

PROVIDENCE Journal

Veterans Journal: Think tank recommends veterans' benefits be privatized

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George W. Reilly

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President-elect Donald Trump could be the first commander-in-chief to address and fix the problems at the Department of Veterans Affairs, according to Washington, D.C., think tank The Cato Institute. The recommended solution is to privatize all veterans' benefits.

A Nov. 17 white paper written by the institute's Michael F. Cannon calls for increasing military pay so that service members can afford to buy private insurance. It also calls for the change in the delivery of government-sponsored insurance benefits by turning the Veterans Health Administration into a private enterprise. Last, it would give vouchers to veterans to be used to buy insurance and get medical care from whichever systems they choose.

Privatization of government programs has been attempted in the past, notably President George W. Bush's attempt in 2005 to reform Social Security and replace it with private investment accounts. His efforts gained no public traction and the proposal died on the vine. Will another attempt be made by the incoming president or his key advisers to drastically change veterans' benefits from the present system? Veterans currently receiving federal benefits should follow this closely as this issue will affect them directly.

Vets in Cabinet posts

President-elect Trump has nominated retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn to serve as his national security adviser. Flynn, 57, delivered a speech during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland this summer that was highly critical of the Obama administration's security policies and called for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton to drop out of the race. Flynn is noted for speaking publicly about what he deems as a necessary mission to thwart Islamic terrorism.

Flynn was known as a skilled, if combative, intelligence officer during his three-decade military career but was forced out as head of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2014 under President Obama for expressing his dissatisfaction with the administration's efforts to defeat terrorists. His

selection by Trump may suggest an upcoming aggressive war on terrorism, possibly without the diplomatic and cultural sensitivities of President Obama which Flynn has repeatedly criticized.

Also on Dec. 1 at a late night Ohio rally, President-elect Trump announced retired Marine Gen. James Mattis as his choice for secretary of defense. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff said he hoped Mattis "will be a strong voice in defending the new GI Bill" and will "work closely with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs ...; to solve issues that plague transitioning service members, exemplified by its failure to implement a sound electronic records system."

Further, Rieckhoff said, "We hope General Mattis will strongly support mandatory mental health screening ...; It is our hope that he will remind our nation that how we care for our veterans returning home is a critical component of our national defense and look forward to Mattis' trademark passion to drive his engagement with veterans as a part of the larger military community."

Holiday gift ideas

Looking for a late holiday gift idea for your favorite veteran and one that will also help other veterans and military families? The Rhode Island Department of VFW will hold a calendar raffle fundraiser to assist families while their military personnel are deployed, help homeless veterans and support veterans' needs in general.

Calendars can be purchased by calling junior vice commander Jake Taraksian at (401) 529-2717 or VFW headquarters at (401) 574-8161. You can also request a calendar by mail along with your check for \$10 and your return address sent to Veterans of Foreign Wars, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908.

What's the raffle part? Participants will have a daily chance to win for the 28 days of February 2017, for a top prize of \$250, eight \$100 weekend winners and 20 \$50 weekday winners. Each winner's name will be put back into the barrel providing opportunities for multiple wins. In addition to helping a worthy cause, the calendars also make great stocking stuffers just in time for Christmas. For more information email Marie Bouchard at mbouchard135@yahoo.com.

Time is running out

Veterans Journal column contributors should immediately email their group's 2017 meeting calendars and event notices to VeteransColumn@verizon.net to ensure inclusion in future columns at the appropriate time throughout the new year. Meeting calendars must be renewed each year and should be sent by email. Happy holidays to all!