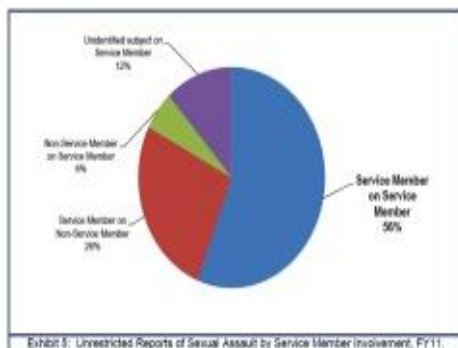


Secretary Leon E. Panetta, U.S. Rep. Loretta Sanchez of California, U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes of Texas and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speak with reporters at the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., April 16, 2012. Panetta and Dempsey met with members of the House to discuss new measures to combat sexual assault in the military. DOD photo by Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo

“General Dempsey and I consider this a serious problem that needs to be addressed,” Panetta said. “It violates everything the U.S. military stands for.”

Panetta and Dempsey met with Rep. Loretta Sanchez of California, Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio, and Rep. Niki Tsongas of Massachusetts. Sanchez chairs the Caucus on Women in the Military, while Turner and Tsongas co-chair the Military Sexual Assault Prevention Caucus.

“Service members and their families must feel secure enough to report this crime without fear of retribution, and commanders must hold offenders appropriately accountable,” the secretary said.



[DOD\(FROM STARS AND STRIPES BY JENNIFER HLAD 17 APRIL2012\)](#)

One Defense Department initiative will elevate the level of investigation for the most serious sexual assault allegations. Local unit commanders will be required to report allegations of rape, forcible sodomy and sexual assault, as well as attempts of those offenses, to a special court-martial convening authority, usually a colonel or Navy captain.

That change will ensure that sexual assault cases receive high-level attention and that cases remain in the chain of command, Panetta said. The initiatives also include:

-- Establishing with congressional approval a “special victims’ unit” within each service composed of specially trained experts in evidence collection, interviewing and working with victims;

-- Requiring that sexual assault policies be explained to all service members within 14 days of their entry into active duty;

<http://www.defense.gov//News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=67954>

- Allowing National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been sexually assaulted to remain on active duty status to obtain the treatment and support afforded to active-duty members;
- Requiring a record of the outcome of disciplinary and administrative proceedings related to sexual assault and retaining the records centrally;
- Requiring commanders to conduct annual organizational climate assessments to measure whether they are meeting the department's goal of a culture of professionalism and zero tolerance of sexual assault;
- Enhancing training programs for sexual assault prevention, including training for new military commanders in handling sexual assault matters; and
- Mandating wider public dissemination of available sexual assault resources, such as DOD's "Safe Helpline," a 24/7 helpline via Web, phone or text message operated by the nonprofit Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

The helpline, which assisted more than 770 people between April and September last year, is available at 877-995-5247 or <http://www.safehelpline.org>.

The initiatives build on others announced in the past year that include appointing a two-star general to head the department's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, and expanding legal assistance to military spouses and adult military dependents.

Panetta called the changes "a strong package," but he added that "there is no silver bullet." All military leaders at every level must understand that they have a responsibility to stop sexual assault, he said.

Dempsey said he agrees with the changes because the crime of sexual assault erodes the trust associated with being in the U.S. military.

"We must send the signal that this is not a problem we are going to ignore," Panetta said.

Rape victims say military labels them 'crazy'

By David S. Martin

CNN, April 14, 2012

(CNN) -- Stephanie Schroeder joined the U.S. Marine Corps not long after 9/11. She was a 21-year-old with an associate's degree when she reported for boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. "I felt like it was the right thing to do," Schroeder recalls. A year and a half later, the Marines diagnosed her with a personality disorder and deemed her psychologically unfit for the Corps.

Anna Moore enlisted in the Army after 9/11 and planned to make a career of it. Moore was a Patriot missile battery operator in Germany when she was diagnosed with a personality disorder and dismissed from the Army. Jenny McClendon was serving as a sonar operator on a Navy destroyer when she received her personality disorder diagnosis.

These women joined different branches of the military but they share a common experience: Each received the psychiatric diagnosis and military discharge after reporting a sexual assault.

I'm not crazy. I am actually relatively normal: Stephanie Schroeder "I'm not crazy," says Schroeder, who is married now, with two daughters. "I am actually relatively normal." McClendon says she had a similar reaction. "I remember thinking this is absurd; this is ridiculous. How could I be emotionally unstable? I'm very clear of mind, especially considering what had happened." McClendon says. "It was a ludicrous diagnosis."

A similar pattern: CNN has interviewed women in all branches of the armed forces, including the Coast Guard, who tell stories that follow a similar pattern -- a sexual assault, a command dismissive of the allegations and a psychiatric discharge.

Schroeder says a fellow Marine followed her to the bathroom in April 2002. She says he then punched her, ripped off her pants and raped her. When she reported what happened, a non-commissioned officer dismissed the allegation, saying, "Don't come bitching to me because you had sex and changed your mind," Schroeder recalls.

Moore says she was alone in her barracks in October 2002 when a non-commissioned officer from another battery tried to rape her. When she filled out forms to report it, she says, her first sergeant, told her: "Forget about it. It never happened," and tore up the paperwork. "It felt like a punch in the gut," Moore says. "I couldn't trust my chain of command to ever back me up."

McClendon says she was aboard a Navy destroyer at sea when a superior raped her on the midnight to 2 a.m. watch. After reporting the attack, she was diagnosed with a personality disorder and deemed unfit to serve. "I was good enough to suit up and show up and serve, but I wasn't good enough after the fact," McClendon says.

Despite the Defense Department's "zero tolerance" policy, there were 3,191 military sexual assaults reported in 2011. Given that most sexual assaults are not reported, the Pentagon estimates the actual number was probably closer to 19,000.

The number of sexual assaults in the military is unacceptable: U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta "The number of sexual assaults in the military is unacceptable," Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said at a news conference in January. "Our men and women in uniform put their lives on the line every day to keep America safe. We have a moral duty to keep them safe from those who would attack their dignity and their honor."

But Anu Bhagwati, a former company commander in the Marines and executive director of Service Women's Action Network, a veterans advocacy group, says she sees a pattern of the military using psychiatric diagnoses to get rid of women who report sexual assaults. "It's convenient to sweep this under the rug. It's also extremely convenient to slap a false diagnosis on a young woman ... and then just get rid of them so you don't have to deal with that problem in your unit. And, unfortunately, a lot of sexual assault survivors are considered problems," Bhagwati says.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/14/health/military-sexual-assaults-personality-disorder>

From 2001 to 2010, the military discharged more than 31,000 service members because of personality disorder, according to documents obtained under a Freedom of Information Act request by the Vietnam Veterans of America. Asked by CNN how many of these cases involved sexual assault cases, the Defense Department says it does not keep such figures, nor would the Pentagon comment on individual cases.

The diagnoses: The latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, known as the DSM-IV, defines a personality disorder as a long-standing, inflexible pattern of maladaptive behavior and coping, beginning in adolescence or early adulthood. That would mean women like Schroeder, Moore and McClendon had a pre-existing personality disorder when they joined the military. Someone with personality disorder tends to get fired from jobs, get in trouble with the law or at school or is unable to maintain relationships.

"It makes absolutely no sense medically for people to be diagnosed all of a sudden after being sexually assaulted as an adult in the military to say 'No, you've had this all along,'" says Bhagwati, of the Service Women's Action Network. "These women have clearly been able to function. They've made it through basic training. They've made it through all the follow-on training. Many of them are deployed overseas in war, and they've done fine there. But, when they're sexually assaulted, and then report it, it seems very suspicious that the military would suddenly stamp them with a pre-existing condition that bars them from serving anymore."

Dr. Liza H. Gold, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine, says it's a rule of thumb among psychiatrists not to diagnose someone with a personality disorder in the middle of a traumatic experience like a divorce, litigation or the aftermath of a sexual assault. The DSM-IV says: "When personality changes emerge and persist after an individual has been exposed to extreme stress, a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder should be considered." Also, by definition, a personality disorder diagnosis cannot be caused by another psychiatric condition, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Gold says. In 2003, when she returned to Germany from a deployment in Israel, Moore says a new Army counselor changed her diagnosis from severe depression to borderline personality disorder after only a half-hour session. Gold is not familiar with Moore's case, but she says a personality disorder was not a diagnosis that typically could be made quickly.

The numbers: Military records show the personality disorder diagnosis is being used disproportionately on women, according to military records obtained by Yale Law School's Veterans Legal Services Clinic under a Freedom of Information Act request.

--In the Army, 16% of all soldiers are women, but females constitute 24% of all personality disorder discharges.

--Air Force: women make up 21% of the ranks and 35% of personality disorder discharges.

--Navy: 17% of sailors are women and 26% of personality disorder discharges

--Marines: 7% of the Corps and 14% of personality disorder discharges

The records don't reflect how many of those women had reported sexual assault.

The cost: A personality disorder diagnosis discharge can carry a heavy financial burden. In the military's eyes, a personality disorder diagnosis is a pre-existing condition and does not constitute a service-related disability. That means sexual assault victims with personality disorder discharges don't receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs to help with their trauma. They can still apply for benefits, but it's considered an uphill battle. There are other costs. For example, members of the armed forces who receive a personality disorder discharge lose education benefits under the GI Bill. Moore, now 32 and married, says the Army came after her for \$2,800 of the enlistment bonus she received when she signed up for six years. With interest and penalties, the bill topped \$6,000. Moore says she's still paying it off.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/14/health/military-sexual-assaults-personality-disorder>

17-year vet Celeste Santana was diagnosed with a disorder and lost her pension after reporting a sexual assault. Celeste Santana, a former Navy lieutenant commander, lost her pension when she was involuntarily separated from the military in 2011 after 17 years of active duty -- three years short of being eligible to retire. Santana says the Navy gave her an adjustment disorder after she reported being sexual assaulted in the middle of the night at a forward operating base in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. She says no medical evaluation ever took place.

An adjustment disorder is an excessive response to a stressful experience, typically lasting three to six months. For example, Gold says, someone who is fired from a job, stops eating, refuses to get out of bed and won't talk to anyone might be suffering from an adjustment disorder.

Secondary injury: Veterans who talked to CNN all say lack of military response to their reports of assault added to their emotional trauma. Gold says therapists call this a "secondary injury." McClendon, Moore and Schroeder each say they became suicidal. Panayiota Bertzikis received an adjustment disorder diagnosis and was forced out of the Coast Guard in 2006 -- after reporting to her superiors that she had been punched in the face and raped by a shipmate during an off-duty hike. When she reported the attack, Bertzikis says the chief of her Coast Guard station ordered her and her attacker to clean out an attic on base together and told to work out their differences. "I am the victim of this crime, and then you report it, and then I felt like I was the one on trial -- I was the one who did something wrong," Bertzikis says. "He got a free pass. I was the one fighting to stay in."

Bhagwati, who runs the Service Women's Action Network, says the sense of betrayal is profound for sexual assault victims whose allegations are not taken seriously. "Very commonly victims will hear that they're lying whores. It's very common," Bhagwati says. "That kind of betrayal deepens the trauma so, so much, and it's hard to recover from that. I mean, it's akin to incest where you grow up with a family, with someone you trust, admire and in many cases, salute, is your perpetrator. It's a huge betrayal that often entails guilt, embarrassment, shame. You're made to feel that you did something wrong and you could have prevented it from happening."

In the civilian world, sexual assault victims can quit their jobs, go to court, go to the media, says J.D. Hamel, a Marine veteran and Yale Law student involved at the Veterans Legal Services Clinic. If higher-ups don't follow-up on allegations, Hamel explains, there is no other recourse. "If the command doesn't deal with it, no one is going to deal with it," he says. "It's just a very lonely position to be in. It's hard for people who have never been in the military to realize how all-encompassing military life is."

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-California, says the military has used personality and other psychiatric diagnoses "almost robotically" to force women who report sexual assaults out of the service.

"It's the default position the military uses," says Speier, a member of the House Armed Services Committee. "The problem we have in the military is the unit commander is in charge of the entire process." Speier has introduced legislation that would take sexual assault cases out of the chain of command and assign them to an autonomous office at the Pentagon. Bhagwati says victims of sexual assault in the military should be able to sue for damages in civil court. It's far too convenient to do the wrong thing now.

Anu Bhagwati, Service Women's Action Network "Until there's a deterrent, you're going to have far too much incentive to the average commander, to the average perpetrator, to do the wrong thing," she says. "It's far too convenient to do the wrong thing now."

Military response: The Pentagon has made changes in policy on personality disorder diagnoses and discharges.

Army guidelines enacted in 2008 require commanders to review administrative separations, such as personality and adjustment disorder discharges, for sexual assault victims. The commander must assess whether the separation "appears to be in retaliation" for reporting the sexual assault or involves a medical condition like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/14/health/military-sexual-assaults-personality-disorder>

After congressional hearings in 2008 looking into Afghanistan and Iraq combat veterans who received personality discharges, the Pentagon also changed the rules to require a psychiatrist or PhD-level psychologist to diagnose personality disorder on troops who "served or are currently serving in imminent danger pay areas." The new rules require personality disorder diagnoses for combat veterans to be corroborated by a peer or higher-level mental health professional and endorsed by the surgeon general of the relevant military branch. This added layer of protection against misdiagnoses does not affect sexual assault victims.

Bertzikis started blogging about her case and says she found other women -- and some men -- who described similar experiences. She has started two websites: stopmilitaryrape.org and mydutyospeak.com, a chance for victims of military sexual assault to share their stories. "For me, writing has been very helpful," Bertzikis says.

At his January news conference, Secretary Panetta announced that for the first time service members who reported a sexual assault would be allowed to make an immediate request to transfer to a different unit. The commanding officer would then have 72 hours to decide whether to grant the request. Panetta also ordered an assessment of the training that commanding officers and senior enlisted personnel receive on sexual assault prevention and response. That report is scheduled to be completed next month.

Moore and Schroeder each say they'd still be in the military if the military had aggressively pursued their attackers and allowed them to switch units. But Schroeder is skeptical about the Pentagon's efforts. "It's all just talk. It's for show," Schroeder says.

Bertzikis started and runs the Military Rape Crisis Center, which helps victims of sexual assault in the military. She and Schroeder have joined a lawsuit suing the Defense Department for unspecified monetary damages for a culture that permitted sexual assaults. Asked by CNN about the lawsuit, the Defense Department says it does not comment on pending litigation. What my chain of command did to me was cruel. Anna Moore

As for the personality and adjustment disorder discharges, the Pentagon tells CNN: "We encourage all separating service members who believe their discharges were incorrectly characterized or processed to request adjudication through their respective military department's Discharge Review Board and Board for Correction of Military Records." McClendon, 41, is married and the mother of four. She teaches college humanities courses. Two or three times a week, she says she's awakened by nightmares.

Schroeder, 30, is getting a business degree and taking care of her daughters, who are in second and third grade. She says she suffers from anxiety and depression and is fighting the Department of Veterans Affairs for a PTSD diagnosis.

Moore, 32, received a diagnosis of PTSD from the Veterans Affairs and is on full disability. "I have nightmares all the time and flashbacks and things like that," Moore says. "I'm still paranoid of the outside world and how cruel people can be -- because what my chain of command did to me was cruel and unnecessary."