

Veterans Choice and Vacation

The Veterans Choice program passed the US Congress and was signed into law by President Obama on 7 August 2014. It came as a result of problems at the VA providing health care to Veterans. Internal investigations into the VA identified 35 Veterans who had died while waiting for care in the Phoenix VA system, for instance. Another audit identified more than 57,000 Veterans waited at least 90 days to see a doctor. It also addressed some of the issues of management at the VA. The Act expanded the number of options Veterans have in receiving health care, using non-VA medical facilities. It was particularly good for rural Veterans. In 2018 replaced the Veterans Choice program with the VA Mission Act, signed into law by President Trump on 6 June 2018. The Mission Act expanded the use of non-VA medical facilities and expanded caregiver's assistance to the families of disabled Veterans into the Veterans Community Care Program. When I was scheduling an appointment at the VA a couple years ago, I was asked if I want to use the Choice option of a non-VA facility. I declined and waited for a VA hospital appointment. As I've mentioned before, I have found the VA facilities in Fargo, ND and in Tucson, AZ to be as good or better than my experience with Sanford in Fargo.

My Sweetie, Bev and I are on well-deserved vacation and I'm writing this column from Walhalla, ND, the Valley of the Gods. Sweetie is part of a paleontology dig with the North Dakota Geologic Survey in the Pembina Gorge area about 10 miles west of Walhalla. While she is having a great time 'digging in the dirt for bones', I'm relaxing in our RV at the Riverside RV park. The park is one of the nicest we've visited along the Pembina river. Of course, I've brought my desktop computer and hotspot so I can have Internet access. RV parks seldom have high speed Internet access, so I bring my own. The fossil dig volunteers, according to the Grand Forks Herald have found giant reptile bones of a new species of a sea creature, sometimes called the dinosaur of the sea.

Walhalla is quiet little community about five miles from the Canadian border with a population of about 1,000 people. They have a local airport with an asphalt runway and a F-4 Phantom fighter at the airport entrance. When I was stationed in northern Japan, our base runway was used by F-4s as their final practice stop before heading to Vietnam. The city of Walhalla is one of the earliest settlements in ND and is home to the oldest building in ND, a trading post of the American Fur Company, built in 1843. Antoine Gingras established another trading post near the city of Pembina in 1844, but because of the annual Red River flooding moved it to a couple miles east of Walhalla. The two posts became a major trading area for fur trappers and local nations people. We are having a very nice week.