

EAGLE



ISSUE #1 2011

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Happy New year to all CVSOs! I am sure you have all greeted those vets who have said for years “After the first of the year, I’m going to go down and visit the Veterans Service Office – I’ve been going to do this for years, and this is the year...” We’ve had our share this year. With the additional presumptive conditions being added and the growing popularity of the Aid and Attendance benefit, it does not look like we will be without work to do in 2011.

Sometimes we question our work and the results of our efforts, but yesterday I received a decision from the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington D.C. It was for a WWII veteran for whom I had been fighting for benefits due to exposure to mustard gas for over 5 years. The decision granted service connection on every issue we had presented. What a victory! An experience like this, and I’m sure you all have had your victories, too, makes it all worthwhile.

So – my thought for today is, don’t let the small stuff drag you down, and if you think you are right, press on! Additionally I will mention the newly introduced Senate Bill #577 by Luke Kenley of Noblesville which contains a major whack on the Indiana Remission of Fees benefit – IC 21-14-4-2; ()IN0577.1.18. --> SECTION 18. IC 21-14-4-2, AS AMENDED BY P.L.141-2008, SECTION 2, IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2011]: Sec. 2. (a) Subject to ~~subsection~~ **subsections (b) and (c)**, an eligible applicant is entitled to enter, remain, and receive instruction in a state educational institution upon the same conditions, qualifications, and regulations prescribed for other applicants for admission to or scholars in the state educational institutions, without the payment of any educational costs for one hundred twenty-four (124) **undergraduate** semester credit hours in the state educational institution.

(b) The maximum amount that an eligible applicant is exempt from paying for a semester hour is an amount equal to the cost of an undergraduate semester credit hour at the state educational institution in which the eligible applicant enrolls.

(c) This subsection applies to an individual who qualifies as an eligible applicant under section 1(3) of this chapter because the individual's father or mother suffered a disability as determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. This subsection does not apply to an individual who also qualifies as an eligible applicant under section 1(1) or 1(2) of this chapter. Subject to subsection (b), the eligible applicant is entitled to a reduction in the educational costs that would otherwise apply as follows:

(1) If the individual's father or mother suffered a disability as determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs with a rating of eighty percent (80%) or more, the individual is entitled to a one hundred percent (100%) reduction in education costs.

(2) If the individual's father or mother suffered a disability as determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs with a rating of less than eighty percent (80%), the individual is entitled to a reduction in education costs equal to the sum of:

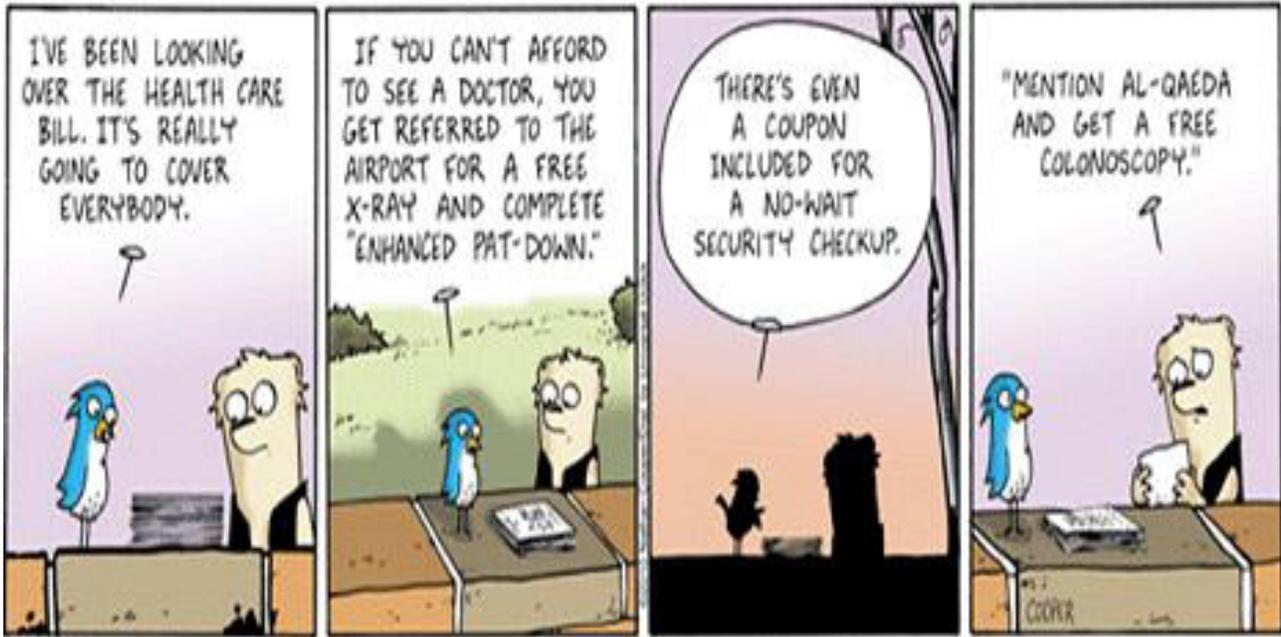
(A) twenty percent (20%); plus

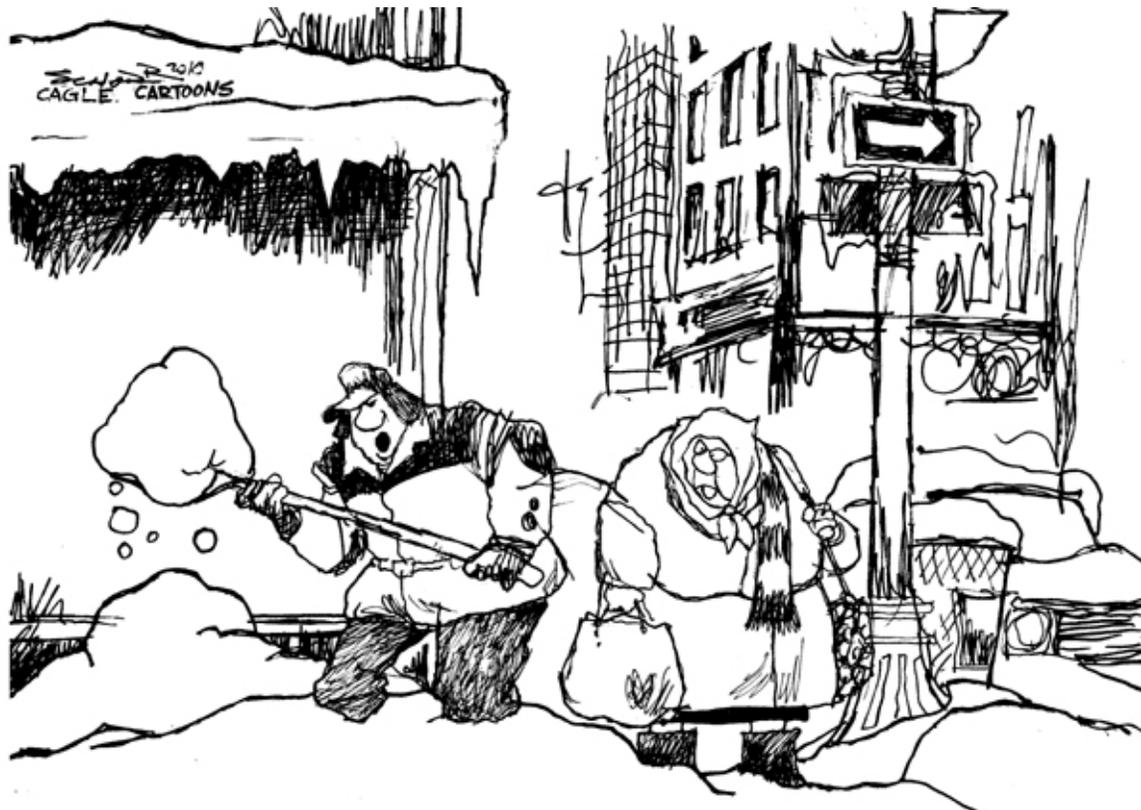
(B) the disability rating of the individual's father or mother.

SOURCE: IC 21-14-4-5; ()IN0577.1.19. --> SECTION 19. IC 21-14-4-5, AS ADDED BY P.L.2-2007, SECTION 255, IS AMENDED TO

READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2011]: Sec. 5. (a) Determination of eligibility for higher education benefits authorized under this chapter is vested exclusively in the Indiana department of veterans' affairs. Any applicant for benefits under this chapter may make a written request for a determination of eligibility by the Indiana department of veterans' affairs. The director or deputy director of the Indiana department of veterans' affairs shall make a written determination of eligibility in response to each request. In determining the amount of an applicant's benefit, the commission shall consider other higher education financial assistance in conformity with this chapter.

(b) **The commission shall administer the benefits and ensure compliance with this chapter.**





"IF YA ASK ME... THEY OUGHTTA PUT THE WEATHERMAN ON THE TERRORIST WATCH LIST..."

Destroyer Laboon foils pirates' plans

By [Sam Fellman](#) - Staff writer

Posted : Thursday Jan 13, 2011 16:00:50 EST

A skiff skirted the edge of the shipping lane in the Gulf of Aden before dawn Monday, possibly watching for merchant ships to hijack. But they, too, were being watched. The destroyer Laboon, on an anti-piracy patrol, shadowed the suspect vessel for three hours in the darkness. At daybreak, they chased it down and dispatched a boarding team.

As Laboon's small boat approached, some of the five Somali men in the skiff began jettisoning weapons, most likely AK47 assault rifles, Laboon's public affairs officer, Ensign Thuy-Van Nguyen, wrote in an e-mail. By the time the eight-man team, led by Lt. j.g. Dave Mitchell, boarded the 6-meter, fiberglass skiff, the small arms had vanished, but other telltale tools of piracy remained.

Sailors confiscated grappling hooks, radios, excess fuel tanks, sledgehammers and other tools used to pry open doors and hatches, a news release said.

The suspected pirates were not taken into custody, Laboon's commander said in an e-mail message.

"Today's disruption demonstrates again the pirates remain well-equipped and willing to take risks," Cmdr. Donald Donegan said. "However, when they encounter professional maritime forces from [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], European Union, or Coalition Task Forces, they quickly surrender. These aspiring pirates were clearly dejected when we sent them off with just enough food, water, and fuel to make it home."

It was the fifth pirate interdiction by the Norfolk, Va.-based destroyer after five months on deployment, Nguyen wrote. Laboon is one of four ships patrolling the Gulf of Aden for Operation Ocean Shield, a NATO-led anti-piracy mission.

Feds: Man Lied About Medals, Won Trip

January 18, 2011 Baltimore Sun

After being struck in the face and head by shrapnel while on patrol in Iraq in 2005, Aaron Joshua Lawless performed first aid on a fellow injured Soldier and returned fire to the enemy from a damaged gun before being struck by an improvised explosive device, later winning a Purple Heart and Silver Star for his bravery.

At least, that's how Lawless recounted his time in Iraq to his employer, a Maryland gun store, and the Glock gun company, which decided to honor Lawless as their 2008 "Glock Hero," awarding the 25-year-old and his wife a paid trip to Las Vegas, two Glock guns and a crystal glass trophy, a package worth \$3,505.91.

But almost none of Lawless' claims of valor on the battlefield are true, according to agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, who filed a criminal complaint on Thursday in federal court in Maryland.

Lawless did serve in the Marine Corps, according to his military records -- but for 35 days, discharged in June 2003 for not disclosing an injury to his right knee before joining the force, the affidavit said.

And Lawless then joined the Army and served in Iraq in 2006 as a Soldier, but he was sent home in July of that year for severe headaches, the affidavit said. His military record indicates that at no time did Lawless suffer from battle injuries or receive the high-level military honors he claimed, according to an ATF agent's interview with Lt. Col. Pat L. Kerbuski, at the time the deputy chief of staff for the 101st Airborne Division.

Agents from the ATF claim in court documents that Lawless spun a far more dramatic tale for his employer, Atlantic Guns in Silver Spring, and the Glock company. Among the injuries Lawless said he suffered: being shot in the buttocks and leg in Fallujah, getting hit by a roadside bomb in Bayji, and suffering from shrapnel in his brain from another roadside bomb, all in Iraq.

In all, Lawless said he earned four Purple Hearts, one Silver Star and two Bronze Stars for battle injuries in 2005 and 2006 while serving with the Marines and Army throughout Iraq, the documents state.

Lawless has received a summons to appear in federal court in Greenbelt on Feb. 23, said Marcy Murphy, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office.

The ATF agent who wrote the affidavit, John P. Cooney, declined to comment on the case, citing an open investigation.

Falsely claiming to have earned a medal from the U.S. military is a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in prison, under the Stolen Valor Act of 2005.

Steve Schneider, the owner of Atlantic Guns, said Lawless worked in his store part time throughout 2008, eventually moving back to Nebraska when his wife became pregnant. Lawless, who Schneider described as personable and a good fit with his other employees, was referred to him by the Veterans of Foreign Wars as an injured veteran stationed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center who enjoyed guns and hunting, Schneider said.

While working at Atlantic Guns, Lawless would describe how he sustained his injuries in great detail for Schneider and the store's employees, Schneider said.

"You're a trusting person and you just don't question something like that," Schneider said. "I knew he was connected with Walter Reed, I knew he was in the military."

As an employee, Lawless worked sporadically, often unable to work because of extreme pain, Schneider said. At the time, Schneider believed the pain was due to a shrapnel injury to Lawless' brain. In reality, the affidavit said, Lawless suffered from a pre-existing brain lesion that was removed in 2008.

Schneider said he hasn't spoken to Lawless since he moved back to Nebraska, and learned of the alleged deceit when law enforcement officials in Nebraska contacted him last spring.

"I'm trusting," he said. "I would probably do the same thing over again."

A Glock representative met Lawless during a marketing event at Schneider's store and thought he would make a good candidate for the company's Glock Hero Award in 2008.

"Aaron Lawless," Glock said in a biography at the time of his award, "is one of an endless list of young men and women that have answered their nations [sic] call. We feel Aaron's story needs to be told."

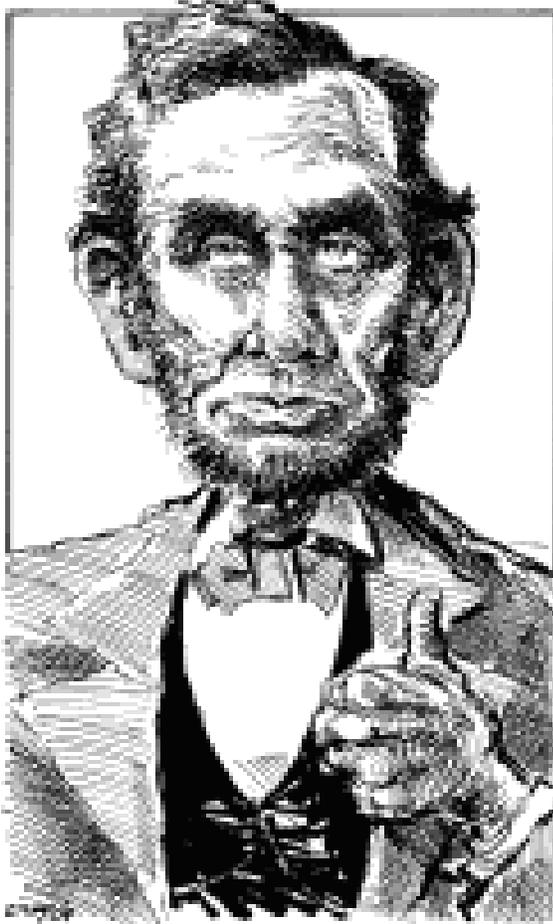
The company did not respond to requests for comment.

Since the Stolen Valor Act was signed by President George W. Bush in 2006, prosecutors have pursued a number of cases against people thought to be falsely claiming military honors. A Colorado man, Rick Glen Strandlof, claimed he had received a Purple Heart and Silver Star after being wounded in Iraq while serving with the Marines. The Marine Corps had no record of Strandlof serving, and he was arrested in 2009, the Associated Press reported. His case is still going through the courts.

Tom Davis, the department adjutant for the Maryland branch of the American Legion, said lying about military honors is akin to "stealing from your buddy in the foxhole."

Prospective employers can verify an individual's military service by calling the U.S. Army's personnel and human resources division, said Gary Tallman, an Army spokesman.

"These cases are extremely regrettable but they do happen," Tallman said. "We do have a mechanism to be able to verify awards and decorations information" and periods of service, he said.



Gates huddles with allies about N. Korea

By Anne Gearan - The Associated Press Posted : Thursday Jan 13, 2011 6:03:11 EST

TOKYO — South Korea would be within its rights to retaliate if North Korea mounts an attack, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday, but the United States wants Seoul and its neighbors to try to head off a North Korean provocation that could lead to war.

The United States fears that the risk of war is rising between U.S. ally South Korea and the heavily militarized and increasingly unpredictable regime in North Korea, which the Pentagon also considers a looming threat to the mainland United States.

"It's a long-standing principle that every country has the right to protect itself and defend itself against an unprovoked attack," Gates said following discussions with Japanese political leaders keyed to the rising threat of war on the Korean peninsula.

Earlier this week Gates lobbied China to pressure the North not to go too far. Gates will go to South Korea on Friday for a quick and hastily arranged crisis session about the North.

Gates was urging patience while China, which props up the fellow communist state, tries to persuade North Korea to avoid a military provocation that South Korea would feel bound to answer.

The North twice shocked the South last year, allegedly sinking a South Korean warship in March, killing 46, and then shelling front-line Yeonpyeong Island in November, killing four. The island sits in waters the North claims as its own.

"The objective that we all have in common is how do we prevent another provocation from taking place?" Gates said.

Japanese Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa condemned "wanton" aggression by the North and said Japan fully supports South Korea.

The top U.S. military officer, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen, said North Korea poses "an evolving threat, not just to the region but to the United States specifically."

Mullen, speaking at the Foreign Press Center in Washington, urged coordinated pressure among China, Russia, South Korea and Japan, which are considered the nations with disarmament leverage and the most at stake.

The capability to strike beyond North Korean shores "is becoming more and more dangerous," Mullen said Wednesday.

Earlier this week, Gates laid out a twofold worry: The South Korean public is fed up after two deadly attacks blamed on the North last year and wants its government to fight back, and the North is developing nuclear weapons it could aim at the U.S.

"With the North Koreans' continuing development of nuclear weapons and their development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, North Korea is becoming a direct threat to the United States, and we have to take that into account," he said during a visit to China.

South Korea and Japan held military talks Monday on accords to share intelligence and provide each other with fuel and medical support, officials said, in a sign of the growing worry about the North.

Seoul and Tokyo are important trading and diplomatic partners, but the possibility of such a military pact is a sensitive topic in South Korea, because of Japan's brutal 35-year occupation of the Korean peninsula that ended in 1945. The accords would be the two nations' first military agreement since then.

The two Koreas restored an important cross-border communication channel on Wednesday, though South Korea still rejected North Korea's calls for talks meant to defuse high tensions.

Retirement of adm. on hold in video inquiry

By [William H. McMichael](#) - Staff writer

Posted : Thursday Jan 13, 2011 11:35:06 EST

In an indication of just how seriously the Navy is taking the investigation into the racy shipboard videos aired four years ago aboard the carrier Enterprise, the scheduled Feb. 1 retirement of the ship's captain at the time — now Rear Adm. Larry Rice — has been put on hold.

“His retirement has been deferred pending the outcome of the ongoing investigation,” Rear Adm. Denny Moynihan, chief of naval information at the Pentagon, said Thursday.

Rice, serving as director of strategy and policy for U.S. Joint Forces Command, would have brought a 31-year career that included more than 3,700 flight hours in Navy fighter jets to a close next month. Instead, he will now report to Fleet Forces Command chief Adm. John Harvey, Moynihan said.

Harvey has launched an investigation into the production of the videos. Officials say it is focused on the actions of senior officers who at the time knew of the videos, and what they did or did not do in response.

XO movie night Warning: These videos are unedited and contain mature content.

- On Jan. 4, Harvey fired Enterprise commanding officer Capt. Owen Honors — just 10 days before the carrier left for a scheduled overseas deployment — for “demonstrating exceptionally poor judgment” in airing weekly short videos aboard Enterprise from 2006-2007 while he served as its executive officer.

Related content • [Enterprise deploys without ex-commander](#)

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Honors, who co-produced the films, employed locker room-style humor as a way to highlight issues such as the need to conserve potable water; in the wake of the firing, he drew exceptionally strong support via a torrent of online comments and letters to editors.

But the films, which included scenes in which same-sex sailors were depicted as taking showers together, along with jokes about masturbation and comments that disparaged those who’d been offended by the films and had complained, as Honors put it in one video, “never to me personally, but gutlessly, through other channels,” angered Harvey, who said they called into question “his character, and undermine[d] his credibility to continue to serve effectively in command.”

Capt. Dee L. Mewborne, the former commander of the carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower, assumed command of Enterprise and took the carrier to sea Thursday morning.

Rice commanded Enterprise from December 2004 to May 2007. What he knew or did not know at the time — or what the two officers who commanded the carrier strike group at the time the videos were made and shown — remains unknown. Strike group commanders and their staffs employ the carrier as their flagship and remain embarked throughout a group deployment.

Rice was succeeded by Rear Adm. Ron Horton — now commander, Logistics Group Western Pacific — who commanded the carrier until May 2010, when Honors took his place.

The strike group was commanded from August 2005 to February 2007 by now-retired Rear Adm. Raymond Spicer. He was followed by now-Vice Adm. Daniel Holloway, now the commander of 2nd Fleet.

Navy legal officials say Spicer could be called back to active duty to face court-martial charges. The statute of limitations under military law for offenses other than those punishable by death, such as murder, is five years from the date the offense was committed; it’s two years for offenses that would be tried by non-judicial punishment.

According to Fleet Forces Command, the investigation will not be unnecessarily rushed. “We want to do what’s necessary to be as thorough as possible to be able to come up with the best answers possible,” said Cmdr. Chris Sims, a command spokesman.

Sims said the initial thinking was to get the inquiry done quickly. But as the process began and what he described as “numerous interviews” began to be conducted, Sims said the thinking shifted into a mode of, “Let’s do what’s right here.”

Sims wouldn’t estimate how long the investigation will take. “As long as it should,” he said.

“Thorough,” Navy spokesman Moynihan agreed. “But expeditious.”

Naval Academy Admissions Under Scrutiny

January 31, 2011The Capital

The Naval Academy will send appointment letters to the Class of 2015 this week, and nearly all of the successful applicants will likely accept.

By mid-August, these 1,240 new midshipmen will be wearing spotless uniforms, drilling in unison and starting and ending each sentence with "sir" or "ma'am." Also, in Naval Academy tradition, they will refer to themselves as "the best and the brightest."

This familiar picture does not reveal the concerns that are surfacing over Naval Academy admissions policies. Some academy supporters say the school on the banks of the Severn in Annapolis admits too many marginal students, most of them minority students and recruited athletes. The academy, they say, is sacrificing its reputation for excellence in the interest of NCAA Division I sports. Others say the academy is too eager to admit minority students, many of whom come from poor school districts that don't prepare students for the academy's demanding curriculum.

An example of the concern is that the Naval Academy requires applicants to take the SAT, but then admits selected students with math scores as low as 410 and verbal scores of 370, according to academy records.

The normal cut-off for SAT scores is about 600 out of a possible 800 points, a former admissions board member told The Capital, though the board will consider applicants with math or verbal scores as low as 570. When a student gets admitted who scores significantly below that, the former board member said, it means the superintendent, athletic director or another high-ranking official wants that particular student at the Naval Academy. Some former admissions board members and officers say the borderline students often struggle to survive at the Naval Academy.

"It is the equivalent of taking a square peg and putting it in a round hole, where it doesn't fit," said one former board member and career military officer who was stationed at the academy.

"The unfairness is absolutely real," said the officer, who agreed to speak on condition of anonymity.

It's unfair, the officer said, to admit marginal students ahead of their better-prepared counterparts, and Naval Academy officers and capable midshipmen are under constant pressure to tutor the underachievers.

"We are pouring money and staff time into getting them through," the officer said. "The drain on the paid staff and the nonpaid staff is enormous."

Last month, English professor Bruce Fleming, who has taught at the academy for 24 years, filed a complaint with the Navy Inspector General's Office, asking for an investigation of the academy's admissions practices.

"Seventy-five percent of black midshipmen have [either math or verbal] SAT scores below 600, while only 25 percent of whites do -- divergence explicable only as the result of racial tracking," Fleming stated in his complaint.

The Naval Academy is becoming two separate schools, he said in an interview.

"Twenty-five percent of the class who come here will knock your socks off -- and 25 percent will keep you in tears," because of their inability to process information, he said.

On Friday, the Naval IG's office notified Fleming that the matters discussed in his complaint are not the type of things the IG investigates, and the case was being forwarded to the Chief of Naval Operations for consideration. Fleming has expressed dissatisfaction with the academy's admissions practices for several years. In June 2009, he wrote an editorial in The Capital criticizing the process. The academy responded by denying Fleming a routine merit pay increase that his supervisor had approved. Fleming filed a First Amendment claim with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel in September, and on Wednesday the office announced that the parties had reached a confidential settlement.

The investigation "uncovered evidence indicating that USNA illegally denied the employee a merit pay increase because of his public statements," according to OSC's statement.

Newspaper's probe

Several Naval Academy graduates have contacted The Capital over the last few years, complaining about the academy's admissions practices.

Last February, the newspaper requested Naval Academy admissions and graduation data under the federal Freedom of Information Act. The academy provided a substantial amount of information and granted background briefings. The most recent briefing and documents came two weeks ago. (The Naval Academy denied a reporter's requests to monitor the admissions board in action, even though all identifying information about students would be redacted from any resulting story.)

The newspaper located some former admissions board members, who agreed to discuss the situation provided their names were kept confidential for fear of ostracism within the military community.

Naval Academy officials defended their admissions practices and said repeatedly that the academy is looking to identify leaders, not scholars.

"We insist on SATs ... but I will tell you I am not someone who believes we can pick people just on their ability to take a test. ... And if we did, we'd probably end up with a bunch of dweebs who couldn't lead anyone out of a paper bag," Superintendent Vice Adm. Michael H. Miller told a gathering of academy graduates soon after assuming command last summer.

The back door

Borderline students enter the Naval Academy by a back door that allows them to get ahead of their more qualified peers.

Every year, close to 300 students -- between one-fifth and one-fourth of each Naval Academy class -- enter the academy this way. These students come to the academy through the taxpayer-funded Naval Academy Preparatory School, or NAPS, located in Rhode Island.

The Navy runs NAPS even though, each year, the Naval Academy has substantially more qualified applicants than it can accept. The Classes of 2012, 2013 and 2014, for example, averaged about 2,435 qualified students who were vying for about 1,230 seats.

"The Navy and the Naval Academy are authorized to fund that school and compose a class within the framework of the law and the needs of the Navy," Naval Academy spokesman Cmdr. Joe Carpenter said. "Some people will disagree with that process."

NAPS program

Each year, the Naval Academy picks some less-than-fully-qualified applicants and sends them to the prep school. These 300 NAPS students join 60 or so other students -- mainly athletes -- who each year attend private prep schools and colleges on Naval Academy Foundation scholarships, before enrolling in the Naval Academy. NAPS students -- Napsters, as they are called at the academy -- have traits that the academy and, ultimately, the Navy and Marine Corps say they need.

Admissions officers look at the applicant's ethnic heritage, history of integrity and ability to overcome hardships, according to Naval Academy officials.

Also, the academy generally claims, students selected for NAPS exhibit superior leadership ability.

A former admissions board member and career officer questions that claim about leadership.

"The Naval Academy's argument is 'They have leadership skills,' " the officer said. "That is pure B.S. 'Leadership' is never discussed by the admissions board. We need another [football player] or African-American, plain and simple."

Students who complete the nine-month NAPS program with a "C" average or better are nearly always deemed to fit the "fully qualified" category, and are admitted to the Naval Academy. Therefore, by spending a year in prep school, the unqualified student of a year ago becomes fully qualified, and moves ahead of the current year's applicants trying to enter the academy.

Naval Academy officials say NAPS grads aren't admitted to the academy automatically, and must undergo careful screening. Yet nearly all get in, according to academy records.

During a recent two-year period, NAPS grads were arriving at the Naval Academy so poorly prepared for college-level work, the Naval Academy superintendent relieved the officer in charge of the prep school. Still, these Napsters were found to be fully qualified and were admitted to the academy, while other qualified students were turned away.

Who goes to NAPS?

The 300-member NAPS Class of 2011 (Naval Academy Class of 2015) contained 190 minority students and 110 recruited athletes, with some individuals being counted in both categories, according to Naval Academy documents.

For the Naval Academy Classes of 2009-2013, 312 African-Americans entered the Naval Academy, 180 (58 percent) of whom came through NAPS, according to documents obtained under FOIA.

Hispanics attended NAPS at a lower rate -- 238 of the 678 total (35 percent) went through the prep school.

Of whites, 521 of the 4,101 admitted to the academy (13 percent) entered through NAPS.

A large number of the Naval Academy's recruited athletes go through NAPS.

"A lot of the time, the athletic director would talk directly with the superintendent, if there was an athlete he needed," one former admissions board member said.

Of the 155 football players listed on Navy's 2010 roster, 86 (55 percent) attended NAPS, according to the school's sports Web page.

Forty of Navy's 60 current male lacrosse players (67 percent) attended NAPS, even though many graduated from some of the country's most prestigious private schools including, locally, St. Mary's High School and Severn School, and St. Albans School in Washington, D.C.

Striving for diversity

The Naval Academy -- and the Navy -- is making a concerted effort to increase the percentage of minority officers who are commissioned, military leaders said.

These officials say they're not trying to right past wrongs so much as prepare the military for the future.

The Naval Academy didn't have an African-American graduate until 1949. Between 1945 and 1964, roughly from the end of World War II to the start of the Vietnam War, only 51 African-Americans entered the Naval Academy, according to historians.

"On average, during this period, only three blacks became midshipmen and two graduated each year," according to a paper published by Robert J. Schneller Jr. of the U.S. Naval Historical Center.

"In fact, no African-American entered the academy with an appointment from a state in the old Confederacy until 1967," Schneller wrote.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead, both Naval Academy graduates, have deemed that having greater minority representation in the officer corps is important for national defense. Between them, Mullen and Roughead have served 80 years as commissioned officers, and both served in the 1960s and 1970s, when the military suffered serious racial unrest and protests. Roughead said in 2009 that "diversity is the No. 1 priority" for building a stronger military.

Currently, about 18 percent of Navy enlisted personnel are African-American, but only 8 percent of the officer corps. Hispanics make up 17 percent of the Navy's enlisted ranks, but only 6 percent of the officer corps, according to the Navy Diversity Directorate.

Capt. Kenneth J. Barrett, Navy Diversity Director for the Chief of Naval Personnel, in Washington, D.C., told The Capital last month that increasing diversity in the officer corps is essential.

"We look at diversity as a strategic imperative," Barrett said. "We look at diversity as critical to mission accomplishment ... I don't want to have any particular talent pool ignored."

Fowler era

Vice Adm. Jeffrey L. Fowler, the immediate past Naval Academy superintendent, once served as the Navy's top recruiter. Upon arriving at the academy in June 2007, he began expanding efforts to publicize the Naval Academy across the country.

Applications rose dramatically for whites and minorities.

Fowler has said repeatedly the officer corps must reflect the enlisted Sailors and Marines who are defending the country.

"It is a substantial change from our past," he once said of the academy's emphasis on minority recruitment.

Another time, he said, "I have made it clear since I have been here, in alignment with the Chief of Naval Operations [Roughead] and even his predecessor, Adm. Mullen, who is now the chair, that my No. 1 goal for long term is to increase the diversity within the brigade to more closely reflect America itself."

Fowler expanded Naval Academy outreach efforts, and not just for minority students. He sent goodwill ambassadors into cities and rural areas where students didn't normally apply to the Naval Academy, officials said. He

also had the academy make a new recruiting video and publish a graphic novel to get middle school students interested in the academy.

The result is that more whites and minorities are applying, and more applications are coming from poor inner-city school districts, academy officials said. Many applicants from this "new" talent pool come from homes with low incomes, and where a family member has never attended college.

The Class of 2011, the last selected under Fowler's predecessor, Vice Adm. Rodney P. Rempt, included 291 minority students, or 24 percent of the class. Of these, 60, or 5 percent of the class, were African-American.

The Class of 2014, the last recruited under Fowler, was the most diverse in academy history -- it entered with 438 minority students, or about 35 percent of the class.

Of these, 129 mids -- or about 10 percent of the class -- were African-American.

Never-ending battle

The disagreement that has pitted some academy graduates and former admissions officers, plus Fleming, the English professor, against the Naval Academy's admissions policies isn't likely to end soon.

It irritates critics, for example, that qualified minority students receive priority over qualified whites -- 91 percent of qualified African-Americans and 82 percent of qualified Hispanics were offered seats in the Classes of 2012-2014, compared to 55 percent of qualified whites. (During this three-year period, 31,155 whites applied, as opposed to 4,516 African-Americans and 4,157 Hispanics. To view this data, go to

www.hometownannapolis.com.)

Naval Academy officials said that standards are not being compromised, and during these three years, only 8 percent of African-American applicants, 10 percent of whites and 13 percent of Hispanics received admission offers.

Naval Academy officials also say that more students entering the academy have completed high school honors and advanced courses than ever, and more freshmen are coming from the top 25 percent of their high school classes.

Recently, some English professors complained to the superintendent that freshmen aren't performing as well as in the past. But according to the Naval Academy, freshmen English grades improved from fall 1999 through fall 2009 -- from an average GPA of 2.80 to 3.17. Furthermore, the overall average for freshmen in core courses stayed stable, going from 2.90 to 2.96.

The Naval Academy also notes that mids who attended NAPS complete the academy at roughly the same rate as other students -- in the Naval Academy Class of 2009, for example, 83.3 percent of Napsters graduated, compared to 86.5 percent of non-NAPS students.

The Naval Academy added that the 10-year military retention rate for the Classes of 1995-1999 varied little by race -- 49.8 percent of whites, 45.8 percent of blacks, and 49.5 percent of Hispanics remained on active duty a decade after graduation.

The fact remains, as critics note, that nearly 300 students each year go through NAPS, while fully qualified applicants are turned away.

"We say we are striving for excellence, and this is not excellence," said a former admissions board member.

"Overall, the mids are the best and the brightest, and the place isn't going to fall apart. But the results are going to be long-term, and the negative ramifications will be seen in the future, in the fleet," the officer said.