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Veterans Housing Center, p.6

VA SECRETARY DEFENDS JOB CUTS AS VETERANS AND LAWMAKERS PUSH BACK

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

During a heated congressional hearing on Tuesday, VA Secretary Doug Collins faced strong criticism as he defended the decision to eliminate thousands of jobs within the department. Meanwhile, Veterans and advocates protested outside the Capitol, voicing



A group of Veterans protest VA staffing cuts outside while Collins testifies in a congressional hearing. (Photo: Ashley Murray/States Newsroom)

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concerns that the proposed cuts would reduce access or quality of health care and benefits for millions who rely on the agency.

Collins told members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee that the VA is seeking to cut 15 percent of its workforce, or roughly 70,000 to 80,000 jobs, to make the agency more efficient. He claimed the cuts would not affect front-line care providers and would instead target nonessential roles such as interior designers and DEI staff. According to Collins, the savings would be reinvested into direct services for Veterans, including disability care and prosthetics.

Senators from both parties challenged Collins' statements. Democratic lawmakers accused him of withholding key details and downplaying the impact of the job cuts. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) called the hearing "a disgrace" and warned that gutting the agency would harm Veterans.

"Make no mistake, it is a

disaster on the horizon," he said.

Republicans acknowledged the VA's problems but stopped short of condemning the cuts. Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) said the agency still needs reform and called the VA the second-largest bureaucracy in the federal government. Others on the panel, including Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND), questioned whether the hiring surge under the Biden administration had improved services. Collins responded that the addition of 52,000 jobs since 2021 had not fixed long-standing issues.

Outside the Capitol, Veterans joined members of Congress in a rally against the proposed reductions. Protesters claimed the cuts would pave the way for privatization while holding posters that read, "Veterans Healthcare Not For Sale." Rep. Chris Deluzio (D-PA), a Navy Veteran, said the administration's plan undermines recent progress made through the PACT Act, which expanded care to Veterans exposed to toxic

substances.

"At this moment, we should be investing in the VA, not gutting it," he told reporters.

In his testimony, Collins argued that reducing staff would eliminate waste and improve results. He pointed to \$14 million saved by ending DEI programs, which he said had been redirected to Veterans in need. He also criticized the VA's human resources department for inefficiencies, stating it took nearly two weeks to provide him with a full list of employees. He maintained that doctors, nurses, and claims processors wouldn't be cut.

Democrats pushed back on that assertion. Sen. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) questioned the claim that all 80,000

targeted jobs were in nonessential fields, saying she was not convinced that Veterans in her state would receive the same or better care under the plan. Blumenthal went on to say that administrative and support personnel are essential to guarantee appointments and service access. As Collins pledged that more details would be shared when internal reviews were complete, many lawmakers remained skeptical.

Veterans groups, including Common Defense, accused the department of trying to weaken the VA from within. Advocacy leader, Jose Vasquez, stated that although the administration refers to the action as "efficiency," [some] Veterans view it as a betrayal.

Collins reiterated his stance, telling senators that reform is overdue and the VA is committed to improving care.

"We are not cutting health care or benefits," he said. "We are making them better."

With thousands of jobs already eliminated and more changes expected, the debate over the future of the VA appears far from over.



Collins testifies in Congress about VA job cuts (Photo: Rod Lamkey, Jr./AP)

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106TH DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA CONVENTION

JUNE 26-29, 2025 | VISALIA, CA

This year the American Legion Department of California, the Sons of the American Legion, and the American Legion Auxiliary come together again as one for our annual convention!

In addition to business matters, this year's convention will also be filled with many fun events, helpful training courses, and more.

LOCATION

Visalia Convention Center
303 E Acequia Ave
Visalia, CA 93291

MANDATORY FORMS: DUE JUNE 1

Mandatory Post and District forms are due June 1. Any post who does not submit the required forms will be placed on probation. Posts placed on probation will not be granted a vote at the Department Convention.

For more information on mandatory forms and their due dates, visit calegion.org/online-forms/

RESOLUTION SUBMISSIONS: DUE JUNE 6

All resolutions for consideration at the Convention are due June 6. Please email all questions and submissions to resolutions@caLegion.org

ATTENDANCE

All Legionnaires and guests are invited to attend. If you have any questions, please contact us at (559) 875-8387

For all Department Convention information, visit
calegion.org/2025-department-convention/

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THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF CA DISTRICT 22 PRESENTS

TOGETHER FOR VETERANS BE THE ONE WEEKEND

COMING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT SAN DIEGO COUNTY VETERANS

OUTREACH, FOOD, MUSIC & RESOURCES

FOR ALL VETERANS

JUNE 13-15 2025

- ✓ Accredited Veteran Service Officers
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- ✓ Information and Presentations
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The American Legion Post 282
8118 University Ave, La Mesa, CA

QUESTIONS? VIC MARTIN
MN.VICMARTIN@GMAIL.COM

Event Sponsorship Opportunities Available

BE THE ONE TO TAKE CENTER STAGE DURING CALIFORNIA REVITALIZATION EFFORT

National HQ

AMERICAN LEGION POST 282 IN LA MESA TO HOST BE THE ONE WEEKEND JUNE 13-15

In February 2023, The American Legion Department of California staged a three-day Veterans Awareness Campaign at American Legion Post 83 in Merced, Calif. The event served multiple purposes: to revitalize posts in the area, connect veterans with service officers, raise awareness about the Legion's Be the One veteran suicide prevention mission and more. There also were panel discussions, as well as both door-to-door and call center membership efforts.

The event was so successful that a similar effort is scheduled for June 13-15, this time focusing on California's District 22. The Together for Veterans Be the One Weekend will take place at American Legion Post 282 in La Mesa and again will provide multiple services to veterans, perform community outreach and again promote Be the One.

District 22 Commander Vic Martin, the service officer at American Legion Post 275 in La Jolla, is coordinating the event after being requested to do so by American Legion National Headquarters staff. Martin was the district second vice commander in 2023 and helped organize that event.

"It ended up being a

huge hit, and everybody seemed to love it," said Martin, who said he was excited when National Headquarters asked for his help coordinating a similar event. "We learned a lot of lessons from the previous, and so we're sort of shifting a little bit. We probably won't have our panel discussions like we had originally. But we're going to have an art show. We're going to have door knockers around into the community and visiting with veterans in our community.

"And it's really going to be a district-wide event. We have a great district. Active and involved. I think this is going to be a huge success."

Happenings over the course of the three days will include:

- Veterans being connected with onsite accredited veteran service officers to help file or update U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' disability claims.
- District 22 partner organizations onsite to offer vital veteran-centric resources.
- Legionnaires will be doing outreach in the community, which includes sharing information on Be the One through post cards, bumper stickers and more.
- Social interactions that include a community barbecue, live music, the City of La Mesa Flag Day parade and fun activities for all ages.

Be the One is very personal for Martin, himself a

suicide survivor. During an April edition of the Legion's Tango Alpha Lima podcast, Martin talked about his own mission to support veterans in crisis, provide peer support and improve access to mental health services.

"I'm very open about my mental health and my mental illness," Martin said. "I see Be the One as one of the most critical programs that The American Legion has. I think its mission has been a part of The American Legion through our Buddy Checks that have been going on forever. It is a defined mission that we've had for over 100 years. And we have clearly defined that mission through Be the One. I think that Be the One has the ability to save lives."



AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY DAY WITH JACKIE ROBINSON 252 FAMILY!

VETERANS, LEGIONNAIRES, AND SUPPORTERS STEP UP AT “STEPS FOR VETS” 5K AT SOFI STADIUM

By Dr. Kathy Cash
Department Chaplain
Post 252 Commander

Inglewood, California — April 26, 2025 — Neither rain nor gray skies could dampen the spirit of Veterans, Legionnaires, and supporters who came together for the annual “Steps for Vets” 5K, hosted by U.S. Vets at the iconic SoFi Stadium.

This year’s event was made even more special through a partnership between U.S. Vets and the Jackie Robinson 252 Family, in celebration of American Legion Family Day. Participants gathered not only to raise funds and awareness for Veteran causes but also to honor the strength, service, and sacrifice of America’s military heroes.

Legionnaires from both Jackie Robinson Post 252 and Post 578 proudly took part in the day’s activities, standing side-by-side with Auxiliary Unit 252 members, Squadron 252

members, and other supporters.

Setting the tone for the event, the renowned Jackie Robinson Unit 252 Color Guard — widely recognized as the best in the nation — posted the colors with their signature precision and pride, providing a powerful reminder of the traditions and values that anchor the Veteran community.

Despite the rain, the enthusiasm among participants was evident. Runners and walkers alike donned ponchos and braved the slick course, determined to show their support for the mission of U.S. Vets: ending Veteran homelessness

and supporting successful transitions to civilian life.

“The rain didn’t slow anyone down. If anything, it brought us closer together,” said Dr. Kathy Cash, Commander of Jackie Robinson Post 252. “Today was about resilience — something every Veteran understands.”

The event at SoFi Stadium, home to countless memorable moments, became another landmark occasion — a testament to the unbreakable bond among Veterans, Legion families, and their supporters.





(Photo: Fred Shacklett, Department Historian)

DEPARTMENT ORATORICAL CONTEST WINNERS

By Mildred Wright-Pearson
Oratorical Commission Chair

On March 30, 2025, the Department Oratorical Contest was held at Clovis Veterans Memorial District, at 808 4th Street, Clovis, CA. The contest started at 1pm. There were 6 students who participated, one from each Area.

The contest finals were:

- 1st place – 6th Area, Dwayne Famenia, speech “Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak”, Van Nuys High School, 12th grade, Post 817, won \$2,400
- 2nd place, 2nd Area, Sylvienne Karlstrand, speech “The Beauty

- and the Burden”, St. Joseph Notre Dame High School, 12th grade, Post 647, won \$2,000
- 3rd place, 3rd Area, Isabells D’Mello, speech “Citizen’s Obligation: The 8th Amendment”, Clovis North High School, 10th grade, Post 247, won \$1,400
- 4th Place, 5th Area, Gavin McGowan, speech “Naturalization in America”, Ramona High School, 12th grade, Post 79, won \$1,400
- 5th Place, 1st Area, Srindhi Nagunuai, speech “Empowering Your Voices”, Vista Del Lago High School, 9th grade, Post 362, won \$1,400
- 6th Place, 4th Area,

- Omar Siddeswaran, speech “Our Unfinished Duty”, Gretchen Whitney High School, 9th grade, Post 359, won \$1,400
- We thank the following Judges for their help with this contest:**
- Mayor Vong Mouanoutoua, City of Clovis
 - Jenna Welch, Field Representative, Office of Shannon Grove
 - Traci Fritzler-Kirkorian, Assistant DA, Fresno County District Attorney’s Office
 - Syndi Day, Associate Director, Fresno Veterans Administration
 - Kevin Christopher, American Red Cross

- Also thanked are the following groups for their behind-the-scenes work:**
- American Legion Posts 2, 23, and 147
 - American Red Cross
 - Department of California Headquarters Staff
 - Fresno Veterans Administration Staff and Volunteers
- Finally, this could not have been done without the donations from:**
- District 15, \$1,550
 - Post 177, \$2,000
 - District 24, \$1,000
 - District 22, \$500 (Ron Seden, PUFL, Post 6)
- Your commissioners and TA were instrumental in making this competition a success. They are:**
- Commissioner, Area 1:

- Patricia Lovisone
 - Commissioner, Area 2: Larry Maggio (Co-Chair)
 - Commissioner, Area 3: Mildred S. Wright-Pearson, (Chair)
 - Commissioner, Area 4: Gil Soto
 - Commissioner, Area 5: Josephine Thomas
 - Commissioner, Area 6: David Gibson
 - Technical Assistant: William Rodriguez
- The last time California won the National competition was 2005. We wish our student luck and hope that he will be the first-place winner. The competition is to be held May 16-18, 2025, at Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan.



West LA VA Medical Center housing (Photo: VA.gov)

TRUMP SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER TO TRANSFORM WEST LOS ANGELES VA INTO NATIONAL VETERANS HOUSING CENTER

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

President Donald Trump signed an executive order over the weekend directing the VA to establish a new housing and care center for Homeless Veterans at its West Los Angeles campus. The center, to be called the National Center for Warrior Independence, is projected to house up to 6,000 Homeless Veterans by January 1, 2028.

The order tasks VA Secretary Doug Collins with leading the development of the center and presenting a detailed action plan within 120 days. In addition to expanding housing, the center is expected to provide a range of services designed

to help Veterans regain independence, including healthcare, substance abuse treatment, and workforce development. These services will be tailored to meet the needs of chronically Homeless Veterans, many of whom face physical and mental health challenges.

“Too many Veterans are homeless in America,” the executive order stated. “Each Veteran deserves our gratitude. Yet the Federal Government has not always treated Veterans like the heroes they are.”

The executive order also calls for other federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, to support the project. HUD Secretary Ben Carson is directed

to work with the VA to improve the effectiveness of the HUD-VASH voucher program, which has struggled in the Los Angeles area. As of 2024, only 62% of the 8,453 housing vouchers available through HUD-VASH were in use, largely due to delays and reluctance from landlords. The new initiative seeks to address these gaps and ensure better coordination between the VA and housing authorities to increase voucher usage rates.

The Trump administration’s move comes amid controversy over the past management of the West Los Angeles campus. A federal judge recently ruled that the VA had violated its obligation to use the land primarily

for Veterans, citing long-term leases granted to private organizations, including the University of California, Los Angeles, UCLA, and a private school. The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals is expected to issue a decision on the VA’s appeal of that ruling. Advocates have long pushed for reforms and better use of the land to benefit unhoused Veterans directly, and this new executive order addresses some of those concerns.

In the wake of Trump’s announcement, some Veterans and advocacy groups expressed cautious optimism. The Veterans Collective, the organization leading the construction of 1,200 housing units on the campus, welcomed the

announcement and said it hopes to complete its work before the end of Trump’s term. However, others remain skeptical. Anthony Allman, executive of Vets Advocacy, said the order goes beyond housing and lays out an ambitious but untested vision.

The order also includes provisions to restore accountability at the VA and improve healthcare access, such as reducing wait times for appointments and expanding virtual care services. While the ultimate impact of the order remains to be seen, the directive has added new urgency and national attention to a longstanding issue at the West Los Angeles VA campus.

NEW BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION SEEKS TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED VETERANS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

A group of lawmakers has introduced legislation in both the House and Senate designed to help ensure the VA complies with federal disability laws and remove long-standing barriers to care and services for Veterans with disabilities. The proposed legislation would establish clear guidance for making VA programs, facilities, and digital platforms more accessible.

An Advisory Committee on Equal Access, consisting of 15 members, would be created, including Veterans with disabilities, representatives from advocacy organizations, and subject matter experts. This committee would evaluate the VA’s adherence to federal accessibility laws and issue recommendations for improvement. Additionally, it would provide a formal platform for Veterans to share direct experiences and concerns regarding access to VA care, services, and information.

“It is unthinkable that federal programs intended to support our Veterans would be inaccessible to so many who live with disabilities,” said Sen.

Rick Scott (R-Fla.), sponsor of the Senate bill titled Veterans Accessibility Act. “Our Veterans deserve a VA that stands ready to support them.” Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), added that the legislation would help ensure the VA complies with accessibility requirements in all locations, including rural areas where challenges are often greater.

Cosponsors Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), and Jerry Moran, with Rep. David Valadao (R-Calif.) introduced the companion bill in the House titled the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act. Veterans advocacy groups have called for this legislation, citing widespread access issues at VA clinics and hospitals. Common complaints include check-in counters that are too high for wheelchair users, limited parking for vans with lifts, and inaccessible exam tables.

Heather Ansley, chief policy officer at Paralyzed Veterans of America, said the legislation would help the VA address problems that federal law already prohibits but continue to affect Veterans. “Doors to some facilities don’t open automatically, restrooms don’t fit wheelchairs, and ramps

are still missing in many places,” she said.

Anne Robinson, vice president of Paralyzed Veterans of America and a paralyzed Army Veteran, said her care often depends on whether VA facilities are properly equipped. “Whether an appointment room is large enough to fit my wheelchair—or even the size of an exam table—can determine whether I get the medical care I need,” she said.

Jose Ramos, a combat-wounded Navy Veteran who works with Wounded Warrior Project, said post-9/11 Veterans frequently encounter accessibility problems. “These Veterans interact with the system the most and have detailed, personal knowledge of the challenges,” he told Stars & Stripes.

Support for the legislation comes from several Veterans organizations, including Disabled American Veterans, Blinded Veterans Association, National Disability Rights Network, and United Spinal Association. Advocates say the legislation is a necessary step toward improving access and ensuring the VA meets the needs of all Veterans with disabilities.

Senator Archuleta Pushes for Full Property Tax Relief for Disabled Veterans in California

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

California Veterans with full service-connected disabilities could soon receive full property tax relief if Senate Bill 296, introduced by State Senator Bob Archuleta, becomes law. As reported by The Downey Patriot, the proposed legislation would exempt qualifying Veterans and their surviving spouses from paying property taxes on their primary residence.

Senator Archuleta, a U.S. Army Veteran and chair of the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, introduced the bill to provide long-term financial relief to disabled Veterans across the state. He emphasized the importance of supporting those who have made immense sacrifices in service to the country, particularly as many Veterans live on fixed incomes and face high housing costs.

“This legislation is a matter of dignity and stability for those who have sacrificed the most for our state and the nation,” Archuleta said. “It’s time we do more to ensure our disabled veterans, many of whom are living on fixed incomes, are not left behind.”

Under the bill, Veterans who are rated 100% disabled due to service-connected injuries by the VA would qualify for the exemption. This includes Veterans who are blind in both eyes or have lost the use of multiple limbs. Unmarried surviving spouses would also be eligible under certain conditions.

If passed, SB 296 would

take effect beginning January 1, 2026, and remain in place through January 1, 2036. The bill applies only to the primary residence of the Veteran or spouse, and prohibits recipients from receiving any additional property tax exemptions on that home.

California has the highest number of Homeless Veterans in the United States, with more than 11,000 living without stable housing. Senator Archuleta believes this bill could offer meaningful support by easing the financial burden on disabled Veterans and reducing their risk of housing insecurity.

“SB 296 is one step toward reducing homelessness and providing much-needed relief for those who honorably served this country,” he said.

The measure has received bipartisan support and mirrors similar legislation in states like Texas, Florida, Virginia, and Hawaii that already offer full property tax exemptions for qualifying Veterans. However, SB 296 does not include a provision for the state to reimburse local governments for the resulting loss in property tax revenue, which may present challenges for local budgets.

As the bill moves forward, Archuleta is encouraging residents to contact their state representatives and express support for SB 296.

Archuleta says this exemption honors disabled Veterans’ bravery and commitment to our nation and gives those struggling with California’s high cost of living a fighting chance to remain in their homes.

Officer selections will be made at the 106th Department Convention in Visalia, CA on June 26-29, 2025. For more candidate info, visit calegion.org/officer-candidates-25-26/

★ ★ ★ ★ 2025-2026 ★



**DAVID
BRAMBILA**
*DEPT COMMANDER
CANDIDATE*

ABOUT THE CANDIDATE

A Blue Cap American
Legionnaire, Native Cali-
fornian, for the position of
Department Commander

David's eligibility was established by his honorable service in the Marine Corps and continued his service through Veterans Organizations.

AMERICAN LEGION

Post 742 Finance Officer (3 years), Post 742 Commander (1 year), District 21 3rd Vice (1 year), District 21 Vice Commander (2 years), District 21 Commander (2 years), Area 5 Vice Commander (1year), Dept. of CA Ways and Means Chairman (2 years), National Media and

Communications (2 years)

OTHER BOARD AFFILIATIONS

Veterans Housing Alliance,
Navy League. Corona
Chamber of Commerce,
Corona Chamber Foun-
dation, Corona Cinco
de Mayo Scholarship
Committee

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Co-Chair for Patriot Day
City of Corona (3 years),
Co-Chair Memorial Day
March (3 years), Cinco de
Mayo Parade Chairman
(8 years). Soccer Coach
and Referee for AYSO (15
years). Awardee of the
Corona Making a Differ-
ence award for the work he
is doing with Veterans in
the community.

MEASUREABLE RESULTS

- He and his team raised over \$500k for post 742 as Chairman of the Building Committee renovated the post with new kitchen, new bathrooms, new flooring, new paint and new parking lot.
- He and his team raised over \$75k to gut the canteen and rebuild it as Post 742 Commander.
- He created a BINGO Committee for

building and parking lot expansion and he and his team today have raised over \$120k for Post 742

- Wrote a grant and created a District wide honor guard team
- Left District 21 with over \$30k to help Veterans and assist our posts and programs
- Wrote a grant to provide 17 desktops and 17 laptops, one of each for each post in D21
- Left Area 5 with enough to fund them for the next 3 years
- Was #1 in Membership for Area 5 without a Membership Chair
- Wrote a \$10k grant for Dept of California membership.
- Led the charge and as of this month we now have a 501c3 named California American Legion Charities to support all posts and the Department of CA write grants and go after corporate donations
- Created the California Legion Store calegionstore.com to help fundraise for the Department
- He and his team as Chairman Hit the \$75k fundraising goal for Ways and Means during Q3 and are expected to bring in \$100+K by this convention.

DAVID'S BACKGROUND

Born in Los Angeles, raised in Santa Ana and a current 25-year Resident in Corona. David, who majored in Business Management at Cal Poly Pomona, has been a business owner (24 years) since leaving the Marine Corps in 2001 and while attending business school. He owned and sold a successful retail store and sold it in 2009. He's a licensed real estate broker since 2009 with Rome Echo Real Estate, helping veterans and their families become homeowners. He also has a marketing firm, Creative Marketing, which helps organizations tell their stories using print, promotional items and Websites.

He is the oldest of five; one brother and three sisters. One of his sisters is currently serving in the Marine Corps stationed at Camp Pendleton as a Gunnery Sgt. Select (E-7). He is a proud brother and will be pinning her new rank this year. David is happily married to Venus and will be celebrating their 29th year anniversary this month. He has two boys, Jacob (14) and David Jr (25).

His plan is to create a plan: a Strategic Plan to include SOP's, marketing

plan, and business plan for the Department of California. We are losing members faster than when we recruit new members. The American Legion has over 400 Posts, all with 400 different missions and messaging. We should all be uniformed the same, using the same logo, same marketing materials, with the same message, same elevator speech, with SOP's and Procedures and a plan to grow. This will have a unified look utilizing our strength in numbers throughout California. He plans to hand off this 3 year plan at Convention 2026 so that the new command and DEC can hit the ground running.

To stop the bleeding with our membership and finances and to be able to fund our VSO's and programs we need a proven leader with measurable results to make drastic changes and elevate the department of California. Vote David for Commander.

CONTACT

David Brambila
david@district21ca.org

The American Legion is a business. Let's get back to business!



**JEFFERY
FREEMAN**
*DEPT COMMANDER
CANDIDATE*

RETURN TO OUR ROOTS

Joined Legion in 2013 via mail in application transferred into Post 263.

Post 263 Asst Chaplain
2015-2017 (Conducted
several Honor guard ser-
vices approx. 60 per year.)

Post 263 1st Vice Com-
mander 2016/17 (Worked
membership and reported
to District meetings)

Post 249 Kitchen Manager
2017-2019

District 11 1st Vice
Commander 2019/20
(Worked with Commander
Leonardi conducting
department revitalizations
bring the department the
last 100% year on record.)

District 11 Commander
2020/22 (Only district in
department with all post
at 100% meeting every
National membership goal

and every Post submitting their forms by June 1st deadline both years.)

Helmets for Heroes
Sub-Committee chair
2021/23: (Worked with
committee and increased
H4H income from 40k to
120k in two years paying
for 1/5th of the VSO
budget.)

Area 3 Vice Commander 2022/23: (Visited every Post in Area and helped train on MyLegion bringing the Area to 1st place in the department and having three of the top five districts in the department membership.)

Area 3 Legislative Chair 2020/22

Mental Health/Suicide Intervention Committee 2021/present: (Helped in the creation of the Committee with Past Commander James.)

Department Membership Director 2023/24: (Finished year at over 95% membership and had the most Post and District receiving 100% than any of the last five years.)

National Security Council 2023/24

BIO

USAF Security Police law Enforcement and Ranger trained who served in a rapid response team in the Air Force. I am a third generation Law Enforcement Officer married for 43 years with one son. I owned and operated my own roofing company making 1.3 million in sales annually for twenty years. After selling the company I then opened a custom wood furniture company making furniture by hand all while being the CFO of my wife's information technology corporation till, she sold it in 2016. I am also an artist in wood and metal venues. I have the corporate knowledge and understanding to properly help the department achieve greatness.

VISION FOR THE DEPARTMENT

To find ways through corporate America and the State of California to fund the department using grants. I have proven this concept in the eleventh district where every Post both legion and VFW received grants to renovate every Post in San Joaquin County. Six million dollars were distributed between every post who owned their own building. Post 190 receiving \$890,000, Post 172 receiving \$800,000, and Post 249 receiving 1.2 million all from grants from the county board. I will retain the Ad Hoc Committee whose only job will be to find and apply for grants to fund all the departments preventing any further increases to our dues in the future.

I wish to update our website the commission and committee pages are up to fourteen years out of date

with many links in them not working. Our commissions and committees need to meet quarterly submitting reports to be placed on the website for all to see. The Mental Health committee needs to roll out their Peer Support education to become state certified Perr Support Specialist something I did last July. I will work through grants to fund this endeavor.

I wish to start departmental Job Fairs collaborating with Corporate America and corporate HR to give training on Interviewing and how to create the perfect resume. With these events we can employ our transitioning Veterans and at the same time show off or programs like the Riders, SAL, Auxiliary, Gaming, Baseball, Ext. This in turn will also allow the department to draft new members from the

participants.

Membership, I know most of you hate hearing about membership. However, the department has been gushing blood for the last five years on membership. This year we are on track losing approx. 4,000 members from last year's final total. In 2022/23 year, we lost almost 10,000 members. These are members who did not renew. Fifteen years ago, we had 120,000 members in the department and today we have 60,000 members. We must find ways to stop this loss, and I have proven over the last seven years that I know how to get members and with my guidance and a new director I feel we can achieve a 100% year again. VFW today has more members than the department, and I find this to be totally unacceptable.



PAUL C. RODRIGUEZ
DEPT COMMANDER
CANDIDATE

WHO IS PAUL C. RODRIGUEZ?

Born in Hawthorne, Paul is a native Californian. Upon graduating from South Hills High School in 1979, Paul enlisted in the US Army. After basic at Ft. Jackson, S.C., and AIT at Ft. Sam Houston, TX, Paul joined the Dental Corp at Ft. Ord, Presidio of Monterey as a Dental Specialist. It was during that time that he met his wife of 40 years,

Bonnie.

After completing 3 years of military service, Paul remained on the Monterey Peninsula working for the City of Monterey for 34 years. At the same time, he was a 22-year volunteer EMT and Fire Engineer for the Cachagua Volunteer Fire District.

Already an active member of the American Legion, upon retirement Paul became even more active in Legion programs. Paul is an Honorary Life Member of Post 512 Carmel-by-the-Sea.

THE AMERICAN LEGION SERVICE HISTORY

- Post 512 Carmel-by-the-Sea**
- Post Commander (2 times)
 - Post Adjutant
 - Post Finance Officer
 - Post General Manager
- Tri-mendous 28th District**
- District Commander

- District Finance Officer
 - District Judge Advocate
 - District Executive Officer
- Area 2**
- Area 2 Vice Commander (2 times)
 - Area 2 Adjutant
 - Area 2 SAL Commissioner
- Department of California**
- Department Chaplain
 - Ways & Means Commission
 - SAL Commission Chairman
 - National Foreign Affairs Commission
- Sons of the American Legion**
- CA SAL Detachment Commander
 - SAL Alternate NEC

MAKING A BETTER DEPARTMENT

The American Legion, Department of California, is in fact a business. A very specialized business but nevertheless a business! To that end it is the responsibility of those in charge to

discharge their duties and responsibilities with all due diligence. The American Legion, Department of California, is in fact a business. A very specialized business but nevertheless a business! To that end it is the responsibility of those in charge to discharge their duties and responsibilities with all due diligence.

Look at the Department of California this way. As a business we need capital. Our investors are our veterans who invest their monies and time to make the organization run. It is the responsibility of the elected officers, appointees, and employees to operate within the guidelines of the corporation.

The Department of California needs a complete re-evaluation of its business plan, operating procedures, and financial policies! I believe most of us will agree that these are challenging times not only for our American Legion but for many of our

cherished organizations. The reasons are many but one thing we all share is we need to make less go further today!

I am proposing:

- Create a sound and realistic income-based budget
- Review the policies for the use of our reserve funds
- Review and revision of our employment policies as well as updating the Employee Handbook
- Well-defined disciplinary policies and guidelines

A strong organization requires a solid foundation. Our American Legion Department of California's 105+ year old foundation needs attention! The resources within our organization are many. I feel we can help to shore up our foundation! I promise you a stronger and better Department of California if elected your Commander!



Officer selections will be made at the 106th Department Convention in Visalia, CA on June 26-29, 2025. For more candidate info, visit calegion.org/officer-candidates-25-26/

★ ★ ★ ★ 2025-2026 ★

A portrait of Sheriff David J. Hargis in a Gendarmerie uniform. He is wearing a dark blue jacket over a light blue shirt and a striped tie. He is also wearing a Gendarmerie kepi with a gold emblem and the number '15'. An American flag is visible in the background. The text 'DAVID J. HARGIS' is visible on the right side of the image.

A portrait of a man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is also wearing a dark military-style cap with gold buttons and a white band. An American flag is visible in the background to his left.

AUGGIE GALAVIZ
AREA 6 VICE
COMMANDER
CANDIDATE

To view Bio Statements for these additional officer candidates, please visit calegion.org/officer-candidates-25-26/

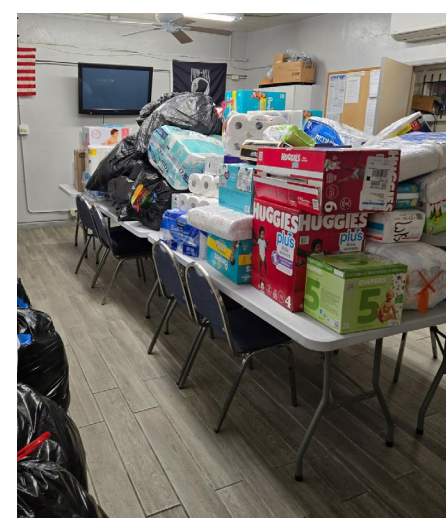
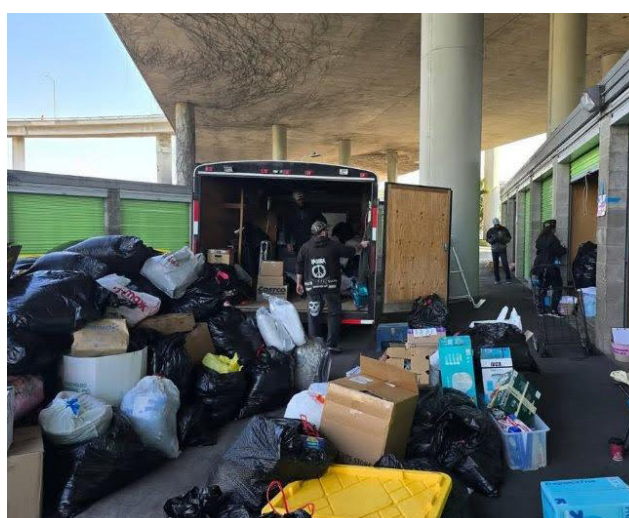

[illegible]

By Cody York
Post 149 Adjutant

outpouring of support filled an 8'x16' enclosed trailer from floor to ceiling, along with the bed and cab of the truck transporting the donations.

A dedicated representative from Post 149 made the 100-mile journey to deliver the much-needed supplies to Pacific Palisades Post 283. The heartfelt gratitude expressed upon delivery underscored the strength and unity of our community. This remarkable effort serves as a testament to the unwavering commitment of American Legion posts to care for one another in times of need.

Together, we stand resilient, demonstrating that even in the face of tragedy, compassion and solidarity can light the way forward.



CALIFORNIA AMERICAN LEGION COLLEGE 1-2025

YOLO POST 77 | WOODLAND, CA



Congratulations to the California American Legion College 1-2025 graduates.

CALC 1-2025 was held at The American Legion Yolo Post 77 in Woodland, California, from 25 to 27 April 2025.

Thank you, Post 77, for being such gracious hosts and continuous supporters of our Department training programs!

We salute the graduates for committing to 2.5 days of reviewing, learning, and collaborating on topics that will make us more efficient in “Doing Something that Matters, For Something that Matters” in our respective communities.

CALC 2-2025 will be held at The American Legion Newhall Post 507 from 17 to 19 October 2025.

Registration opens on 1 August 2025 and closes on 30 September 2025.

For more information, please visit calegion.org/training/legion-college/



Michael Aycock



Joseph Benton



Larkin Cockrill



Richard Davis



Paul Del Rosario



James Eubanks



Lois Flint



Carlos Gonzales



Brain Le Pore



Patricia Lovisone



Daniel Mclain



William Smithson



William Swalve



Andy Wen



Michael Wilbourn

CALIFORNIA AMERICAN LEGION COLLEGE 2-2025

OCTOBER 17-19 | NEWHALL POST 507

REGISTRATION BEGINS AUGUST 1 | [CALEGION.ORG](http://calegion.org)



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

MAY 2025

By Seth Reeb
Reeb Government
Relations

Currently, there are only **five military veterans serving in the California Legislature**, underscoring the importance of strong advocacy to ensure that veteran issues remain a legislative priority. Notably, newly elected Marine Corps veteran Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez (District 36) brings valuable military perspective to the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee and has already demonstrated strong support for veteran-focused legislation.

The Legislature's new bill limit of 35 bills per two-year cycle (down from 25 per year) encourages a more strategic approach to introducing and supporting legislation. Several promising bills benefiting veterans have already emerged this session.

AMERICAN LEGION ADVOCACY DAY

American Legion Advocacy Day is crucial for highlighting veterans' needs to legislators.

Through June, your engagement in advocating for veterans' program funding is vital. For one-on-one meetings or Zoom sessions, contact me at sethr@water-warrior.com.

NATIONAL COMMANDER'S VISIT

Recently, I had the honor of hosting American Legion National Commander James A. LaCoursiere, National Adjutant Rodney Rolland, Department Commander Nick Rosa, Legislative Chairman Don Harper, Department Adjutant Sam Flores, District Six Commander Mark Rice, and Past Department Commander Jere Romano at the State Capitol.

The delegation engaged with key legislative staff, including:

- Patty Patten, Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee Consultant (Air Force veteran and American Legion member)
- Jenny Callison, Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee Consultant (Army veteran)
- Staff from Senator Groves's office
- Staff from Assemblymember Gonzalez's office

We visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and All Veterans Memorial, honoring our nation's veterans. This second annual event continues to grow in significance.

GOVERNOR NEWSOM LAUNCHES MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION, INCLUDING

SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

Governor Gavin Newsom has unveiled a transformative initiative, the **Master Plan for Career Education**, aimed at expanding educational and economic opportunities for Californians, including veterans. Announced at Modesto Junior College, the plan prioritizes practical, skills-based learning to better prepare Californians for today's dynamic job market.

The Master Plan introduces **Career Passports**, innovative digital tools that integrate academic achievements with verified real-world experiences such as military service, work history, and vocational training. This system is designed to move employment practices away from traditional degree-only hiring, thereby opening the door to thousands of high-paying jobs for skilled Californians without a college degree.

A key component, the expanded **Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)** program, specifically benefits veterans and working adults by translating their real-world experience into academic credits. Approximately **250,000 Californians, including around 30,000 veterans**, are expected to directly benefit from CPL. This advancement significantly reduces the time and financial cost of earning degrees or certifications, promising substantial economic gains for the state.

The Master Plan further emphasizes the need for better state and regional coordination of career education and workforce training. A new statewide collaborative will synchronize educational programs with labor market needs, reduce redundancy, and help students and veterans transition smoothly from

educational settings to employment through enhanced internships and stronger employer partnerships.

To learn more about Governor Newsom's Master Plan and its full benefits for veterans, you can access the detailed proposal at gov.ca.gov/2023/08/31/freedom-to-succeed/

KEY LEGISLATIVE DATES:

- **May 14, 2025:** American Legion Advocacy Day at the Capitol
- **May 23, 2025:** Deadline for fiscal bills reporting to the floor
- **June 15, 2025:** Deadline for passing the budget bill
- **July 12, 2025:** Last day for policy committees to meet
- **September 12, 2025:** Deadline for all bill passage

STATE BUDGET CHALLENGES

California faces a significant **\$6.2 billion budget shortfall in the Medi-Cal program**, driven primarily by increased enrollment, rising senior care costs, and expanded coverage for undocumented individuals. Additionally, the state is confronting severe fiscal pressures from wildfire response and recovery, ongoing healthcare expansions, continued pandemic-related expenses, and an unprecedented demand for mental health services.

These challenging fiscal conditions mean state resources are limited, intensifying competition for funding among critical programs. It is essential now, more than ever, for veterans and supporters to actively participate in grassroots advocacy (calcommanders.org/take-action/). Without strong, coordinated, and persistent grassroots engagement, there is a

real risk that veterans' programs and priorities could be overlooked or deprioritized.

Your active involvement, through contacting legislators, participating in advocacy days, engaging your community, and making your voice heard, is crucial. Our collective efforts will determine whether veterans' needs remain at the forefront during these challenging budget negotiations.

BUDGET CONTEXT FOR VETERANS' LEGISLATION

Governor Newsom's budget proposes a retired veteran benefit: a **partial income tax exclusion** for military retirement, which would exempt up to \$20,000 annually for eligible veterans, impacting about 130,000 Californians and reducing state revenue by approximately \$85 million annually. Ensuring this remains in the final budget requires vigilant advocacy.

PRIORITY BILLS FOR 2025

Tax Relief Bills

- **AB 53 (Ramos D)** – Military Services Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act
- **SB 1 (Seyarto R)** – Military Services Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act

Property Tax Exemptions

- **SB 23 (Valladares R)** – Disabled Veteran Homeowners
- **SB 56 (Seyarto R)** – Household Income for Disabled Veterans
- **ACA 5 (Schiavo D)** – Veterans' Exemption
- **SCA 4 (Archuleta D)** – Constitutional Amendment Veterans' Exemption

Bills Targeting Predatory Practices ("Claim Sharks")

- **AB 826 (Gonzalez)**

R) – Veterans’ Benefits Protections

• **SB 694 (Archuleta D)** – Veteran Service Providers

COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP

Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee

View Current Members: svet.senate.ca.gov/

• **Senator Bob Archuleta (Chair)** – District 30: Los Angeles, Orange

• **Senator Shannon Grove (Vice-Chair)** – District 12: Kern; parts of Fresno, Tulare

• **Senator Jerry McNerney** – District 5: San Joaquin; parts of Alameda, Stanislaus, Sacramento

• **Senator Caroline Menjivar** – District 20: San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles

• **Senator Thomas Umberg** – District 34: Parts of Orange, Los Angeles

Contact: Jenny Callison
Committee Office: 1020 N Street, Room 251
Phone: (916) 651-1503

Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee

• **Assemblymember Pilar Schiavo (Chair)** – District 40: Santa Clarita, SF Valley

• **Assemblymember Laurie Davies (Vice-Chair)** – District 74: Parts of Orange (Dana Point) & San Diego (Camp Pendleton)

• **Assemblymember Anamarie Ávila Fariás** – District 15: Parts of Contra Costa

• **Assemblymember Juan Carrillo** – District 39: Antelope Valley, Los Angeles

• **Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez** – District 36: Parts of Riverside

& Imperial

• **Assemblymember Michelle Rodriguez** – District 53: Parts of San Bernardino (Pomona, Chino)

• **Assemblymember Avelino Valencia** – District 68: Parts of Orange (Anaheim)

Contact: Patty Patten
Committee Office: 1020 N Street, Room 389
Phone: (916) 319-3550

STAY CONNECTED


• **YouTube:** Vet11b-DownRange

• **Notion:** Leg4VetsCA

• **X:** @SRGR1985

• **Veterans Discord:** discord.com/invite/HY45dyfRyn

For one-on-one meetings or to schedule a Post-education Zoom session, please don’t hesitate to contact me at sethr@water-warrior.com





VA headquarters building in Washington D.C. (Photo: J. David Ake – Getty Images)

VA LAUNCHES NEW PLAN TO TRANSFORM ACCESS TO SURVIVOR BENEFITS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The VA has introduced a three-part effort to simplify how survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and Service Members access benefits and support services. The plan involves moving the Office of Survivors Assistance, establishing a dedicated outreach team, and increasing the use of automation in handling claims to improve accuracy and reduce delays.

Starting this month, the VA will move the Office of Survivors Assistance, OSA, from the Veterans Benefits Administration back to the Office of the VA Secretary. The office had been transferred in 2021 during the previous administration, a decision the VA now says led to reduced effectiveness by isolating OSA under layers of bureaucracy. The relocation is intended to restore OSA’s original advisory role with direct access to VA leadership. A five-person team will now guide policy decisions

and oversee programs related to survivors and dependents, helping shape legislation and survivor-related policies moving forward.

At the same time, the VA is launching a new White-Glove Survivor Outreach Team. Based at the Philadelphia VA Regional Benefit Office, the team will consist of trained experts who will help survivors navigate the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, DIC, claims process. These specialists will provide

personalized assistance throughout the entire process to help families receive the benefits they are eligible for, aiming to close long-standing gaps in communication and support.

The third part of the plan focuses on expanding automation. The VA now processes more than 1,000 DIC payments or adjustments daily through automation and is working to raise that number by identifying additional opportunities. Officials say the added automation will

reduce delays and make it easier for families to access their benefits without having to go through a complicated manual process.

VA Secretary Doug Collins emphasized that the department is focused on removing barriers and improving service during times of grief.

“The last thing survivors need in their time of grief is frustrating red tape and bureaucracy. That’s why we are creating a better system to more quickly and effectively provide survivors the services, support, and compassion they’ve earned,” Collins said.

The department says it is working to return to what leadership describes as its core mission of serving Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. In the first 100 days of the current administration, the VA has taken steps such as opening six new clinics, ending remote work for thousands of employees, cutting non-essential spending, and eliminating programs not directly related to its mission.

The survivor-focused reforms are set to begin immediately, with full implementation continuing through 2025.

VA Under Fire for Billions in PACT Act Benefits Errors

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The VA is facing scrutiny after a federal watchdog revealed the agency made billions of dollars in disability compensation mistakes over the last four years. These errors, linked to poor training and outdated systems, have left thousands of Veterans either underpaid or facing unexpected debts.

The issues stem from the implementation of the PACT Act, a 2022 law that expanded benefits for Veterans exposed to toxic substances during their military service. As more Veterans and survivors became eligible for compensation, the VA struggled to manage the surge in claims. Brent Arronte, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations, told lawmakers that VA claims processors were unprepared to interpret and apply the new regulations, resulting in widespread miscalculations.

A review of PACT Act-related claims filed between August 2022 and August 2023 found that about one in four were calculated incorrectly. Between May 2022 and April 2023, errors involving Veterans rated as unemployable led to \$85 million in underpayments and \$10 million in overpayments. Survivors of deceased Service Members were shorted by an estimated \$33.1 million during the first seven months of 2023 alone.

From fiscal year 2021 through 2024, the VA issued at least \$5.1 billion in overpayments.

Nearly \$1.4 billion of that occurred in 2024, according to lawmakers. Although these errors account for less than one percent of the VA's total \$161 billion compensation budget, they have created financial stress for Veterans and their families.

"Our Veterans live paycheck to paycheck," said Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-Texas) chairman of the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. "The worst thing you can do is overpay a Veteran and then tell them they have to give it back."

Nina Tann, executive director of the VA's compensation service, said many payment problems come from late or missing updates from Veterans about changes in their eligibility. These include deaths, divorces, and changes in income or dependent status. She said the VA is improving outreach and training and recently corrected an administrative error that caused duplicate payments for around 15,000 Veterans with dependents.

Arronte emphasized the need for better tools and more consistent training. He said claims processors rely on outdated software to determine benefit start dates and must navigate frequently changing policies scattered across multiple systems.

Lawmakers stressed that while progress has been made, it is not enough. "We must ensure the VA delivers the right benefits the first time," Luttrell said. "Veterans should not be responsible for fixing government mistakes."

NEW STUDIES REVEAL LONG-TERM HEALTH TOLL ON VIETNAM VETERANS

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

More than 50 years after the Vietnam War, U.S. Veterans continue to face serious health problems linked to their combat experiences, according to two new studies from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and the VA Boston Healthcare System. Findings show that both combat exposure and PTSD are major contributors to chronic health conditions that affect Veterans well into old age.

The research is based on one of the longest-running studies of Vietnam Veterans, tracking 729 men who served in Vietnam and were surveyed in 1984, 1998, and 2020. These participants, now averaging 72 years old, were part of a larger initial group of 12,400 Service Members who served during the conflict.

"Combat exposure and PTSD were strong predictors of heart disease and other chronic illnesses in Veterans, especially those who faced the most intense combat," said Dr. Jeanne Stellman, co-author and professor emerita of health policy and management at Columbia.

Nearly 28% of the Veterans reported being diagnosed with heart disease. Those exposed to the heaviest combat were nearly twice as likely to have heart conditions compared to

those with lighter or no combat exposure. PTSD was also strongly linked to other health issues such as arthritis, sleep apnea, and gastroesophageal reflux disease, contributing to a diminished quality of life.

One key finding centers on sub-threshold PTSD, when symptoms of trauma are present but not severe enough to meet clinical diagnosis criteria. Around 25% of participants fell into this category at some point. These Veterans had worse physical and mental health than those who never experienced PTSD but are often ineligible for VA support or treatment programs due to diagnostic thresholds.

"Veterans with sub-threshold PTSD suffer health burdens that are often overlooked," said Dr. Steven Stellman, co-author and professor emeritus of epidemiology at Columbia. He called for VA policy changes to ensure this group receives the care they need and deserve.

The study identified four long-term PTSD

patterns: current PTSD (9.1%, rising to 15.5% among those who faced heavy combat), past PTSD (9.7%), sub-threshold PTSD (25.2%), and never PTSD (56%). Those with current or sub-threshold PTSD reported the lowest life satisfaction, highest anxiety and depression levels, and most chronic illnesses compared to other groups.

Veterans who lacked community support after returning from Vietnam were more likely to develop PTSD, researchers found. They also faced higher rates of divorce, social isolation, and difficulty reintegrating into civilian life.

"This research reinforces how the trauma of war continues to affect Veterans long after the war ends," Jeanne Stellman stated. The authors say long-term care plans must address both the physical and mental effects of combat, especially for aging Veterans still carrying the weight of their service.



(Photo: U.S. Air National Guard Master Sgt. Anthony Agosti)

REMAINS OF CALIFORNIA WWII AIRMAN SGT. JAMES H. MURRAY IDENTIFIED AFTER DECADES

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

A February press release issued by the Department of Defense announced that on September 23, 2024, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, DPAA, confirmed the identification of U.S. Army Air Forces Sgt. James H. Murray, a World War II prisoner of war. Murray, a 25-year-old from Hollywood, California, was captured during the war and later died as a prisoner. His family recently received a full briefing on his identification, allowing more details to be shared about his case.

In late 1941, Murray served with the 93rd Bombardment Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group

in the Philippines when Japanese forces invaded in December. Intense battles followed until U.S. forces in Bataan surrendered on April 9, 1942, with Corregidor falling shortly after on May 6. Thousands of U.S. and Filipino troops were captured and forced to endure the grueling 65-mile Bataan Death March, suffering from relentless violence, starvation, and exhaustion along the way. Many perished along the way due to execution, disease, or exposure. Survivors were sent to prison camps, including Cabanatuan POW Camp #1, where conditions were dire, and thousands more lost their lives.

Murray was among those held at Cabanatuan, where malnutrition and disease

were rampant. According to historical records, he died on November 22, 1942, and was buried in Common Grave 816 within the camp cemetery. After the war, the American Graves Registration Service exhumed remains from the site and relocated them to a temporary military mausoleum in Manila. An initial identification effort in 1947 was only able to confirm one set of remains from the grave, while the rest were classified as unidentifiable and interred at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, MACM, as "Unknowns."

In 2019, as part of the ongoing Cabanatuan Project, DPAA recovered the remains from Common Grave 816 for further analysis. Scientists

used dental and anthropological assessments, along with mitochondrial DNA testing, to identify Murray's remains. Circumstantial evidence further supported the findings. Though his grave was marked as "Unknown" for decades, it was maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission, ABMC. With his identification confirmed, a rosette will be placed next to his name on the Walls of the Missing at the MACM to indicate that he has been accounted for.

Murray's final resting place will be Arlington National Cemetery, though the burial date has yet to be determined. His family and those wishing to attend his services can contact the Army Casualty Office at (800) 892-2490



WWII POW Airman Sgt. James H. Murray (Photo: DPAA)

for further details.

DPAA acknowledges the contributions of the ABMC and the U.S. Army in their continued efforts to locate and identify missing Service Members, ensuring that those who made the ultimate sacrifice are honored and remembered.

VA ENDING TEMPORARY VASP PROGRAM THAT HELPED PREVENT VETERAN FORECLOSURES

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The VA will stop accepting new applications for the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase, VASP, program on May 1. Launched by the Biden administration in 2023, VASP was designed as a temporary solution to assist VA-backed mortgage holders at risk of foreclosure following the end of COVID-19-era mortgage forbearance programs.

VA press secretary Pete Kasperowicz said the program "was unilaterally created by the Biden administration and lacks congressional authority." He stated that current participants and those who enroll before the May 1 deadline will not be affected by the program's termination.

Since May 2023, the VA has purchased over 17,000 loans totaling approximately \$5.5 billion under VASP. These purchases enabled struggling Veteran homeowners to retain their homes through modified loans with reduced interest rates, typically at 2.5%. The agency stated that while the program served an emergency purpose, the VA is not structured to act as a long-term mortgage restructuring entity.

The decision to end VASP has drawn differing reactions. Republican lawmakers, including House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-Ill.) and Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-Wis.), welcomed the move, arguing that the program placed undue financial risk on taxpayers and undermined the VA Home Loan program. A bill introduced by

both legislators aimed to limit VA's direct loan purchases under the program.

On the other hand, industry experts and housing advocates have expressed concern about the potential rise in Veteran foreclosures without a replacement program. Bob Broeksmit, president and CEO of the Mortgage Bankers Association, MBA, warned that halting VASP without implementing a permanent partial claim option could leave many Veterans without viable alternatives to avoid foreclosure.

Broeksmit stated that the VA's previous partial claim program, which expired in 2022, had provided a helpful tool for borrowers to defer missed payments without additional interest. He described VASP as the only viable home retention

option for some Veterans and disputed characterizations of the program as a lender bailout.

Foreclosure activity on VA loans has surged since a federal foreclosure moratorium ended in late 2024. In January 2025, VA loans accounted for roughly 20% of new foreclosure filings, an unusually high proportion. Experts suggest that the increase may be linked to the backlog of delayed proceedings during the moratorium period.

Housing policy analysts argue that the VA lacks the advanced loss mitigation tools available through

other agencies like the FHA, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac. Some have called on Congress to grant the VA broader authority to establish standardized foreclosure-avoidance procedures similar to those used in the conventional mortgage market.

With VASP ending and no immediate replacement announced, housing advocates, lawmakers, and mortgage industry leaders continue to press for a permanent solution to support Veteran homeowners facing financial hardship.



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approaching!

Reservation Form found
at the page linked below.

DELEGATES

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National Convention
Delegate Forms are due
June 1.

**Tampa Convention
Center**, 333 S Franklin
Street, Tampa, Florida
33602

HOTEL INFO

Barrymore Hotel,
Tampa Riverwalk,
111 W Fortune Street
Tampa, FL 33602

Starting this year, all
delegates for the National
Convention will be
required to pay their own
delegate fees. Fees are
\$35 per person, due no
later than June 29.

To book a hotel room,
please use the Hotel

To pay your delegate
fees, call Department
Headquarters at
(559) 875-8387

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calegion.org/106th-national-convention/

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