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ORANGE COUNTY VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL FACES DEMOLITION AFTER CORRUPTION SCANDAL

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

A Vietnam War memorial in Mile Square Park that once promised to honor American Service Members and South Vietnamese allies now stands as a symbol of failed oversight and corruption. The project, funded with one million dollars in taxpayer



Vietnam War Memorial in Fountain Valley (Photo: Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

A county assessment estimates that repairing the memorial could cost as much as \$420 thousand, with an additional \$40 thousand needed to complete the engraving. Making the site compliant with federal accessibility standards could add another one million dollars. Demolishing the structure would cost no more than \$30 thousand dollars—and is currently the most likely outcome.

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money, remains unfinished and deteriorating while the elected official who championed it serves time in federal prison.

The memorial was envisioned as a smaller version of the Washington D.C. landmark, with special recognition for the South Vietnamese military and the tens of thousands of refugees who made Orange County their home after the war. Instead, its black granite slabs sit cracked and blank. An eternal flame sculpture at the center is stained with bird droppings, and no names were ever engraved.

Andrew Do, the former Orange County supervisor who directed the funding in 2023, allocated the money to the Viet America Society, a nonprofit where his daughter held an officer role. Do is now serving a five-year sentence in Arizona for a federal bribery scheme involving millions in pandemic relief funds that were meant to provide meals for seniors. Prosecutors and county attorneys say much of the money he steered to the nonprofit was diverted for personal use. The leader of the organization, Peter Pham, has been indicted and fled the

country.

During a recent visit arranged by OC Supervisor Janet Nguyen, reporters saw the memorial unobstructed for the first time since tarps and fencing were removed. Nguyen, who won Do's former seat, called the memorial a disgrace. She said it dishonors Veterans and was built with poor materials that are already failing. She added that the project lacks accessibility and may pose safety risks, stating that most Vietnam Veterans are now in their seventies or older.

Vietnam Veteran and Veterans Alliance of Orange County president Nick Berardino supports tearing the structure down. He said the scandal surrounding the project stains the memory of those who served and that a new memorial would better honor their sacrifice.

Nguyen said she is committed to pursuing a new memorial, possibly at the planned Orange County Veterans cemetery in Gypsum Canyon, and intends to work with county officials and private donors to move forward.

VA Report Finds Major Shortcomings in How West LA VA Land is Leased and Managed

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

A long overdue report from the VA reveals major shortcomings in the way land use agreements on the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center campus are being managed, according to recent filings with Congress. The report was first mandated by the West Los Angeles Leasing

Act of 2016.

The VA's report finds that several third-party leases on the West LA campus generate significantly less revenue than what the land could command on the open market. The combined market rental value of leases held by Brentwood School, UCLA, and the company operating the SafetyPark parking lots is

estimated at roughly \$48 million annually, while the actual revenue collected during the reporting year was only about \$1.7 million.

Additionally, the VA says it cannot verify millions of dollars in "in-kind" benefits claimed by lessees, which are services or support allegedly provided for Veterans that the VA

cannot substantiate. Brentwood School, for example, claimed in-kind benefits of around \$1.84 million during the period in question, but the VA reported that it could not confirm whether those benefits were actually delivered or whether the valuation was accurate.

See **WEST LA VA LAND LEASE AND MANAGEMENT SHORTCOMINGS** page 10

**THE AMERICAN LEGION
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The American Legion Family is celebrating the nation's 250th birthday with a year-long initiative focused on wellness, service, and support.

The USA 250 Challenge invites individuals and teams across the country to participate in activities that promote physical health, mental well-being, and community engagement. The challenge runs

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House of Representatives, Washington D. C. (Photo: Andreas Praefcke)

THE AMERICAN LEGION HELPS SHAPE KEY VETERAN LEGISLATION

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The American Legion recently provided testimony on a wide range of legislation that seeks to strengthen services and protections for Veterans. These measures include improving access to care, expanding education opportunities for those transitioning out of military service, and ensuring fallen Service Members are properly honored. In September, the House of Representatives passed 14 Veteran-related bills. Many of these align with priorities that The American Legion has consistently supported.

A key measure among them is H.R. 3579, the Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act. The American Legion played an important role in shaping the final language of this bill. Its purpose is to

amend existing law regarding the length of time Veterans can participate in the VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment Program. The revised text establishes a maximum enrollment period of 96 months, or eight years. In extraordinary cases, extensions would require formal requests submitted to both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Initially, The American Legion opposed the draft version of the legislation, raising strong concerns:

“A major cause for concern within this legislation is the lack of exemptions or protections relating to delays stemming from aggravation of a current disability or onset of a new disability. Furthermore, many programs, specifically in STEM fields, require completion of pre-requisite coursework before applying

for acceptance into the program. Acceptance may be determined by randomized selection processes and constrained by program availability and staffing, adding further delay beyond the Veteran's control.”

“The American Legion strongly opposes penalizing Veterans for circumstances that are outside their control. Any arbitrary limit on program participation that fails to consider medical, academic, or administrative barriers not only undermines the spirit of the VR&E program but also risks excluding the very Veterans it was designed to support.”

As a result of this feedback, lawmakers revised the text so that the time allotted for employment assistance now matches the current standard of 18 months. The original draft limited that period to 12 months.

The American Legion expressed appreciation to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs for adopting the recommendation.

Of the 14 bills considered, The American Legion has testified on 10. Examples include H.R. 3400, the TRAVEL Act, which supports overseas assignments as a tool for recruitment and retention. Another is H.R. 3767, the Health Professionals Scholarship Program Improvement Act, which addresses the longstanding challenge of bringing medical providers into the VA system.

Other bills backed by The American Legion include H.R. 3854, which seeks to modernize claims processing using artificial intelligence, and H.R. 2034, which strengthens the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship. The organization also expressed support for H.R. 2334, the Service Member

Residence Protection Act, while recommending amendments to clarify enforcement procedures. Additional legislation covers areas such as digital delivery of information for student Veterans, rural access to benefits, inventory management in VA hospitals, religious heritage restoration for fallen Service Members, and expanded cancer care coordination for Women Veterans.

This collection of bills is only a portion of the more than 255 proposals that The American Legion has reviewed during the 119th Congress. The Legion's Washington, D.C. team continues to analyze legislation, meet with congressional staff, and provide expertise to ensure that policies benefit Service Members, Veterans, Military Families, and survivors.

CALIFORNIA AMERICAN LEGION COLLEGE 2-2025

NEWHALL POST 507 | OCT 17-19

Congratulations to the California American Legion College 2-2025 graduates.

CALC 2-2025 was held at The American Legion Newhall Post 507 in Newhall, California, from October 17-19, 2025.

Thank you, Post 507, 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.

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



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MINDSET MONDAY

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December 8, 2025
TAL: Community Engagement & Impact | Vic Martin

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Maintaining Post Tax Exempt Status | John Hudson

March 9, 2026
Parliamentary Procedures: Tactical Motions | Diane DeVries

April 13, 2026
Post Adjutant: Administrative Excellence for Legion Posts | Chris Yates

Each class will start at 6 PM and is approximately 60 minutes, with an added 30 minutes for Q&A.

Register today at: calegion.org/mindset-mondays-registration





Pictured from right: 1 - Warlito Moises, 2 - Vallejo Mayor Andrea Sorce, 3 - Manuel Concepcion, 4 - City Manager Andrew Murray, 5 - Mike Brown, 6 - Raymond Hart, and 7 - Kari Lacy. (#1, 3, 5, 6, 7 are TAL MLQ Post 603 members.)

THE AMERICAN LEGION MANUEL L QUEZON POST 603 HONORS VETERANS WITH HEARTFELT CEREMONY AT VALLEJO WARRIORS' MEMORIAL

By **Nestor Aliga**
Post 603 Judge Advocate

VALLEJO, CA — The Vallejo Warriors' Memorial came alive with reverence and pride as about 200 community members gathered for the city's annual Veterans Day ceremony.

Warlito Moises - a US Navy Seabee Vietnam War Veteran, past The American Legion (TAL) Dept. of California District 5 and Manuel L Quezon (MLQ) Post 603 Commander, and son of a WWII Veteran - emceed the event. Moises quipped that one positive change for Veterans is that 60 years ago when coming home from Vietnam, protesters yelled obscenities and pelted eggs on his bus but now Veterans are thanked for their service and even offered complimentary meals at many restaurants.

The ceremony featured stirring prayers by Mike Brown, 22-year Navy Submarine Service Veteran, City of Vallejo Chaplain, and Post 603 life-member, Parade The Colors by Scouting America Vallejo Troop 7012 Scouts, the National Anthem fervently sung by former Councilmember Tom Bartee, and the Pledge of Allegiance led by US Army Veteran and Post 603 Commander Raymond Hart.

Distinguished speakers included Mayor Andrea Sorce, City Manager Andrew Murray, Solano Supervisor Cassandra James, and Mel Orpilla read a letter from US Representative John Garamendi. All of them thanked all Veterans for their service, valor, sacrifice, and ongoing contributions to the community and also urged everyone to match

Veterans' military service with acts of gratitude and for government agencies to improve access to healthcare, housing, education, and employment.

Manuel Concepcion, a retired US Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant (E-7) was squared-away in his dress blues and his Bronze Star Medal with Combat V for Valor, and Purple Heart and other medals. His speech was about the 250th birthdays of the Navy and Marine Corps and their storied connection with the former Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo. The ceremony concluded with the wreath-laying, the sounding of Taps by US Navy Veteran Kari Lacy, and the benediction. The video posted at www.youtube.com/@nestoraliga7537 includes a sample resolution and program.

Veterans Outpace Civilians in Volunteering and Voting, Report Finds

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Veterans continue to show higher levels of civic participation than their civilian peers, but the gap between the two groups has narrowed in recent years, according to the 2025 Veterans Civic Health Index released Sept. 18.

The report, compiled by 'We the Veterans and Military Families' in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship, draws on U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2023 Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement and the 2022 and 2024 Voting and Registration Supplements. It found that while Veterans remain more likely to vote, donate, and volunteer more hours, both groups reported slight declines in civic involvement compared to earlier surveys.

Military Times, which first reported the findings, noted that Veterans continue to exceed civilians in several measures of civic engagement. In the 2024 election, 73% of Veterans cast ballots, compared to 66% of non-Veterans. Participation at the local level was also stronger among Veterans, with 64% voting in recent local elections, compared to 53% of civilians. Registration rates were similarly higher, continuing a pattern of consistent electoral engagement.

Volunteering rates between the groups were nearly identical, with 27% of Veterans and 28% of non-Veterans reporting volunteer work. But Veterans contributed more time, averaging 93 hours per year compared to 69 hours for civilians. Altogether, Veterans contribute nearly half a billion volunteer

hours annually, the equivalent of more than 200,000 full-time workers.

Still, those numbers represent a decrease from 2021 levels. Report author Chris Marvin said the decline appears across both groups, not just Veterans. Despite the drop, researchers emphasize that Veterans remain one of the most civically engaged groups in American society. Veterans also run for public office and serve in government roles at higher rates than civilians, reflecting a continued commitment to service beyond the military. Surveys show they are more likely to contact elected officials and to stay informed about current events.

The study states that post-9/11 Veterans now make up the largest portion of the Veteran community. This generation, many of whom served multiple deployments, carries forward lessons of teamwork and resilience into civic life. They are also more diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity than earlier cohorts, reshaping the face of Veteran civic engagement.

"Civic groups should see Veterans not as people in need of help, but as assets ready to help solve problems," Marvin said.

With just under 18 million Veterans and millions more family members connected to service, the report concludes that investing in their civic potential could help strengthen communities at a time when national trust in institutions is low.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN LEGION'S 106TH NATIONAL CONVENTION | TAMPA, FL

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The American Legion's 106th National Convention was held earlier this year at the Tampa Convention Center, bringing together thousands of Veterans, families, and supporters for a week of tributes, policy discussions, and forward-looking initiatives.

Delegates elected Kansas Legionnaire Dan K. Wiley as the 2025–2026 national commander. Wiley pledged to carry forward the Legion's mission of suicide prevention, emphasizing teamwork across the Legion Family. "We must continue to be the one for each other," Wiley said.

Pam Ray was elected as American Legion Auxiliary National President, and William "Bill" Clancy III as Sons of The American Legion National Commander.

One of the most memorable moments was when Medal of Honor recipient Dwight Birdwell addressed delegates. Birdwell, who received the nation's highest military honor for his heroism in Vietnam, recounted his 2022 White House ceremony with President Joe Biden and reflected on his award as a tribute to those who did not survive the battle. Recently joining The American Legion as a member of Post 30 in Lincolnton, N.C., Birdwell reminded attendees that "every job in the military is important" and urged Veterans and families to take pride in their service.

U.S. Senator Ashley Moody (R-Fla.) welcomed attendees on opening day, praising the Legion's ongoing commitment to service. She urged Veterans to continue leading in their communities and in public



2025–2026 National Commander Dan K. Wiley raises his hands high in celebration alongside William "Bill" Clancy III, Sons of The American Legion National Commander, and Pam Ray, American Legion Auxiliary National President. (Photo: The American Legion National Headquarters)

life.

Natural disaster response was a major focus. A Disaster Preparedness Panel featured Legionnaires from North Carolina, California, and Texas, who shared first-hand accounts of recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene, the Palisades Fire, and flooding in Kerr County. Panelists described challenges ranging from destroyed posts to long-term rebuilding efforts, highlighting the Legion Family's resilience and leadership in times of crisis.

The convention also celebrated achievements and service. National Commander James LaCoursiere Jr. presented the Distinguished Service Medal to the U.S. Marine Corps, accepted by Maj. Gen. Joseph Clearfield, as the branch marks its 250th anniversary alongside the Army and Navy.

Notable happenings:

The ALA Jackie Robinson Color Guard took first place in the Military Open Class, second place in the Open Class, and third place in Post and Retrieve.

LegacyRun2025 raised \$855,785 for the Veterans & Children Foundation, with top donors including The American Legion Departments of California, South Carolina, Virginia, Texas, and Maryland.

The American Legion partnered with Hiring Our Heroes to host a LinkedIn workshop and hiring fair for Veterans and military spouses, providing direct access to more than 20 employers.

The Foreign and Outlying Posts and Departments of The American Legion, FODPAL, elected new officers and recognized award winners during its annual breakfast meeting.

Innovation in Veterans' health care took center stage during the Veterans Health Hackathon, held in collaboration with the VA, MIT Hacking Medicine, Microsoft, and others. Nearly 500 participants worked with Veterans to develop solutions aimed at improving access to care, operational efficiency, and coordination within the VA system. Winning projects will advance to a makeathon and accelerator

program to refine and test their ideas.

The week also featured remarks from several high-profile leaders. VA Secretary Doug Collins urged Veterans to stay engaged in suicide prevention and provided updates on the VA's progress, including reducing the claims backlog from 260,000 in January to under 150,000 by late August. He emphasized that efficiency in helping Veterans is more important than the size of the VA, pointed to expanded access to community care, extended VA hours for younger Veterans, and renewed commitments to ending Veteran homelessness.

The convention recognized outstanding service: Phyllis J. Wilson, president of the Military Women's Memorial and an Army Veteran, received the Patriot Award for her decades of service and advocacy for women Veterans. The Legion presented its National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award to Sgt. Shane Maloley of Beatrice, Neb., and the National Fire-fighter of the Year Award to Lt. Jason Harmsen of

Clayton County, Ga.

Awards were extended to the employment sector as well. JB Hunt Transport Services was recognized as Large Employer of the Year for its Veteran hiring and support efforts, while Maria Lindsey of the Texas Veterans Commission received the DVOP Specialist of the Year Award for her dedication to Veteran career counseling. Additional VE&E awards honored small and medium businesses, service representatives, and programs that support Veteran employment.

Speakers also connected the convention's themes to America's past and future. Author Robert Edsel, best known for *The Monuments Men*, introduced his new book *Remember Us* and called for a U.S. version of the Netherlands' grave adoption program, where families honor the memory of fallen soldiers.

Looking toward 2026, Rosie Rios, chair of the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission, encouraged the Legion to support America 250, the nationwide initiative to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary. She outlined programs such as America Gives, the largest planned service initiative in U.S. history, and Our American Story, an oral history project collecting voices from across the country.

Business and entrepreneurship were also in focus. During the Small Business Conference co-hosted with the SBA, speakers stressed patience in transitioning from military service to entrepreneurship and called attention to federal efforts to expand opportunities for Veteran-owned businesses.



USS Annapolis (Photo: U.S. Navy Lt. James Caliva)

ADVOCACY GROUP SEEKS EXPANDED BENEFITS FOR SUBMARINE VETERANS

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The Submariners' Advocacy Group, a nonprofit representing current and former submarine sailors, is pushing for expanded health care and disability benefits connected to toxic exposure in submarine environments, according to reporting from Stars and Stripes. The group released a detailed report outlining more than 150 contaminants that crews may have faced during long stretches spent in sealed underwater spaces.

Titled "The Unseen Burden," the report brings together earlier U.S. Navy research, studies from the National Research Council, and information compiled

by members of the advocacy group. It describes submarine duty as a setting where exposure to hazardous chemicals, higher carbon dioxide levels, and reduced oxygen occurred daily.

The group says these conditions may contribute to health problems that often emerge long after a sailor's service ends.

Some of the hazards listed include benzene, ozone, and asbestos—along with monoethanolamine, a chemical used to help scrub carbon dioxide from the air. The report also highlights a chemical byproduct produced by a common lubricant that has been found on surfaces throughout submarines.

This residue has appeared on walls, floors, eating utensils, and on the skin of crewmembers.

Members of the advocacy group are also asking the Navy to release atmospheric studies conducted more than two decades ago that remain classified. Reported by Stars and Stripes, these studies examined the makeup of submarine air systems and could provide insight into patterns of disease seen in former crew members. The group says the lack of updated research has made it difficult to fully understand how chemical mixtures behave inside the enclosed spaces of a submarine.

Radiation exposure is

another concern raised in the report. Navy submarines operate with strict safety protocols, and crewmembers carry personal radiation monitors, but the group says sailors can still experience low-level exposure for extended periods. A 2022 National Library of Medicine report referenced by the advocacy group states that the long-term cancer risks associated with low levels of radiation in submarine crews are still not well understood.

The Submariners' Advocacy Group estimates that about 300,000 Veterans have served in the submarine force since 1947. Many of them, the group says, struggle when seeking disability recognition for conditions they believe are

tied to submarine service. According to the report, claims from submarine Veterans are denied at a higher rate than other VA claims, partly because many illnesses develop slowly over time.

The organization is requesting that the VA expand coverage under the PACT Act so that more conditions linked to submarine toxic exposure qualify for presumptive benefits. It is also urging the Navy to conduct new research on chemical, biological, and radiation exposures aboard modern submarines. The group says continued attention is needed to ensure submarine Veterans receive care that reflects the environment in which they served.

THE HISTORY OF VETERANS DAY, FROM THE '11TH DAY' TO THE PRESENT

By Christian Southards
Associate Editor

Veterans Day honors all who served in the United States Armed Forces, both in peace time and in war.

1918–1920 — “THE 11TH HOUR OF THE 11TH DAY OF THE 11TH MONTH”

On “the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month” of 1918, World War I—an unprecedented blight of destruction and suffering—ended with a quiet, uneasy ceasefire. A little over four years and as many as 40 million casualties across Europe, Africa, and Asia abruptly ended, bringing relief and joy—and solemnity.

Most of the architects of the war’s end wanted to preserve an indefinite peace. The first anniversary of the war’s end became Armistice Day, serving as a somber reminder. It was individually recognized by most of the Allied Powers, and honored both those lost and the survivors that served.

Armistice Day in the United States

The American Legion was formed the same year, playing a critical role in honoring Armistice Day in the United States from the beginning. Legion Posts ran grassroots campaigns and promoted civil observances. Local events became state events, and at the direction of Congress, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11, 1919, as the first Armistice Day.

“To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country’s service and with gratitude for the victory”



Armistice Day in 1922 (Photo: Harris & Ewing, Library of Congress)

– President Woodrow Wilson

Communities were encouraged to pause activities at 11:00 a.m. for a moment of silence, reflecting the armistice’s timing. Parades and public gatherings became common commemorative events in towns and cities.

Here in California, cities like Los Angeles organized Armistice Day parades that first year and on, with Veterans, military bands, and civic leaders marching to honor those who served. The following year, CA formally declared Armistice Day as a state holiday.

1926 AND 1938 — OFFICIAL FEDERAL RECOGNITION BEFORE WORLD WAR II AND THE KOREAN WAR

The early observances of Armistice Day set a pattern of patriotic commemoration that would continue each year. However, there was no formal federal recognition for events. In 1926, Congress rectified this, passing a concurrent resolution urging the sitting president to issue annual proclamations for November 11.

It would be another 12 years before Armistice Day was recognized as an official federal holiday. Veterans’ groups like The

American Legion and civic organizations lobbied Congress throughout the Interwar Period, and on May 13, 1938, they succeeded. The law declared Armistice Day “a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace” and set it apart to honor the Veterans of World War I.

Armistice Day became an annual nationwide day of remembrance. Banks and federal offices closed, and the whole country paused to honor Veterans—and what would shortly become ill-fated peace. The promise to “end all wars” didn’t survive the rise of fascism in Europe and Asia.

1945–1954 — VETERANS OF NEW WARS AND THE PUSH FOR A BROADER HOLIDAY

The Second World War eclipsed the atrocity of the first in every way measurable, but did little to dissuade further conflict. Less than five years after the end of World War II, the Korean War threatened to ignite a third global war. Within a short period, tens of millions of Americans representing multiple conflicts had served in uniform.

Yet Armistice Day still largely focused on World War I. Those who served in World War II and Korea

also deserved national recognition.

Surviving Veterans from both wars, along with Veterans’ organizations, launched efforts to broaden Armistice Day’s scope. In 1947, World War II Veteran Raymond Weeks organized the first “National Veterans Day” celebration in Alabama, treating Armistice Day as a day to honor veterans of all wars. He later advocated for making this change nationwide. Meanwhile, The American Legion and other groups passed resolutions urging Congress to change the holiday’s name and purpose. Public sentiment changed first, and towns and cities across the U.S. held the first inclusive Veterans Day ceremonies.

Eisenhower Signs Veterans Day Bill

In 1954, Congress acted to officially change the holiday. Rep. Ed Rees of Kansas introduced a bill to rename Armistice Day; it swiftly passed. President and Veteran Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the legislation shortly after, and November 11 became Veterans Day.

Eisenhower issued the first Veterans Day proclamation later that year, calling on citizens and Veteran organizations to join in a nationwide observance that acknowledged and

honored all who answered a call to serve during peace and war.

1968–1978 AND NOW — THE VETERANS DAY DATE CHANGE...AND RETURN

Veterans Day’s somber origins took an unusual turn in 1968. As part of an effort to create more three-day weekends for federal workers, several federal holidays were moved from fixed dates to designated Mondays throughout the year. Veterans Day was slated to be observed on the fourth Monday in October instead of November 11, disconnecting the holiday from Armistice Day. Public support was weak at best.

While the change did not officially take effect until 1971, many cities and states throughout the United States ignored the new federal policy out of tradition. By 1975, opposition had grown strong enough that Congress passed a new law returning Veterans Day to its original date beginning in 1978. When signing the bill, President Gerald Ford remarked that the return respected the “desires of the overwhelming majority.”

PRESENT-DAY MEANING AND OBSERVANCE

The 1968–1978 episode showed how strongly Americans felt about the symbolism of November 11 without losing the acknowledgement of Veterans who served after World War I. What began as Armistice Day—a grave anniversary of the end of World War I—has transformed into a heartfelt tribute to all Veterans and their role in defending the United States.



Image by Fredrick Shacklett via Google Gemini

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED: A VETERANS DAY MESSAGE

By **Fredrick Shacklett**
Post 51 Commander

On Veterans' Day 2025, The American Legion joins the nation in honoring the dedicated individuals who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces and recommends our support to those who have protected our freedoms.

Veterans' Day, first known as Armistice Day after World War I, now honors all who have served in the military. Veteran's Day recognizes their courage, dedication, and patriotism—sometimes in conflict areas; sometimes elsewhere.

For The American Legion—an organization founded by Veterans, for Veterans—this day is at the very core of who we are. The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month will never be diminished nor forgotten. Our mission, "For God and Country," is lived out daily through our

unwavering commitment to all Veterans and to the four pillars of The American Legion.

THE LEGION SUPPORTS...

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

We work tirelessly to ensure that Veterans receive the benefits they have earned and the care they deserve. This includes advocating for robust healthcare services, fighting Veteran homelessness, and providing assistance to families navigating the challenges of military service and transition.

National Security

Our Legionnaires understand that a strong nation is essential to protect freedom. We champion the need for a robust military, support our active-duty Service Members, and advocate for the legislation and resources needed to

maintain global peace and deter aggression.

Americanism

We promote patriotism, civic responsibility, and respect for our flag and Constitution. We believe in educating future generations about the sacrifices made to secure their freedoms.

Children and Youth

Programs such as American Legion Baseball, Boys & Girls State (a hands-on civics education program for high school juniors), Oratorical Contests (public speaking contests for promoting knowledge of the U.S. Constitution), Junior Shooting Sports (a safety and marksmanship program), and support for Scouting, we invest in the young leaders of tomorrow, instilling values of service, leadership, and citizenship that mirror the very best qualities of our veterans.

VETERANS DAY 2025

This Veterans' Day, we honor those who have served and pledge our support to all veterans. Let us ensure our Veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned, that benefit assistance is available, and access to the training and employment opportunities available within our communities. And we will always remind our veterans:

"You are not alone; you will not be forgotten."

Every Veteran has played a vital role in the protection of our nation, whether serving in combat overseas or fulfilling support duties. Their contributions—made in the air, on land, at sea, or beneath it—remain unwavering and essential.

Their stories—Veterans' personal stories—are essential to America's narrative. Each is a thread in the fabric of our democracy. Each tells us that freedom is earned. And each of us should always be willing to listen and honor their legacies. When a Veteran speaks, learn to listen—and listen closely. Veteran legacy is our legacy.

'BE THE ONE' ON VETERANS DAY

What is on your Veterans Day agenda? Each of us has an obligation to be the one person who steps up and offers a hand to a Veteran in need. Be the one to say, "Yes, I will help you."

Be the one to step up. Be the one to go above and beyond. The American Legion is the nation's leader with our Be the One program. The American Legion founded this program with one goal: Stop Veteran suicide.

In recent years, Veteran suicide has been as high as 22 casualties a day. That

should be unacceptable to any civilized society. The Be The One program is designed to identify at-risk Veterans and direct resources to them in a time of crisis.

THE MISSION

The American Legion recognizes and honors all those who have served in the U. S. Military. We express our gratitude for their courage, their sacrifice, and their dedication to our nation's defense. We understand the true meaning of that commitment.

We extend our heartfelt thanks and our best, sincerest well-wishes to all Veterans, to all of our like-minded Veteran service organizations—and as always, for God and country, God bless the United States of America.



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bit.ly/calegion-emails

VA EXPANDS PTSD TREATMENT OPTIONS TO SUPPORT VETERANS' RECOVERY

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Facilities across the VA offer a variety of proven, evidence-based treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, helping Veterans restore relationships, regain hope, and reclaim important aspects of their lives.

Treatments include Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Written Exposure Therapy. Each of these options takes a different approach and can be matched to the Veteran. CPT is often recommended for individuals facing trust issues, while PE is suited for those who avoid certain situations. EMDR can be particularly effective for Veterans with multiple traumatic experiences, as it works in line with the brain's natural healing process.

PTSD occurs when the body's natural recovery process after trauma is

disrupted, often through avoidance. For many Veterans, the trauma continues to feel immediate, creating barriers that interfere with daily living. VA programs are designed to break through those barriers and guide individuals toward recovery.

The right therapy can be transformative. According to the VA, one Veteran who had witnessed an improvised explosive device blast during deployment carried years of guilt, believing more could have been done. After several therapy sessions, he came to understand that the event was not his fault, opening a path toward lasting change.

Individualized treatment goals are at the heart of VA care. Recovery does not look the same for every Veteran. For some, success means being able to play with children again, attend family milestones, or regain a sense of calm. Treatment plans are built around what brings purpose and joy to each



(Photo by RDNE Stock project)

individual.

Building long-term resilience is also a central focus. In addition to addressing past trauma, Veterans learn coping skills to handle future stressors. Many continue with group sessions or booster appointments to stay supported as they move forward.

Beyond trauma-focused therapies, VA care also addresses related concerns such as insomnia, nightmares, and difficulties with emotional regulation. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, Acceptance

and Commitment Therapy, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy are available to strengthen overall wellness. Whole health programs provide additional holistic support to complement traditional treatments.

Treatment can be accessed in person or virtually. Remote sessions have made it easier for Veterans to receive care by removing barriers such as transportation, work conflicts, or physical pain. Many are now choosing virtual care as their primary method of treatment.

Stigma, particularly among male Veterans, remains a challenge. Some hesitate to seek support, believing it signals weakness. VA providers emphasize that reaching out is an act of strength and a step toward resilience.

For more information, visit VA.Gov.

Veterans in crisis or those concerned about another Veteran can contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support, available 24/7. Dial 988 and press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text 838255.

West LA VA Land Lease and Management Shortcomings

WEST LA VA LAND LEASE AND MANAGEMENT SHORTCOMINGS page 1

Under the West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016, leases on the campus must principally benefit Veterans and their families. The VA report states that some of the leases, particularly those with Brentwood School, UCLA, and SafetyPark, may fail to meet that standard because their primary purpose appears to serve non-Veteran entities rather than directly supporting Veterans.

This report arrives amid ongoing litigation in which a federal judge ordered the VA to accelerate

development of housing for Veterans on the West LA campus. Advocacy groups argue that these findings reinforce the need for the VA to shift away from allowing high-value land to be leased for private use and to instead fulfill its original mission to serve Veterans. In its report, the VA indicated it is reviewing all existing lease agreements and is prepared to terminate those that are inconsistent with the Leasing Act or other federal laws.

The disclosure comes as the VA works on a master plan for the campus that prioritizes housing and

services for Veterans. The report details how lease revenue has been spent, including more than \$4.3 million used during the reporting period for safety and infrastructure improvements at Veteran housing areas on campus.

The gap between market value and actual lease revenue suggests that the VA may not be capturing fair value for the land, potentially diverting resources away from Veteran housing projects. The inability to verify in-kind benefits also raises questions about whether Veterans are receiving the full value of these agreements



West LA VA Campus shuttle stop (Photo: VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System)

as required by law. The potential noncompliance with the 2016 Leasing Act strengthens calls for legal and congressional oversight of how the West LA VA campus is managed.

The VA now faces

increasing pressure to resolve these lease issues and accelerate the development of supportive housing for Veterans, ensuring that the West Los Angeles campus fulfills its original purpose to care for those who served.



U.S. Marines roll into Kuwait International Airport in light armored vehicles and M-998 high-mobility, multipurpose, wheeled vehicles after the retreat of Iraqi forces from Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm. (Photo: Public Domain)

GULF WAR ILLNESS IS FORMALLY RECOGNIZED AFTER DECADES OF ADVOCACY

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

After more than 30 years of reports from Veterans about unexplained and debilitating symptoms, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has formally recognized Gulf War Illness, GWI, as an official medical condition.

According to Stars and Stripes, the CDC introduced a diagnostic code for the illness, which took effect on Oct. 1. This is a long-awaited step for Veterans who served during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s.

The new code, included in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10-CM), will enable doctors and researchers to more accurately identify, track, and treat GWI. As reported by Task & Purpose, this decision provides overdue medical recognition for a condition that has affected as many as one-third of the nearly 700,000 U.S. troops deployed to the Persian Gulf.

Veterans have reported

symptoms such as respiratory issues, chronic fatigue, joint pain, digestive disorders, cognitive problems, and skin rashes that often worsen with time. Without an official diagnosis, many were previously classified under other conditions like chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia. The lack of a specific code made it difficult for doctors and researchers to study and treat the illness within and outside the VA healthcare system.

UC San Diego Today says the new diagnostic code is progress in medical care and research. Studies from the University of California, San Diego have connected GWI to chemical exposures that disrupt the body's energy production and cause long-term changes to the brain and immune system. The new classification will help physicians access research-backed information and provide appropriate treatments.

Researchers from Boston University and Nova Southeastern University told Task & Purpose the new code will help healthcare providers

properly diagnose and monitor Veterans affected by GWI rather than labeling their symptoms under unrelated categories. It will also streamline future research by allowing scientists to identify patients through medical records instead of informal networks.

As Stars and Stripes reported, the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics oversees these diagnostic codes, which are used globally by medical professionals. Including Gulf War illness in this system means it is now officially recognized as a physical condition related to military service rather than a psychological one.

Veterans' organizations such as Veterans for Common Sense and Vietnam Veterans of America praised the decision, saying it validates the experiences of Gulf War Veterans who have waited decades for acknowledgment and care. The new code is also expected to make it easier for those affected to access medical benefits through the VA.

VA POLICY CHANGE ADDS BARRIERS FOR MALE VETERANS WITH BREAST CANCER

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

October was Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time when attention turns to early detection and treatment. This year, the VA has come under scrutiny after changing how it handles breast cancer coverage for male Veterans.

A newly obtained memo from the VA outlines that male breast cancer will no longer be presumed to be connected to military service under the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics, or PACT, act. The law, passed during the Biden administration, dramatically expanded health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to toxic substances such as Agent Orange and burn pits.

Under the new policy, Veterans who are newly diagnosed must now prove that their illness was caused by military service. The VA confirmed the change, stating that as of Sept. 30, male breast cancer is no longer included on the list of presumptive conditions. Veterans already receiving treatment through the VA will continue to have their care covered.

The memo cites an executive order signed by President Donald Trump titled Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government. The order claims that male breasts were incorrectly categorized as reproductive organs under the PACT Act, which provides coverage for reproductive

cancers.

Medical specialists have long said that male and female breast tissue share similar biological structures and that treatment methods are nearly identical. Studies have also found that breast cancer among men is more deadly because it is often detected later, and the rate of cases among Veterans is higher than in the general population.

Each year, about 100 male Veterans are diagnosed with breast cancer. While uncommon compared to women, the disease can be just as aggressive. Toxic exposure during service has been linked to several cancers, including breast cancer, through studies involving contaminated water and chemical agents.

Supporters of the PACT Act say the policy change could make it harder for Veterans to receive timely care and may reverse progress made in improving access to health benefits. They also worry it could open the door for additional rollbacks in coverage for toxic exposure-related illnesses and treatments.

The VA maintains that Veterans with male breast cancer can still receive benefits if they can show a direct connection to their military service. The department said it will continue to process claims individually. This decision has brought attention to how difficult it can be for Veterans to get care and recognition for illnesses tied to their service.

VA EDUCATION PAYMENTS DELAYED BY SHUTDOWN AND SYSTEM FAILURE

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

A software malfunction and the federal government shutdown have created significant delays for more than 75,000 students who rely on VA education benefits. The issue, first reported by Stars and Stripes, halted automated tuition and housing payments under the VA's Chapter 35 program, which provides monthly stipends to the dependents and survivors of deceased or fully Disabled Veterans.

The VA confirmed that a new claims management system implemented in August triggered the disruption. Technicians who could fix the software are among those furloughed since the shutdown began on Oct. 1. As a result, claims are being processed manually, extending wait times for students whose October payments have yet to arrive. VA Press Secretary Peter Kasperowicz said the problem might not be fully resolved until late November or December,



(Photo: Krishna Rawat)

though all delayed payments will be issued in full once processing resumes.

Chapter 35 beneficiaries receive monthly stipends to help cover the costs of college, trade, or vocational school. Payment rates for the 2025–2026 school year are \$1,574 per month for full-time enrollment and \$912 for half-time. Students must

verify their enrollment each month by email or text to continue receiving funds.

The shutdown also closed key communication services, including the GI Bill hotline, some features of AskVA.Gov, and the School Certifying Officials hotline, cutting off students and families from vital support. Without

these resources, those awaiting benefits have few options for updates or assistance. The lack of available counselors further compounded the issue, leaving Chapter 35 students unable to complete certifications, reenroll for the next semester, or make changes to their academic schedules.

In response, The American

Legion and other Veterans' advocacy organizations urged the VA to create a post-shutdown recovery plan to manage the backlog and prevent additional lapses. They argued that even temporary interruptions in educational support can have lasting consequences, especially for families already managing financial challenges.

The VA said it had intended to use overtime pay and automation tools to ensure a smooth rollout of the new system, but could not do so once the shutdown began. Some furloughed employees with claims experience were recalled to assist with manual processing.

Many students are still waiting for payments. The agency maintains that once the system is repaired and staff return, all Chapter 35 benefits owed will be issued. Until then, thousands of dependents and survivors are facing uncertainty about how to cover educational and living expenses amid the fallout.

VETERANS REMOVED OVER COVID VACCINE RULES REGAIN GI BILL ACCESS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Thousands of Veterans discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine during the Biden administration may now regain access to GI Bill education benefits. The VA confirmed the change on Nov. 17, following a major policy shift tied to a January executive order from President Donald Trump.

Trump's order, Executive Order 14184, directed federal agencies to identify former Service Members who were removed from the ranks because they declined the vaccine and

to take steps to restore opportunities lost because of their discharge status.

The directive followed years of controversy over the military's pandemic-era requirements, which took effect in August 2021 under then Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. The mandate was officially rescinded in January 2023.

The VA and DOD have been reviewing records of those affected. More than 8,000 Service Members were separated after refusing the vaccine during the Biden administration. Over half received discharges classified as less than fully honorable,

which can limit a Veteran's access to education programs under the GI Bill.

After initial reviews, Defense officials reported that 899 Veterans now meet eligibility requirements for GI Bill benefits due to upgraded discharge statuses. The number is expected to grow as more Veterans request reviews through their service branch's Discharge Review Board or Board for Correction of Military or Naval Records.

VA Secretary Doug Collins said the department is working to carry out the order and restore benefits

to those affected. Collins described the earlier mandate as a policy that disrupted the lives and careers of Service Members who chose not to take the vaccine. He said the department is committed to helping Veterans regain opportunities that were limited by those separations.

White House spokesperson Anna Kelly said the executive order aims to correct what Trump views as improper dismissals. Kelly said the president wants Veterans who did not reenlist to have access to the GI Bill benefits that help many transition to

civilian careers.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth also directed the military departments to make it easier for former Service Members to pursue discharge upgrades. Hegseth called the earlier separations an attack on troops who were otherwise healthy and willing to serve. He said restoring benefits will rebuild trust among those affected by the mandate.

For more information, read our full article at: calegion.org/veterans-removed-over-covid-vaccine-rules-regain-gi-bill-access/



Orange County and State Leaders Move Forward with Veterans Cemetery at Gypsum Canyon (Photo: County of Orange, California)

NEWSOM SIGNS BILL ADVANCING ORANGE COUNTY VETERANS CEMETERY AT GYPSUM CANYON

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

On September 22, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 571, authored by Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva (D-Fullerton), moving the Orange County Veterans Cemetery at Gypsum Canyon closer to becoming a reality. The legislation establishes the framework for the long-awaited project, authorizing CalVet to oversee environmental review and the next steps needed for development.

The bill passed with strong bipartisan and community support, backed by the County of Orange, every city in the county, and numerous Veterans

organizations.

AB 571 follows years of bipartisan work to secure a final site for Orange County's first Veterans cemetery. With the Governor's signature, responsibility now moves to CalVet, a major step forward for local Veterans and their families who have spent more than a decade advocating for the project and working to preserve the Gypsum Canyon location.

Assemblywoman Quirk-Silva described the signing of AB 571 as a historic step for Veterans in Orange County. She said that working with CalVet honors the service of Veterans and brings the community closer to a cemetery they have long

deserved. Quirk-Silva expressed deep gratitude to Governor Newsom for his continued support throughout this decade-long effort.

Orange County Supervisor Don Wagner called the signing of the bill a milestone for local Veterans. He credited Quirk-Silva's persistence for helping the project overcome years of political obstacles and delays. Wagner also thanked the Governor for standing with the Orange County community to help deliver a Veterans cemetery at Gypsum Canyon, a site that has long been considered the most suitable and accessible location for the project.

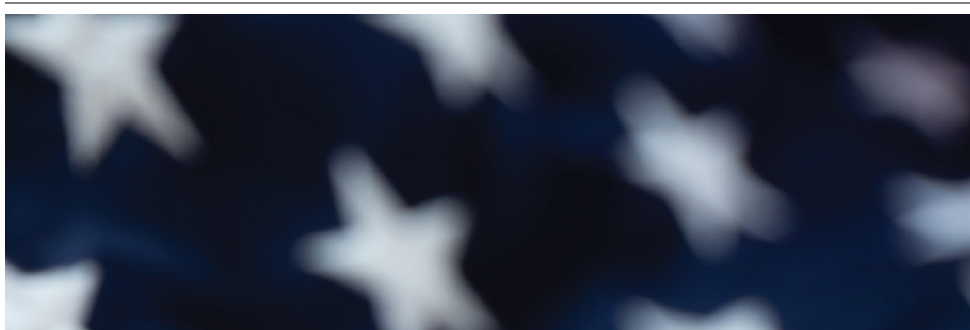
Nick Berardino, President

of Veterans Alliance of Orange County (VALOR), said the legislation clears the path for progress after years of waiting. He stated that Veterans have fulfilled every requirement set by state and federal agencies to build the cemetery and that the bill removes any reason for further delays. Berardino thanked Governor Newsom for his support and commitment to seeing the project through.

Under AB 571, the Gypsum Canyon Veterans Cemetery is exempt from additional California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review. The measure is designed to remove bureaucratic barriers and expedite the construction process. The exemption

applies only under specific conditions, including that the cemetery must be a less intensive use than the previously approved Mountain Park development, which underwent an environmental impact review in 2005. An updated addendum has already been completed to align with current environmental standards.

The exemption is temporary and will expire on January 1, 2030. The urgency statute took effect immediately upon the Governor's signature, allowing CalVet to move forward without delay.




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NUREMBERG AND THE DUTY TO REMEMBER: A MESSAGE FOR THE AMERICAN LEGION

By Jeff Daly
Department Historian

On November 20, 1945, the world gathered in Nuremberg to begin the first international trial of its kind. The next morning, on November 21, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson (portrayed in *Nuremberg* by Michael Shannon) delivered one of the most consequential speeches in modern history.

“The privilege of opening the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the world imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot survive their being repeated. That four great nations, flushed with victory and stung with injury stay the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that Power has ever paid to Reason.”

— Justice Robert H. Jackson, Opening Statement,

November 21, 1945

On this anniversary, we pause to reflect on the magnitude of that moment and on the legacy it left not only for our nation but for generations of service members who have spent their lives defending the principles Jackson articulated.

The Allied victory in World War II ended the fighting, but the struggle for justice had only begun. In the wake of the Holocaust, with overwhelming evidence of mass atrocities emerging from the liberated camps, the war’s final front shifted from the battlefield to the courtroom. The new film *Nuremberg*, now playing in theaters nationwide, vividly portrays this “war after the war,” when a new generation of warriors—lawyers, investigators, and soldiers-turned-prosecutors—took up the mission of holding evil accountable.

Director James Vanderbilt’s *Nuremberg* brings to life the monumental trials that began on November 20, 1945, and concluded on October 1, 1946. The

first trial targeted 22 of the most senior surviving leaders of the Third Reich and established the foundation for modern international law. But the film does more than recount events; it illuminates the human beings who carried out this mission, revealing the moral complexity they faced in the pursuit of justice.

Russell Crowe delivers a chilling, layered performance as Hermann Göring, Hitler’s second-in-command, capturing the ego, charisma, and danger of a man who believed himself untouchable. Rami Malek portrays U.S. Army psychiatrist Douglas Kelley, whose psychological study of Göring blurs the line between duty and obsession. And Michael Shannon, as Chief Prosecutor Robert H. Jackson, commands the screen with quiet intensity, embodying a pursuit of justice rooted in integrity rather than vengeance.

Vanderbilt’s direction balances historical authenticity with emotional power. The cinematography is stark, the pacing deliberate, and the dialogue grounded in the

legal and moral dilemmas that defined the postwar moment. The result is a courtroom drama that transcends the genre. It is both historical chronicle and ethical reckoning.

For military and veteran audiences, *Nuremberg* will strike a familiar chord. The film’s depiction of discipline, preparation and tactical thinking mirrors the battlefield mindset: improvise, adapt, overcome. The courtroom becomes an extension of the campaign for freedom, where words replace weapons but strategy still determines victory.

The Allied forces won the war, but as *Nuremberg* reminds us, lawyers and soldiers together won the peace. In the words of The American Legion’s preamble, it remains our duty “to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars.” This unforgettable film does exactly that—honoring those who fought for justice long after the guns fell silent.

“It was an honor to portray a soldier in *NUREMBERG*, an experience which

deepened my appreciation for the men and women who wear the uniform, and for the physical bravery and the moral courage it takes to stand up for justice for victims and survivors, even in the darkest chapters of history. Today and always, thank you for your service.”

— Rami Malek

For the American Legion community, the legacy of *Nuremberg* is inseparable from the legacy of service. The soldiers, lawyers, and military personnel who carried the mission forward exemplified both courage and restraint—choosing justice over vengeance, and principle over power. On this anniversary, we honor their example and reaffirm the enduring truth Justice Jackson articulated: civilization survives only when we choose to defend it.

The film is well worth seeing, especially as we mark the 80th anniversary of the *Nuremberg Trials*. For more information and tickets please visit: <https://nuremberg-film.com/>



U.S. Marines with Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One make radio calls during an MV-22 Osprey long-range raid training, Oct. 8, 2025. (Photo: U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Andrew King)

THE AMERICAN LEGION AND VETERANS' GROUPS URGE CONGRESS TO PASS THE PAY OUR TROOPS ACT

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Leaders from The American Legion and several Veterans organizations gathered in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 14 to demand that Congress pass the Pay Our Troops Act and end the ongoing government shutdown. Hosted by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the press conference brought together a coalition of advocates representing millions of Service Members, Veterans, and Military Families across the country.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter, a Marine Corps Veteran and CEO of IAVA, said the shutdown is creating financial hardship and anxiety for troops and their families. She explained that while some VA benefits continue, many Veterans are experiencing delayed payments and difficulty reaching GI Bill hotlines or rescheduling appointments. Hunter urged lawmakers to deliver a permanent solution so that military pay isn't jeopardized during political

disputes.

"Even before the shutdown began, nearly one in four active duty Service Members face food insecurity," Hunter said. "Nearly half of our active duty Service Members are living paycheck to paycheck, and putting them in a situation where they are facing uncertainty is not good for our national security."

The American Legion's Executive Director of Government Affairs, Mario Marquez, who previously served as a senior enlisted Marine leader, said he has seen firsthand how shutdowns hurt morale and readiness.

"It was the people who paid the price for political failure," Marquez said. "Congress must protect those who protect us. When lawmakers fail to keep their promises, they fail the very people who make this nation work."

Marquez described how shutdowns disrupt essential military programs and delay support services for Veterans. He pointed out

that furloughs and pay delays can have lasting impacts on morale, readiness, and even mental health. The American Legion, representing 2.5 million members of the Legion family, stands with other organizations calling on lawmakers to "reopen the government and pass legislation to pay our troops so we never have to do this again."

The coalition emphasized that temporary measures allowing pay to continue are not enough. Tom Porter of Blue Star Families said that while 27 organizations recently urged Congress to act, Military Families continue to face uncertainty.

"Missing a payday means missing rent, missing meals, missing doctor visits," he said. "This isn't a bureaucratic inconvenience. It's a direct assault on the financial stability of those who sacrifice so much for this country."

The shutdown has also affected education benefits. Student Veterans of America (SVA) warned

that the closure of the GI Bill hotline and furlough of counselors are leaving student Veterans without guidance or support. Many rely on these services to resolve payment issues, verify enrollment, and maintain housing while in school. Delays in these benefits could force some to drop classes or face housing insecurity.

Other speakers included representatives from the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), and the National Military Family Association (NMFA). Each shared the same message: Service Members and their families should not be caught in the crossfire of partisan gridlock.

Candace Wheeler of TAPS explained that even though troops report for duty, many may do so without pay. "Although the administration has provided a temporary solution, it's not sustainable," she said.

"Our military and surviving families must not be caught in the crosshairs of this budget process."

NMFA's Besa Pinchotti said it's time for America to take military pay off the political table entirely. "We've allowed military pay to be weaponized as a bargaining chip," she said. "Every time our nation disagrees, our troops end up holding the bill."

With bipartisan support reportedly growing for the Pay Our Troops Act, advocates are calling on lawmakers to move quickly. The bill would guarantee that all active-duty, reserve, and National Guard personnel continue to receive pay during any lapse in government funding.

"Caring for America's Veterans and Service Members should not be a partisan issue," said DAV's Scott Hogan. "Keeping our promise to Veterans and their families should unite every lawmaker in Washington."



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