



# California LEGIONNAIRE



Convention photos, p.6

AUGUST 2021

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CALEGION.ORG

## POST HOSTS 'GOLD MINE' OF VETERAN SERVICES

By Jared Morgan  
Editor

Some American Legion posts have a hard time finding their purpose within the communities they live and operate in.

That's not the case for South Gate Post 335.

Blood drives are just one of many ways this post serves its community.

Normally conducted quarterly at the South Gate post, the May 27 blood drive was the first held in collaboration with Jackie Robinson Post 252.

"Aaron and I got our heads together and decided we'd do a blood drive together," said Patricia Jackson Kelley, commander of Jackie Robinson Post 252 in Los Angeles. "This is an important program of The American Legion. We

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## New Commander And the golden foundation of membership

By Jeff Daly  
Department Membership Director

On Sunday, June 27, 2021, Autrey James became the Commander of the Department of California, of The American Legion. He came in with a theme that inspires a philosophy of unity and purpose:

**One Team. One Fight.**

After the election, the United States of America went through an annual Patriotic Season of Flag Day and then The Fourth of July. Americans celebrate what we veterans have devoted our lives to. Now we Legionnaires of the Department of California can use the momentum of the season to bring some polished shine to the Golden State. Think of it as a...RENEWAL. I think you'll see that theme pop up in this article.

We all know that everything we do is bolstered by having a strong, healthy membership. There's a lot that goes into

that, so let's start by building on foundations at every level.

### MEMBERS

- Sign up at MyLegion.org. Once you do that, you have access to everything available to you from National. You can sign up for email newsletter, replace a lost ID card and so much more.
- Take the free and really well done, BASIC Training course at [www.legion.org/basictraining](http://www.legion.org/basictraining). The more you learn about the organization, the more you can make it your own and contribute to its long-term growth.
- Ask lots of questions and find ways to get involved. Suggest activities that would interest you and take the LEAD in making it happen.
- Follow your Post, District and Department on social media and tag them when you do something super Legionnaire-ily awesome! We need stories to tell and one of those stories might be yours.
- RENEW EARLY! We need that foundation set, so we can get to the work of

See **MEMBERSHIP** page 5



Sign up for American Legion  
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## Amazon pledges to hire 100,000+ veterans and spouses by 2024

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

Amazon has pledged to hire over 100,000 U.S. veterans and their spouses by 2024, the company recently announced.

Amazon announced it had "far exceeded its pledge to hire 25,000 [U.S. veterans] by 2021." Currently, the company says it employs over 40,000 veterans and spouses throughout all of its core businesses. Of the 100,000 anticipated hires, Amazon expects 16,000 to be military spouses.

Amazon says it offers many benefits for veterans and military spouses, including deployment benefits, military spouse support, mentorships, fellowships, community groups, upskilling, free career transitioning assistance, and free technical training for careers in software engineering.

In Amazon's initial Joining Forces pledge from 2016, the company announced that it had intended to hire over 25,000 veterans and spouses in addition to training over 10,000 veterans for technical careers involving cloud services through its AWS Educate program. It is unclear if Amazon met the latter goal. The online retailer also notes it has 35,000 open positions across the United States, including over 1,000 open positions at its new Southern California facilities. Visit [Amazon.jobs](http://Amazon.jobs) for info.

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**One team,  
One fight.**

**Autrey James**  
Department Commander

As we enter our Legion year, I want to convey to you all three things about membership.

One, other departments have a market penetration in membership of about 11%. California has a market penetration of only 4%.

Two, retaining and recruiting new members is a team effort. One person will not stop the slide of membership in California or our national organization. One Post and one District won't either.

As a team we are way more powerful in this fight than we are working alone.

Three, we have a kick butt membership team that is going to GSD (Get Stuff Done) and they are going to try some new ideas, but that team includes each and everyone of you.

Because membership team California is gearing up to stop the slide. In this letter the Adjutant and I are making training available for each and every member of the Department. If you did not know National has a membership training workshop every year and in the past we have sent the Membership Director and one other to Indianapolis for this workshop. This year, the Adjutant and I are making this workshop available to every Legionnaire in the Department at no cost to you or the Department.

How can we do that you may ask, well the membership workshop is online and we are sharing the link with everyone. It is being sent to the Area Vice Commanders, and District Commanders with the instructions to log in and participate and pass it to their post and ask them to participate. We are going to put it on the website and the Friday leadership email. If you call our membership staff and give the staff your email, they will send the link to you directly. We need everyone to log on for the workshop, we want you to engage with the National staff and leaders through the chat so we can develop our membership team together!

**11 resolutions  
adopted at  
convention**

**By Nestor Aliga**  
Post 603 Historian

The Department of California convention was very successful despite being held virtually on June 26-27, 2021.

These 11 resolutions were adopted:

From Post 77, Resolution 2021-001, **Past Department Commanders/Alternate National Executive Committee and DEC Status**, proposes to "Change to the 2021 DOC Proposed Bylaws revision in Article X, Department Executive Committee, Section 1, subparagraph b, to better define the status of the Past Department Commanders and Alt NEC Representative's status withing the Department Executive Committee."

From ALR Chapter 595, Resolution 2021-002 (Revised), **Reassignment of the American Legion Riders Officer Titles**, seeks to have the NEC reconsider the title change directive because "The NEC in October passed a resolution (NEC Resolution 19, October 2020) which in part required that the Titles of the offices of President / Vice-President be changed to either Director / Vice-Director or Chairman / Assistant Chairman.

From Post 161, Resolution 2021-003, **Medical Malpractice**, proposes to give Service members the option to file medical malpractice suits against Department of Defense medical facilities/physicians for injuries/death occurring as a result of gross medical malpractice. This was authored by Manuel Vega of Post 731 as a result of his son Patrick dying during USMC boot camp <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/01/31/boot-camp-casualty-the-story-inside-one-recruits-mysterious-death-that-triggered-big-boot-camp-changes/>

From Post 603, Resolution 2021-004, **Support Funding to Expand Vet Centers**, urges the VA to fund and expand Vet Centers, Mobile Vet Centers, and Vet Center Outstations, to provide child care at Vet Centers just like other VA facilities, and to provide VA transportation to fixed Vet Centers and Outstations.

From Post 603, Resolution 2021-005, **Naming of a Combat Ship**, urges the United States Navy and Secretary of the Navy to name a U.S. Navy warship in honor of Fireman Petty Officer Second Class Telesforo Trinidad, a Medal of Honor recipient.

From Post 603, Resolution 2021-006, **Support for Veteran Support and Outreach Act**, urges Congress to immediate

See **WHEREAS** page 10

# Going beyond the ‘Buddy Check’

By Marilyn E Rideaux  
Jackie Robinson Post 252

Recently, a Legionnaire who I’ve known for almost 30 years was taken to the hospital ER due to a bad fall.

The accident occurred during a regular post meeting. Having been a district adjutant for many years, I was contacted by the commander of that post who was seeking next of kin information regarding this injured Legionnaire.

As it turned out, the post had no information on this Legionnaire other than the fact that the individual lived alone, and was dedicated to providing assistance when called upon.

It turned out that the hospital where this individual had been transported was reluctant to provide medical care without knowing any medical history.

They wanted to make contact with a next of kin or a family member or friend who might be able to provide critical information.

My brain went into panic mode!

The only thing I could recall was that most family members were deceased, someone who had obviously been a confidant mentioned some years ago that this individual had a brother who was still living.

Unfortunately, the individual who I heard this from was now deceased.

The only other things I remembered was that there was a former spouse and which state this individual was from.

I started contacting other members who knew this individual by phone and email.

It all turned out the same — no contact names, phone numbers, medical history on the individual, and no leads.

I advised the post commander to recommend to hospital personnel to search through the individual’s personal belongings and particularly the cellular phone if one was available and unlocked for out-of-state phone numbers that might lead to a family member.

I also mentioned the I.C.E. (In Case of Emergency) program which I learned about several years ago.

**In Case of Emergency**  
ICE is a public safety concept

focusing on awareness and personal responsibility.

ICE can be integrated into your daily routine and employed in the event of natural disasters, terrorist incidents, workplace accidents or medical emergencies.

Increased attention to this topic followed the July 2005 London Terrorist Bombings and has since taken on new significance in respect to safety.

ICE4SAFETY has been promoting this concept in a variety of forms since that time.

There are six basic concept tenants — preparedness, prevention, responsibility, communication, awareness and application.

The application is made simple using the publicly available web-based information and tools.

The image(s) representing ICE were designed by safety professionals specifically as a public safety tool using safety colors that serve to attract and focus the attention of first responders and emergency personnel to the presence and location of critical emergency information or resources.

Some of the more common uses to date include Emergency Info "smart-ICE Applications" for Smartphones and Mobile Devices, Workplace Safety Emergency Action Planning, Personal Preparedness in Vehicles, Home, Travel & Recreation using ICE Cards, ICE Stickers and in Securing of Critical Personal Information.

The versatility of ICE and the tools in constant refinement by ICE4SAFETY allow it to be used in a variety of ways by anyone, virtually anywhere.

An internationally recognized and promoted (United Nations) non-language based symbol known as E.123 has been in use on cell phones since May 2008.

Web Based Tools currently available were created with modification by business, public safety organizations and individuals in mind.

Sponsorship of community public safety initiatives can be achieved easily using the available formats.

The use of ICE on jobsites also adheres with OSHA recommendations (1910 & 1926) that companies and workers maintain

emergency medical and contact information in the event of an accident or workplace emergency.

Users can download forms and toolkits to be used at no charge and links to the ICE4SAFETY website can be completed using the trademarked ICE image.

Helmet Safety Cards and Stickers along with Medical Emergency Forms make this an almost instant program reality for jobsite safety managers. Tool Box Talks in support of this process are provided free online or you can make your own.

ICE4SAFETY stresses redundancy in application of this concept because the reality is that no one single method of preparation for emergencies can ensure a reasonably high probability of success.

Because of this fact, ICE4SAFETY continues to develop more ways to use ICE for the public and private sector and has also allied itself with several other public safety organizations to better spread awareness for personal responsibility for safety and preparedness.

Individuals are able to acquire an ICE KIT for free by sending a SASE to the address listed on the website.

The ICE KIT which is currently sponsored by an online merchant, provides users with ICE Stickers for phones, home, work, vehicles and ICE Contact and Medical Cards and self adhering holders so they can be affixed to almost any solid surface like a refrigerator, glove box, helmet, wheelchair etc. or carried wherever you go in your

wallet or purse.

You can keep abreast of practical new developments on the website and Blog at [www.ice4safety.com](http://www.ice4safety.com) the Google Blog at [www.ice4safety.blogspot.com](http://www.ice4safety.blogspot.com) and Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ice4safety](http://www.twitter.com/ice4safety)

## Setting Emergency Contacts on Android

1. Select the “Groups” tab.
2. Select “ICE – Emergency Contacts”.
3. Use the icon to the right of “Find contacts” (a plus sign) to add an emergency contact.
4. Select or add a new contact to the group.
5. All contacts in this group will be available from the lock screen, so you can call them without unlocking your phone.

## Set up your Emergency Contact Information Using Medical ID

1. Open the Health App and tap Medical ID > Edit.
2. Enter your preferred emergency contacts and health information like your birth date, height, and blood type.
3. Make sure you turn on Show When Locked to make your Medical ID available from the Lock screen. In an emergency, this gives people who want to help some important information, like the emergency contacts that you’ve entered.
4. When you’re finished, tap Done.

Source: <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/your-emergency-contact-it-matters.html>



# Book looks at America's Cold War success in a small Berlin neighborhood



A young girl in the Eastern Sector looks through barbed wire into Steinstuecken.

**Donald Smith**  
Author

I'm retired Army, and a veteran of Desert Shield/Storm and the Cold War.

I've written a book about a unique episode in America's Cold War history. It's a success story, which should make Americans and Berliners proud.

It deserves to be remembered. Steinstuecken (German for "stone pieces") was a West Berlin neighborhood that belonged to the

American Occupation Sector after WWII. But, it was completely surrounded by Soviet territory! Steinstuecken sits one kilometer outside the Berlin city limits.

No West-Berlin owned road or strip of land connected it to West Berlin. During the Cold War, this caused lots of problems for the residents and the United States.

Many interesting and inspiring stories resulted; my book tells those stories.

Here's why I think this book is worthwhile to read, purchase and

share with others:

- With Steinstuecken America did the right thing, instead of the easy thing. The U.S. could have easily justified letting the East Germans take over the neighborhood — but it didn't.

The U.S. had promised to protect West Berlin, and Steinstuecken was part of West Berlin. For over twenty years, the Army and State Department safeguarded the village and kept it free. (The Army even set up an MP post in the village, sustained by a helicopter airlift). America kept its word.

- Many Americans know about the many things the U.S. did for Berlin, such as the Berlin Airlift.

But, my book also talks about some things that Berliners did to help the U.S. during the Cold War. Berliners supported the Americans, openly and frequently, and often at real personal risk to themselves.

For example, in 1946, Berlin held city elections. Thousands of Berliners voted for the Western political parties, even though they knew the Soviets were watching. (Kidnappings by Russian secret police were an everyday occurrence all throughout Berlin at this

time). This was a huge PR blow for the Communists; my book tells this story, and others like it.

- During the Cold War, hundreds of thousands of American servicemen and their families built close relationship with their German neighbors and friends.

Many of those relationships are still strong today. My book will help remind people of a proud moment in American-German relations ... and hopefully strengthen those relations for future generations.

My book features stories and personal photographs of the people who lived the Steinstuecken story themselves — the MPs who guarded the village, the helicopter pilots who maintained the "airbridge" to the neighborhood, the diplomats who wrangled with Soviet and East German officials on its behalf, and the villagers who tried to live as normal a life as possible.

The book is available for preorder now: <https://www.acclaimpress.com/books/steinstuecken-a-little-pocket-of-freedom/>

# California challenges other departments in 100 Miles for Hope fundraiser

## The American Legion

The American Legion Department of California issued a fundraising challenge to several other departments for the month of July. The challenge is centered on American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford's 100 Miles for Hope Program, which was developed as a way to help inspire veterans and Legion members to become more physically

active while also raising money for the Veterans & Children Foundation. This event is open to the public. We encourage you to invite your friends, family and colleagues to join you in your pursuit to support The American Legion as you keep each other motivated to be healthy and active. Watch the video here:

<https://youtu.be/gWQIJ9pfsMk>



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[bit.ly/calegion-emails](http://bit.ly/calegion-emails)

## Tell Your Story

Whether you've got an interesting military history or a fun story about why you joined The American Legion, we want to read it. Share your story by emailing [editor@caLegion.org](mailto:editor@caLegion.org) or mailing it to

Department headquarters:  
1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657

\*Don't forget photos!

# Membership is One Team, One Fight

From MEMBERSHIP page 1

telling the American Legion story and welcoming new members to our ranks.

## POSTS

- We need Posts to be accessible to take advantage of efforts being made at the Department level. The first step in doing that will be to make sure that all Post contact information is correct in MyLegion.
- A presence on social media will be essential to our expanded accessibility plan. I suggest that all Posts start a Facebook page.

## TRAINING AND MEDIA/ COMMUNICATIONS

- Your Membership Committee should consider ways to make the Post more appealing for recruitment and retention. It could be a fresh coat of paint or creating a team of ambassadors to interface with members and prospective members to make them all feel welcome.
- Establish a calendar for patriotic holidays, community events and other activities where you can make an impression in the community.
- Make a communication plan with all of your members and especially your new members. We want to avoid them hearing from us only when we want their renewal. (Stay tuned for additional training on this)
- Encourage your members to RENEW EARLY!

## DISTRICTS

- Bring Post leadership together and make membership regular discussion.
- Consider combining community

service projects with all of your Posts for a bigger impact and visibility.

- Double check that your Posts are up to date in MyLegion and that they are encouraging members to register with MyLegion.
- Motivate the Posts to motivate their members to RENEW EARLY!

## DEPARTMENT

- We are starting to develop some partnerships that should deliver new members to the organization.
- We are creating content on social media and distributing it in a targeted way, to help members find us! This is why we need your Post contact information to be correct.
- We are ramping up training and communication to get questions answered, information transferred, and positivity flowing. It's not against the rules to have fun at this!
- We are actively planning Department wide events, for even larger impact and visibility.
- We plan on actively advocating for timely transactions of membership continuation. Sorry, I mean that we'll be advocating for everyone to...RENEW EARLY! Seriously, don't make us get on TikTok and do a whole song and dance. Nobody needs to see that.

Like I said, this is just the foundation. To really discover the riches of The Golden State we are going to need an effort from every member.

We are going to need to take on the mantra of Commander Autrey James and come together to be:

**One Team; One Fight!**



Aaron Thum, left, 1st vice commander of the South Gate Post 335 gives blood during an event at his post on Thursday, May 27, 2021. He is joined by Patricia Jackson Kelley, commander of Jackie Robinson Post 252.

## Posts collaborate on quarterly blood drives

From SERVICE page 1

never know who is going to need blood.”

She referenced her collaboration with Aaron Thum, newly-elected 1st vice commander of the South Gate post and a program manager for Volunteers of America Los Angeles.

“This post is a gold mine for veterans who need assistance,” Kelley said.

Thum has been with VOALA for seven years and within the past 4 and a half years has focused on veterans employment. He said he gets a real sense of fulfillment that comes with helping the hapless.

“We see a lot of improvement in a veteran’s life when they get a job. That’s why I do this work,” Thum said.

### SOUTH GATE POST 335: A VETERANS SERVICES HUB

Since November 2019, Post 335 has hosted a number of services for veterans and their families, including homeless veteran job referral, suicide awareness training, veteran peer support training, security guard training, OSHA certifications and more.

The post was recently made a hub for the Veterans Peer Access Network and it often collaborates with other veteran services groups like Veterans Stand Together.



Department of California Membership Director Jeff Daly shows his patriotism.



Your post can receive a credit for each dollar spent on the purchase of American Flags from Emblem Sales.

[Legion.org/dispatch/flag](http://Legion.org/dispatch/flag)





### A new Commander

Autrey James was sworn in as commander of The American Legion Department of California on Sunday, June 27, 2021.

His motto "One Team, One Fight" illustrates his plan to unify the various elements of the American Legion in the Golden State to present a unified front in the work to assist veterans and their families.

Photos by Fred Shacklett  
Department Historian



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE 2021

By **Seth Reeb**

Legislative Advocate  
Reeb Government Relations

The state budget was passed by the legislature and signed by the governor on June 28.

The budget included funding for deferred maintenance at Barstow and Yountville veterans homes, an increase of the financing for County Veterans Service Officers, and \$25 million in grant funds for California service providers that provide services to veterans.

## Key Issues

Some of the key issues we have advocated for on behalf of the Legion in 2021 are SB 363 (Leva) Educational equity: government instruction conferences: Sacramento.

We worked with the author, American Legion-California Boys State, and the American Legion Auxiliary-Department of California to meet the author's concern and the American Legions.

SB 766 (Eggman) Private post-secondary education. This bill was pulled due to the federal legislation that fixed the 90/10 rule, which we have been trying to settle here in California for the past few years.

Governor Newsom's California Comeback Plan includes the establishment of the Veterans Support for Self-Reliance grant program.

This funding will be administered by CalVet and will support California's most vulnerable veteran population, including aging veterans and veterans with disabilities who have experienced chronic homelessness.

The program is a three-year competitive grant that CalVet will administer to qualified grantees who serve veterans through permanent supportive housing.

The program will primarily target those projects supported by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing, also known as HUD-VASH.

## Operating in the Capitol

Reeb Government Relations is still dealing with the effects of COVID at the state capitol. We have continued to meet via zoom,

email, and conference calls.

When the Legislature returns from summer recess, we anticipate more access to the Legislature and the Capitol.

Below is a list of bills that American Legion has taken a position on and are still moving:

### AB 107

(Salas D) Licensure: veterans and military spouses.

#### Position: Support

Summary: Current law requires a board within the Department of Consumer Affairs to issue, after appropriate investigation, certain types of temporary licenses to an applicant if the applicant meets specified requirements, including that the applicant supplies evidence satisfactory to the board that the applicant is married to, or in a domestic partnership or other legal union with, an active duty member of the Armed Forces of the United States who is assigned to a duty station in this state under official active duty military orders and the applicant submits an application to the board that includes a signed affidavit attesting to the fact that the applicant meets all of the requirements for a temporary license and that the information submitted in the application is accurate, to the best of the applicant's knowledge.

This bill would expand the requirement to issue temporary licenses to practice a profession or vocation to include licenses issued by any board within the department, except as provided.

The bill would require an applicant for a temporary license to provide to the board documentation that the applicant has passed a California law and ethics examination if otherwise required by the board for the profession or vocation for which the applicant seeks licensure.

### AB 576

(Maienschein D) Community colleges: apportionments: waiver of open course provisions: military personnel.

#### Position: Support

Summary: Current law waives open course provisions in statute or regulations of the board of governors for any governing board

of a community college district for classes the district provides to inmates of certain facilities, and authorizes the board of governors to include the units of full-time equivalent students generated in those classes for purposes of state apportionments.

This bill would waive open course provisions in statute or regulations of the board of governors for any governing board of a community college district for community college courses the district provides to military personnel, their dependents, and authorized civilian employees on a military base, and would authorize the board of governors to include the units of full-time equivalent students generated in those community college courses for purposes of state apportionments.

### ACR 5

(Mathis R) AMVETS 75th Anniversary.

#### Position: Support

Summary: This measure would commend AMVETS Department of California on its 75th year of providing benefits and services to Veterans.

### ACR 12

(Seyarto R) Purple Heart Day.

#### Position: Support

Summary: This measure would declare August 7, 2021, as Purple Heart Day in California.

### ACR 13

(Seyarto R) Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

#### Position: Support

Summary: This measure would commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

### ACR 21

(Dahle, Megan R) Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge.

#### Position: Support

Summary: This measure would designate the South Yuba River Bridge over State Highway Route 49 in the County of Nevada as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge. The measure would request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost for appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon

receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, to erect those signs.

### AJR 10

(Choi R) Veterans cemeteries: Republic of Korea and Republic of Vietnam veterans.

#### Position: Support

Summary: This measure would urge the United States Congress and the President of the United States to permit states to extend burial and memorial benefits in state veterans cemeteries to Republic of Korea veterans and Republic of Vietnam veterans who served in the Vietnam War and who subsequently became United States citizens.

The measure would urge the United States Congress and the President of the United States to extend the same benefits in national cemeteries.

### AJR 12

(Stone D) Veterans' educational benefits.

#### Position: Support

Summary: This measure would urge the United States Congress to revise the United States Code to remove the requirement that, to be eligible for GI benefits, a law school be accredited by a specialized accreditor and the overly broad restriction that graduates must be eligible to sit for a bar examination in any state.

See **BILLS** page 10

## Important dates

- Aug. 16: Legislature reconvenes from Summer Recess
- Aug. 27: Last day for fiscal committees to meet and report bills to the Floor
- Aug. 30-Sept. 10: Floor Session Only
- Sept. 10: Last day for each house to pass bills
- Oct. 10: Last day for Governor to sign or veto bills passed by the Legislature on or before Sept. 10 and in the governor's possession after Sept. 10





## 2021 Virtual Boys State a rousing success

**By Tim Aboudara, Sr.,**  
Chief Counselor  
California Boys State

The American Legion Virtual California Boys State Program took place June 19-25. To say, based on the “post program” comments that this year’s Session was a huge success would be an understatement.

The 2021 Session had approximately 775 Delegates. With two exceptions, we were able to virtually replicate all of the things that we do in the “in person” program. The only two exceptions this year were the fact that we did not have a Boys State Band or our afternoon athletic program. Our 775 Delegates made us the largest Virtual Boys State Program this year.

There were some major additions to this year’s program, driven by both our Virtual Task Force and the Delegates themselves. These included: a virtual newspaper, a nightly Boys State newscast, podcasts, the development, and

publishing of a Voter’s Guide prior to the General Election (what is normally seen with a sample ballot).

The partnership with the Department of Nevada was a very nice enhancement, providing opportunities for Delegates from Nevada to attend a Boys State Program this year and provided our Program with some great new Staff Team Members. In addition to the delegates from Nevada, we also had Delegates attend virtually from Hawaii, Illinois, and Arizona.

To make this year’s Program function as smoothly as possible, a “Virtual Command Center” was set up at Post 77 in Woodland. Approximately 18 Members of our total staff of 60 worked at the Command Center. The remaining staff members helped deliver their portion of the Program remotely. While we had a few expected “hiccups,” the flow of the program went very smoothly. Watching the way this year’s Delegates embraced the Program and

how they used the creativity they developed in a distance learning environment all contributed to the outcome.

The 2021 American Legion California Boys State Governor was Ethan Arnold, sponsored by Post 246 in Danville. Governor Arnold addressed the Department Convention on Saturday, June 26. Delegates Weston Jenkins and Ryan Jung were selected to attend Boys Nation. California was also represented by on the Boys Nation Staff by Chief Counselor Tim Aboudara, Sr., 2019 Boys Nation Senator Luke Takashima and Post 43 Member Jeff Daly.

The success of this year’s program is the result of great teamwork by the Boys State Staff and work of the Virtual Task Force. The Team pulled together and overcame some real challenges and help the Staff deliver to the Delegates. The over 75 comments that the Program has received from Delegates and Parents was very heartwarming.

## VA program brings cancer care to over 50,000 veterans

### The American Legion

The Department of Veterans Affairs National Precision Oncology Program was launched in 2016 to bring targeted, personalized cancer care to veterans. Additionally, the program standardizes precision oncology in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

Precision oncology assesses genetic and molecular information to diagnose and treat cancers. This information is then used to personalize treatment and medicine tailored to a patient’s individual cancer. Precision oncology improves patient outcomes while reducing side effects from cancer-treating medications and overall improves the quality of life for cancer patients.

As the largest integrated provider of oncology services in the United States, VHA diagnoses more than 200 new cases of cancer each day and provides cancer-related care to more than 50,000 veterans annually.

Another effort by VA to help close the care gap for veterans is the expansion of VA’s National Oncology Program

teleoncology access. In 2020, VA announced it is working with the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation to build new programs that enable VA oncology specialists to provide veterans access to precision cancer care regardless of where they live.

Bristol Myers Squibb committed to providing VA \$4.5 million in grant funds over three years to develop a national teleoncology center that would enable VHA to better reach veterans living in rural communities, providing all veterans access to precision oncology care.

“By developing, implementing and standardizing workflow processes, this project will expedite the expansion of a model for delivering specialized oncology care in a virtual setting — and help cancer care teams provide the utmost patient experience in a virtual care environment,” Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation President John L. Damonti said in a release.

Veterans with questions about the oncology services offered by VHA should consult with their VA health-care team.



**From BILLS page 8****SB 363**

(Leyva D) Educational equity: government instruction conferences.

**Position: Remove Opposition**

Summary: Would, commencing Jan. 1, 2023, exempt from the Sex Equity in Education Act's sex discrimination provisions, and other specified provisions, any gender-segregated programs or activities of the American Legion or the American Legion Auxiliary related to their respective yearly Girls State and Boys State conferences and any promotion of, or selection of pupils for, any of those conferences by secondary educational institutions if the conferences comply with certain conditions, including providing substantially similar access to government officials and facilities, providing substantially similar programming, except as specified, providing an equal number of participation opportunities, and, for pupils who do not identify as either male or female, or with their assigned birth gender, allowing those pupils to participate in either conference.

**SB 498**

(Umberg D) Funds for the provision of legal services to indigent persons: disabled veterans.

**Position: Support**

Summary: Current law requires an attorney or law firm receiving or disbursing trust funds to establish and maintain an Interest On Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) account in which the attorney or law firm is required to deposit or invest all specified client deposits or funds.

Current law directs IOLTA account interest and dividends to be paid to the State Bar of California to be distributed for the provision of civil legal services to indigent persons in a prescribed order, including, after payment of administrative costs, 85% of remaining funds to qualified legal services projects.

Current law defines terms for these purposes, including the definition of "indigent person."

This bill would expand the definition of "indigent person" by increasing one measure of income eligibility from 125% to 200% of a specified poverty threshold.

The bill would further require, for the purpose of that definition, that the income of a person who is disabled be determined after deducting disability compensation from the United States Veterans Administration paid to a veteran with a service-related disability.

**SB 661**

(Newman D) Veterans' farm and home loan program.

**Position: Support**

Summary: Current law establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is headed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Current law requires the secretary, as head of the department and subject to the policies adopted by the California Veterans Board, to perform all duties, exercise all powers and jurisdiction, assume and discharge all responsibilities, and carry out and effect all provisions vested by law in the department.

Current law defines "veteran" for the purposes of the various programs granting benefits to veterans.

This bill would authorize the

secretary to designate a deputy, employee, or other official in the department to act for them and to represent them at meetings.

The bill would authorize the secretary to delegate powers and duties, as specified.

**SB 665**

(Umberg D) Employment policy: voluntary veterans' preference.

**Position: Support**

Summary: The California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) provides that nothing in that act relating to discrimination on account of sex affects the right of an employer to use veteran status as a factor in employee selection or to give special consideration to Vietnam-era veterans.

This bill would enact the Voluntary Veterans' Preference Employment Policy Act to authorize a private employer to establish and maintain a written veterans' preference employment policy, to be applied uniformly to hiring decisions, to give a voluntary preference for hiring or retaining a veteran over another qualified applicant or employee.

The bill would require a private employer with a veterans' preference employment policy to annually report to the Department of Fair Employment and Housing the number of veterans hired or retained under the preference policy and any demographic information about those veterans that the employer is already required to report, as specified.

The bill would require the department to report that information, in addition to the number of discrimination claims received based on an employer's veterans' preference employment policy, to

specified legislative policy committees by July 1, 2025, and July 1, 2027.

**SB 667**

(Roth D) Property taxation: disabled veterans' exemption: claims: executor and administrator of claimant's estate.

**Position: Support**

Summary: Current property tax law, pursuant to the authorization of the California Constitution, provides a disabled veterans' property tax exemption for the principal place of residence of a veteran, the veteran's spouse, or the veteran and veteran's spouse jointly, and the unmarried surviving spouse of a veteran, as provided, if the veteran is blind in both eyes, has lost the use of 2 or more limbs, or is totally disabled as a result of injury or disease incurred in military service, or if the veteran has, as a result of a service-connected injury or disease, died while on active duty in military service.

Existing property tax law requires any person claiming the disabled veterans' property tax exemption to file a claim, which is required to be filed under penalty of perjury, with the assessor giving any information required by the State Board of Equalization, as provided.

This bill would authorize the executor or administrator of the claimant's estate to file a claim with the assessor in the manner described above.

For More information contact: Don Harper, Legislative Commission chairman, govvia@comcast.net; and Seth Reeb, sethreeb@comcast.net

**From WHEREAS page 2**

pass the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act, to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the U.S. Department Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to enter into contracts with and award grants to States to promote health and wellness, prevent suicide, and improve outreach to veterans, and for other purposes.

From Post 603, Resolution 2021-007, **Support**

**for the Expansion of VA Technologies for Continuous Buddy Checks**, urges the Department of Veterans Affairs to utilize and leverage existing programs to improve overall communications with Veterans that will decrease mental health issues while improving metrics on other collateral issues.

From Post 603, Resolution 2021-008, **Decrease Veteran Homelessness Utilizing Veteran Empty Nesters**, urges the VA to

query empty-nest Veterans who may be willing to rent out their empty-rooms, and for VA to collaborate with other GOs and NGOs to find outside-the-box and innovative ways to compassionately end Veterans homelessness.

From Post 603, Resolution 2021-011, **Support Suicide Prevention using DHHS and VA Services**, urges the entire federal government to fully utilize existing safety net services from the Departments

of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and expanding Veterans Affairs (VA) services and benefits.

From Post 77, Resolution 2021-012, **Put into the Bylaw to Allow Technical Advisors for Department Commissions**, adds a Section to the 2021 DOC Proposed Bylaws revision in Article XI, to authorize the use of Technical Advisors by all the Commissions.

From Post 731, Resolution 2021-013, **Add**

**the Department Service Officer to the Personnel Committee**, proposes to add to the Department Bylaws in Article XI, Section 11 to add the Department Service Officer to the Personnel Committee as an ex officio member with no vote.

To read the verbiage for each resolution passed during the June 26-27, 2021 Department of California convention, visit the resolutions page.



Toxic sites like the Open-Air Burn Pit at FOB Salerno in Afghanistan (pictured here, 2012) have been linked to respiratory illnesses suffered by veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Photo: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction)

## Burn pit legislation introduced

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

On May 26, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.) unveiled the Honoring our PACT Act of 2021, which consolidates a bipartisan effort in Congress to prioritize care for veterans who have been exposed to airborne toxins during military service.

The bill has garnered widespread support from both sides of the legislature; many veteran services organizations, including The American Legion; and celebrity activists like comedian Jon Stewart.

If passed, the Honoring our PACT Act of 2021 will provide expanded health care benefits for as many as 3.5 million veterans that have been exposed to airborne hazards, including exposure to burn pits that commonly occurred during the

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Additionally, the bill will mandate that the Department of Veterans Affairs adopt a more streamlined approach to evaluating veteran claims of exposure to airborne toxins. New policies will require that the VA maintain a "presumption of service connection" for veterans suffering from a now-expanded list of illnesses associated with both toxin and radiation exposure.

The VA similarly announced that it is already planning to relax its criteria for benefit claims associated with Agent Orange and particulate matter exposures (including burn pits) on May 27.

If the Honoring our PACT Act does not pass Congress, the VA's anticipated new policies should still make it easier for veterans to get benefits for airborne toxin exposure, albeit without concrete legislative backing.

## Report highlights challenges in VA modernization, health care staffing

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

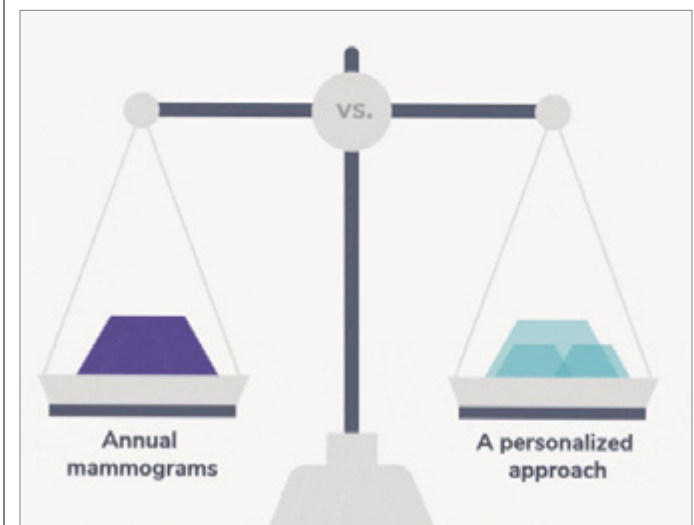
On June 9, the Government Accountability Office released a preliminary report detailing staffing, communications, and planning concerns the Department of Veterans

Affairs has struggled to rectify since the GAO began oversight operations in 2018.

First among the concerns is the VA's ability to find and retain staff, which has resulted in project delays and management issues across the board. The GAO

says that the VA has been able to address vacancy rates in some fields. For example, after instituting a special salary rate for its engineers the VA saw its engineer vacancy rate improve 4.6% from 2019 to 2020 despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Using WISDOM to beat breast cancer



Maren T. Scheuner, MD, MPH  
Principal Investigator, WISDOM for VA  
San Francisco VA Health Care System

Researchers with the Department of Veterans Affairs want to let you know about the WISDOM study, a nation-wide study to find the best way to screen for breast cancer.

The WISDOM study is being conducted by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco. It is funded by the National Institutes of Health. There is no cost to participate.

The WISDOM study compares two ways to screen for breast cancer in women age 40 and over with no history of breast cancer. One way is the standard yearly mammogram. The other way is a personal screening plan for mammogram and possibly other screening based on your risk, including your genetics.

Participation is easy and can be done from home. You do not need to change where you get your mammogram or go to a study site. To join WISDOM or to learn more, visit [www.thewisdomstudy.org/VA](http://www.thewisdomstudy.org/VA) or call 855-729-2844.

The GAO reports that "VA officials, however, continue to describe staffing difficulties in planning and executing projects and limits on the number of projects that facilities can undertake."

The second concern the GAO notes includes communications issues between different departments as the VA continues to modernize its health care facilities across the United States. The GAO says that the VA has taken positive steps here as well, but ineffective communication has been responsible for delaying the launch of several new facilities by creating confusion in oversight offices.

This has delayed actions such as hiring, furnishing facilities, and the deployment of medical equipment.

Finally, the GAO says the VA lacks a clear system that can accurately evaluate the progress of ongoing projects and highlight areas for improvement.

The GAO says these three concerns highlight the VA's difficulties with addressing goals outlined in the VA MISSION Act of 2018, noting the VA "faces a growing backlog of maintenance on its facilities" and "faces challenges aligning its capital assets to meet veterans' needs given ongoing changes in veterans' demographics."

## Homeless veterans deserve spiritual support

*Editor's Note: Headed by Ronald Reagan-Pacific Palisades Post 283's Joe Ramirez, the "Revive Spiritual Care" initiative seeks to bring a higher message to the homeless veterans living on the outskirts of the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs campus. The initiative is a collaboration between the American Legion post and Ramirez' Rivive L.A. church.*

**By Joe Ramirez**  
Pacific Palisades Post 283

We are at the beginning stages of forming a spiritual care initiative in the City of Los Angeles, reaching out to our city's homeless beginning with the encampment outside the West LA Veteran's Administration.

Our purpose is to bring Spiritual Care to the homeless which we believe are in serious neglect when it comes to faith. As Christians, we know God's supernatural power is an awesome source of healing, comfort and strength.

Twice a month, on Sunday afternoons we will be taking church to the streets, providing bibles, the Word, prayer, coffee and some snacks. We will also provide reference and professional sources for rehabilitation clinics, sober living & mental health options.

You can help by joining us at one of our gatherings, help us plan, provide resources such as food and funds. Just send us a message and we will provide more information.

*Email [joe@revivela.net](mailto:joe@revivela.net) for more information.*



A row of tents sit along the western sidewalk outside the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs campus. (Photo: Nancy Loo)



In 2015, the VA estimated that as many as 6,000 homeless veterans live in Los Angeles in areas like Skid Row, pictured here. (Photo: Laurie Avocado)

## \$420 million grant to help homeless veterans in California

**By Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded \$418 million in grants to over 260 non-profit organizations across the United States to combat homelessness among veterans, the agency announced July 6.

The funding is authorized under the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program, and is slated for fiscal year 2022 (beginning this October and running through September 2022). The SSVF program is intended to help non-profit organizations permanently house veterans and their families who are either already homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough said that

“since [2010], hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families have been placed into permanent housing or prevented from falling into homelessness by VA's homelessness programs and targeted housing vouchers provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.”

This fiscal year, over 112,000 veterans and their families benefited from SSVF grants.

### CALIFORNIA ORGANIZATIONS ACCOUNT FOR NEARLY 20% OF 2022 SSVF FUNDING

Nearly \$79 million of the \$420 million in SSVF grant money for fiscal year 2022 is being directed to 32 non-profit organizations in California.

According to a 2020 Department of Housing and Urban Development report, more than half the nation's homeless population lives in California, including 31% of the nation's homeless veterans. As of 2020, 70% of these 11,400 veterans were unsheltered. On a brighter note, the report also says that veteran homeless in California dropped by 36.5% between 2009 and 2020.

It remains unclear how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic impact has affected efforts to curb veterans homelessness in the state. However, in an April 12 statement, the VA commented that the “pandemic has added to the nation's housing challenges, including among veterans.”



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