



AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

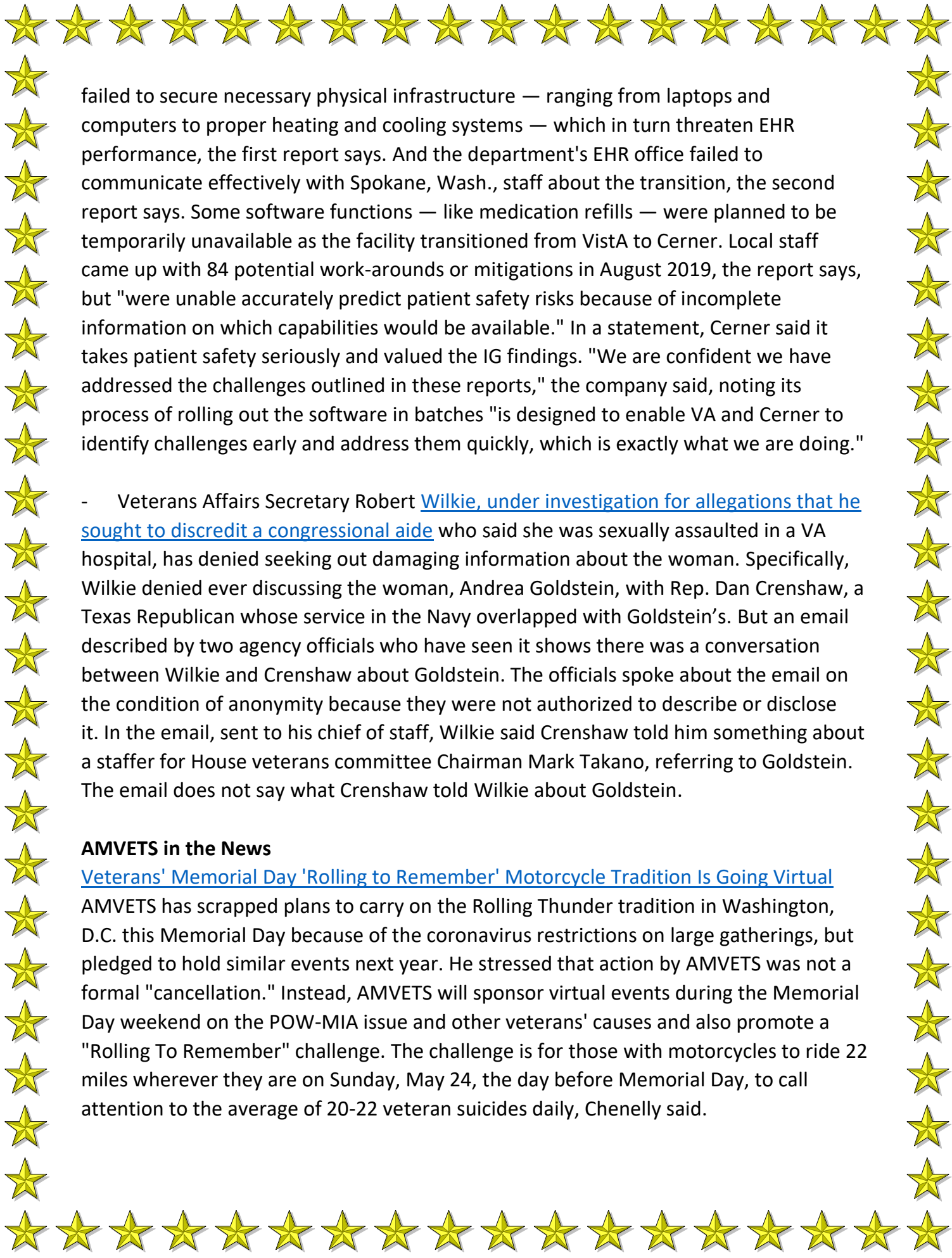
MAY 4, 2020

News Driving the Week

- Veterans Affairs officials announced Friday that the department's top congressional liaison will also serve as acting chief of staff, filling another of VA's most senior leadership vacancies. [Brooks Tucker](#), who currently works as assistant secretary for the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, will serve in both that role and the chief of staff post. In a statement, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie praised Tucker as the right person for the work. He temporarily takes the place of Pamela Powers, who was tapped to serve as acting deputy secretary earlier in the month. The latest personnel move leaves three of the department's top six posts — the deputy secretary, chief of staff and under secretary for health — all filled by acting appointees.

- [Both chambers of Congress will return to the Capitol](#) for regular legislative session on May 4, which is 11 days before the current stay-at-home order in Washington, D.C., expires. House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer announced on a Democratic Caucus conference call that the House will also be in session next week and said votes are possible, according to his press office. With a return now set for next week, both chambers are expected to hold regular weekly legislative sessions through May 22 before leaving for a weeklong Memorial Day recess, according to the schedule. But many on Capitol Hill have acknowledged that the previously announced calendar for 2020 has been upended and more changes could be ahead. If the House is able to vote on a rule change to allow remote committee hearings and markups and/or remote or proxy voting, members may be allowed to choose where they feel most comfortable working. But it's unclear if there will be a plan that can garner bipartisan support, as Pelosi said she was seeking. McConnell and others in Republican leadership oppose implementing remote voting during the pandemic. When Kentucky Republican Rand Paul tried to adopt a resolution last week to allow senators to vote remotely, McConnell blocked it on the floor.

- An "aggressive, likely unrealistic" schedule and poor communication afflicted the [VA's multibillion-dollar EHR project](#), potentially endangering patient safety, a pair of reports from the department's Office of Inspector General concluded. The department



failed to secure necessary physical infrastructure — ranging from laptops and computers to proper heating and cooling systems — which in turn threaten EHR performance, the first report says. And the department's EHR office failed to communicate effectively with Spokane, Wash., staff about the transition, the second report says. Some software functions — like medication refills — were planned to be temporarily unavailable as the facility transitioned from VistA to Cerner. Local staff came up with 84 potential work-arounds or mitigations in August 2019, the report says, but "were unable accurately predict patient safety risks because of incomplete information on which capabilities would be available." In a statement, Cerner said it takes patient safety seriously and valued the IG findings. "We are confident we have addressed the challenges outlined in these reports," the company said, noting its process of rolling out the software in batches "is designed to enable VA and Cerner to identify challenges early and address them quickly, which is exactly what we are doing."

- Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert [Wilkie, under investigation for allegations that he sought to discredit a congressional aide](#) who said she was sexually assaulted in a VA hospital, has denied seeking out damaging information about the woman. Specifically, Wilkie denied ever discussing the woman, Andrea Goldstein, with Rep. Dan Crenshaw, a Texas Republican whose service in the Navy overlapped with Goldstein's. But an email described by two agency officials who have seen it shows there was a conversation between Wilkie and Crenshaw about Goldstein. The officials spoke about the email on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to describe or disclose it. In the email, sent to his chief of staff, Wilkie said Crenshaw told him something about a staffer for House veterans committee Chairman Mark Takano, referring to Goldstein. The email does not say what Crenshaw told Wilkie about Goldstein.

AMVETS in the News

[Veterans' Memorial Day 'Rolling to Remember' Motorcycle Tradition Is Going Virtual](#)

AMVETS has scrapped plans to carry on the Rolling Thunder tradition in Washington, D.C. this Memorial Day because of the coronavirus restrictions on large gatherings, but pledged to hold similar events next year. He stressed that action by AMVETS was not a formal "cancellation." Instead, AMVETS will sponsor virtual events during the Memorial Day weekend on the POW-MIA issue and other veterans' causes and also promote a "Rolling To Remember" challenge. The challenge is for those with motorcycles to ride 22 miles wherever they are on Sunday, May 24, the day before Memorial Day, to call attention to the average of 20-22 veteran suicides daily, Chenelly said.



[Amid Nationwide Unemployment Spike, AMVETS Partners with Military Hire](#)

Military Hire and AMVETS announce a partnership of their organizations in multiple efforts to support veteran transitions to civilian life. The first major initiative between the organizations is a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) program intended to train female veterans in the area of cybersecurity, a major focus of Military Hire and its recent partnership with CompTIA. As part of this agreement, Military Hire will provide awareness to promote the mission and message of AMVETS while connecting AMVETS to its job placement candidate and recruiter pools. In turn, AMVETS will provide job counseling and placement services as needed to Military Hire candidates choosing those services from the Military Hire site.

AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

Continued News

- The [2018 DoDSER](#) revealed that the active-duty Marine Corps component experienced suicides at a slightly higher rate than any other service branch for that particular year. The Marine Corps rate was only slightly higher than the Army active-duty component with 29.5 per 100,000. Across the entire active-duty service, regardless of branch, the rate for 2018 was 24.8 per 100,000. These rates -- after being adjusted for age and gender -- were "statistically no different" from the CY17 adult United States population, the report said.

- Like other federal agencies, the [Department of Veterans Affairs has been expanding its use of telework](#) in the past month as workers have been forced to work remotely. The VA is also fulfilling its mission to serve veterans by expanding its use of telemedicine. The agency is doing so by investing in laptops, iPad devices, and other equipment. The hardware investment came after the VA made a \$1.2 billion request for

the department's "Information Technology Systems account" to support the "quick shift" to telehealth and social distance working, according to an Office of Management and Budget memo sent out in March. The VA said the shift to telework would require investment in IT resources "to support increased use of simultaneous telehealth appointments and upgrade associated bandwidth for employees and healthcare providers."

- U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner is leading an effort to include the [National Suicide Hotline Designation Act](#) in the next COVID-19 relief package. The bipartisan, bicameral effort is being joined by 22 senators and 17 representatives. Senate Bill 2661 would designate 9-8-8 as the three-digit number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. Gardner introduced the legislation with Sens. Tammy Baldwin Jerry Moran, and Jack Reed. The legislation would include the Veterans Crisis Line for veteran-specific mental health support. The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Veterans Crisis line is 10-digits long, which is a barrier to Americans in crisis seeking support, a FCC report found.

- [Opinion](#): In Trump, veterans have a friend they can count on

- [Opinion](#): America can't wait: It's time for a Marshall Plan for mental health



May 4, 2020