



# California LEGIONNAIRE

INSIDE



Let the Games begin!, p.16



Endorsed for natl. commander, p.5

AUGUST 2022 | VOL. 110, NO. 3

Official Publication of The American Legion Department of California

CALEGION.ORG

## California American Legion elects new commander

By Jared Morgan  
Editor

The American Legion's Department of California closed its 103rd annual convention in Visalia, Calif., on Sunday, June 26,

with the election of a new top leader and the passing of several resolutions (Page 4) supporting major issues of interest to the veteran community.

The resolutions will go before the delegation of The American Legion's national convention for consideration in Milwaukee late-August.

The crowd in attendance at the Visalia Convention Center was jubilant as First Lady Martha Romano "capped" her husband Jere Romano during the leadership afternoon changeover.

Continued on page 2



Department Commander Jere Romano delivers remarks during the American Legion Department of California's 103rd annual convention in Visalia, Calif., on Sunday, June 26, 2022. (Photo: Jared Morgan/California American Legion)

## American Legion testifies on citizenship for service, deported veterans

By Mackenzie Wolf  
The American Legion

The American Legion has advocated for those who seek a legal path toward naturalization for more than 100 years. Non-citizen immigrants have served in the U.S. military in every conflict since the nation's inception. Approximately 760,000 have gained American citizenship through military service over the last 100 years. Nearly 24,000 non-citizen immigrants are currently serving in the U.S. military and 5,000 join every year.

The American Legion again advocated for these veterans and servicemembers in a statement for the record submitted to the House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship for a hearing on the oversight of immigrant military members and veterans.

"Every day, brave immigrant service members risk their lives in support of our country," House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said in his opening remarks. "We rely on them to keep our nation safe and to protect U.S. global interests. In return, we must honor their sacrifices by supporting them and their families, and by giving them every opportunity to become U.S. citizens if they so desire."

The process of gaining

Continued on page 13

### SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Your donation will help with production of the California Legionnaire in print and online.



Scan the code with your phone's camera, or visit

caLegion.org/newsletter or Call HQ: 559-875-8387



## 988 suicide crisis hotline is now live

By The American Legion

The Suicide Prevention Lifeline's new three-digit dialing code will go live nationwide on July 16.

People experiencing a mental health crisis will be able to call 988 and connect to counselors with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network.

Advocates believe that designating a three-digit telephone number will transform access to

mental health care. The three-digit number is easy to remember, which should make it faster for Americans dealing with a mental health crisis to receive life-saving support.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network consists of more than 200 crisis centers nationwide.

Veterans experiencing distress or a mental health crisis will now be able connect to the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing

988 then pressing 1.

This will provide veterans with fast and easy access to veteran-specific mental health support.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs 2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, nearly 46,000 Americans — including over 6,000 veterans — died by suicide in 2019.

The American Legion supported the legislation designating 988 as the universal telephone number of the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system through Resolution No. 377: Support for Veteran Quality of Life.

The current suicide prevention lifeline phone number (1-800-273-8255) will remain available after the launch of 988.



**THE AMERICAN LEGION  
DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA**

1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801

☎ 559-875-8387 ✉ admin@caLegion.org

— LEADERSHIP —

<b>Department Commander</b> Jere Romano commander@caLegion.org	<b>Department Adjutant</b> Barbara Lomrano adjutant@caLegion.org
--	--

*California* LEGIONNAIRE

— PRINT & DIGITAL —

<b>Editor / Web Team Lead</b> / <b>Page Designer</b> Jared Morgan editor@caLegion.org 310-750-9782	<b>Web Team Member</b> Rick Pushies <b>Facebook Manager</b> Lillian Moss facebook.com/caLegion
<b>Staff Writer</b> Christian Southards	<b>Photographer</b> Fred Shacklett

**For Sponsorship Opportunities:** contact the editor

**PUBLICATION POLICY**

The California Legionnaire (PP 167) is published 4 times a year in February, May, August, and November by:

**Mid Valley Publishing Inc.**  
740 N. St., Sanger CA 93657-3114

**POSTMASTER:**  
Send address changes to:

The California Legionnaire  
1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801  
559-875-8387

ISSN 2575-0976

**SUBMISSIONS:**

- Submissions can be made via email, online and mail
- Email print articles to: [editor@caLegion.org](mailto:editor@caLegion.org) with the words "California Legionnaire" in the subject line of your email so that it will not be overlooked
- Submissions to The California Legionnaire must be made by the 6th of the month prior to the issue month (Example: To submit material for the February issue, submissions must be received by Jan. 6)
- Submissions to the Department website can be made at any time by visiting [caLegion.org/ugc](http://caLegion.org/ugc) (please email the editor to let them know you've submitted online)
- Photos should be sent at the highest resolution possible
- Do not embed photos in a Word.doc. Send photos as email attachments with photo captions either typed in a word document or in the email body. Images that are pulled off of websites will not reproduce well, if at all. PDFs must be saved as high resolution from their original document
- All submissions become the property of The American Legion Department of California. All submitted material is subject to edit, rework and omission. We are not responsible for lost items or misplaced material
- Please send "Change of Address" and "Deceased Notifications" to: [admin@caLegion.org](mailto:admin@caLegion.org) or mail to headquarters (See address above). To publish an obituary, please copy the editor on your email or mark letters "ATTN: California Legionnaire Editor – Obituary"



**Sign up for American Legion  
Department of California  
email updates:**

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



First Lady Martha Romano "caps" her husband, incoming Department Commander Jere Romano. (Photo: Jared Morgan/California American Legion)

## About your new department commander

Jere Romano has been a member of The American Legion for 12 years and is a Paid Up For Life member. His eligibility is based on his 6 years of honorable service with the United States Marine Corps. He was not your typical Marine as he was a Hawk Missile Technician, aka Rocket Scientist. He is a police

captain responsible for 50 members and manages a \$6 million operational budget. His Legion career has been fast paced: four years as commander of Ronald Reagan-Palisades post 283, District 24 commander and LA County Council commander. He has had National appointments to Americanism, National Security and

maintains his relationship with Congressman Ted Lieu on the Legislative Council. While being the Area 6 membership chair, he led District 24's "Race to the Top" twice, but his greatest success has been his marriage to Auxiliary leader, Martha Romano and their eight children, who are all active members of the Legion Family.

SAVE PAPER.  
SAVE POSTAGE.  
SAVE TIME.



www.legion.org/renew

QUICKLY AND EASILY RENEW ONLINE

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS



## 3 ways to renew!

- Pay by check or money order to Post or Department
- Call Department at 559-875-8387 to renew with a credit or debit card
- Pay online with a credit or debit card at Renew ([mylegion.org](http://mylegion.org))

*You can also scan the code above with your phone*

Renewing your membership is as easy as pulling out your phone. Scan this QR code and you'll be taken to the national website to renew, where you'll be asked for your member number and last name. If you're reading this on your phone screen, click here to renew.



District 25 Legionnaire Kevin Stonestreet (left) poses with his diploma next to then-Department Commander Autrey James during California American Legion College, held May 12-15, 2022.

## Knowledge gained at Spring 2022 California American Legion College

By Chris Hoffman  
Training Committee

The American Legion Department of California recently held Department Legion College, May 12-15, 2022.

This year's college session was held at the Clovis Veteran's Memorial District through 3 days of compressed, intensive learning

sessions geared toward advancing attending Legionnaires' leadership skills.

Attendees were selected from applicants who submitted applications wrote an essay on a selected topic and prepared a resolution as part of the selection process.

Those selected could come from any of the

Legion Family as Legionnaires, Auxiliary, Sons of the Legion, and American Legion Riders are all encouraged to participate and apply.

The weekend started that Thursday evening with a "meet and greet" session held at nearby Cecil Cox Post 147 where 24 students and 9 facilitators met in a social setting to introduce

themselves and become familiar with those with which they would be sharing considerable time over the following 72 hours.

Classes began early Friday Morning and dismissed for the day early in the evening.

Saturday was another early start and late recess with Sunday wrapping up the college itinerary with a few classes, a question-and-answer session with Department Commander, Autrey James, and then, finally, a formal graduation ceremony where students received certificates of completion and facilitators accepted

certificates of appreciation.

Sessions included topics such as mentorship, resolution writing, parliamentary procedures, assessing leadership needs, creating leadership development, evaluating leadership development, corporate responsibility, constitution, and bylaws as well as building community relationships.

At the end of the weekend, students, and facilitators eagerly divulged that they were very glad they attended and that the staff had successfully fulfilled the intent and goals set forth at the beginning of the weekend.

### ATTENDEES

Anthony Aguilar  
Barbara Jung-Lowe  
Jeffrey Jewell  
Carlos Portillo  
Jay McCann  
Joshua Epstein  
Danielle Duffaut  
James Cragg  
Chris Hoffman  
Kevin Stonestreet  
Robert Lassotovitch  
Auggie Galaviz  
Michael Chargaulaf  
Mark Rice  
CJ Reeves  
Tancredo Pastores  
Xiomara Jovel  
Geraldine Armstrong  
Robert Boyd  
Kenneth Sutton  
George Silva

### FACILITATORS

Jeff Daly,  
Rudy Valadez,  
Mark Rice,  
David Brambila,  
Chris Yates,  
Diane DeVries,  
Frank Ducar,  
Brian Johnson,  
Chris Hoffman,  
Lorenzo Rios, and  
Amy Cross

### Oct. 21-23

The fall course of California American Legion College will be held at the Clovis Veteran's Memorial District

## 'Invisible Veterans' no longer

By Nestor Aliga  
Manuel L. Quezon Post 603

For the 152nd Memorial Day ceremony at the Mare Island Naval Cemetery, we were lucky to have two amazing women Veterans as our guest speakers.

Director Lourdes Tiglao of the US Department Veterans Affairs Center for Women Veterans and Deputy Secretary Virginia Wimmer of the California Department of Veterans Affairs spoke eloquently



Lourdes Tiglao, USDVA Director of Women Veterans, right of US flag, was given a hearty reception at Vallejo Vets Building after her Memorial Day keynote speech.

about the historical sacrifices and accomplishments as well as the ongoing challenges of women Veterans.

Both speakers mentioned that women who have served in the military are

often referred to as "invisible Veterans" because their service contributions are largely unrecognized by politicians, the media, academia, and the general public, and even though

women have been officially serving in the military since 1901, they have not always been considered qualified for veteran status for the purpose of receiving benefits, and even

after women were granted veteran status, there are still numerous issues of access, exclusion, and improper management of their health care and other hard-earned benefits.

# Resolutions passed at department convention



## Correcting injustice against black sailors

The delegation of several hundred veterans also voted to have the “Port Chicago Fifty” and the “Philadelphia Fifteen” exonerated for punishment received in the 1940s. Both groups were comprised of Black sailors who voiced concerns about how they were being treated by their commands.

The “Port Chicago Fifty” were court-martialed for protesting unsafe

ammunition handling practices after the deaths of 320 servicemen and the “Philadelphia Fifteen” for writing a letter to a newspaper describing shipboard abuse and discrimination.

The resolution seeks to correct the actions of “institutional racism” rampant in that era and “urges Secretary of the Navy to sign a document to remove an injustice and by collaborating with Congress to exonerate these Sailors and upgrade their discharges to honorable.”



## Tax policies that support veterans

The American Legion supports veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned small business development, growth, entrepreneurship, and preference in government contracting.

The federal government has the obligation to minimize tax burdens for veterans, active-duty military personnel, and their families.

The American Legion has historically supported enhancements to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program that would increase incentives for businesses to hire veterans, service-disabled veterans, and active-duty.

Tax relief is an important policy mechanism for ensuring a conducive economy that allows for veteran-owned small businesses and military families to achieve their financial goals. Tax reform provides a unique opportunity to provide financial support to military families and ensure that they have flexibility when filing their taxes. Fiscal policy encompasses a wide variety of issues that have the potential to impact the lives of veterans, active-duty service members, and their families. The American Legion broadly supports tax policies that benefit veterans, veteran small businesses, active-duty service members, and military families.

## Correcting injustice against Filipino soldiers

From July 26, 1941, to Dec. 31, 1946, Filipino U.S. Army soldiers and guerrillas fought and defended a sovereign territory of the United States, as part of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East and defeated the Japanese Imperial Forces in October 1944 and liberated the Philippines in August 1945. The Rescission Act of 1946 provided that “service

in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines should not be deemed to have been service in the military or naval forces of the United States,” therefore, post-WWII benefits for Filipino veterans of the U.S. Army were no longer the responsibility of the U.S. government.

In 1998, U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi stated, “I consider the Rescission Act of 1946 to be a scar on the historical record of

the United States,” and this injustice to Filipino WWII veterans remains a dark chapter in U.S. history for as long as the 1946 Rescission Act remains in the books. To help correct this injustice, The American Legion’s California delegation voted the national organization urge Congress to act and repeal the Rescission Act of 1946 to help heal the indignation and sorrow those veterans have endured.



## Education and outreach to Filipino communities

With further regard to the destructive nature “The Rescission Act of 1946” had on the Filipino veteran community, the California delegation also voted to conduct outreach to over 250,000 WWII Filipino veterans throughout the respective communities of American Legion posts to “build back better and safer shelter.”

This resolution also calls for the dissemination and implementation of education programs specifically designed for succeeding generations to remain motivated, vigilant and ready to do what is necessary to maintain and sustain the freedom that were preserved by

the sacrifices of these warriors.

Using the resources developed by FilVetREP; as well as the resources of an educational program for High School students as created by The Bataan Legacy Historical Society.

The Philippines Islands are considered by many to be the “Pearl Harbor” in Asia and the Filipino veterans of WWII were the front-liners whose

experience included the Bataan Death March and played a significant role in preserving freedom in the world.

Those Filipino veterans suffered the injustice of the “The Rescission Act of 1946” and retroactively had their compensation and benefits annulled, which would have been payable to Filipino troops for their service during WWII.



## Veteran food insecurity

The delegation also supported a resolution pushing support of legislation that facilitates solutions that effectively addresses the unique

circumstances that lead to food insecurity among veterans.

The delegation further called on the national organization to extend support to legislation that secures

the availability of food resources and systems that serve as a pipeline in getting nutrition to veterans who are experiencing or at risk of food insecurity.

**Continued on page 5**

## James endorsed for national commander

The American Legion Department of California made its endorsement for national commander during its annual convention in Visalia, Calif., on Sunday, June 26.

A resolution to back outgoing California Department Commander Autrey James for the highest position in The American Legion was passed by the voting body, making him the official candidate from California.

### About Autrey James

Autrey B James Jr. earned his eligibility for membership in The American Legion through honorable service as a member of the United States Coast Guard and United States Coast Guard Reserve from August 1990 until August 2000.

He served with honor in the Coast Guard as a Law Enforcement Boarding Officer working in the area of commercial vessel



inspections, vessel safety compliance and search and rescue.

He served during the Gulf War as part of a Port Security Force responsible for the safety and security of four high endurance cutters and U.S. Coast Guard Island Base Alameda

James also worked for 24 years as a police officer, retiring as a police sergeant after working patrol division, investigation assignments in sexual

assault unit, crimes against children unit, gang unit, vice-narcotics units, and the homicide unit.

James held ancillary assignments as a crisis negotiator, supervisor of the crisis negotiation team, regional trainer in crisis negotiations, forensic interview specialist.

While working as a police sergeant, James began and completed law school at an ABA approved law school in California.

He has been admitted

to practice law in the State Bar of California, The United States District Court, Northern District of California, The United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

James worked 17 years as an assistant deputy prosecutor, trying numerous criminal cases from simple theft to special circumstances homicide cases, and was assigned to make all felony plea offers in the northern portion of Alameda County, California.

James is a 17 year paid-up-for-life member of Harding-Noia American Legion Post 161 in the Department of California.

He has served The American Legion with distinction in the following positions, post commander, post adjutant, district commander, department judge advocate, department training commission chair, and department commander.

After returning from National Legion College in 2014, Autrey developed — funded through donations — and implemented The first Legion College in the Department of California.

James has served as a member of the National

Americanism Council, National Finance Commission, National American Legion Charities, assigned to assist National Commander Oxford's committee investigating a Department within the American Legion, National Commander Dillard's committee to study Membership Processing during the 2022-23 Year, and serves as The American Legion representative on the Veterans, and Families Task Force advising the Presidential Commission preparing for the celebration of America's 250th Birthday in 2026.

James continues working with other local Veterans organizations in his community to develop and implement a Veterans stand down, developing a Veterans park in the local community, renaming streets for local veterans from the community.

James has through his many years of experience, dedication and hard work, has served as a loyal and respected legionnaire and has demonstrated that he has the qualifications most needed in a leader such as national commander.



### More support for homeless veterans

Veterans represent approximately 11% of the general homeless population. Some 3.7% of veterans become homeless in the first five years after service. Isolation and lack of social support systems are major risk factors among United States veterans leading to one out of five veterans living alone

with an increased risk of going homeless if proper social support is not in place after discharge. The (FY) 2021 Department of Veteran Affairs Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups (CHALENG) report that consistent with 2020 data and with the previous 20 years of data, unmet needs of veterans are primarily services

that VA cannot provide directly.

Project CHALENG cites eight of the 10 unmet needs continue to be housing for veterans who need to register as sex offenders, and legal assistance in the areas of court fees/court fines, credit issues/debt collection, expunging criminal records, child support, family law, discharge upgrade appeals, and tax issues. It sites six of the 10 met needs continue to be medical services, mental health services, case management, food, TB testing, and substance abuse treatment.

Several studies have identified unemployment as one of the factors that greatly contribute to homelessness among veterans due to a combination of factors that may

or may not include mental or physical problems and substance abuse.

The California delegation voted to renew its commitment to assisting homeless veterans and their families with continued support the efforts of the public and private sector agencies and organizations offer with resources necessary to aid homeless veterans and their families.

This effort should seek and support any legislative or administrative proposal that will provide medical, rehabilitative and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families. The delegation expressed strong support of the importance of collaboration among agencies and sectors to meet the needs of veterans and put an end to

homelessness and at-risk homelessness among veterans.

### Expand interments at Veterans Affairs national cemeteries

The California Delegation also voted to urge the federal government to amend Section 2402 of Title 38, United States Code, to expand interments at Veterans Affairs national cemeteries for 1.) members of the Reserve Components whose service was terminated under honorable conditions; 2.) members of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps of the Army, Navy, or Air Force who died under honorable conditions while a member; and 3.) the spouse, minor child, or unmarried adult child of any member described above.



Two veterans introduced by California Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia have advanced to the Senate. (Photo: Office of Eduardo Garcia)

## 2 new bills: Ending veteran suicide; stop deporting non-citizen veterans

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

Two veterans bills introduced by Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella) were advanced to the California Senate.

The first bill, AB 2032, would require the State Department of Health Care Services to establish an Ending Military and Veteran Suicide Task Force within the Office of Suicide Prevention to systematically reduce military and veteran suicides and to develop a plan to eliminate all military and veteran suicides in the state.

The bill was referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee on June 28.

Ending veteran suicide in California remains

a top priority for policymakers. Earlier this month, the governor's office announced a proposal to establish the California Veterans Health Initiative, or CVHI, which would evaluate current and future state policies, research, and management of care relating to veteran suicide in the state.

The second bill, AJR 19, would have the state of California formally call on the federal government to end the current policy of deporting veterans that are not U.S. citizens.

In a recent press release, Garcia notes, "it is unconscionable to deport our nation's heroes to countries where they will lose accessibility to the veteran services they have earned and often to places where they have

no memories and do not speak the language. Yet, upon their deaths, they can be brought back to the United States to be honored.

We should honor their valiant contributions by allowing our servicemembers to stay in the country, their home that they fought to protect."

AJR 19 was ordered to the Senate consent calendar on June 28.

If passed in the Senate, California would only adopt an official stance in opposition to ending the federal process of deporting non-citizen U.S. veterans.

The California American Legion has compiled a full list of California veterans bills here.

<https://calegion.org/legislation>

## Affordable veterans housing project begins construction in Ventura

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on June 15 for Ventura Springs, a new affordable veterans housing project in Ventura County, the Ventura County Star reported.

The project is co-sponsored by nonprofit A Community of Friends and veterans service organization U.S. Vets, and is intended to house 120 low-income veterans, their families, and two property managers.

More specifically, and according to U.S. Vets' website, Ventura Springs will offer 78 one-bedroom units, 33 two-bedroom units, and 11 three-bedroom units. Additionally, Ventura Springs will offer supportive services, a community center, picnic areas, playgrounds, a computer lab, and more.

U.S. Vets says Ventura Springs is intended to "promote community integration with the surrounding area, giving its residents a sense of home and a neighborhood feel. Its therapeutic residential setting will also encourage health and engagement through its many community amenities and outdoor

spaces."

Ventura Springs is expected to be completed sometime in 2024 with a current cost of \$69 million, up nearly \$10 million as construction costs have increased in the COVID-19 era and delays have pushed the grand opening back. Funding is provided by both private and public sources, including nearly \$3.2 million from the city of Ventura.

According to the most recent U.S. Census data, about 38,000 veterans live in Ventura County. Current estimates of the number of homeless veterans living in the county are conflicting, with most sources suggesting less than a 100. However, Gold Coast Veterans Foundation—which is currently building Veterans' Village in Ventura County, another affordable housing development—says the number is likely closer to 150, with as many as "1,000 to 1,300 potential homeless."

In recent months, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has made Southern California, particularly Los Angeles, the focal point of its efforts to end veterans homelessness in the United States.



The city of Ventura is expected to contribute around \$3.2 million to Veterans Springs, an affordable housing project for veterans. (Photo: Kristina D.C. Hoepfner)



CALIFORNIA AMERICAN LEGION COLLEGE  
FALL 2022 COURSE  
OCTOBER 21 TO 23  
CLOVIS VETERAN'S MEMORIAL DISTRICT



On June 7, President Joseph Biden signed several veterans bills aimed at improving healthcare, education, and awarding U.S. Army Rangers who served during World War II.

## Biden signs 9 veterans bills, advocates for Honoring Our PACT Act

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

On June 7, President Joseph Biden signed nine bipartisan veterans bills into law while advocating for the passage of the Honoring Our PACT Act, which is currently on the Senate floor.

In a release issued by the White House, President Biden notes, “our nation has many obligations, but only has one truly sacred obligation...to prepare and

equip those we send into harm’s way and to care for them and their families when they come home. It’s a sacred obligation.

Because veterans are the backbone, the spine of who we are as a country.”

Oh the nine bills, five directly affect California veterans and their families.

First, the United States Army Rangers Veterans of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act (S.1872) collectively awards the nearly 7,000

Rangers who fought in the Second World War, most notably in operations in North Africa and Italy, the D-Day landings at Normandy, and the liberation of The Philippines.

In education, the Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program Restoration and Recovery Act of 2022 (S.4089) prevents the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs from charging entitlements for retraining assistance that veterans were unable to complete

because the program was either shut down or lost approval by the governing state agency.

The remaining three bills all affect veterans healthcare.

First, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Extension Act of 2022 (S.4119) extends compensation programs for veterans who were exposed to radiation as a result of atomic weapons testing for two more years.

Next, both the Making

Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans Act (S.2533) and Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas Supporting Expanded Review for Veterans in Combat Environments, or SERVICE, ACT (S.2102).

The first mandates the VA to improve medical services relating to breast cancer treatment and mammograms through a combination of new trial programs, research, implementing updated technology at all facilities, improving outreach and accessibility, and updating accompanying administrative policies.

The SERVICE Act expands specific eligibility for veterans who served in any theater recognized by the VA’s Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, which includes deployments in Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and more.

Many veterans bills are currently on the Senate and House floors, including the Honoring Our PACT Act, which has been endorsed by most major veterans service organizations, including The American Legion, the President, the VA, and senators and representatives from both sides of the aisle. If passed, the Honoring Our PACT Act would provide medical treatment for the millions of veterans exposed to toxins during their service going back decades.

## VA to suspend all caregiver program reassessments

By **Military Times**

Veterans Affairs officials will suspend all annual reassessments of families in their caregiver stipend program, citing continued work into revising rules and policies associated with the benefit.

The move comes after months of controversy over the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which provides monthly financial

support to about 33,000 veterans in need of full-time at-home care.

VA officials also repeated their promise not to discharge or reduce stipends for any families based on earlier reassessments.

Currently the program is open only to veterans who served after 2001 or before 1976, but it is scheduled to expand it to all veterans this fall. In preparation for that, officials last year began a review of all

existing post-9/11 veteran participants to ensure they still qualified for the stipend under amended rules.

In March, in response to complaints from families about the process, VA leadership acknowledged that roughly 90% of families who underwent the reviews were scheduled to be booted from the program based on decisions by administrators. That would have dropped almost half of all current families from

the program.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough responded by suspending plans to remove any families from the program and promising to develop new eligibility criteria that is more flexible and less punitive for families.

The stipends — awarded to veterans with service-connected injuries that limit their ability to live independently — vary based on where veterans

live, but generally hover around \$3,000 a month for the most severely wounded individuals and \$1,800 for others in need of around-the-clock care.

Advocates have said that losing the stipend could force infirm veterans and their families into financial distress, since many spouses and parents cannot work full-time and care for their loved ones.

Read the full story at [MilitaryTimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com)

# LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2022

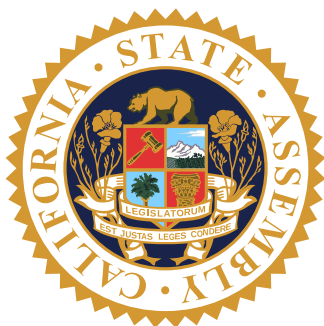
By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

Below is a comprehensive list of veterans bills expected to see debate in the California Assembly and Senate during the 2022 legislative session.

The California Legionnaire news will continue to cover these bills as new actions are taken.

The deadline for new bills to be introduced to the California Legislature was March 18.

As of June 3, this article has been updated with the most recent legislative action on each bill.



## CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLY BILLS

### AB 411 — Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Bond Act of 2022

This bill would provide additional funding for the California agencies, including CalVet, to house veterans and their families as outlined in the Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Bond Act of 2014.

Status: AB 411 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to several Senate committees.

### AB 1595 — Veterans Cemetery: County of Orange & SB 42 — Veterans Cemetery: County of Orange

Existing Southern California veterans cemetery legislation would be updated to allow a study for a newly proposed location for the

state-funded cemetery in Anaheim Hills.

Status: AB 1595 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to several Senate committees under the “urgency” designation.

### AB 1623 — Personal Income Taxes: Exclusion: Uniformed Services Retirement Pay: Survivor Benefit Plan Payments

If passed, AB 1623 would amend the California Personal Income Tax Law to exclude military retirement pay starting no earlier than Jan. 2023 but before Jan. 2033.

Status: AB 1623 has not been passed in the Assembly.

### AB 1629 — Income Taxation: Exclusion: Military Survivor Benefits

This bill would change the California Personal Income Tax Law to exclude up to \$20,000 in U.S. Survivor Benefit Plan benefits per year as early as Jan. 2021 but before Jan. 2027.

Status: AB 1629 has not been passed in the Assembly.

### AB 1633 — Public Postsecondary Education: Veterans’ Educational Benefits: Information Sharing

California State Universities would be required, with consent from student veterans and servicemembers, to send relevant personal information to CalVet for the purpose of educating veterans on additional student aid benefits.

Status: AB 1633 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to several Senate committees.

### AB 1669 — California Internet Consumer Protection and Net Neutrality Act of 2018: United States Department of Veterans Affairs:

#### Telehealth Applications

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, or VA, would be made exempt from California’s Net Neutrality laws, including the handling of personal data, for the sole purpose of ensuring veterans receive uninhibited telehealth services.

Status: AB 1669 has not been passed in the Assembly.

### AB 1692 — Veterans: Mental Health

CalVet would be required to conduct a study on women veterans within the context of VA benefits for processing service-related disability claims, obtaining affordable housing, and health information about service-related illnesses for veterans and their dependents and/or survivors.

Results of the study would be reported to the California Assembly no later than July 31, 2023.

Status: AB 1692 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.

### AB 1762 — State Capitol: Gold Star Families Monument

A monument honoring Gold Star Families of California would be built and maintained on the grounds of the State Capitol. Funding would come from private sources.

Status: AB 1762 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.

### AB 1828 — CalFresh: Income Eligibility: Basic Allowance For Housing

The California Department of Social Services would be required to send a request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to waive basic housing allowances for servicemembers when determining eligibility and benefits from the CalFresh program.

Status: AB 1828 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to the Senate Human Services Committee.

### AB 2032 — Emergency Alert System: Green Alert

This proposed bill would establish a Green Alert system for the California Highway Patrol. On the order of investigating law enforcement

agencies, a Green Alert would be issued in relevant locations for a veteran thought to be at risk for suicide.

Status: AB 2032 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.

### AB 2105 — Contractors: Initial License Fee Reduction: Veterans

Honorably discharged veterans in California would be eligible for a 50 percent reduction for a state-issued contractor license fee.

Status: AB 2105 has been passed in the Assembly, amended, and re-referred to the Senate Business, Professions, and Economic Development Committee.

### AB 2119 — Veterans: Medical Foster Home Pilot Program

The Medical Foster Home Pilot Program would allow the VA to designate medical foster homes that are not subjected to federal requirements for the purpose of taking care of elderly veterans.

Caregivers would be required to register with the state and would be placed under the jurisdiction of the California





State Auditor.

The pilot program would be created no sooner than Jan. 2025 and run through Jan. 2027.

Status: AB 2119 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to several Senate committees.

**AB 2389 — Veterans (definition amendment)**

California’s definition of “veterans” would officially be changed to recognize servicemembers who are honorably discharged from the U.S. Space Force.

Status: AB 2389 has not been passed in the Assembly.

**AB 2509 — Vehicles: Registration Fees: Exemptions**

Purple Heart recipients or surviving spouses of Purple Heart recipients would be exempt from special license plate fees.

Status: AB 2509 has been passed in the Assembly and referred to the Senate Rules Committee.

**AB 2692 — Public Postsecondary Education: Priority Registration for Members and Former Members of the Armed Forces of the United States**

U.S. Space Force veterans would officially be included among other veterans who are granted priority registration from California Community Colleges, a California State University, or a University of California.

Status: AB 2692 has not been passed in the Assembly.

**AB 2837 — Vehicles: Disabled Veterans**

The disability rating required for obtaining disabled veterans license plates would drop from 100 to 70.

Status: AB 2837 has not been passed in the Assembly.



**CALIFORNIA SENATE BILLS**

**SB 837 — Driver’s Licenses: Veteran Designation**

Veterans would no longer be required to pay a fee when requesting the word “veteran” be printed on their driver’s license or state-issued ID.

Status: SB 837 has been passed in the Senate and referred to the Assembly Transportation Committee.

**SB 949 — Veterans: California Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery**

The veterans cemetery planned for Fort Ord would no longer be required to report the status of the Endowment Fund and “obsolete provisions” would be removed.

Note: Fort Ord is also the site of growing public concern over environmental contamination and prior toxic exposure for veterans

and their families.

Status: SB 949 has been passed in the Senate and referred to the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

**SB 984 — Military Service: Leave Of Absence: Pay and Benefits**

Civilian employers of Reservists or National Guardsman who are actively deployed would be required to continue paying servicemembers for the first 30 days of an active deployment.

Status: SB 984 has been passed in the Senate and referred to several Assembly committees.

**SB 1073 — Property Tax: Exemptions: Disabled Veterans**

Disabled, partially disabled veterans, or their spouses would receive a partial tax exemption on their principal place of residence.

Status: SB 984 has been passed in the Senate and referred to the Assembly Judiciary Committee.

**SB 1195 — Veterans Homes**

CalVet is currently required to evaluate veterans homes every five years to accommodate the needs of

the local population. This bill would require CalVet to include the potential for the VA to establish satellite medical clinics within a 30-minute drive of the veterans home in this evaluation.

Status: SB 1195 has been passed in the Senate and referred to the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

**SB 1311 — Veterans: Protections**

Individuals or businesses that engage in any kind of deceptive or unfair competition, advertising, or any other kind of business act against veterans to pay a fine of \$2,500 per violation.

Status: SB 1311 has been passed in the Senate and referred to the Assembly.

**SB 1357 — Property Taxation: Exemption: Disabled Veteran Homeowners**

If passed, the bill would mandate the Assembly and Senate’s intent to write legislation exempting disabled veteran homeowners from property taxes.

Status: SB 1357 has been passed in the Senate and referred to several Assembly committees.

**SB 1478 — Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises**

Disabled veteran business enterprises, or DVBEs, would be afforded an alternative bidding method for contracts issued under the Small Business Procurement and Contract Act. Status: SB 1478 has been passed in the Senate and referred to several Assembly committees.





A US soldier stands on top of a destroyed tank during the Gulf War. (Photo: Renee L. Sitler/Army)

## 10 things you probably didn't know about the army

According to the U.S. Army Center of Military History's website – at [history.army.mil](http://history.army.mil) – it was on June 14, 1775 that “the Continental Congress authorized enlistment of expert riflemen to serve the United Colonies for one year.”

The site also includes information about the specific birthdays of the Army's basic and special branches. Those are interesting factoids in themselves, but here are some other things you might not know about the institution.

1. Before World War II, 45th Infantry Division members wore a swastika patch on their left shoulder in honor of Native Americans. It was changed to a thunderbird in the 1930s.

2. The Army was tasked with mapping America, including the Lewis & Clark expedition. Army officers were some of the first American citizens

to see Pikes Peak and the Grand Canyon.

3. The Army was the last service branch to adopt an official song. On Veterans Day 1956, “The Army Goes Rolling Along” was so declared.

4. Twenty-four U.S. presidents served in the Army, including in state militias that supported it during the American Revolution and the Civil War.

5. And two of them are connected: in the famous painting “Washington Crossing the Delaware” by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, the man holding the flag alongside future president George Washington is future president James Monroe.

6. There are Army astronauts, who wear astronaut wings. One is retired Col. Douglas Wheelock, who logged 178 days in space after serving as the first active-duty soldier to command the International Space Station.

7. If the Army was a city, it would be the 10th-largest in the United States.

8. And it owns so much land that if it was a state, it would be larger than Hawaii and Massachusetts combined.

9. In 2011, each soldier required 22 gallons of fuel per day on average; a soldier during World War II only required 1 gallon of fuel per day on average.

10. The oldest active-duty infantry unit is the famous 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, also known as “The Old Guard.” Stood up in 1784, the 3rd is an official ceremonial unit and escort to the president of the United States, and is also in charge of the “Changing of the Guard Ceremony” at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The Old Guard received The American Legion's Distinguished Service Medal in 2016.

Article originally published on [Legion.org](http://Legion.org)

## Veteran small business start-ups need more federal and community support, advocates say

By **Military Times**

Would-be veteran entrepreneurs planning to leave the military and launch their own businesses need more access to capital and support services to succeed in their efforts, outside advocates told lawmakers last week.

“We have to elevate the conversation related to veteran business ownership in this country in a way where those interested become networked,” said Michael Haynie, executive director of the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families, during a House Small Business Committee hearing.

“We need something akin to a health care network, where we can manage the coordination and the navigation of veteran-owned businesses through [available] resources,” Haynie added. “It starts at the local community level, extends to the state level, and then available increased federal resources, primarily from the Small Business

Administration.”

The hearing comes as federal officials have reported an uptick in new business launches in the wake of massive layoffs and furloughs during the American coronavirus pandemic.

In April, SBA administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman said that business applications have risen more than 30% from pre-pandemic levels, with 5.4 million new ones filed in 2021 alone.

Past research has shown that veterans make up an outsized portion of that entrepreneur workforce. Veterans are 45% more likely to be self-employed than non-veterans, and roughly one-in-ten veterans own their own firm, according to SBA.

But Haynie and other advocates told lawmakers that those links between the military and small business ownership don't always lead to smooth transitions for veteran start-ups.

Read the entire story at [MilitaryTimes.com](http://MilitaryTimes.com)



A small business consultant speaks to sailors aboard the USS Green Bay during a Boots to Business seminar on Aug. 10, 2016. (MC3 Class Patrick Dionne/Navy)



**Veterans  
Crisis Line**  
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**



Representative Mark Takano (D-CA) speaks during a press event to highlight the PACT Act at the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, March 2, 2022. The legislation will address military toxic exposure. (Photo: Leigh Vogel/UPI)

# U.S. House Passes PACT Act...again

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

The Honoring Our PACT Act is getting closer to becoming law, but is seemingly mired in “procedural issues,” as it was sent back to the U.S. Senate after several changes were made in the House before passing it July 13.

The PACT Act is a package of bills that would create a presumptive bias for many ailments suffered by veterans that were caused by their service.

Millions of veterans are expected to benefit from the legislation and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has been slowly preparing for a massive backlog of new patients, one that could take years to address.

The bill is now in the Senate awaiting passage to President Joe Biden’s desk, where he is expected to sign it immediately.

The bill has widespread support among lawmakers, the VA, veterans services organizations including The American Legion,

advocates like Jon Stewart, and a strong majority of veterans and service members.

The PACT Act was first introduced by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.) last year.

The House passed the bill earlier this year before the Senate passed it in June. However, when the bill was sent back to the House for a final vote, technical problems were discovered in the language of the bill, creating a delay.

On June 16, the U.S. Senate passed the Honoring Our PACT Act with an 84-16 vote, sending it back to the House for a final vote.

The PACT Act, as it has come to be known, officially recognizes toxic exposure during military service as a cost of war, granting veterans extensive VA medical benefits on a presumptive basis even if ailments develop years or decades after the initial exposure.

The American Legion and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimate

that as many as 3.5 million veterans, including those who served in Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the War on Terrorism, will benefit from the legislation.

The Honoring Our PACT Act was first introduced by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.) almost a year ago.

After leaving the Senate proceedings, Takano said, “next week I will take this bill back to the House floor for final approval and once more we will make clear to America’s veterans how much we value their service and sacrifice. I am eager to vote on the final version of my PACT Act and swiftly send it to President Biden’s desk for his signature. And I am confident my colleagues will join me in a bipartisan fashion.”

The Honoring Our PACT Act still has strong bipartisan support in the House and is currently expected to pass a final vote. If so, the bill will then be sent to President Joe Biden’s desk, who has previously expressed his support.

## The American Legion hails Congress for ‘historic bipartisan achievement’ on PACT Act

By The American Legion

WASHINGTON (June 16, 2022) – The head of the nation’s largest veterans organization praised the Senate for its passage of legislation that will provide comprehensive benefits to veterans suffering from conditions linked to toxic exposure during their time in the U.S. Armed Forces.

“Today, the U.S. Senate has saved lives and truly delivered for veterans,” American Legion National Commander Paul E.

Dillard said. “By passing the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act, the 117th Congress has put substance behind the phrase, ‘Thank you for your service.’ The American Legion is grateful for the service of millions of veterans who were exposed to burn pits, atomic radiation, Agent Orange and other environmental poisons. Thanks to the U.S. Congress, these men and women will be able to receive the care and benefits they have earned. The PACT Act is an historic bipartisan achievement. The American Legion thanks not only those who voted for this legislation but the thousands of Legionnaires and

advocates who worked to make this happen. We look forward to President Biden signing the Honoring Our PACT Act into law.”

The Honoring Our PACT Act, which had already passed in the House of Representatives, will provide health care for millions of veterans who were exposed to contaminants emanating from open-air burn pits. It establishes presumptions of service connection for 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers linked to burn pits and other hazards. It will also provide additional resources and staff to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The American Legion is dedicated to the motto of “Veterans Strengthening America.” Chartered by Congress in 1919, The American Legion is committed to mentoring youth and sponsoring wholesome community programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security and continued devotion to servicemembers and veterans. Legionnaires in more than 12,000 posts across the nation and regions overseas serve their communities with a devotion to mutual helpfulness.



National Commander Paul E. Dillard

# About the U.S. and Allied victory at the Battle of Okinawa during World War II

By Christian Southards

The Battle of Okinawa was the bloodiest conflict U.S. Forces fought in during World War II.

The last stop before Japan, the United States viewed Okinawa as the perfect staging ground for an invasion that would ultimately never occur.

## PRELUDE TO THE BATTLE OF OKINAWA DEC. 7, 1941

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor forced the United States into a war it was not ready to fight.

The first six months saw a string of American defeats at the hands of an Imperial Japanese military battle-hardened by a decade of fighting in the Pacific.

However, the Attack on Pearl Harbor ultimately failed to be the decisive blow Japanese leaders hoped it would be.

## JUNE 4, 1942: THE U.S. TURNS THE TIDE AT THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

After defeats at Pearl Harbor, Wake Island, Guam, and The Philippines, the United States was reeling and public morale was low. Combat-wise, the United States' lone bright spot was a stalemate fought at the Battle of the Coral Sea.

For the Imperial Japanese Navy, the Battle of Midway was meant to be the death blow Pearl Harbor was supposed to be. Instead, U.S. Forces inflicted a stunning defeat that would completely reverse the momentum of the war and Japan's navy would never recover.

## 1942-1945: ISLAND HOPPING DRIVES BACK IMPERIAL JAPANESE FORCES

After the defeat of the Japanese Navy, the U.S.



Sailors honor naval losses suffered on April 14, 1945 during the Battle of Okinawa. (Photo: Navy)

Military adopted an island hopping strategy of reclaiming lost territory in the Pacific. From the Battle of Guadalcanal to the Battle of Iwo Jima, U.S. and Allied forces continued to push back on Imperial Japan.

By early 1945, Japan was preparing for a seemingly inevitable invasion of its home islands.

## THE FINAL BATTLE: APRIL 1, 1945-JUNE 22, 1945

### THE GROUND BATTLE

Allied commanders expected the amphibious landings on the northern beaches of Okinawa to be a bloodbath. However, they didn't encounter any resistance for the first few days of the battle. Marines and soldiers of the U.S. 10th Army were able to quickly secure two key airfields before finally facing enemy resistance on the Motobu Peninsula, about 20 miles from the initial landing points.

Though the skirmish was costly, it allowed the United States to control much of the northern part of the island while finally confronting the bulk of Japanese forces

concentrated within the Japanese defensive perimeter, the Shuri line.

On April 7, Imperial Japan's last remaining major naval asset, the battleship Yamato, was sent to beach itself on Okinawan shores to act as ground-based artillery. The plan never got off the ground, though: U.S. submarine forces almost immediately spotted the Yamato and a nearby carrier fleet was able to destroy the ship and its sizable escort before it ever reached Okinawa.

Had the plan worked, U.S. Forces attempting to break through the Shuri line may have been completely destroyed.

Instead, American forces put an extreme amount of pressure on the defensive line through some of the Pacific War's worst conditions.

Torrential downpours and constant artillery barrages prevented the removal of bodies while Japanese holdouts alternated between nighttime assaults and the relative safety of inground bunkers.

After some of the fiercest fighting of the war, the Shuri line was broken

in late May, forcing the remainder of the Imperial Japanese Army to retreat to the southern tip of Okinawa.

Over a period of two weeks, most of the remaining Japanese force either fought to the death or committed suicide.

### THE NAVAL BATTLE

The naval battle surrounding Okinawa began as quietly as the ground campaign, but on April 4, the first wave of Kamikaze attacks struck the U.S. Fifth fleet.

Despite an overwhelming numerical advantage, the U.S. Navy was poorly equipped to defend itself from the hundreds of suicide bombers launched from nearby Japanese-controlled islands.

Despite the constant attacks, the U.S. Navy never lost naval supremacy. However, by the end of the battle, the U.S. Navy suffered nearly 10,000 casualties and lost close to 800 aircraft and 40 support ships.

### LEGACY OF THE BATTLE OF OKINAWA

The Battle of Okinawa lasted 81 days and resulted in massive

casualties on all sides.

The United States suffered nearly 50,000 total casualties while an estimated 110,000 Japanese soldiers were killed.

The local Okinawan population suffered immensely, with some estimates suggesting as much as half of the population of 300,000 were killed due to starvation, indiscriminate fire, and by suicide or as human shields at the coercion of Japanese soldiers.

Ultimately, the importance of the battle is debated by historians.

The capture of Okinawa was meant to serve as a staging area for an invasion of the Japanese mainland, but the battle served as a cautionary note for U.S. commanders.

To avoid a potentially unprecedented loss of life, President Harry Truman ordered the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and later, Nagasaki.

Losing on all fronts, Imperial Japan surrendered unconditionally.

To read about more U.S. Military and veterans holidays, visit <https://calegion.org/veterans-holidays>

**DEPORTED VETERANS, from page 1**

citizenship through military service is convoluted, leaving many servicemembers assuming they had earned their citizenship automatically through their service. The branches of the Armed Services needed to work with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to begin the process of establishing citizenship for the servicemember. Oftentimes, the servicemember was unaware of the need to begin the process through USCIS, and the individual service branches failed to inform the servicemember while on active duty. Servicemembers were often

left to pursue citizenship on their own with little assistance or guidance.

This resulted in many veterans being deported as a result of minor, non-violent or substance-related crimes, which could result in being barred from naturalization for life, despite meeting all other criteria for citizenship.

“The American Legion believes all non-citizen immigrant veterans should be afforded every opportunity to complete the process toward citizenship before exiting the military,” The American Legion wrote in the statement for the record. “Post-service opportunities should also be bolstered for veterans and their family members.

“The American Legion believes in honoring the promise this nation makes to immigrants who seek naturalization through military service: if you enlist and serve honorably, this nation will make you a citizen.”

Based on resolutions No. 15: Expedited Citizenship Through Military Service; No. 10: Expedited Citizenship Applications For Deported Veterans; No. 19: Oppose Deportation of Non-Citizen Immigrant Veterans; and No. 20: Oppose Deportation Of Immediate Family Members Of Non-Citizen Immigrant Veterans, The American Legion recommended some changes to the subcommittee.

These include implementing measures within the Department of Defense to ensure the process of naturalization through honorable military service is completed prior to discharge, reopening 19 field offices abroad to support the naturalization process for deployed servicemembers, providing expedited citizenship applications and the resources to complete the applications to deported veterans if their discharge is honorable and they do not have a felony conviction and establishing a pathway to lawful permanent residence for immediate family members of noncitizen servicemembers and veterans and strengthen the

pathway to citizenship.

“Immigrants have served in the United States Military since the founding of our nation. In recognition of their honorable service, we have promised the opportunity to become American citizens. Although the pathway to citizenship has been accomplished for many non-citizen immigrant servicemembers and veterans, there are still many barriers. The American Legion’s position is clear. These brave men and women served our nation honorably. It is only right that we recognize their service with the pathways to citizenship they deserve,” The American Legion concluded.



The Government Accountability Office notes that the VA and DOD can do more to improve “health outcomes” of LGBT veterans and servicemembers. (Photo: California National Guard)

## VA working to improve ‘health outcomes’ of LGBTQ veterans

By **Christian Southards**

An updated U.S. Government Accountability Office report says the U.S.

Department of Veterans has taken positive steps to improve “health outcomes” for LGBT veterans since the initial report was published in fall 2019.

The original GAO report notes that LGBT veterans are more likely to suffer from depression and thoughts of suicide, yet because the VA failed to

record veterans’ sexual orientations during health care visits, the amount of data the VA could use to inform new policies and treatment options was severely limited.

As such, the GAO made four recommendations for improving data collection and analysis efforts. In late 2021, the VA began addressing all four concerns.

First, the Veterans Health Administration established a subcommittee last September to build a portal that, as of Jan. 2022, allows veterans to submit their gender identity. In an accompanying press release, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said, “all veterans, all people, have a basic right

to be identified as they define themselves. This is essential for their general well-being and overall health. Knowing the gender identity of transgender and gender diverse veterans helps us better serve them.”

The VA also updated all enrollment and clinic visitation forms with response options for veterans, further expanding opportunities for data collection.

Finally, the VA expects the first set of data analyses for transgender veterans to be completed by this September with a second set on sexual orientation expected by December.

Generally, actionable data can take several years to implement new policies.

## Despite promises of inclusivity, VA motto remains focused on men

By **Military Times**

In his first message to Veterans Affairs staff shortly after confirmation in early 2020, Secretary Denis McDonough promised to make the department more “inclusive” as an institution, and to ensure that “VA welcomes all veterans, including women, veterans of color and LGBTQ

veterans.”

But in the 16 months since, most VA facilities still welcome veterans with a motto emblazoned on the wall that is focused on men only, a message that is less-than-inviting for many veterans, critics say.

“There have already been so many good opportunities to change the motto and make it more inclusive to veterans who are

women, transgender, gay,” said Kaitlynn Hetrick, government affairs associate at Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “But it feels like they’re just pushing the issue aside.”

The fight centers on the the long-used department motto, which quotes President Abraham Lincoln’s promise in his second inaugural address: “To care for him who shall

have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.”

Advocates say the motto is too specific for today’s diverse veterans community and have lobbied for a change to gender-neutral language: “To care for those who shall have borne the battle, and for their families, caregivers and survivors.”

The idea has gained

support from Democratic lawmakers and a few Republican members of Congress, but that idea was largely sidelined during President Donald Trump administration when then-VA Secretary Robert Wilkie publicly opposed any change, claiming it was a revision of American history.

Read the entire story at [MilitaryTimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com)



The Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act establishes a pilot program to partner veterans suffering from PTSD with service dogs. (Photo: Martin Castro)

## Palo Alto among VA facilities chosen to pilot PTSD treatment program established by Paws Act

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that the VA Medical Center in Palo Alto, California will be one of five locations used to pilot a program that will connect veterans suffering from PTSD with canine training for service dogs as a treatment method.

The five-year program was established by the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy, or PAWS Act, and will evaluate the effectiveness

of pairing veterans with service dogs as well as creating relevant guidelines should the pilot prove successful.

The bill was signed into law last August.

Clinicians at the Palo Alto center and other VA sites will determine individual eligibility requirements; however, three broad requirements have been outlined by the VA: participants must be enrolled in the VA health care system, been diagnosed with PTSD, and recommended by either a VA mental health provider or clinical team.

Commenting on the

program, VA Secretary Denis McDonough notes, “there are many effective treatments for PTSD and we’re looking at service dog training as an adjunct to those options to ensure Veterans have access to resources that may improve their well-being and help them thrive.”

A launch date for the program has not been announced but is expected sometime this year.

The other four locations that will pilot the program include:

- Anchorage, Alaska
- Asheville, N.C.
- San Antonio, Texas
- West Palm Beach, Fla.

## Plan would give VA more power to protect GI Bill benefits in future national emergencies

By Military Times

When the Covid-19 pandemic in America forced many colleges to shift classes online, Congress granted emergency authorities to Veterans Affairs officials to ensure the changes wouldn’t disrupt veterans’ education benefits.

Now, with most campuses returned to normal operations and those authorities expired, a group of lawmakers wants to grant similar powers to VA leadership in cases of similar future emergencies.

In early June, Reps. Mike Levin, D-Calif., and Nancy Mace, R-S.C., introduced the Student Veteran Emergency Relief Act to take immediate action to protect students’ benefits in cases where the White House declares a national emergency, without having to wait for Congress to act.

“The pandemic exposed the gaps in GI Bill benefits that exist when emergencies cause veterans’ educational programs to be cut short, canceled, or moved online,” Levin said in a statement.

“While we were able to pass several bipartisan bills to protect veterans’ GI Bill benefits during the pandemic, it’s critical that we reauthorize those protections and extend them to any other national emergency.”

The main issue is how

VA education benefits are paid out to students who attend college classes remotely, rather than in-person.

Students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill — the most popular veterans education benefit — receive money for tuition as well as a monthly housing stipend. Individuals enrolled in traditional in-person classes receive the full financial benefit, while students in online-only classes are granted just half of that housing stipend.

The difference between half of a housing stipend and the full payout can range from a few hundred dollars to nearly \$2,000, since the payouts depend on the location of the student and school.

When the coronavirus pandemic forced colleges to shift courses from physical classrooms to internet meeting rooms in spring 2020, nearly all students were reclassified as online-only, triggering a reduction in their housing benefits.

Congress passed legislation giving the VA secretary emergency powers to ignore the change, and keep awarding full benefits to those students. VA officials said nearly 60,000 students would have faced significant financial impact without the moves.

Read the entire story at [MilitaryTimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com)

## VA takes bold steps to improve support for caregivers

By Department of Veterans Affairs

As part of the VA MISSION Act of 2018, VA’s Caregiver Support Program (CSP) has undergone bold steps and improvements to enhance the program and increase access to Veterans and their caregivers.

“President Biden has charged us with fighting like hell for Veterans, and that includes their caregivers,” said VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy. “We’ve come a long way in supporting caregivers, and we have more work to do.”

Expanding support for caregivers  
In 2020, the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) expanded to Veterans who served before May 5, 1975. This added over 22,000 caregivers of Veterans to PCAFC, more than doubling the program’s size. PCAFC is set to expand to Veterans of all eras beginning October 1, 2022.

Additionally, the resources available in VA’s Program of General Caregivers Support Services (PGCSS) are also undergoing enhancement and expansion.



## Coast Guard rescue swimmer saved 9 people in disabled boat from freezing to death



Aviation Survival Technician 2 Joshua Carlson saved the lives of nine people in a migrant vessel off the coast of Southern California in January 2021. He has been selected as the *Military Times*' 2022 Coast Guardsman of the Year. (Weston Scott/*Military Times*)

By **Military Times**

Aviation Survival Technician 2 Joshua Carlson wanted to do something “exceptional” with his life. That’s how he knew the Coast Guard was for him.

“I saw the Coast Guard website and saw the guy jump out of the helicopter — I was sold immediately. That was exactly what I wanted to do,” Carlson, who is stationed at U.S. Coast Guard Air Station San Diego, told *Military Times*.

“Looking back I don’t really know what was going through my head because I didn’t know how to swim,” Carlson said.

That’s no longer an issue.

Carlson, 30, who saved the lives of nine people suffering from hypothermia in a migrant vessel off the coast of Southern California, has been selected as *Military Times*' 2022 Coast Guardsman of the Year.

In January 2021, Carlson was on duty when an alarm went off regarding a disabled panga boat more than 100 miles offshore. Carlson’s team was initially diverted to another emergency, but

later arrived on scene to provide overwatch for the disabled vessel in the event something went wrong while awaiting approval from the chain of command to accept the mission.

“These people are ... hypothermic and they’re malnourished,” Carlson said. “And what really got the ball rolling was the fact that they ... might be drifting into San Nicolas Island.”

Once they got the green light, their helicopter landed on the Navy dock landing ship Pearl Harbor to refuel, then took off to hover near the migrant vessel.

Carlson dropped into the water and swam to the vessel where he found 21 people “under the influence of panic.” All but one were outfitted with lifejackets. The plan was for Carlson to swim with each of them individually so they could be hoisted in a basket up into the helicopter.

“Between each person, I would swim back to the boat, and it was like over 300 yards in heavy surf,” Carlson said. “I came back to the boat after three of them, I was like, ‘Oh no, like, this is not swimming in a pool. This is extremely exhausting.’”

Because of a similar incident in which Carlson was involved in Corpus Christi, he knew he couldn’t continue swimming back to the vessel each time, so he insisted the helicopter get closer to the ship for the subsequent rescues.

“They were smart,” he said. “They saw me swimming up and one would just jump off.”

Read the full story at [Militarytimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com)



Airman Paul Garcia owned a 2012 McLaren MP4-12C for four years. (Photo courtesy of Paul Garcia)

## How this E-8 bought a McLaren without financing at 27 percent

By **Sarah Sicard**  
*Military Times*

Perhaps one of the most prolific stereotypes about those that enlist in the U.S. military is that, when given their first paycheck by Uncle Sam, they run to nearest sleazy auto dealer, which invariably sells them a sports car akin to snake oil at an annual percentage rate so high, it’ll leave them chowing down on a Top Ramen diet for years.

And while it is true in many cases, it doesn’t have to be.

Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Paul Garcia, who joined in 2004 and now serves with the 535th Airlift Squadron, managed to finance a number of dream cars — including a McLaren and a Nissan Skyline — without a ridiculous interest rate.

His secret? Waiting.

“You always see those memes, those 20 percent Camaro and Mustang,” he told *Military Times*. “Everything takes time. And it’s about patience, and understanding and knowing you can achieve what you want in due time.”

Garcia started small after enlisting at 18. His first car was a Honda Prelude. Choosing to buy it used and for less helped him establish a relationship with the bank that allowed him to eventually scale his auto purchases.

“I kind of stuck with the same credit union, which ended up continuing to finance,” Garcia said. “As my credit grew better interest rates came, and higher financing amounts.”

Garcia purchased the McLaren in 2016, valued at \$160,000. He put down \$30,000, while the bank financed the other \$130,000. But it wasn’t long before he set his sights on another car: a 1999 R34 Nissan Skyline GT-R V-Spec, which is not available in the United States.

“Being a car aficionado, I love so many vehicles,” he said. “This one was definitely a dream being that they only made 282 of them worldwide. And it was mainly just in Japan that you know, it’s where the car came from, and it’s such a rarity.”

In addition to carefully scaling his car selections up from a \$10,000 used

Honda over the last 18 years, Garcia made a few other shrewd financial decisions. He bought a multi-bedroom house and rented out rooms to fellow airmen, and he invested in a franchise of Capriotti’s sub shop.

“I bought a house by Edwards, and ended up selling, and I bought another home down at Travis,” he noted. “I ended up renting that one out and bought another one. When the time was right, I ended up selling both of those houses and invested in opening up a Capriotti sandwich franchise.”

And although Garcia is happy with his Nissan Skyline, he foresees rejoining the McLaren family again someday.

“I do want to continue to pursue what’s next,” he said. “I think I love the McLaren brand. I love what it stands for, the ideology of its race roots. So I’d love to be able to get back into a McLaren.”

*Observation Post is the Military Times one-stop shop for all things off-duty. Stories may reflect author observations.*



## CALIFORNIA LEGION GAMES

# SWEAT FOR OUR VETS.

WALK with us. WORK OUT with us. Simply WOW us.

**Nearly 2 million heroes who have served our country call California home. And sometimes, even those heroes need a helping hand.**

The American Legion Department of California has launched California Legion Games to bring awareness to the mental and physical challenges many of our Veterans, Active Duty and dependent families face. Together, we can commit to changing the lives of each of those heroes who needs a helping hand, demonstrating the love and appreciation they deserve from our proud California community.

## 4 Great Ways to Participate

1

### Sweat with us.

Join us on October 15 at San Onofre Beach State Park for our first **California Legion Games**.

Whether you walk, run or challenge yourself in our competitive divisions, together we can improve the health and well-being of our Veterans, Active Duty, and their families.

2

### Fundraise.

Activate your network of friends and family to support the **California Legion Games** and make an **even bigger impact**.

Build your own fundraiser, reach awards levels when others support you, and raise valuable resources to combat health challenges for our heroes.

3

### Go Virtual.

Can't make it to **California Legion Games** this year? You can still make an impact by participating virtually.

Follow our program or make up your own workout plan the day of the event.

Encourage others to join your workout on behalf of our brave heroes.

4

### Donate.

You can still make an impact by participating virtually.

Follow our program or make up your own workout plan the day of the event. Encourage others to join your workout on behalf of our brave heroes.

**Join US! October 15, 2022** on San Onofre Beach and help put an end to the physical and mental hardships that impact our California heroes and limit their quality of life.



**Scan the QR code to register or go to: [californialegiongames.com](https://californialegiongames.com)**

The American Legion, Department of California is proud to introduce the California Legion Games in its continuing service to improve the lives of Veterans, Active Duty, and military families in our communities. • Learn more about the programs we sponsor and how we continue to lead the fight to promote the principles that have defined The American Legion since its founding. • Together, we can accomplish great things for our heroes in uniform and our next generation of young Californians.