

For many of these vets, PTSD has meant a lifetime of trouble.

Chenoweth served with the Marines in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969, when the U.S. sustained some of its heaviest casualties. He turned 18 just before boarding the plane to Asia and soon found himself fighting in villages where anybody could be the enemy.

Chenoweth ended his tour of duty in a psychiatric hospital in Oakland. But it wasn't until the late '80s—after more than a dozen failed jobs, several more hospital stays and two broken marriages—that he was diagnosed with PTSD.

"The killing doesn't stop," Chenoweth said. "You taste it. You smell it. And you feel it. It uses all your senses."

The numbers of older veterans seeking mental-health treatment surged again in recent years, as new wars unfolding on television in Iraq and Afghanistan added to their stress.

That, coupled with the influx of soldiers returning from Iraq, has ratcheted up pressure on the VA system.

#### MORE BECOME ELIGIBLE

In the '90s, the VA went through a dramatic overhaul, moving away from a centralized hospital system as hundreds of new clinics opened up around the country. Congress also loosened eligibility requirements, so that more vets qualified for services, and increased the agency's overall health-care budget from \$17 billion to more than \$28 billion.

The transformation was lauded as a great success in an *Annals of Internal Medicine* article last year.

But mental-health services often lost out as regional administrators juggled budgets to pay for soaring caseloads, new services and pricey new drugs.

Managers also sometimes balked at pouring money into treatment for illnesses of the mind when compared with physical illnesses that are often easier to measure and cure.

"I regret to report that there are stigmas in the VA about the mentally ill," Thomas Horvath, a psychiatrist who serves as chief of staff at the agency's Houston medical center, told Congress in 2004.

"In this, we may be no worse than the rest of health care. VA needs to do better."

Sen. PATTY MURRAY, who worked as a college intern in the Seattle VA psychiatric ward, has helped lead the congressional effort to boost funding for VA programs, including mental health.

"I have talked to soldiers who are returning, and a number of them say 'my marriage is much more difficult . . . I am having trouble getting my head back in to work,'" said MURRAY. "It's the beginning of trouble. And the fallout from this 10, 15, 20 years from now is tremendous."

The issue of VA funding has been rife with partisan politics recently.

MURRAY, a Democrat, initially was rebuffed by the Republican majority in an effort to gain emergency funding for VA medical services.

VA administrators in June acknowledged a roughly \$1 billion budget shortfall, prompting Senate Republicans to do an about-face and work with MURRAY to boost funding.

Congress is expected to approve an additional \$975 million to \$1.5 billion to help dig the agency out of the hole for this fiscal year.

If this money is equally divided within the agency, mental health would receive less than \$300 million.

This emergency cash would fall short of shoring up the system.

To fully meet the needs of the seriously mentally ill, the VA would require an infusion of as much as \$1.6 billion, according to a draft of the agency's strategic plan.

That estimate didn't assess the added costs of treating new Iraq veterans.

#### JUST GOOD-ENOUGH CARE

There is no fixed formula for treating PTSD.

Instead, the VA offers general guidelines for addressing the illness. This treatment may involve drugs that aid sleep and reduce anxiety or help fight depression. It may include classes in anger management and other coping skills.

Finally, there is therapy, which often enables the vet to recount and come to terms with combat experiences.

Some patients may benefit from just a few classes and counseling sessions. Others with chronic PTSD attend sessions for months or years. Some patients do fine in group; others do much better with individual therapy. But as budgets have shrunk, some VA mental-health workers say, they have been pressured to treat more people in less time.

In Portland, the VA mental-health clinic staff by January had shrunk by 25 percent due to budget freezes, according to an internal staff newsletter. The newsletter described the Portland program as "unquestionably underfunded."

Therapists in Portland earlier this year were asked to consider cutting individual sessions from 50 minutes to 30 minutes, and lengthen the time between visits, according to an internal VA memorandum.

They say they were also asked to consider dropping some patients altogether, after refilling their prescriptions and referring them back to primary-care physicians.

Megan Streight, a VA spokeswoman, said the Portland VA does not expect staff to cut back services for patients who need therapy. She also said that some jobs have been filled. "We are confident that veterans continue to receive high-quality mental-health care," Streight said.

But several Portland VA therapists expressed worries that expanding caseloads combined with a smaller staff threaten the quality of some care. All requested anonymity, concerned that speaking publicly could cost them their jobs.

These therapists say they have been asked to try to complete treatment of new patients in 10 or fewer counseling sessions, even those recently returned from Iraq. Some of these vets arrive at the VA with marriages already in turmoil or broken. Others have isolated themselves at home, and balked at returning to work. One, who came in after beating his wife, had penned a suicide note.

One therapist said she has been reluctant to stick several troubled Iraq vets in first-step classes of 20 or more that teach coping skills. But her own caseload already runs to several hundred patients, so she has no openings for more one-on-one counseling. To make room for the Iraq veterans, she asks some of her older veterans to come less often.

"But what kind of message is that—that you're not as important as the new guys coming in," she said.

The therapist says she needed to get used to the short-staffed conditions.

"I was told that there needed to be some changes made at the hospital due to the lack of resources, and I was going to have to adjust my thinking," said the therapist. "You need to give just good-enough care."

The Puget Sound VA's mental-health programs also have been caught in the region-wide budget crunch, which included a partial hiring freeze that replaces only one worker for every five who leave their jobs.

"We have to make the best use of resources that we can," said John Park, Puget Sound VA's director of health-care planning, at an April 30 community meeting on mental

health sponsored by U.S. Rep. JIM McDERMOTT, D-Seattle. "You can only cut so much of the budget before things get dicey."

#### SHARING HOPES AND FEARS

Most PTSD patients in Puget Sound are seen in a specialized program that includes clinics and in-patient care. The program has a national reputation for research and treatment.

McFall, who heads that program, says he was able to snag a special grant that allows him to add several more positions to the 21-person clinic staff in the months ahead.

"I want to say that the sky isn't falling. We can get every Iraq veteran an appointment within a week," he said.

But the local VA policy to limit treatment for patients who have had six months of therapy has caused a backlash. The loudest protests have come from the state network of private-practice therapists who are paid by the VA to treat vets with chronic PTSD.

"I believe that in order to do long-term recovery, I have to do a lot of work," said Steve Akers, a Vietnam vet who is an Everett therapist. Akers offers weekly group sessions, as well as individual counseling.

At the group sessions, the vets spend 90 minutes sharing hopes, fears and a few laughs before ending with a healing circle where they all grasp hands on a wooden staff known as a "talking stick."

One veteran of both the Vietnam and Gulf wars still lives on a razor's edge. At his house, he has installed a perimeter trip wire that sounds an alarm to warn of intruders, and outside lights that can turn midnight into day along a 400-foot driveway. The house is full of loaded guns, weapons his wife fears might be inadvertently used in a combat flashback.

"She doesn't want the one under the bed, and in every room," the vet said during the session. "But I've got to live with myself. I don't feel secure."

Akers opted to take things one step at a time, focusing on a pistol in a bedroom drawer.

"So, at one point, would you be willing to put the pistol in one drawer, and the ammo in another? You'll still have your safety factor but have to think to react."

"I could do that," the vet responded. "But it will be really hard for me. When they break in that door, they're only going to do it once."

Under the new VA policy, the group's weekly meetings will be reduced from twice a month to once a month.

Among the vets, that's the subject of much bitter debate.

"I try not to take it personally," said the veteran with the loaded gun. "There is an intimacy here that is incredible. I want to save it. And the fear, you know, is that it's not going to last."

#### THE 2005 NEVADA CENTENNIAL RANCH AND FARM AWARD

#### HON. JIM GIBBONS

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, forever memorialized on our state seal, ranching and farming are two of Nevada's traditions. The most storied of Nevada's ranches and farms, some dating back to the mid 1800's, are being honored this month with the 2005 Nevada Centennial Ranch & Farm Award. From Minden to McDermitt, these families represent the best in Nevada agriculture.

To qualify to receive this prestigious award, a family must have been ranching or farming on the same Nevada property for at least 100 years, and the property must be a working ranch or farm with 160 acres or with gross annual sales of at least \$1,000.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and honor the following recipients who have not only shown a commitment to land, but a commitment to family and our land. Blue Eagle Ranch, Tonopah; Bunker Farm, Inc., Bunkerville; Ferraro Cattle Company, Paradise Valley; Green Springs Ranch, Duckwater; Heise Family Ranch, Gardnerville; Krenka Ranch, Ruby Valley; Laura Springs Ranch, Gardnerville; Riordan Ranch, Jiggs; Snyder Livestock Company, Inc., Yerington; Stodieck Farm, Minden; Wilkinson Little Meadow Ranch, McDermitt.

The success, sustainability, and longevity of these ranches and farms stand as an example, to those in agriculture and beyond, of what commitment, determination, and hard work can accomplish.

LET YOUR DEEDS MATCH YOUR  
APOLOGIES

**HON. MAJOR R. OWENS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, July 27, 2005*

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, In politics apologies are always important. We need more apologies and less fiction among nations and groups. We need apologies that help to avoid wars. Apologies can never be adequate substitutions for restitution or reparations; however, apologies offer their own alternative satisfaction. The present German nation has apologized for the Nazi German Holocaust. But the Koreans and Chinese are not happy with the rather muddled apologies of the Japanese for the atrocities of World War II. And, of course, no one has ever apologized for the Atlantic Slave Trade and two hundred and fifty years of slavery in America. Despite the fact that there is still a huge apology gap in our civilization, we must applaud small apologies wherever they occur. We applaud Republican National Committee Chairman Mehlman for his recent statement to the NAACP apologizing for the "Republican Southern Strategy". This speech was given still more credibility when House Judiciary Committee Chairman Sensenbrenner, at that same NAACP Conference, pledged to lead the fight for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. Mehlman's apology appears to perhaps be a sparkplug for the launching of a new Republican offensive to capture more Black votes. A suffering Black community challenges the Party of Lincoln to show us some concrete policy and program deeds to match the apologies. Listen to the plea of the following RAP poem:

APOLOGIES ARE REAL COOL

To apologize  
Is real cool  
But don't play  
The Black agenda  
For no eager fool.  
Don't rush to play,  
Delay thumping your chest,  
Push your words  
Into the action test:  
Jobs right now we need,

Hungry mouths we have to feed,  
Lots of ills But can't buy pills.  
Prison terms often repeat  
Homeless shelters  
Are never neat.  
Tax cuts we can't eat,  
Iraq war dollars wasted  
Spell school repair defeat.  
Right now!  
Take the action test.  
Show us the Bush best.  
For any apology  
We grant a pat  
On the Republican back;  
From Democrats  
The slavery apology  
We desperately lack.  
To apologize  
Is real cool  
But don't play  
The Black agenda  
For no eager fool.

USA PATRIOT AND TERRORISM  
PREVENTION REAUTHORIZATION  
ACT OF 2005

SPEECH OF

**HON. GARY L. ACKERMAN**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, July 21, 2005*

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill, (H.R. 3199) to extend and modify authorities needed to combat terrorism, and for other purposes:

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Chairman, I certainly believe that the United States needs to be vigilant in protecting our nation and combating terror; however, we must be careful that we do not unnecessarily sacrifice our civil liberties in pursuit of our enemies.

While many of the provisions were needed, both then and now, when Congress passed the original PATRIOT Act in October 2001, we rightfully placed sunset clauses on certain provisions that infringed on our civil liberties and granted extraordinary powers to federal authorities. These sunset clauses were incorporated in order to provide us with the opportunity to reexamine and reevaluate whether the need for such invasive powers continues to outweigh their sometimes overly intrusive nature.

Rather than providing Congress with the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of a measure and correct any abuses, the PATRIOT Act Reauthorization would renew two of the original sunset provisions for a period of ten years and make the rest of the temporary provisions permanent. This would effectively remove all Congressional oversight over the PATRIOT Act. As a result, Americans would forever forfeit some of their most cherished privacy rights and precious civil liberties.

One of these provisions gives federal investigators authority to examine and access individual records at libraries and bookstores. Under this measure, federal authorities do not have to demonstrate probable cause of criminal activity or of an individual's connection to a foreign power. In addition, libraries and bookstores are prohibited from informing patrons that the government is monitoring their reading transactions. While there is broad bipartisan opposition to this provision, the Republican leadership, in a gross abuse of the democratic process, failed to allow even a

vote on an amendment that would repeal this egregious provision.

Measures like this are not going to help us prevail in the war against terrorism. Instead, we should be providing our law enforcement agencies with sufficient risk-based funding, so that they can be adequately equipped to protect our homeland. Yet, the Bush administration continues to cut funding for state and local law enforcement, the men and women in our communities who serve on the front lines of domestic security.

I too am committed to keeping our nation safe while we are fighting the war on terror. But at the same time, it is just as imperative that we protect our constitutionally guaranteed civil rights. A free society is what makes our nation great, and now, more than ever, it is crucial that we protect our civil liberties with unshakable resolve.

HEALTH CARE WEEK

**HON. TAMMY BALDWIN**

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, July 27, 2005*

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my disappointment in the bills that the House of Representatives is considering during this so-called "Health Care Week."

While I applaud House leaders for turning their attention to the health care crisis, I do not believe that the bills we are considering will solve the problem we face, and I fear that some of these measures may actually worsen the crisis. I look forward to the day when we will consider real solutions to ensure that all Americans have access to quality, comprehensive, affordable health care.

According to the latest figures released by the Census Bureau, 45 million Americans are uninsured. Millions more are underinsured. Just last month, the Commonwealth Fund released a study estimating that there are 16 million Americans who are underinsured—meaning their insurance would not adequately protect them in the event of catastrophic health care expenses. That means that 61 million Americans either have no health insurance or have insurance coverage that leaves them exposed to high health care costs. Sixty-one million is nearly 21 percent of all Americans, or one in five. Put simply, this is unacceptable.

Unfortunately, the health care legislation that the House will consider this week fails to address our nation's health care crisis. These bills will not do anything to provide quality, comprehensive, and affordable health care to these 61 million Americans or to the millions more who constantly worry about losing their health care.

As in years past, I remain opposed to proposals to create "association health plans" or AHPs. AHPs purport to offer affordable health care to small business owners and employees, but this is accomplished by exempting insurers from state insurance and consumer protection laws including benefit mandates, solvency standards, and pricing rules. This evasion of state laws could be devastating to the consumer who thinks that they have comprehensive coverage only to discover, after the fact, that their policy offers a bare bones minimum of benefits.

In addition, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that AHPs will cause 10,000 people