

VA EXTENDS SUSPENSION OF BENEFIT DEBT PAYMENTS THROUGH 2022

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

Veterans with benefit debts will not have to

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make payments until Jan. 1, 2023, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The current suspension of veterans benefit debts payments was set to expire on Sept. 30.

It was established shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The suspension currently includes payments for disability compensation, education benefits, and non-service-connected pension debts.

"Helping veterans manage, pay off, and — in some cases — eliminate their debt is one of our top priorities," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said. "Extending this hardship suspension is a key part of that critical effort, and it will help ease the burden for vets who are living with debt."



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough speaks during an event to honor children in military and veteran caregiving families in the East Room of the White House, Nov. 10, 2021. (DoD photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jack Sanders)

The VA began sending new debt notification letters with details and additional options specific to veterans' cases in September.

It remains unclear how many veterans are affected by the suspension.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and

the resulting economic downturn, veterans have been among the hardest hit groups.

Using San Diego, Calif. as a case study, panelists at a U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing found that rising costs of living in San Diego had become "extremely prohibitive" for addressing

basic issues such as food insecurity.

Panelists reported that while San Diego veterans live in one of the most expensive counties in California, the findings generally apply to veterans households throughout California and the United States, at large.

WIN A TRIP TO LAS VEGAS: MEMBERSHIP DRAWING



In September, we announced the winner of the Cancun, Mexico, trip and now you have another chance at winning a vacation, this time to Las Vegas!

Join or Renew your membership in the American Legion Family — American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion, American Legion Riders — by Dec. 14 for your chance to win.

The prize is a 7-day stay in a 2-bedroom

suite off the Las Vegas strip. Again, this is for the entire Legion Family to be entered into the drawing.

You can be relaxing by the oasis pool at the Royal Tahitian Resort just by being a member of the American Legion Family.

Paid-up-for-Life members and memberships that are up to date are automatically entered into the drawing, which will take place Dec. 22.

Contact your post adjutant for more information.

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**EFFECTIVE DATE FOR PACT
ACT PRESUMPTIVES**

By Marty Callaghan
American Legion Director
of Benefits & Claims Services

VA has announced that all the presumptive conditions included in the PACT Act are eligible for benefits, effective 10 August 2022 (the day the bill was signed into law): <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/press-release.cfm?id=5815>

There are no waiting periods for future effective

dates. So please urge veterans to file their claims asap – especially those whose claims were previously denied.

While VA may reach out to veterans whose previous claims were denied, there is no indication VA will review and re-adjudicate those denials (as it did when three more presumptive conditions for Agent Orange/herbicide exposure were recognized in 2010).

Please encourage

veterans to work with VA-accredited representatives to help ensure their claims are filed properly – and to help them avoid predatory claims companies that charge exorbitant fees (based on future VA benefit payments) for their services.

This link provides a full breakdown of the PACT Act and related VA benefits: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>

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Department Commander, Jere Romano, left, poses for a photo with William "Bill" Danko, the 2022 Legionnaire of the year.

WILLIAM "BILL" DANKO, 2022 LEGIONNAIRE OF THE YEAR

By Fred Shacklett
Department Historian

An award banquet for The American Legion Department of California, Legionnaire of the

Year, took place at the Veteran's Memorial Building in Pleasanton, CA, this fall. Honored was William "Bill" Danko, of Pleasanton post 237.

His nomination was approved by

his local post, then passed to the district for approval, then forwarded to the Area Commander for his review and approval.

Bill's selection occurred at the department's annual convention on June 30, 2022, held in Visalia, CA.

His citation noted his exceptional service to the community and his unswerving commitment to the Pleasanton Navy Sea Cadets, a group that he helped establish, and numerous American Legion related community projects.

Department Commander, Jere Romano, presented the plaque of recognition.

The banquet had approximately 150 attendees of legion and community members, including Department Commander Jere Romano with his wife Martha, Department Historian Fred Shacklett and his wife, Pamela and Jr. Past Department Commander Autrey James.

Also in attendance were Pleasanton City Council members Jack Balch, Kathy Narum with her husband Jeff, and Julie Testa, as well as, the Mayor of Pleasanton, Kayla Brown.

The banquet was held at the historic Pleasanton Veterans

Memorial Building and catered by a local eatery, Pastas Trattoria.

This building is a Spanish Revival style structure designed by renowned architect, Henry Meyers, and was completed in 1932. Originally owned by the County of Alameda, it was transferred to the city of Pleasanton on January 7, 1997.

In need of repair, the building was fully renovated back to its original design, while preserving the historical and architectural integrity to meet code standards, in 2007.

Continuing to be used for various city recreational activities, social events, and community meal programs, the building houses two veterans' organizations, The American Legion Post 237 and VFW Post 6298 with its VFW Post 6298 Ladies Auxiliary.

American Legion Post 237 in Pleasanton CA is dedicated to serving and assisting both Servicemembers and Veterans in Pleasanton, Dublin, San Ramon, and surrounding areas.

Their website can be reached at <https://www.americanlegion-post237.org/> The current Post Commander is Greg Clune. The District 10 Commander is Carlton Buddy Loggins.

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VA: NEW POLICY GRANTS BENEFITS TO LGBTQ+ VETERANS' SURVIVING SPOUSES

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on Oct. 13 announced that surviving partners of LGBTQ+ veterans who were previously unable to marry because of same-sex marriage laws may now qualify for survivor benefits.

Tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ veterans were never able to legally marry their spouses before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled same-sex marriage bans were unconstitutional in 2015. Even after the federal

ban was lifted, many LGBTQ+ veterans passed away before their surviving spouses were able to meet the requirements for survivor benefits.

The VA's new policy will allow surviving partners to reapply for benefits regardless of their previous marital status provided they can provide proof of a "marriage-type relationship," such as a commitment ceremony, joint baking account, or joint purchase of a house." The VA notes that any awarded benefits will not be retroactive.



Speaking on the policy reversal, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said, "VA is closing a gap in benefits for surviving spouses of LGBTQ+ veterans, righting a wrong that is a legacy of the discriminatory federal ban on same-sex marriages. It is VA's mission to serve all

veterans."

The VA's policy change isn't the first recent win for LGBTQ+ veterans. In late September, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill establishing an office to help California LGBTQ+ veterans discharged under the now-defunct Don't Ask,

Don't Tell policy to obtain benefits.

Veterans or spouses can learn about survivor benefits here. Alternatively, The American Legion offers veterans free help obtaining VA benefits.



VA AUTHORIZES ADDITIONAL \$431 MILLION IN GRANTS TO REDUCE VETERANS HOMELESSNESS

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

On Aug. 1, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that

nearly 260 non-profit organizations, including 31 in California, will be

receiving \$431 million in grant funds to combat veterans homelessness.

The grants are offered through the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families, or SSVF, program and are scheduled to be released on Oct. 1, the first day of fiscal year 2023.

The program provides several avenues of assistance to low-income veterans and their families, including:

Providing direct assistance to veterans at "imminent risk" for homelessness.

Finding more economically sustainable housing.

Housing already homeless veterans and their families.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough issued a statement along with the VA's announcement, "Nobody should be homeless in the country they fought to defend — nobody. These grant funds will help our partner organizations across the country provide at-risk veterans with the resources they need to stay in their homes, where they belong,

or find a new home."

According to the VA, the SSVF helped 114,175 veterans, spouses, and dependents last year, but the program is just one tool the VA is using to eliminate veterans homelessness in the United States. The VA claims it has housed 19,000 veterans so far in 2022 and is still on track to house 38,000 by year's end.

Many live in California. In February, the VA reiterated its focus on combating veterans homelessness by focusing on Southern California, where roughly 30 percent of the United States' homeless veterans live.

Of the 258 private organizations receiving funding for 2023, 31 serve California veterans — the majority of which are based in either Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, or San Bernardino County, where most of the state's veteran population lives.

However, several non-profits represent other veteran hubs like Kern County, the Bay Area, and Sacramento.



LEGION-SPONSORED BBQ BRINGS REGIMENT GAMERS TOGETHER IN PERSON

By National HQ

When U.S. Marine Corps veteran Chris Earl started Regiment Gaming in 2020, his goal was to keep his military camaraderie and unite veterans in a gaming community. But as evidenced on Aug. 6 in Cincinnati, Earl's impact has gone well beyond that.

At Regiment's American Legion-sponsored BBQ at Veterans Memorial Park, around 50 or so members of Regiment's gaming community met up in person, some for the first time ever. And there was a common theme among the group: these were not just fellow gamers.

"It's family. It's home, for sure," said 21-year-old Adrianna "Whiskey" Bennett, Regiment's content director and a resident of Eaton, Ohio. "When I first got out of the Marine Corps (in 2021), I was so lost. Going from having the Marine Corps be my everything to a new town that I'd never been a part of, I didn't have any friends. Regiment found me, and now it's like I have a home and a family."

Bennett's description of what Regiment has meant to her matched that of Los Angeles resident Andrew "Oakley" Wiley, who served in the U.S. Army from 2008-2012, deploying to Iraq from 2009-2010. Wiley, a

professional photographer, said being a part of Regiment's community has proven therapeutic for him – and likely for others.

"I'm a veteran who didn't have to shoot anybody or get blown up," Wiley said. "We dealt with our fair share of crap. But I feel my deployment was super light. And even just the effects that a deployment like that have on someone's mindset is nutty. For what this does for me ... it hits me in my heart and in my head every day that I get to spend with these guys on Discord and at events."

"So, when it comes to someone who has seen a lot more (during deployment), I couldn't even put a value on what this does for mental health. You can talk to anybody here and they're knowledgeable about what it takes to survive."

Getting a chance to meet up in person and strengthen bonds already in place was a good reason for Wiley to make the trip to the Midwest. "I think a lot of people don't realize that even if it's through a computer and a camera, when you spend four or five hours of your life every single day with somebody ... there's an attachment," he said. "Getting to meet these people adds so much more to the

connection."

Stephen "Shanghai Six" Machuga, the founder of Stack Up and a former guest on The American Legion's Tango Alpha Lima podcast, traveled to Cincinnati for the event and said in-person events are needed in the gaming community.

"Two much of a good thing is bad," said Machuga, a member of American Legion Ronald Reagan-Palisades Post 283 in California and former Army intelligence officer. "A lot of these guys, a lot of these gals, they're hardcore gamers. And you can spend eight to 10 hours a day in front of your television not interacting with people. You need to bring that part of it into reality. You've got to get out there. You've got to interact with other people."

That also was the case for Regiment Gaming VA Officer Tanner "Blackjack" Yackley, who traveled from Grand Forks, N.D., to attend the event. Yackley served in the U.S. Air Force from 2010-2018, operating drones being used in combat zones in Afghanistan and other areas of combat zones.

"It's such a cool feeling," Yackley said. "We have a lot of streamers in (Regiment), and you get to see their faces on the stream. But meet them in person and tie those two together,

it's something special. Being able to do that and continue to build those relationships is going to make it even better going forward – 'hey, I met that guy'. You have a lot stronger connection."

Being a part of Regiment has been a continuation of his military bond, Yackley said, while also serving as a way to deal with the aftereffects of his service. "When you're a part of the military, whether you realize it or not, you are part of a community or part of a brotherhood," he said. "You go through things with people that most people will never even imagine. Being able to have a common ground with people ... and having events like this, where you can put a face (with) the game tag, it's such a fantastic thing."

"There are a lot of people that have been through so much. Regiment's extremely important to me. I found them, luckily, in a very dark time in my life. And yeah, I may have been physically sitting at a computer, but I'm talking to 15 different people. It's just amazing to be able to do that and build those relationships with a bunch of fantastic people."

Last winter, Yackley teamed up with American Legion Department of Minnesota service officer Jeremy Wolfsteller for a Department of Veterans Affairs assistance workshop streamed through Twitch.

"It was fantastic, being able to do that and being able to bounce things off (Wolfsteller) based on my experiences and what I've been through with the VA system," Yackley said. "Being able to have a person there like Jeremy that is extremely knowledgeable in that area was fantastic. To be able to have that piece and really utilize the collaboration between the two organizations. That information is out there, but it's never really effectively

communicated to the people who need it."

It's one of several collaborations that the Legion and Regiment have had, including an in-person tournament last May and setting up gaming stations at the Legion's upcoming national convention in Milwaukee. The Legion also backed a Regiment online tournament in December 2021. It's a relationship that Earl appreciates.

"The American Legion is obviously a household name among not just veterans, but communities because of how much they do for their communities," he said. "Just to have them watching our six, helping us out with things like this, it just brings huge validity to what we do. We look forward to hosting more events with them."

Under Earl's leadership, Regiment's community has grown to nearly 16,000 members, the largest military and veteran gaming community in the nation.

"What Chris has done in the past two years has been fascinating," Machuga said. "Him being able to bring all these people together. It's breathtaking."

And knowing what his community has done for others is even more satisfying for Earl. "It's a great feeling," he said. "The reason I did this full time – I dropped out of college and quit my job – is the first time someone messaged me and said Regiment saved their life. 'I was going to kill myself last night, but I didn't because Regiment was there for me, and the community members were there for me.'"

"It's surreal. I never thought as a 24-year-old kid I'd be able to do something this impactful and save people and change people's lives."

Story first published on Legion.org.

IMPORTANT VETERAN BILLS SIGNED, OTHERS STILL ON THE TABLE

By **Seth Reeb**
Reeb Government
Relations

The Governor signed a series of veterans and military related bills in to law recently.

Note that SB 837 by Senator Tom Umberg fulfills the longtime goal of veterans orgs to remove the fee to obtain the "VETERAN" designation on the drivers license and ID cards.

There are still some veterans bills on the Governor's desk. Please send this to your members.

AB 305 by Assemblymember Brian Maienschein (D-San Diego) – Veteran services: notice.

AB 325 by Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks) – Veterans: discharge upgrades.

AB 738 by Assemblymember Janet Nguyen (R-Huntington Beach) – Community mental health services: mental health boards.

AB 1633 by Assemblymember Kelly Seyarto (R-Murrieta) – Public postsecondary education: veterans' educational benefits: information sharing.

AB 1715 by Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi (D-Torrance) – Space

Force.

AB 1731 by Assemblymember Laurie Davies (R-Laguna Niguel) – Post-secondary education: Title 38 awards: postsecondary educational institutions: application for approval or renewal.

AB 1762 by Assemblymember Devon Mathis (R-Porterville) – State Capitol: Gold Star Families monument.

AB 2119 by Assemblymember Heath Flora (R-Ripon) – Veterans: Medical Foster Home Program.

AB 2509 by Assemblymember Vince Fong (R-Bakersfield) – Vehicles: vehicle license fee and registration fees: exemptions.

SB 837 by Senator Thomas Umberg (D-Santa Ana) – Driver's licenses: veteran designation. (See notes below)

The bill to delete the \$5 fee for the VET driver's license has been signed by the Governor. However, there is a requirement in another bill that deals with DMV that states that SB 837 will only go into effect if SB 1193 also gets signed in to law and SB 837 is signed first. SB 1193 is still on the Governor's desk.

SB 1193 would allow for Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) customers



to opt in to receiving select DMV notices electronically. It is expected that SB 1193 will be signed in to law since it seeks to streamline processes at DMV.

SB 949 by Senator John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) – Veterans: California Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery.

SB 984 by Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera) – Military service: leave of absence: pay and benefits.

SB 1041 by Senator Toni G. Atkins (D-San Diego) – Sales and use taxes: general exemptions.

SB 1182 by Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman (D-Stockton) – Family law.

SB 1195 by Senator Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield) – Veterans homes.

SB 1237 by Senator Josh Newman (D-Fullerton) – Licenses: military service.

SB 1193, Newman.

Department of Motor Vehicles: electronic notifications and transactions.

Existing law requires a

state department, including the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), or a division, officer, employee, or agent, to give various notices or communications to persons and requires that whenever that notice is required to be given, the notice is to be given by personal delivery, by certified mail, or by mail.

This bill would, among other things, for a provision of the Vehicle Code or of Title 13 of the California Code of Regulations that requires the DMV to mail, notify, deliver via certified or first class mail, provide information in written form, or otherwise references the use of paper, a writing, or the mail to convey information to a person, authorize that requirement to be satisfied by electronic notification, if certain conditions are established by the DMV, including that the person consented to the electronic receipt of the document or

information delivered. The bill would authorize the DMV to adopt regulations to implement these provisions and would make conforming changes.

Existing law requires a person to have a valid license or temporary permit issued by the DMV to act as a vehicle salesperson and requires the DMV to issue a license bearing a fullface photograph of the licensed vehicle salesperson, among other information, upon their application for the license.

This bill would authorize the DMV to require a photograph at the time of the license renewal.

This bill would incorporate additional changes to Section 12811 of the Vehicle Code proposed by SB 837 to be operative only if this bill and SB 837 are enacted and this bill is enacted last.

For full text of the bills, visit: <http://leginfo.ca.gov>

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SOME OFFICIALS QUESTION RESULTS OF VA, HUD HOMELESSNESS REPORT

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced the results of an interagency study on veterans homelessness, suggesting the crisis has lessened in recent years.

The VA-led investigation, which was carried out with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, compared a single-day count conducted in 2022 to a similar count made in 2020.

Likewise, the agencies found that the number of homeless veterans had decreased by 11 percent over that period, and by 55 percent since 2010.

The results of the count do not reflect the VA's successful efforts to house over 31,000 veterans since fall 2021, though.

As such, it is unclear how many veterans remain on

the streets, particularly in Los Angeles County, where the VA has been focusing its efforts on combating veterans homelessness.

Moreover, some Southern California leaders are disputing the official count. As reported by the Washington Examiner, Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva says, "the [homeless] count on everything has gone up. I don't see any evidence of anything going down. It's not like they are opening homeless shelters all over the place that are getting filled up. We have 80,000 homeless here, and 20 percent are veterans. We are the capital of homelessness in the U.S."

Villanueva's numbers conflict with a recent report published by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, or LASHA, which places the total number of veterans in Los Angeles at just under 70,000 people, including 3,942 veterans.

LASHA's report is among

many used by the VA-HUD homeless veterans count.

Commenting on the LASHA report, Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger says the agency "finding that 39% of people experiencing homelessness reported experiencing serious mental illness or substance abuse are both guesstimates, at best."

Citing a 2019 UCLA study, she notes, "I think both of these numbers are much bigger than what's being reported."

Barger's comments did not, however, dispute LASHA's homeless tally, only the nature of those who were reported to be homeless in the county.

As of yet, there is no system in place that keeps track of homeless veterans.

Veterans who are homeless must note their status when volunteers or agencies conduct counts, oftentimes without a foolproof method for verification.



SUSPECTED BATTERY FIRE DESTROYS 11 'TINY HOMES' AT VA WEST LA CAMPUS

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

A fire broke out just after midnight on Aug. 9 at the VA West Los Angeles campus, quickly spreading to engulf 11 of the 140 tiny homes built for homeless Los Angeles veterans, the LA Times first reported.

No one was injured in the fire but the LA Fire Department estimated \$160,000 in property damages, including \$50,000 in residential property.

At least 20 veterans were temporarily displaced by the fire; however, all 20 have been relocated to new homes on the campus.

A defective lithium battery is suspected of being the cause of the fire but an investigation is ongoing.

None of the tiny homes were equipped with a

sprinkler system or fire suppression system of any kind.

Nearly all 140 homes were constructed earlier this year with the help of veterans service organization AMVETS, donations from former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the VA, and Los Angeles County. Many of the campus' residents formerly lived on "Veterans Row", the now defunct homeless encampment that had existed outside the West Los Angeles campus for years.

It remains to be seen how the fire will impact the VA's plans to build 1,200 tiny homes on its West Los Angeles campus.

The plans have already faced staffing shortages and have failed to meet certain milestones by projected dates.



The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority reports that there are nearly 70,000 homeless people living in the city, including just over 3,900 veterans. (Photo: Russ Allison Loar)

WHAT IS NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY?

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

Every third Friday in September, National POW/MIA Recognition Day is celebrated to honor past and present prisoners of war and military members who never returned home from their service.

The Department of

Defense lists 83,204 American servicemembers as missing in action. Of that number:

73,547 served in WWII
7,883 served in the

Korean War
1,642 served in the Vietnam War, including 116 Californians

126 served in the Cold War

Six served in the War on

Terrorism

No current U.S. servicemembers are labeled as prisoners of war.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day was established by the 1998 Defense Authorization Act to recognize the sacrifice of servicemembers and veterans who were previously taken prisoner or declared missing

in action during their service. The date is one of six days throughout the calendar year that the POW/MIA Flag may be flown beneath the U.S. flag on government buildings.

While National POW/MIA Recognition Day honors all former prisoners of war and those who are still declared missing

in action, the day is most associated with the Vietnam War.





NEWSOM SIGNS BILL AIMED AT HELPING CALIFORNIA VETERANS DISCHARGED UNDER DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL OBTAIN FULL BENEFITS

By **Christian Southards**
Staff Writer

On Sept. 17, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill aimed at helping gay, lesbian, and transgender veterans discharged under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy to obtain full veterans benefits.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed by the Obama Administration in 2010, allowing LGBTQ veterans to serve in the military without obstruction. When the policy was repealed, the Department of Defense enacted new policies allowing veterans who were previously discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell to receive their entitled benefits.

However, according to Newsom, the process can be lengthy and costly, and often requires claimants to hire legal counsel.

To rectify the issue,

California bill AB-325, introduced by Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), establishes the Veteran's Military Discharge Upgrade Grant Program to educate veterans on the appeal process, including changing their discharge status, in addition to providing legal counsel to veterans "for free or at low cost."

Additionally, the provisions established by AB-325 apply to veterans who were discharged less than honorably due to "a mental health condition, traumatic brain injury, sexual assault or harassment."

The Veteran's Military Discharge Upgrade Grant Program is to be carried out by the California Department of Veterans Affairs, or CalVet. Program funding "is subject to appropriation by the

legislature."

It is unclear exactly how many California veterans can benefit from the program, but the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs says over 14,000

veterans were discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell nationally.

In 2021, the VA announced that it would be changing policies to grant veterans discharged

on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity full VA benefits.

Albeit, the policy change has no mechanism for legally changing a veteran's discharge status.

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Airmen stand at attention during a retreat ceremony March 30, 2018, on Kadena Air Base, Japan. (Staff Sgt. Micaiah Anthony/Air Force)

BILLS RECOGNIZE WOMEN VETERANS, FILIPINO SAILOR

By Nestor Aliga
Post 603 Public Affairs

The Manuel L. Quezon Post 603 had another good year in drafting resolutions for the California Legislature. Post 603 then collaborated with the other veterans service organizations in Vallejo – www.VallejoVetsBuilding.org and www.VallejoNavyLeague.org – in getting the bills approved or chaptered in 2022:

On August 18, Assembly Concurrent Resolution-205 was passed and it designates Women Veterans Recognition Day. This was introduced by Assemblywoman Lori Wilson, and it recognizes the 2,000,000 women Veterans in the United States and abroad, and the 163,000 women Veterans in California. It also acknowledges that women are the fastest growing group in the

veteran population, as they account for approximately 10 percent of the overall veteran population today, and it is projected that women will make up 18 percent of the veteran population by 2040.

On August 30, Senate Concurrent Resolution-111 was passed and it designates the interchange of Interstate 80 and Interstate 780 in Vallejo as the Congressional Gold Medal Memorial Interchange.

This was introduced by State Senator Bill Dodd, and it will honor all the Congressional Gold Medal recipients from General George Washington to the African American “Hidden Figures” NASA mathematicians and engineers, and various other warriors, including the Native American Code Talkers, Tuskegee Airmen, Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team, Montford Point Marines, Hispanic 65th Infantry Regiment, Filipino Veterans of World War II, and the Chinese American Veterans of World War II, and others.”

On August 31, Assembly Concurrent Resolution-187 was passed and it designates the rest area on Interstate 80 in Vallejo as the Medal of Honor Safety Roadside Rest Area. This was introduced by Assemblyman Tim Grayson, and it will honor the Medal of Honor recipients who were born, entered service, had their last home of record, settled, died, or buried in Vallejo, including James Cooney, William Halford,

Alexander Parker, Richard D. Dunphy, William S. Bond, Patrick J. Burke, George Carter, Anund C. Roark, Robert H. Young, John O. Dahlgren, Frank A. Young, Johan Johanson, Richard Willis, Henry Thompson, Reinhardt J. Keppler, William Johnson, and Thomas Lakin.

Earlier in 2022, Assembly Members Grayson and Wilson, and Senator Dodd also cosponsored Assembly Joint Resolution-31 which urged the Secretary of the Navy to name a Navy surface combatant ship after United States Navy Fireman Second Class Telesforo Trinidad.

On May 19, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced that a future Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer will be named after USS Telesforo Trinidad (DDG 139). These were a direct result of the resolutions passed in 2021 by our Department and National per <https://calegion.org/name-us-navy-ship-after-telesforo-trinidad/> and <https://archive.legion.org/handle/20.500.12203/15020>

The complete text of those bills can be found at <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/home.xhtml>

Bill calls for VA clinic to be named after woman veteran of color



The US Veterans Affairs has 1,255 facilities but only a handful are named in honor of women veterans and only two (as of early November) are named after women veterans of color.

To help fix this simple inequity that women veterans face, the veterans service organizations (VSOs) within the Vallejo Vets Building suggested in early 2022 to U.S. Representatives Mike Thompson (CA-05) and John Garamendi (CA-03) to name the Veterans Affairs clinic at Mare Island in Vallejo as the Delphine Metcalf-Foster VA Clinic.

The California State Commanders Veterans Council (CSCVC) -- the collective voice for California's 23

major VSOs -- then collaborated with the California departments of The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans to send letters to Thompson and Garamendi. This team effort resulted with the introduction of H.R.9237 on October 25, 2022.

“Delphine Metcalf-Foster has dedicated her life in service to our country, our community, and her fellow veterans,” said Thompson. “Proud to introduce this bill to honor Ms. Metcalf-Foster for all that she has done to better our community and uplift our veterans. She is the epitome of selflessness, and this is well-deserved recognition. I look forward

to working to pass this legislation in the House and for President Biden to sign it into law, making this a reality.”

“I am thrilled to join Mike Thompson in recognizing the accomplishments and lifelong service of Delphine Metcalf-Foster. She has dedicated her life to helping others — be it here in the Bay Area or across the globe. I look forward to this bill becoming law, finally recognizing Delphine for her decades of work on behalf of others,” said Garamendi.

Contact your reps: <https://www.voterveice.net/iframes/CSCVC/Campaigns/98358/>



PACT ACT: VA HEALTHCARE TO EXPAND ELIGIBILITY AND DEADLINE

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

On Sept. 28, the U.S. the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is expanding eligibility and delaying deadlines for Gulf War and Post-9/11 veterans to enroll in VA health care, as provisioned by the Honoring Our PACT Act that was signed into law on Aug. 10.

The move is expected to open VA health care to hundreds of thousands of veterans who served during these two periods. Additionally, the VA previously expanded eligibility for Vietnam veterans following the passage of the PACT Act.

Following months of debate, the Honoring Our PACT Act exponentially expanded VA benefits and eligibility for veterans who

were exposed to a wide range of toxins during their military service. Before the act's passage, most claims were denied by the VA because a majority of veteran claimants could not prove a connection between their ailment and their service. However, the PACT Act removed this barrier, paving the way for over two million veterans to receive care.

Although the effective date for PACT Act presumptions shares the act's signing date and the VA is actively encouraging all veterans to file a claim, the VA cannot legally process toxic-exposure claims until Jan. 1, 2023. The department and lawmakers expect significant backlogs.

VA health care's expanded eligibility period for Gulf War and Post-9/11 veterans is set to end on Oct. 1, 2023.

Anniversary of the founding of the Marine Corps

By Christian Southards
Staff Writer

The U.S. Marine Corps celebrates its birthday every November 10 in honor of the founding of the Continental Marines.

THE FOUNDING OF THE U.S. MARINE CORPS

In 1775, America's first amphibious infantry force was created to harass British naval forces during the War for Independence.

APRIL 19, 1775: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION BEGINS

After years of increasing tension between the 13 American Colonies and Great Britain, the American Revolution began on April 19, 1775, when British forces attempted to seize an American weapons cache in Concord.

Colonial militiamen confronted the British troops at Lexington and

later near the weapons cache itself before dispersing into the countryside to regroup. Not long after, the Siege of Boston began and the war had officially begun under the direction of the Continental Congress and General George Washington.

NOVEMBER 10, 1775: THE CONTINENTAL MARINE ACT IS SIGNED

Colonial leaders knew that defeating the British Navy was an unrealistic goal, but creating a small force that could harass the enemy fleet at key locations in the Atlantic could further the war effort at home.

Roughly a month after the founding of the Continental Navy (which would later become the U.S. Navy), Congress agreed that an amphibious infantry force would help the Navy accomplish this mission. As such,

Congress signed the Continental Marine Act of 1775 on Nov. 10, creating two battalions of marines.

LEGACY OF THE CONTINENTAL MARINES

Ultimately, the Continental Marines only held a minor role in the American Revolution and were disbanded shortly after the war. However, the groundwork laid during this time paved the way for the re-establishment of the Marine Corps as it is known today.

In 1798, and in response to growing tensions with the French Navy and other European powers, President John Adams signed a new law formally establishing the United States Marine Corps to again act as an auxiliary force under the direction of the Navy.

Over two hundred years later, the U.S. Marine Corps continues to fulfill this mission.



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CALIFORNIA AIR NATIONAL GUARD SAVES INJURED SAILBOAT RACER

By Crystal Housman
129th Rescue Wing

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. – The crew member of a racing yacht who developed a life-threatening infection at sea while returning a racing sailboat from Hawaii to California is safe on land after being stabilized and airlifted for additional medical care.

Airmen from the California Air National Guard's 129th Rescue Wing at Moffett Air National Guard Base hoisted the crew member from a tanker ship in August.

According to organizers of the Pacific Cup race, the 57-year-old Bay Area skipper of the Spindrift V was injured in heavy weather that also damaged the sails on the 37 ft. fiberglass keelboat and knocked out its communications systems.

The sailboat and its crew were more than 1,000 nautical miles from California on their way home from Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, after placing first in their class of the Cup when race organizers alerted the U.S. Coast Guard of the skipper's condition.

In the overnight hours of

Aug. 5, he was transferred onto a Panama-bound Liberian tanker ship which diverted to provide the skipper with more medical capabilities and improved communications.

Race organizers said medical consultants from George Washington University determined the necessity of a medical evacuation for the injured man.

The injury developed into a worsening bacterial skin condition with potential for spread and serious health effects if the man stayed at sea any longer without medical attention.

U.S. Coast Guard's 11th District, lead agency on shipboard emergency responses for California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah, officially requested pararescue response through the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center after the patient's condition worsened.

The morning of Aug. 5, the wing launched an HC-130J Combat King II multipurpose cargo aircraft from the 130th Rescue Squadron for 10.5 hour flight along with a Guardian Angel pararescue team

from the 131st Rescue Squadron.

Two pararescuemen jumped out of the aircraft into the ocean where they were met by the ship's recovery boat.

Rough seas made reaching the ship from its smaller boat a challenge, said U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Bryan, one of the pararescuemen.

"Traditionally we have at least four guys on this," he said. "Due to the waves and the ship's recovery boat breaking down, we were only able to jump two guys."

The boat struggled between jumps, leaving the Airmen to board the ship as a pair instead of a team of four, as originally planned.

"It was difficult to connect the ship's hoist to the tiny recovery boat they had due to the 10 ft. waves and weak engine," Bryan said. "The hoist was sketchy because we loaded the boat to the max."

Bryan and his teammate held tightly to the boat as it waffled on the hoist. The weight of the boat's crew and the pararescue jumpers tested the system's limits.

"As it was getting raised the nose of the boat started to point down towards the water 40 ft. below us," he said.

Once aboard the tanker, the Airmen worked in shifts to stabilize the man's injuries by providing around-the-clock medical care including antibiotics, pain management and wound treatment.

As emergency medical treatment continued on the ship at sea, members of the 129th Operations Group at Moffett coordinated and planned a hoist rescue and airlift for the patient.

To backfill an aircraft shortage due to deployment, the group called in an HC-130 and crew from the U.S. Air Force's 79th Rescue Squadron, an active duty unit stationed at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, Arizona.

Airmen from the 129th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron worked throughout the day to wash the salt water off the HC-130J and reconfigure it for the next phase of the mission. They also conducted checks and maintenance on three helicopters pegged to be the primary and backup

aircraft for the rescue.

Crew chiefs in a variety of military pay statuses arrived at 5 a.m. to further prepare the aircraft. The mission, which happened during the wing's drill weekend, had additional staffing from both full-time Guard Airmen and traditional Airmen who train on the base one weekend a month as part of a scheduled unit training assembly (UTA).

"The nice thing about it was the timing," said Senior Master Sgt. Daniel Starnier, production superintendent of the 129th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. "It just happened to be UTA weekend, so we had more people than we normally would have."

Two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters from the wing's 129th Rescue Squadron took off from Moffett Federal Airfield at 7:40 a.m. and met the ship 343 nautical miles west of San Francisco, significantly closer and safer than the yacht's original position of 800 nautical miles out to sea when the Coast Guard first learned of the injury.

The Arizona-based HC-130 provided the helicopters with air-to-air refueling and provided overwatch on the airlift once all three aircraft reached the ship more than two hours later.

One helicopter hovered over the ship and lowered a 40 ft. hoist to pick up the patient followed by both pararescue jumpers, still in their high visibility dry suits from two days prior.

Once the jumpers and patient were safely aboard the helicopter, the aircraft headed back toward the Bay Area.

The Moffett-based 130th Rescue Squadron launched one of its HC-130Js to take over contingency fuel and overwater escort duties.

Editor's notes: Last names of special tactics airmen are withheld for operational security. Story first published at Grizzlyshort-handstories.com.



BUDDY CHECK INCLUDED IN OMNIBUS MENTAL HEALTH BILL

Reducing the rate of veteran suicide is at the top of The American Legion mission. Now, The American Legion is turning its attention to encouraging new comprehensive legislation that aims to improve mental health care for veterans.

H.R. 6411 — the Support the Resiliency of Our Nation's Great (STRONG)

Veterans Act of 2022 — is a comprehensive mental health package that addresses mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It calls for VA to:

- Update training for its workforce and Veterans Crisis Line staff.
- Implement pilot programs to examine Veterans

Crisis Line facilitation to increase use among high-risk veterans

- Expand access to mental health care.
- Conduct studies and research on best practices.
- Provide outreach to veterans regarding mental health resources.

During The American Legion's recent national convention, National

Legislative Division staff briefed attendees at the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission meeting on the STRONG Veterans Act. Many provisions in the STRONG Veterans Act are efforts supported by The American Legion in stand-alone bills that have now been incorporated into this mental health omnibus legislation.

Notably, it includes a provision designating a national Buddy Check Week. The American Legion launched its Buddy Check program several years ago as a way to encourage Legionnaires to conduct veteran outreach. The idea is to reconnect with veterans who may need assistance but don't know where to go or who to ask.

The American Legion worked with Congress to draft the original bill that would establish a Buddy Check Week, as well as provide educational opportunities, materials, and references for veterans to learn how to conduct personal wellness checks and require expanded resources for the Veterans Crisis Line to handle any

potential increased usage during the designated week.

"Far too many service-members return home suffering from the invisible wounds of war," Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman, Jon Tester, D-Mont. said in a statement. "It's on us to make sure the Department of Veterans Affairs has the tools it needs to connect those who served with their earned support."

As American Legion members, our most sacred responsibility is to look out for each other and our fellow veterans.

As a way to reach out to members and former members who may need help, the National Executive Committee passed Resolution 18 during Spring Meetings in May 2019.

The resolution calls for Buddy Checks to be conducted Legion-wide on the weeks of The American Legion's birthday, March 15, and Veterans Day. However, American Legion posts are encouraged to perform this vital function whenever it makes the most sense in their communities.

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