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UKRAINE, ISRAEL, YEMEN... AMERICAN VETERANS ARE INCREASINGLY SERVING IN OVERSEAS CONFLICTS

American Veterans serving as advisors, combatants, and in support roles in foreign wars without approval from the U.S. Government is not new — but it is increasing in frequency.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE

In early 2022, forces of the Russian Federation invaded neighboring Ukraine to spark a conflict that's largely devolved into a stalemate reminiscent of World War I, but with high-tech drones, cruise missiles, and long-range rocket artillery exhibiting contemporary methods of killing.

Touted as a "special military operation" by Russian leadership to eliminate alleged extremist groups within Ukraine, the Russian war machine seemingly failed to achieve much more than what eastern Ukrainian separatist groups had already garnered since the initial conflict began in 2014. Much publicized offensives and counter-offensives have occasionally shifted frontlines and Russia has, to date, abandoned any real attempt to capture Ukraine's capital of Kyiv.

Commonly accepted casualty numbers suggest that the Russian Federation has lost over 300,000 troops while Ukraine's losses are thought to be closer to 200,000. A big reason for Ukraine's continued survival? The United States and NATO have funneled tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons and supplies into Ukraine, along with detailed intelligence about Russian troop movements, capabilities, and supply issues.



An unnamed American Veteran serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, circa 2022. (Photo: Mstyslav Chernov)

Moreover, the United States has unofficially allowed dozens — if not hundreds or thousands — of Veterans to directly join the conflict in both humanitarian and combat roles, with most joining the Ukrainian Foreign Legion, a nongovernmental organization that works closely with Ukrainian Intelligence, and a select few enlisting in the Ukrainian Military.

The exact nature of these roles is often unclear, but there is significant evidence that many Americans are still fighting on the frontlines in Ukraine. And some are not returning home. In July, The California Legionnaire reported on the passing of Ian "Frank" Tortorici of Lake Forest, California, who was killed by a Russian collaborator while off-duty. Prior to his murder, Tortorici had served at the front for over a year.

Tortorici's reason for joining the war effort? He saw Russia's invasion as a precursor to World War III and wanted to do his part to prevent an escalation.

THE NEW CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND GAZA

Some reasons for American Veterans putting boots on the ground in foreign conflict zones are more immediate. When Hamas launched an all-out assault on Israeli civilians and military checkpoints, Israel effectively prevented entry and exit to Gaza, trapping thousands of American citizens in the besieged territory.

Right away, two American Veterans groups traveled to Israel to help evacuate Americans amidst constant air strikes and bombardments in coordination with the U.S. State Department. It is currently unclear how many, if any Americans remain trapped in Israel or the Palestinian

territories. Meanwhile, the conflict threatens to expand as Israel launches an urban ground offensive and neighboring countries, including Iran, threaten retaliation.

MORE CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD

Fighting old rivals and providing humanitarian assistance are not the only reasons that American Veterans have joined foreign conflicts in recent years. American Veterans, including high-ranking officers such as Gen. Jim Mattis, have been assisting the United Arab Emirates in both advisory and combat roles as the country exerts a growing military influence in both nearby Yemen and Libya, far to the west.

This relationship, however, has not occurred on humanitarian or ideological grounds, but for direct compensation.

See OVERSEAS CONFLICT page 7

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 - Submissions to the Department website can be made at any time by visiting caLegion.org/ugc (please email the editor to let them know you've submitted online)
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John Aldridge, Commander 2023-2024

Greetings everyone and welcome to the Legionnaire,

If you're reading the California Legionnaire for the first time, welcome to our November issue!

In this edition of our newsletter, we're excited to share some legislative information that may be of interest and benefit to you. Our members work hard developing resolutions and urging our State and Federal representatives to pass legislation that will benefit veterans and their families.

The larger our organization grows the more congress pays attention to our voice.

If you are not a member of the American Legion, please read on and learn some of the things we do.

This newsletter is published 4 times a year (August, November, February, and May). If you would prefer to receive this publication by mail or email, please subscribe at calegion.org/california-legionnaire/

To join the American Legion, go to legion.org and click join, or visit an American Legion post nearby.

Membership in the American Legion has its privileges. Each quarter we'll share relevant news and information, as well as a list of important dates that raise awareness of veteran issues.

Last month was buddy check week where Legionnaires checked on buddies

to see how they were doing.

Below you'll find some upcoming important dates:

- November 19 - National Family Week
- November 23 - Thanksgiving
- November and December - Holiday Blood Drives
- December 25 - Christmas
- January 1 - New Year
- January 15 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- February - Americanism Month
- February 10 - Department of California Four Chaplains Observance

I welcome your comments and any concerns you may have regarding the following information. Please contact our editor at editor@calegion.org

Thank you,
John Aldridge
Department Commander

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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE GRADUATES OF CALIFORNIA AMERICAN LEGION COLLEGE 2-2023

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

In an eventful weekend hosted at American Legion Post 149, a group of graduates from the California American Legion College 2-2023 were honored. These Veterans dedicated their time to deepen their understanding of The American Legion's mission and improve their leadership skills.

California American Legion College 2-2023 was hosted at Post 149 in Escondido from October 20 to 22. We congratulate the graduates who devoted 2.5 days to learning and

collaborating on strategies to become more effective Legionnaires, both in their communities and for the larger mission of The American Legion.

The California American Legion College is run by a highly capable and motivated staff from all across the state. The college is tailored for Legionnaires who aspire to lead American Legion Posts within their communities. The curriculum offers insights into management techniques, compliance, collaboration, membership growth, resource utilization, and the skills required to increase public

awareness of The American Legion's mission and programs within California communities.

Participation in an organization like The American Legion becomes a richer experience when one has an understanding of its history, purpose, and objectives. The capacity to influence the organization and its mission is amplified with knowledge, and this knowledge becomes an asset. To maximize the impact of newfound knowledge, individuals are encouraged to consider mentoring other Legionnaires.

For those interested in attending California American Legion College, the next session, CALC 1-2024, will be held from April 19 to 21 at American Legion Post 77 in Woodland, California. Enrollment for this class will open on Feb. 1.

A prerequisite for enrollment is completing The American Legion Basic Training Course, which is available online through the National organization, free of charge. This course can be completed in just a couple of hours, and every Legion member can benefit from this resource. Individuals can email

their ALEI Basic Training completion certificate to calc@calegion.org. More information and enrollment details can be found at legion.org/alei

For any inquiries or to seek additional information, individuals are encouraged to contact CALC@caLegion.org



FOUR PILLARS SWEEPSTAKES WINNERS

1st Prize: \$5,000
Jim Havens
Borrego Springs, CA
Post 853

2nd Prize: \$1,000
Richard McClelland
Antioch, CA
Post 161

3rd Prize: \$500
John Pollock
Laguna Hills, CA
Post 281

4th Prize: \$250
Ric Copeland
Fresno, CA
Post 147

5th Prize: \$100
Mark Heinemann
Danville, CA
Post 246

6th Prize: \$50
David Chubbuck
Rocklin, CA
Post 620

7th Prize: \$50
Shelley Vasquez
Pomona, CA
Post 30

8th Prize: \$50
Steve Gibson
Indio, CA
Post 101

Readers can Support American Legion Programs by Donating Used Vehicles

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

Vehicle owners can make a substantial contribution to The American Legion by donating vehicles through Charitable Auto Rides & Services Inc., CARS.

The program accepts a wide range of vehicles, including cars, trucks, vans, SUVs, boats, motorcycles, RVs, and more, regardless of their condition, whether they can be driven or not. A significant portion of the proceeds generated from auctioning these vehicles goes toward supporting American Legion charities and programs.

The American Legion, one of the nation's largest Veterans service organizations, is dedicated to a variety of causes, including

mentoring youth, sponsoring wholesome community programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting national security, and providing support to fellow servicemembers and Veterans. Vehicle donations play an important role in providing the support needed to continue these missions. Most donated vehicles are sold at live auctions to licensed dealers, recyclers, and exporters from around the world.

By donating a vehicle, owners are directly contributing to these programs that serve those who have served our nation. In return for the generosity, donors that itemize their donations can receive a tax deduction.

Donating a vehicle to The American Legion Vehicle

Donation Program is a hassle-free process, and the program offers quick and convenient vehicle pick-up and towing just about anywhere in all 50 states. Once the process has been initiated, a pick-up arrangement will be made within 48 hours.

Readers can donate their vehicle and support American Legion charities and programs by scheduling a free and convenient pick-up by calling 844-453-4466 or completing the donation form on their website at legion.careasy.org/home

For questions about the donation process, tax deductions, and motor vehicle regulations, The American Legion's Donor Support Line can be reached at 844-453-4466.



CALIFORNIA POST 419 DONATES TO DEPARTMENT OF HAWAII

By Ralph Jacob
Post 419 Historian and Jr Past Commander

At the 2023 American Legion National Convention held in Charlotte, NC, American Legion Post 419 in Santa Clara, CA, donated \$2000

to the Department of Hawaii Adjutant George LeCampte.

Monies raised from the Annual Post 419 Car Show are used to support Veterans and various organizations. The post members thought that this



would be the most valuable use for the initial distribution of those funds.



Matt Perella and his horse, Buck, end a 184-day cross-country journey at Onslow Beach, Camp Lejeune. (Photo: Matt Perella)

MARINE VETERAN AND HIS HORSE COMPLETE COAST-TO-COAST JOURNEY FOR PTSD AWARENESS

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

Marine Veteran Matt Perella and his horse, Buck, completed a remarkable 7,000-mile journey across 17 states from Camp Pendleton, California to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

This feat, achieved in just under six months, made Buck the fastest horse to cross the country coast-to-coast. Perella embarked on this journey to raise awareness for Veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, inspired by the suicides of military friends and his own battles with PTSD.

Perella found solace in his horse, Buck, and nature, which inspired him to leave everything behind and set out on this adventure. Along the way, he encountered numerous challenges, including injuries to Buck, but the support and generosity of people they met kept them going.

This experience inspired

Perella to find a deeper purpose in helping not only Veterans but also animals in need.

During his journey, Perella fundraised to support his future project, the Righteous Life Rescue Ranch, a 300-acre property in his hometown of Asheville. This venture will be a mental health rehabilitation center for healing and renewal for both Veterans and animals. Perella emphasized the importance of nature's influence and its role in the healing process.

Perella wants to help other Veterans, just as his animals have provided support to him. The ranch will serve as a sanctuary for retired animals like Buck and rescue animals like his own dog, Rafe.

After his long cross-country journey, Matt Perella anticipates a three-month recovery, and he looks forward to the opening of the Righteous Life Rescue Ranch.

CALIFORNIA VETERANS PUSH FOR A NATIONAL VIDEO GAMING PROGRAM

By Jared Morgan
Senior Editor

The American Legion Department of California Video Game Committee convened its inaugural meeting this month.

But this shift isn't just a California dream. In August, during the national convention in Charlotte, NC, committee members took it upon themselves to pitch the idea of video game committees to delegates from all over the nation. Their goal? To get each state to recognize and incorporate gaming as a tool for community building among its veterans.

At the national convention, California's efforts to propel the video gaming movement were evident. Pacific Palisades Post 283 and the California Video Game Committee teamed up with Stack Up, a nonprofit organization that focuses on fostering connections among veterans through the shared enjoyment of video games. Also participating was Regiment, a national community of both veterans and active service members who see gaming as more than just a pastime, but a means to camaraderie and understanding.

The collaboration between these groups highlighted the fusion of tradition and modernity. As part

of their participation, Palisades Post 283 purchased a gaming PC for a raffle, with a post from New Jersey emerging as the lucky recipient. The computer isn't just for leisure; the New Jersey post plans to leverage it as a magnet to draw in veterans, fostering both a sense of belonging and friendly competition.

Closer to home, Palisades Post 283 hasn't been shy about integrating video games into its community events.



Palisades Post 283 hosted a video game day in September 2023.



Congrats to New Jersey and Post 174 Adjutant Michael Smith for winning a custom-built gaming PC from Paradox PCs during The American Legion National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina on Aug. 29, 2023.



On Sept. 24, the post organized a family video game day. The event, bolstered by the recent purchase of two Xbox consoles, was designed to appeal to families and veterans alike, emphasizing that gaming can bridge generational divides.

And they're not stopping there. In what promises to be an engaging event, Post 283 has announced plans to host a two versus two video game competition in collaboration with Newport Harbor Post 291. It's a testament to how deeply this new initiative

has been embraced and the potential it has to reshape the way veterans connect post-service.

For over a century, The American Legion has provided a space for veterans to share stories, support one another, and build community. Today, in California and beyond, the organization shows it can evolve with the times, all

while maintaining the core values that have always defined it.

For many veterans, the digital battlefield might be very different from the ones they encountered during their service. But the camaraderie, competition, and community they find? That remains unchanged.

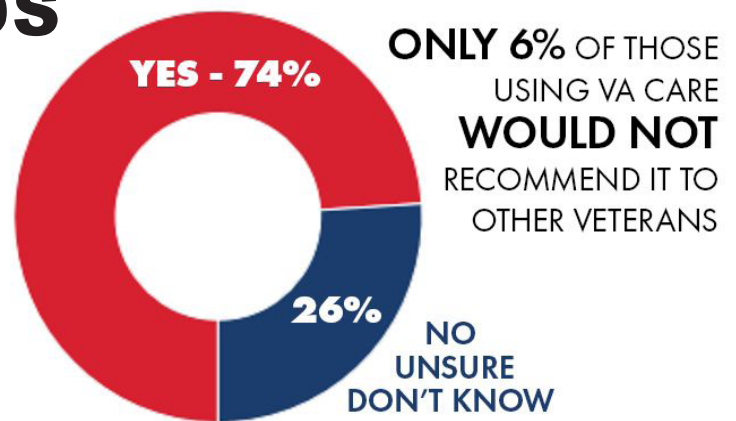
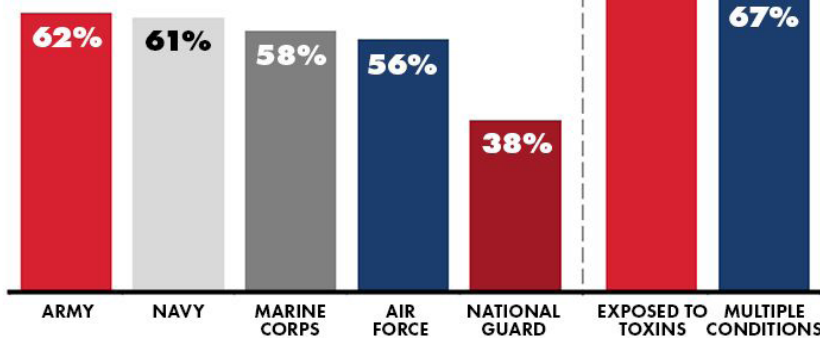
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AMERICAN LEGION SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS VETERANS' CONCERNS REGARDING VA HEALTHCARE STANDARDS

THREE IN FIVE,
OR 59% OF VETERANS POLLED,
ARE ENROLLED IN VA HEALTHCARE



By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The American Legion unveiled the results of a nationwide survey to amplify the voices of Veterans in light of the VA's anticipated National Standards of Practice, or NSP.

This release comes shortly before an upcoming hearing on NSP by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs' Health subcommittee.

The Federal Supremacy Initiative, designed to establish standardized national practice standards across more than 50 healthcare specialties within the VA, seeks to harmonize services provided by healthcare professionals, irrespective of state-specific licensure or certification. The objective is to ensure uniformity in patient care across the VA system.

While many healthcare specialties maintain consistent requirements nationwide, certain highly specialized professions exhibit significant

variations from one state to another. The impending hearing will scrutinize the transparency of the initiative's process and its potential impact on patient care.

The survey, conducted by Pierrepoint Consulting & Analytics LLC, involved 1,400 Veterans surveyed between February and April of this year. It encompassed Veterans of all ages and branches of service.

Before the survey, The American Legion's Resolution No. 20, approved in October 2022, stressed the importance of the VA aligning NSP providers' licensure with state standards and prioritizing high-quality care for Veterans.

Although the VA is in the process of creating standards for 50 different healthcare occupations, the survey focused primarily on anesthesiologists and nurse anesthetists due to the potential for debate in these areas. The survey uncovered a strong preference among

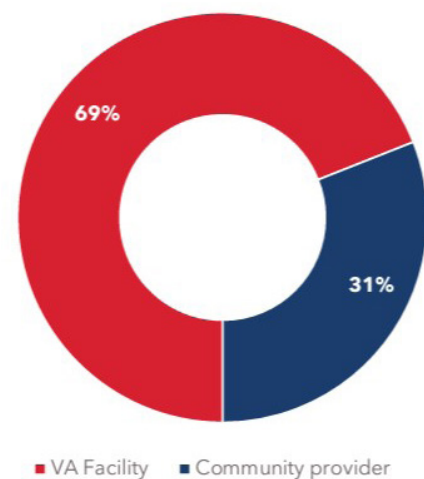
Veterans for physicians over nurses in administering anesthesia care during surgery. Sixty-one percent of respondents favored physicians, with only 4% choosing nurse anesthetists.

Furthermore, the survey indicated that 52% of Veterans would seek healthcare outside the VA if their only option for anesthesia care were nurse anesthetists. Seventy-one percent of Veterans held the belief that the VA's quality of care would undergo a transformation should nurse anesthetists assume the roles of physician anesthesiologists.

Other findings related to anesthesia care included:

- 74% of Veterans considered it important for anesthesia care during surgery to be provided by a physician anesthesiologist.
- 61% strongly agreed that surgery and anesthesia, being inherently risky, necessitate physician involvement.
- 64% strongly agreed that Veterans should

WHERE DO YOU PREFER TO RECEIVE YOUR CARE?



receive the same high-quality care during surgery as non-Veterans at top-rated hospitals.

Among the broader findings of the survey:

- Nearly 9 out of 10 Veterans expected the same level of healthcare quality as top-rated non-VA hospitals.
- Only 6% of Veterans receiving VA healthcare would not recommend it to fellow Veterans.
- Veterans with burn pit exposure were 30% more likely to enroll in

- VA healthcare.
- 60% of Veterans reported suffering from multiple health issues.
- The American Legion's survey highlights Veterans' perspectives and preferences, emphasizing the vital role of Veterans' voices in shaping the future of healthcare standards within the VA system.

View the full survey at legion.org/publications/260120/veterans-care-preferences-survey-key-findings

In your opinion, is it important that your anesthesia care during surgery be provided by a physician anesthesiologist?

U.S. Veterans (%)	All	Gender		Age					Race/Ethnicity			Miscellaneous		
		M	F	23-34	35-49	50-64	65-74	75+	Wht	Blk	Hisp	VA Enrolled	Multiple Health Issues	Burn Pit Exposure
Yes, it is important	74	75	72	82	81	74	67	71	72	82	79	75	75	78
No, it is not important	18	17	20	13	12	17	23	23	20	13	13	18	18	17
Don't know	8	8	8	5	7	9	10	6	8	6	8	7	7	5

Is it legal for American Veterans to join foreign wars and conflicts?

OVERSEAS CONFLICT
page 1, cont.

Regardless of the reason American Veterans are joining foreign conflicts, the phenomenon does raise a question: is it legal?

Muddy federal law supposedly restricts current and prior American Service Members from serving foreign entities without express approval from both the Pentagon and State Department (and possibly Congress). Whether approval is occurring — or if serving in foreign militaries is actually illegal — has largely remained unclear, and possibly unenforced.

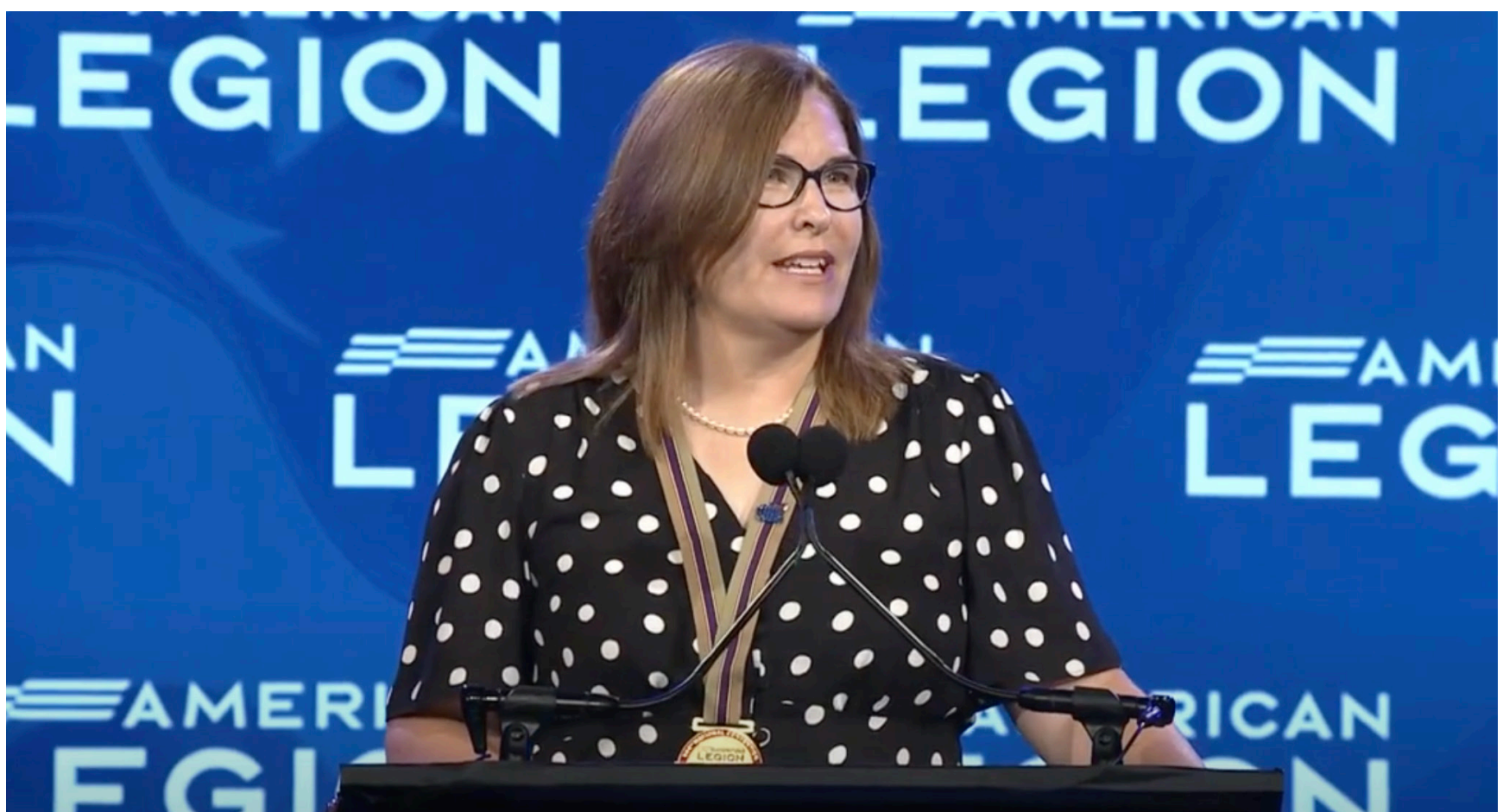
The Veterans working in

Israel to evacuate American citizens are, again, doing so in collaboration with the State Department. However, in both Ukraine and the UAE, this is much less clear. The purpose of the aforementioned laws is to ensure that Veterans are not actively working against American interests.

Likewise, the United States has been nothing but vocal about its support for Ukraine, and has labeled the Houthi rebels that the UAE is fighting a terror

organization. Nevertheless, the State Department has maintained a policy of discouraging Veterans from joining the Ukrainian war effort, but with the only apparent consequence being that the U.S. Government cannot rescue or assist Americans operating in Ukraine or Russia should they be captured, wounded, or killed. As for the conflicts the UAE has been participating in, the State Department has largely remained silent.

Whether American Veterans joining foreign conflicts speaks to the increasing number of high-profile conflicts in the world or highlights domestic issues — such as difficulty transitioning from military to civilian life or ensuring financial stability post-service — is ultimately difficult to say. But as these occurrences continue, they are likely to draw the eyes of policymakers.



Suzy DePrizio, a U.S. Navy Veteran and Chief Marketing Officer for Centene, expressed her enthusiasm at The American Legion's 104th National Convention for working together with American Legion to improve Veterans' overall well-being and reduce the rate of Veteran suicide. (Photo: americanlegionHQ)

WELLCARE AND AMERICAN LEGION PARTNER TO IMPROVE VETERAN HEALTHCARE AND COMBAT VETERAN SUICIDE

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

During The American Legion's 104th National Convention, Wellcare, the Medicare brand of Centene Corporation, announced it has entered into a partnership with the nonprofit, marking the beginning of collaborative efforts to address the healthcare needs of Veterans and combat Veteran suicide.

This partnership will provide innovative healthcare solutions to Veterans aged 65 and older, their spouses, and the broader military community. Wellcare will serve as the exclusive Medicare partner, offering products and solutions that complement the healthcare benefits available to eligible Veterans through the VA. Additionally, they will organize joint events at Legion Posts across the country to educate people

about Medicare Advantage Plans.

Furthermore, Wellcare will support American Legion's Be the One initiative, which focuses on reducing the stigma surrounding Veterans seeking mental health support, providing resources for Veterans in need, and ultimately, preventing Veteran suicides.

Currently, military suicide rates are more than

50% higher than those of non-Veteran adults, with nearly 6,000 Veterans and Service Members taking their own lives each year.

Wellcare and The American Legion are committed to raising awareness and taking action on this critical issue through various leadership and event activities. The partnership will enhance healthcare options for Veterans and their families, provide

resources to Veterans, and work towards eliminating Veteran suicide through educational events and outreach efforts.

Interested individuals can call 844-599-0128 (TTY:711) for more details. More product information is accessible on Wellcare's website.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2023

By **Seth Reeb and Dana Nichol**

Reeb Government Relations, LLC

The California State Legislature adjourned for the 2023 legislative year on September 14. Legislation that survived the legislative process to that point were sent to the Governor for his signature or veto. The Governor had until October 14 to review all of those bills and sign or veto. Below is a listing of the bills that were signed in to law by the Governor.

No bills that were supported by the Legion were vetoed.

Since 2023 is the first year of the 2023-24 legislative session, next year will have a combination of “2-year bills” and “Second-year bills”.

Editor’s note: this an abridged version of the 2023 legislative report. For the full version, visit caLegion.org



AB 46 (RAMOS D) PERSONAL INCOME TAXES: EXCLUSION: MILITARY SERVICES RETIREMENT AND SURVIVING SPOUSE BENEFIT PAYMENT ACT.

AB 46-Ramos, the bill that sought to exempt military retirement pay and SBP from the state income tax was held under Submission in the Senate Appropriations Committee on September 1. In the case

of AB 46, the Governor’s Department of Finance (DOF) indicated to the author that the bill idea had merit, but a way needs to be found to reduce the hit to the state’s revenues. Assemblyman Ramos has committed to working next year to find a solution in the budget process or some other way to alleviate DOF’s concerns. AB 46 is not bound by the January 31 deadline since it passed its house of origin and is in the Senate.

Position: Support

AB 322 (MATHIS R) VETERAN AND CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD SUPPLEMENTAL ORIENTATION ACT OF 2023.

Would, commencing no later than the 2025-26 academic year, would require each campus of the California State University and the California Community Colleges, and would request each campus of the University of California, to include within first-year student and transfer student orientations the location and contact information of the campus point of contact for students who are veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States and members of the California State Guard and the California National Guard, and their dependents, make available in hard copy form at the location of the campus point of contact a document that includes information on policies, resources, and services for these students and their dependents, as specified, and post the document, along with other information available to these students and their dependents, on the campus’s internet website.

Position: Support

AB 1361 (HOOVER R) PROPERTY TAXATION: VETERAN’S EXEMPTION: PRELIMINARY APPLICATION.

Current property law, pursuant to the authorization of the California Constitution, provides a disabled veteran’s tax exemption on specified property, as described. Current law sets forth procedures to claim property tax exemptions. This bill would authorize a county assessor to provide written or electronic determination of preliminary eligibility for the disabled veteran’s tax exemption. The bill would make related findings and declarations.

Position: Support

AB 1452 (MATHIS R) STATE CAPITOL: IRAQ AFGHANISTAN KUWAIT VETERANS MEMORIAL MONUMENT.

This bill would authorize a nonprofit organization representing veterans of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait in consultation with the Department of General Services, to plan, construct, and maintain a monument to the veterans of the wars in Iraq,

Afghanistan, and Kuwait on the grounds of the State Capitol. The bill would require the nonprofit organization to submit a plan for the monument to the Joint Rules Committee for its review and approval. The bill would require the monument to be funded exclusively from private sources.

Position: Support



SB 82 (SEYARTO R) PROPERTY TAXATION: DISABLED VETERANS’ EXEMPTION: ELIGIBILITY LETTERS.

Current property tax law provides, pursuant to the authorization of the California Constitution, a disabled veteran’s property tax exemption for the principal place of residence of a veteran or a veteran’s spouse, including an unmarried surviving spouse, if the veteran, because of an injury incurred in military

service, is blind in both eyes, has lost the use of 2 or more limbs, or is totally disabled, as those terms are defined, or if the veteran has, as a result of a service-connected injury or disease, died while on active duty in military service. This bill would require a county assessor to accept an electronically generated letter of service-connected disability, as defined, in lieu of an original letter of service-connected disability, at the discretion of the claimant, for purposes of verifying eligibility for the above-described exemption.

Position: Support

SJR 4 (OCHOA BOGH R) VETERAN HEALTH CARE.

This bill would urge the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to locate satellite Veterans Health Administration medical clinics on or near state veterans home campuses and further urges the United States Congress to provide federal funding for the operation of such satellite clinics.

Position: Support



(Photo: Alex Proimos)



CALIFORNIA LEADS THE WAY WITH UNIFIED HEALTHCARE FINANCING: SB 770 SIGNED INTO LAW

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

With the recent signing of Senate Bill 770 into law by Governor Gavin Newsom on October 7, California is making significant strides in healthcare reform.

This legislation positions California as the first state in the nation to pass a bill with the potential to establish a unified healthcare financing system. The passage of SB 770 marks a step towards greater healthcare equity and accessibility not only to residents but also to Veterans.

Under the provisions of SB 770, the secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, CalHHS, is responsible for working in conjunction with stakeholders and federal authorities to develop

a waiver framework for a medical package encompassing a wide range of medical, behavioral health, pharmaceutical, dental, and vision benefits. This framework is designed to ensure that essential healthcare services are not driven by profit motives but are accessible to all residents of California.

The benefits of SB 770 extend beyond the general population, addressing the healthcare needs of Veterans. In 2021, less than half of Veterans in the United States were enrolled in VA health care or Tricare, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This disparity was often attributed to issues such as excessive red tape, challenges in appointment availability, and location concerns. These barriers

have deterred many Veterans from using VA health care services.

For Veterans with private insurance but without VA health care, SB 770 offers the promise of a more accessible and equitable healthcare system. The bill eliminates insurance copayments, deductibles, and the hurdles associated with finding in-network providers. Veterans who have forgone medical care or worried about paying their medical bills due to a lack of access to VA health care may find relief through SB 770.

By November 1, 2025, the CalHHS secretary must submit a report detailing the finalized waiver framework to the state legislature and Governor Newsom.

President of Healthy

California Now, Michael Lighty, emphasized the importance of SB 770 in ensuring equitable healthcare services for all. He highlighted the bill's commitment to eliminating insurance copayments, deductibles, and the challenges of finding in-network providers. With SB 770, disparities in healthcare coverage will be eliminated, and financial incentives to deny necessary care will be removed.

SB 770 also brings about change by offering a single level of care for everyone, including Veterans, regardless of age, income status, employment status, immigration status, or other factors. Lighty pointed out that while California has made progress in expanding its healthcare coverage, some remaining issues can only be addressed through systemwide reform.

The Healthy California For All Commission issued a report earlier this year, indicating that transitioning to a unified healthcare financing system could save Californians \$158 billion annually by 2031 while preventing 4,000 deaths each year. Small businesses in the state stand to benefit substantially from SB 770, as it levels the playing field by providing health insurance for all, reducing the financial burden on employers, and potentially increasing wages and pensions for workers.

The passage of SB 770 is a momentous achievement in California's ongoing efforts to ensure healthcare

for all. Lighty stressed the importance of continued work, emphasizing that while there is much to be done, this victory signifies California's commitment to guarantee healthcare for everyone.

Opposition to SB 770 primarily came from health insurance companies, as voiced by the California Association of Health Plans and other industry organizations. They argued that Californians are generally satisfied with their healthcare and should have the freedom to choose private coverage for their families. Nonetheless, the bill's supporters stress the importance of moving towards a unified financing system that prioritizes equitable, accessible, and high-quality care for California residents, as well as Veterans residing in California.

This legislation represents a major step in the ongoing transformation of California's healthcare system, setting the state on a path to establish a unified health care financing system that fosters inclusivity, fairness, and the provision of high-quality care for every resident. The benefits of SB 770 extend not only to the general population but also to California Veterans who have faced challenges in accessible and affordable healthcare. California is expected to serve as a model for other states looking to enhance their healthcare systems.



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On October 9, Palestinians surveyed the destruction caused by an airstrike in the El-Remal district of Gaza City (Photo: Wafa)

NONPROFIT VETERAN VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS EVACUATE AMERICANS FROM ISRAEL AND GAZA AMID RAGING CONFLICT

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Volunteer Veterans from the nonprofit Special Operations Association of America, or SOAA, are currently engaged in a critical mission to evacuate hundreds of stranded Americans from Israel and Gaza as the conflict in the region escalates toward a potential ground invasion.

The SOAA, based in Washington, D.C., is collaborating with local authorities, Israeli forces, and the U.S. government to identify Americans in

need of evacuation and their locations. Veteran volunteers, who possess expertise in navigating challenging areas based on their own experiences in war zones, are working tirelessly to facilitate the safe evacuation of these individuals.

SOAA has partnered with Save Our Allies, a rescue nonprofit, to help execute this massive operation. While over 200 Americans have been successfully evacuated by SOAA and its partners from the region, there remains an ongoing effort to assist hundreds

more who still require evacuation from Israel and Gaza.

David Cook, the Executive Director of SOAA, emphasizes the organization's commitment to ensuring the safety of trapped Americans, despite the inherent dangers of the situation. The security environment in the region is delicate, and evacuation efforts could become more complex if the conflict expands. The SOAA has previously helped with evacuations in Afghanistan and Ukraine, making a significant impact during the

Afghanistan withdrawal. These Veteran organizations help to bridge the gap between government intervention and the bureaucratic challenges of escaping war zones, ultimately providing a lifeline for those in danger.

The U.S. Department of State and other governmental bodies are actively engaged in the evacuation process, working to find solutions for Americans stranded in Gaza. U.S. officials are also actively negotiating with Israel and Egypt to facilitate the safe passage of American

citizens, dual nationals, and international organization employees. Egypt and Jordan, while wary of accepting refugees, have engaged in discussions with the U.S. as well to facilitate the safe passage of Americans through their borders.

Despite the difficulties and concerns on all sides, the focus remains on the safety and well-being of those trapped in the region. The mission to evacuate Americans from harm's way is ongoing, with unwavering dedication from those involved.

VETERANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OWN A HOME AND EXPERIENCE HOUSING INSTABILITY, ACCORDING TO A RAND STUDY

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Recent research conducted by the RAND Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute reveals that Veterans in the United States, while more likely to be homeowners than the general population, also face an increased risk of housing instability.

According to the study, about 79 percent of Veterans are homeowners, compared to 62 percent of non-Veterans. The main reason for this is the accessible home financing programs provided through the U.S. VA, which offer lower down payment requirements and more favorable interest rates compared to the commercial market. These home financing options significantly reduce the

initial barriers to homeownership for Veterans.

Nevertheless, while Veterans enjoy higher homeownership rates, the research also indicates that they are more likely to experience homelessness compared to non-Veterans. Homelessness among Veterans is associated with behavioral health concerns, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, psychotic disorders, and substance use disorders. Veterans who have a history of military misconduct or dishonorable discharge are at a higher risk of homelessness. Combat-experienced Veterans, on the other hand, are less likely to face housing instability.

Veterans who served after September 11, 2001, experience higher



housing cost burdens than non-Veterans, partly due to increasing housing and rent prices. Women Veterans, whose population is expected to increase in the coming years, face lower incomes and lower homeownership rates than their male counterparts. The location where Veterans reside also plays a

significant role, as overheated housing markets increasingly make homeownership unattainable for both Veterans and Non-Veterans alike.

The research emphasizes the need for targeted support and policy interventions to bridge the gap between successful

and struggling Veterans, particularly among vulnerable groups. Educational efforts regarding financial resources and support programs could provide a path toward more equitable housing outcomes for those who have served their country.

VA Enhances Maternity Care Support for Veterans

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

As of October 1, the VA has expanded its maternity care coordination services to support Veterans throughout their pregnancy and up to one year postpartum.

Previously, maternity care coordinators had only been available for eight weeks post-partum.

Maternity care coordinators play an important role in helping Veterans navigate healthcare within and outside the VA system. They provide support throughout the pregnancy journey, ensuring access to post-delivery care, follow-up screenings, and more. The move guarantees that all new mothers



receive the necessary support and resources from the VA, regardless of where they choose to give birth.

The expansion is part of VA's commitment of implementing the White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis. In addition to maternity care coordinators, the VA offers a range of maternity care services, including

primary care, examinations, tests, ultrasounds, newborn care, lactation support, and more.

As the number of pregnancies among women Veterans using VA care has surged by more than 80% since 2014, the need for such extended care is evident. Women Veterans represent the fastest-growing cohort of VA users, half

of whom are of child-bearing age. This extended support recognizes that many new mothers require care coordination well beyond the initial eight weeks postpartum. Over 50% of pregnancy-related deaths in the United States occur between one day and one year after giving birth, with one in eight happening after six weeks postpartum. By offering

extended care and support, VA hopes to improve the physical and mental health of both mothers and babies.

VA's maternity care coordinators also address concerns, including social, physical, and mental health, lactation consulting, and resources for childbirth education. VA also offers additional essential services, such as mental health care, housing assistance, and resources to combat food insecurity.

This initiative is part of the broader effort to address the maternal health crisis in the United States and to ensure that women Veterans receive the care and support they need during and after pregnancy.



U.S. Marines patrolling in Helmand province in 2010. (Photo: U.S. Marine Corps)

ANNIVERSARY OF THE FINAL WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

By **Christian Southards**
Associate Editor

On Aug. 30, 2021, the United States formally withdrew from Afghanistan.

In 20 years of war, hundreds of thousands of Americans served. Tens of thousands were wounded. And 2,611 never came home.

PRELUDE TO THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: THE ATTACKS ON SEPT. 11, 2001

On Sept. 11, 2001, four commercial airliners were hijacked by extremists later confirmed to belong to the terror organization Al-Qaeda. Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks and the world changed overnight.

Al-Qaeda, a terror

organization primarily based in Central Asia and the Middle East was blamed — and years later claimed responsibility for the attack — while the

Taliban of Afghanistan were held responsible for sheltering the terror group and its leader, Osama bin Laden.

The attacks represented the first time since the surprise Attack on Pearl Harbor that a foreign entity openly attacked the United States, and launched the country

into two decades of war.

OCT. 7, 2001: 20 YEARS OF INSTABILITY AND WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Soon after the Sept. 11 Attacks, and after President George W. Bush declared a Global War on Terror, U.S.-led forces invaded Afghanistan. Within months, Coalition forces, on paper, controlled virtually all of Afghanistan and had begun the process of installing a democratic regime.

Despite this seeming victory, both Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were able to flee and regroup in Pakistan, ensuring the war could continue indefinitely. And it did. While Coalition forces maintained control of all of Afghanistan's population centers,



Taken from a helicopter just after the south tower of the World Trade Center in New York City had fallen during the Sept. 11 Attacks. (Photo: U.S. EPA)



A view of the Situation Room during Operation Neptune Spear. (Photo: U.S. White House Archive, Pete Souza)

instituting some measure of democratic progress and economic advancement, control over rural communities remained elusive.

MAY 2, 2011: OSAMA BIN LADEN IS KILLED BY U.S. FORCES

Nine years after Osama bin Laden escaped Afghanistan during the Battle of Tora Bora, the CIA discovered that the Al-Qaeda leader was living at a compound in a residential area of Abbottabad, Pakistan. In a subsequent operation that nearly caused a diplomatic incident with Pakistan, bin Laden was killed.

Hours later, President Barack Obama proclaimed, “justice has been done” to the American public. But despite bin Laden’s death, the war continued as U.S. Forces looked to stabilize the young Afghan government in the face of a growing Taliban-led insurgency.

AUG. 15, 2021: THE LAST C-17 DEPARTS KABUL, ENDING U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR

Over the next decade, the United States and NATO changed their mission in Afghanistan, gradually withdrawing coalition

forces and reverting to a support role while the Afghan Army took over most combat operations. By spring 2021, only a token force of Coalition troops remained in the country — down from a peak of 100,000 in 2010.

The Taliban, which had reasserted its presence as early as 2003, began seizing land and power from the Afghan government at a breakneck pace after news of a full U.S. withdrawal was confirmed. Weary of two decades of war and little to show for it, the United States offered only limited support to the failing Afghan Army.

LEGACY OF THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Over 170,000 Afghani civilians are estimated to have been killed during the War in Afghanistan. Historians still largely debate both its purpose and its legacy.

The remnants of the Coalition-sanctioned Afghan government exist purely in exile. The Taliban has reclaimed full control, and worse, has only been empowered by America’s speedy withdrawal as thousands of weapons and vehicles were left behind because it was cheaper to abandon them than to bring them home.

Al-Qaeda’s influence and power has dramatically faltered, but this has only led to the rise of new terror groups like Islamic State Khorasan.

Many note similarities between the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan to the final days of the Vietnam War nearly five decades prior. Although life under Taliban leadership has rolled back any hope for progress in Afghanistan. Women especially suffer under the new regime, which has returned the country to an extreme form of Islamic rule.

Most Veterans have mixed feelings about the withdrawal. Many see it as a betrayal to those who served and the Afghani people. Some feel that the withdrawal could have been handled better — or that the resurgence of the Taliban necessitated a renewed commitment from the United States. The general public has largely been apathetic, although Veterans of Afghanistan have been spared the treatment their forebears received following the Vietnam War.

Read about more veterans holidays and important events at calegion.org/veterans-holidays/

VA’S ONLINE VETERANS LEGACY MEMORIAL PLATFORM EXPANDS, HONORING FIVE MILLION MORE VETERANS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The VA has expanded its Veterans Legacy Memorial project just in time for Veterans Day, adding approximately five million more Veterans and nearly doubling the number of individuals honored with online memorial pages.

This project allows people to access information about Veterans who served in the U.S. Military, dating back to the Revolutionary War, even if they cannot physically visit their final resting places. In addition to these five million new Veterans, the VA continues to work on including the 26 American military cemeteries overseas managed by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

The project, originally launched in 2019, began as a website providing basic details on 3.7 million Veterans buried in the VA’s 155 national cemeteries. Over time, it expanded to include VA-supported state, tribal, and territorial Veterans cemeteries, as well as National Park Service cemeteries. Earlier this year, the VA added Veterans at 27 cemeteries managed by the Air Force, Navy, and Army, including Arlington National Cemetery.


The most recent expansion includes Veterans buried in private cemeteries. This was made possible by collecting

information on Veterans buried at these sites who received a headstone, marker, or medallion from the National Cemetery Administration since 1996. By including a broader range of cemeteries across the country, this means that roughly one-quarter of all U.S. Veterans throughout history are now listed in this online database, a substantial increase from the initial number of individuals from VA cemeteries and government sites.

Family members and friends can visit these online memorial pages to access basic military service records, locations of final resting places, and more. They can also contribute photographs, awards and other historic documents to celebrate the Veterans’ lives and service. As of now, more than 72,000 tributes have been posted on these pages by family members, friends, colleagues, and historians.

The Veterans Legacy Memorial project serves as a meaningful way to preserve the legacies of Veterans, connecting family members, friends, and the general public with the stories and contributions of those who served in the U.S. military. The project not only pays tribute to these Veterans but also provides a way to treasure their memories and ensure they are never forgotten.

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U.S. Marines and Sailors prepare bags of food for a food bank during San Francisco Fleet Week 2022 (Photo: U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Aldo Sessarego)

New RAND Study Highlights Food Insecurity Among Veterans

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

A recently published research report conducted by Rand Corp. has unveiled more evidence for a concerning issue affecting our nation's Veterans: food insecurity.

This problem is alarming because it reveals that almost 70% of Veterans

aged 70 and older who are struggling to secure enough food are not utilizing government food assistance programs. The research points to a critical need for the federal government to rethink its approach to identifying Veterans facing food insecurity and to reevaluate disability payments to encourage more Veterans to seek assistance.

Food insecurity, as this study emphasizes, can set off a chain of problems, including physical and mental health issues, and an elevated risk of suicide.

The data from RAND's research suggests that 1.4 million Veterans in the United States are dealing with food insecurity. Less than 5% of these Veterans

are enrolled in the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps.

To address this issue, the study recommends screening methods for Veterans to assess their food access and to conduct further research to understand the barriers preventing them from enrolling in assistance programs. These hurdles could include stigma surrounding accepting help, a lack of awareness about the program, or policies that count Veterans' disability benefits as income. While the study did find that Veterans receiving disability payments are less likely to enroll in SNAP, more research is needed to understand if these payments are making Veterans ineligible for assistance even when they struggle to afford enough food.

The VA conducts routine screenings for food insecurity during primary care visits. It's important to note that Veterans who don't qualify for or use VA health care may

not be included in these screenings.

While this study focuses on Veterans, a parallel issue has been identified among active-duty Service Members. Approximately, 15% of Service Members experience food insecurity, and housing allowances can push their incomes above the eligibility threshold for government assistance.

Responding to growing concerns, the White House initiated a national strategy on hunger, nutrition, and health, urging the VA to review its food-assistance programs and screening procedures.

The results of this study emphasize immediate action to address food insecurity among our Veterans. By addressing the barriers preventing Veterans from accessing food assistance programs and conducting further research into the underlying causes of food insecurity, steps can be taken to improve Veterans' well-being.

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Marines attend REBOOT! at Camp Pendleton, a three week transitioning program to prepare service members for civilian life. (Photo: Cpl. Eugenio Montanez, 1st Marine Division)

USC STUDY REVEALS INSIGHTS INTO THE CHANGING NEEDS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA VETERANS TRANSITIONING TO CIVILIAN LIFE

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

A regional study led by the Military and Veterans Programs, or MVP, at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work has revealed insights into the changing needs of Veterans in Southern California as they transition from active duty to civilian life.

The State of the American Veteran: The Southern California Veterans Study, funded by the RAND-USC Epstein Family Foundation Center for Veterans Policy Research, is a first-of-its-kind study, surveying nearly 3,200 Veterans across Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties.

The study employed a

combination of in-person and online surveys to understand the different aspects of the Veteran experience, including their general well-being, physical and mental health, relationships, access to care, and unmet needs.

Notably, the study highlighted several challenges facing Veterans in the region, including housing, employment, physical and mental health, and substance abuse. Additionally, it underscored issues such as loneliness among Veterans, the unique challenges faced by Women Veterans, and the prevalence of food insecurity among Veterans.

The Southern California Veterans Study revealed an absence of emotional preparedness for Veterans

transitioning from the military. Many Veterans reported feeling unprepared for challenges such as job searches, housing, and the emotional toll of leaving the military. Sara Kintzle, associate research professor in the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, emphasized the need to address these emotional challenges and equip service members with the tools to navigate them effectively.

One of the significant barriers to seeking help, as emphasized by the study, is the prevailing attitude among Veterans that they should handle their challenges independently. The military culture ingrains self-reliance and reluctance to admit vulnerability,

making it challenging to convince Veterans to seek help. Shifting this mindset is an ongoing challenge, as the study points out.

The research also challenged the notion that Veteran suicide rates are solely driven by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and combat service. It suggested that identity crises during transition periods, such as joining the military or returning to civilian life, contribute to suicide ideation. Therefore, understanding the complex needs and challenges Veterans face is essential.

Previous studies by USC Military and Veterans Programs resulted in increased funding for Veteran services and encouraged collaborative approaches

by community organizations. With the insights from The Southern California Veterans Study, local agencies and Veterans' organizations are better equipped to understand the multifaceted challenges Veterans confront today.



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WORKING TOGETHER ON BEHALF OF CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS FOR OVER 56 YEARS



The California State Commanders Veterans Council serves as the collective Legislative voice for the state's major veterans service organizations. CSCVC supports veterans through advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing the rights, benefits, and well-being of California's 1.6 million veterans and their dependents.

Some of the Veteran Organizations in CSCVS are below



To Contact CSCVC visit the website or by email
CSCVC Website: <https://calcommanders.org/>
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