



March 2024 Issue  
**NEVADA LEGION NEWS**

The American Legion, Department of Nevada

**AMERICAN  
LEGION  
BE THE  
ONE**



 **AMERICAN  
LEGION**  
**DEPARTMENT OF NEVADA**

**LETTERS OF INTENT ARE BEING ACCEPTED**

**FOR THE FOLLOWING DEPARTMENT ELECTED POSITIONS**

***DEPARTMENT COMMANDER***

***DEPARTMENT 1<sup>ST</sup> VICE COMMANDER***

***DEPARTMENT 2<sup>ND</sup> VICE COMMANDER***

***DEPARTMENT SERGEANT-AT-ARMS***

***NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE PERSON (2024 – 2026)***

***LETTERS OF INTENT CAN BE EMAILED***

***[taldon737@aol.com](mailto:taldon737@aol.com)***

***OR MAILED***

***737 Veterans Memorial Drive***

***Las Vegas, NV. 89101***

The logo for the American Legion Auxiliary. It features the words "AMERICAN LEGION" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Above the word "AMERICAN" are three horizontal red and white stripes. Below "AMERICAN LEGION" is a thin horizontal line, and below that is the word "AUXILIARY" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

Greetings American Legion Family!

I had the distinct pleasure and honor of having dinner with National Commander Seehafer during his visit to Las Vegas. This would not have been possible if not for Commander Morris. It has been his push to open the lines of communication and unite the Department AL & ALA. I am the first ALA President to have this honor bestowed upon her in quite some time. I look forward to our continued work together. Thank you, Commander Morris.

Cynthia Ferris, ALA Unit 76 President has pushed through so many boundaries to bring Southern Nevada Veterans Creative Arts Festival to Southern Nevada. She alone cannot bring it to full fruition for its 3<sup>rd</sup> year here in Las Vegas without our American Legion Families help. She will be hosting a meeting for all to attend at Post 8 on March 10<sup>th</sup>. 6:00pm till? She will have flyers to distribute and give us all the heads up on how to get our creative Veterans involved. I implore everyone who can attend to do so. Post 8's Chef Dan will be serving until 6pm. Come early and enjoy Post 8's Restaurant.

Our turnout in 2023 was poor and we can do so much more with your help. The contest will be in September. Date still to be announced. Remember, we did have one Veteran make it to the National Event and we are wishing her luck!

As I am Administrator for the Department of Nevada Website, it gives me great pleasure to remind you:

**NEW DEPARTMENT WEBSITE IS LIVE!** <https://www.nvlegion.org/>

**NEW DEPARTMENT FACEBOOK PAGE:** [NevadaLegion](#)

Please take time to check it out and send me all of your feedback good or bad. We can only make it better together.

American Legion Family: Be the Team!

Remember to send me your upcoming events so that I can email the info to other Nevada Posts so that they too may attend or that it may be included in future Newsletters.

Girls State has a date: June 16-22, 2024 at the UNR.

Have a Happy St. Patrick's Day American Legion Family.

For God and Country,  
Charmaine Meana  
ALA Department President  
[charnvaux@gmail.com](mailto:charnvaux@gmail.com)



Greeting fellow Legionnaires!

It was my pleasure to help escort National Commander Daniel Seehafer to various places in Las Vegas along with Department Morris, NEC Evans, Adjutant Motta, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Walker, and PDC Stewart. He arrived on February 4<sup>th</sup> and left on February 7<sup>th</sup>.

We went to the Southern Nevada Veterans Hospital and took part of a Question and Answer session with the board and staff members/doctors. The Director stated they were dealing with large number of Pact Act veterans.

There was a discussion about Veterans suffering from diabetes about not being able to receive Dexcom patches from the pharmacy. The end result was that the Director was going to look into this matter.

Another issue was communication between the VA and Community Care. The Veteran gets transferred from place to place and the information not being shared between the two agencies. They acknowledge there is a snafu and are trying get this issue resolved.

In the interest of time, I did not bring up an issue that I have seen a couple of young Veterans struggle with; joint replacements. The VA hospital in Salt Lake did my hip replacement a couple of years ago because I met the criteria. I had moderate to severe osteoarthritis and I was old enough. I sat across from a young man in the waiting room at the hospital and had a discussion. He did so many jumps from his time in service that his hip was in severe shape but because he was not old enough, they would not replace his hip. This young man struggled to get up from the chair even with the help of his service dog. Another young man in my Post is still fighting with the VA about hip replacements. Both of his hips were fractured due to his time in the military, but they told him he was not old enough. Both Veterans have service-connected disabilities, receive 100% disability pay, are unemployable, receive pain meds, but cannot get the surgery they need in order to have quality of life just because they are too young. Perhaps the VA needs to revamp their criteria of who can receive joint replacements so our Veterans can enjoy their lives and not wait until they are old enough to receive the help they need.

Always in service,

Brenda Horton  
Department 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander



## Sons of the American Legion – Detachment Commander



The Detachment of Nevada is currently at 70.8% membership and did not meet the February 14<sup>th</sup> target of 75%. We are behind on meeting the 80% goal on March 13<sup>th</sup> and are currently in 52<sup>nd</sup> place nationally; we need to step up the membership efforts if we want to meet target. This is following a trend over the last two years where we have a surge to the end of the year and a delay until spring. Let's strive to bring those members forward because they are no longer current and in jeopardy of losing their membership. Membership is key and helps support the amazing things that the SAL does. Let's keep recruiting and renewing.

Commander Hall has issued a Commander's Challenge to all Squadrons to support the four pillars and become a National Four Pillar Squadron. To do so, a Squadron needs to raise \$1/member for each of Operation Comfort Warrior (VA&R), CWF (Children and Youth), Department's Boys State (Americanism), and hold a blood drive (National Security). Achieving each of the above will result in an award for being a National Four Pillar Squadron. Forms have been sent to Squadron and Post leadership (if I have your information; hint, hint)

Wild Willy's Western Rendezvous was a great success with 3 Past National Commanders in attendance along with the leading candidate for National Commander. With the expansion of the Western Region we had new faces and a significant contingent from Nevada. There was nearly \$3,000 raised for the CWF with Nevada once again leading the charge. The focus for the Rendezvous was fundraising with an exercise led by none other than Mark Nave, Chairman of the SAL's CWF Committee. We are always looking for feedback to improve next year.

I will be introducing the National Sons of The American Legion University (SAL U) over the next few months. This is a new leadership program, and the SAL U is launching a leadership program in 2024, aiming to train SAL members in effective leadership. The upcoming session is a pilot to refine the course content. Participants will test the program and offer feedback for future sessions. As the programs are introduced, I will present them to you.

As in past years, I have CWF and other challenge coins and pins to raise money for CWF and VCF, etc. I am happy to take \$10-20 donations for various causes in exchange for these. Colorado has been making waves about their amazing fundraising abilities so let's continue the streak and bring home the per-capita awards again and take the opportunity to show Colorado how it is really done by raising \$30/member.

I have confirmed that Eric Hoss will volunteer to improve the Nevada SAL web site (<https://nevadasal.org>). The current site is out of date and needs content. Contributors are always in need to keep web content engaging and relevant. Check out our social media as well @nevadasons on Facebook and @SALDetNV on Twitter.

Detachment EC meetings will be the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 via Teams (when it cooperates).

Teams Meeting ID 272 911 810 647

Passcode D3p5ib

Phone in – 775-393-9964

Conference ID 796 285 50#

Please join us if you can.

Let's have an exciting 2023-2024 and don't forget your buddy checks and watch out for our entire Legion Family.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawn Horton

Commander, Detachment of Nevada

#SALStrong

#BeTheOne



## 2024 SAL Membership Report: February 19, 2024

#	DETACHMENT	2024 DET. YEAR END GOAL	NEEDED TO MEET 80% TARGET 3/13/2024	2024 ACTUAL MBRSHIP	% OF YEAR END GOAL	2024 RENEWAL %
1	HAWAII	120	-24	120	100.00%	89.92
2	SOUTH DAKOTA	1,611	-321	1,610	99.94%	84.03
3	PUERTO RICO	156	-24	149	95.51%	89.54
4	FRANCE	168	-28	160	95.24%	83.13
5	NORTH DAKOTA	1,075	-151	1,011	94.05%	84.72
6	WISCONSIN	4,398	-600	4,118	93.63%	83.14
7	SOUTH CAROLINA	1,570	-185	1,441	91.78%	76.94
8	FLORIDA	23,066	-2,595	21,048	91.25%	76.13
9	RHODE ISLAND	348	-27	305	87.64%	74.64
10	IOWA	4,914	-367	4,298	87.46%	79.91
11	OREGON	1,534	-108	1,335	87.03%	71.55
12	MARYLAND	16,803	-1,163	14,605	86.92%	79.14
13	NEW HAMPSHIRE	6,027	-399	5,221	86.63%	76.95
14	ILLINOIS	13,716	-825	11,798	86.02%	79.70
15	OHIO	31,890	-1,755	27,107	85.54%	78.68
16	MICHIGAN	26,236	-1,431	22,420	85.46%	76.40
17	PENNSYLVANIA	62,746	-3,416	53,613	85.44%	79.35
18	NEW YORK	30,863	-1,523	26,053	84.97%	77.71
19	MINNESOTA	11,435	-558	9,706	84.88%	78.45
20	CONNECTICUT	1,865	-91	1,583	84.88%	74.48
21	LOUISIANA	1,821	-87	1,544	84.79%	78.21
22	NEBRASKA	6,992	-314	5,908	84.50%	80.55
23	NEW MEXICO	1,582	-69	1,335	84.39%	66.71
24	ARIZONA	8,595	-336	7,212	83.91%	69.63
25	ALABAMA	2,100	-81	1,761	83.86%	72.27
26	GEORGIA	4,887	-172	4,082	83.53%	72.62
27	DIST OF COL	91	-3	76	83.52%	76.14
28	INDIANA	37,244	-1,192	30,987	83.20%	76.80
29	VERMONT	3,920	-125	3,261	83.19%	77.41
30	VIRGINIA	4,367	-118	3,612	82.71%	71.64
31	NORTH CAROLINA	2,770	-70	2,286	82.53%	68.18
32	TENNESSEE	1,792	-44	1,478	82.48%	68.66
33	MISSISSIPPI	736	-17	606	82.34%	70.86
34	WYOMING	1,248	-13	1,011	81.01%	71.76
35	TEXAS	5,783	-55	4,681	80.94%	69.36
36	DELAWARE	2,596	-24	2,101	80.93%	72.17
37	KANSAS	6,055	-28	4,872	80.46%	73.93
38	MAINE	2,757	20	2,186	79.29%	70.31
39	COLORADO	2,952	22	2,340	79.27%	68.15
40	NEW JERSEY	9,662	95	7,635	79.02%	70.58
41	MONTANA	1,091	11	862	79.01%	74.05
42	CALIFORNIA	11,292	127	8,907	78.88%	67.75
43	MASSACHUSETTS	5,432	99	4,247	78.18%	70.53
44	ARKANSAS	406	8	317	78.08%	62.16
45	WEST VIRGINIA	2,593	62	2,012	77.59%	67.80
46	UTAH	460	13	355	77.17%	66.00
47	IDAHO	659	19	508	77.09%	59.30
48	WASHINGTON	2,682	110	2,036	75.91%	60.87
49	ALASKA	1,740	73	1,319	75.80%	63.25
50	LATIN AMERICA	33	1	25	75.76%	37.50
51	MISSOURI	3,337	158	2,512	75.28%	67.18
52	NEVADA	387	36	274	70.80%	60.61
53	OKLAHOMA	1,430	145	999	69.86%	56.69
54	KENTUCKY	2,399	306	1,613	67.24%	57.39
55	PHILIPPINES	79	19	44	55.70%	53.16
<b>Grand Totals:</b>		<b>382,111</b>	<b>-17,016</b>	<b>322,705</b>	<b>84.45%</b>	<b>75.95</b>



Please send me your events so we can get them online for others to see.

We need more engagement from the riders, it is well known that the Legion Riders events can be great membership opportunities. Always carry a packet of membership forms with you for the Legion, SAL, and Auxiliary, you never know when they might be handy.

Please send feedback, what would you like to see in future newsletter articles? What would you like to see done differently by the Legion Riders?

I can always be reached via email ([commander@nevadasal.org](mailto:commander@nevadasal.org)) or phone (720-394-5965), just leave a message if I don't answer.

Sincerely,

Shawn Horton  
Commander, Detachment of Nevada  
Legion Riders Department of Nevada Liaison



American

Event Schedule		
Date	Where	What
May 18, 2024	Elko, NV	Armed Forces Day Ride



# LAUGHLIN CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD



**I was asked by Lionel to submit this article about receiving The Laughlin Citizen of the Year Award. At first, I was hesitant due to it looking like bragging. I realized that it is an opportunity to accept the Thank You from my community and to use it as a tool to increase the visibility of the American Legion.**

**We as Legionnaires must remember that every opportunity of being visible to our community as a whole is an opportunity to reach out to our fellow Veterans and show them how active we are within that community. It is said that it takes a village and I certainly did not do all the work by myself. What we do and how we are seen is very important, each time we wear our Legion Hats, shirts vests, etc. We are a direct reflection of the Legion Family as a whole.**

**I applaud all our Legionnaires and know each of you are working diligently to make our veteran community better and assisting with our youth, Americanism and National Security programs just that much better.**

**For God and Country  
Pamela Walker  
AL Post 60 Commander**



# National Commander Seehafer's Visit to Southern Nevada

## North Las Vegas Va Medical Center



National Commander Seehafer's Visit to Southern Nevada  
Boulder City Veterans Home



Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery



# National Commander Seehafer's Visit to Southern Nevada Las Vegas Fisher House



Children and Youth Check Presentation





PO Box 1055 • Indianapolis, IN • 46204-1055

10/19/2023

To The American Legion Post Commanders,

The American Legion Marketing Division has been working on an opportunity with Wellcare, a brand of Centene. Wellcare is now a new benefits partner and the official Medicare Advantage partner of The American Legion.

Wellcare will be hosting in-person events to showcase their services at our local posts. During these events, they will be able to assist members and veterans in this complex world of Medicare packages.

If they haven't already, a representative from Wellcare will be reaching out to your post to schedule events. Please ensure to respond and find a time to welcome them for engagement with your members.

For questions about this partnership, please contact Mary Jo Dial at [mjdial@legion.org](mailto:mjdial@legion.org).

For Wellcare agent related issues, including customer complaints please contact the Wellcare National Events team at [nationalevents@centene.com](mailto:nationalevents@centene.com).

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul A. Evenson".

**Paul Evenson (SD)**

Chairman, Marketing Commission

**Dean Kessel**

Chief Marketing Officer

**Mary Jo Dial**

Director, Marketing

# White paper: Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA)

## February 2024

### Issue Summary

Currently, Afghans who were admitted to the United States under temporary humanitarian parole following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan can only pursue permanent legal status through the asylum system or, for those who directly supported the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan during the last 20 years, the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. Both options face severe backlogs, long processing times, and logistical obstacles for Afghans who were brought to the United States under emergency circumstances.

The Afghan Adjustment Act would establish a pathway to lawful permanent resident status for eligible Afghans and incentivize those admitted to the United States with temporary humanitarian parole status to come forward for security vetting. After completing the additional vetting, including the in-person interview required during the application process, this pathway to status adjustment would provide eligible Afghans in need of protection with stability as they continue to rebuild their lives in the United States. Congress has passed similar bipartisan adjustment legislation in the wake of other wartime evacuations, humanitarian crises, and U.S. military actions including the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Specifically, the Afghan Adjustment Act would:

- Allow Afghans with temporary humanitarian status in the U.S. who submit to additional security vetting to apply for permanent legal status.
- Establish an Interagency Task Force, led by the U.S. Department of State, to continue the relocation and resettlement of eligible Afghan partners from Afghanistan over the next ten years.
- Require the U.S. Department of State to respond to congressional inquiries related to SIV applications or U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) referrals.
- Expand SIV eligibility for Afghans who worked and served alongside U.S. forces, including members of the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command, the Afghan Air Force, the Female Tactical Teams of Afghanistan, and the Special Mission Wing of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

### Misinformation Concerns

1. Concern: the Afghan Adjustment Act wiped from *The American Legion's* priorities.

**FALSE.**

Response: TAL has always supported redress for Afghan allies and partners through the following resolutions:

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Afghan Adjustment Act" Office of Congressman Earl Blumenauer, July 14, 2023: <https://blumenauer.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/blumenauer.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/one-pagetheafghanadjustmentact.pdf>

- Resolution No. 16: Recognition for Afghan and Iraqi Combat Translators, 2018<sup>2</sup>

---

- **“RESOLVED, By The National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 17-18, 2018, That The American Legion urges the presidents of the United States and the U.S. Congress to recognize contributions of Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa recipients and Priority 2 Refugee Admissions Program recipients who stood shoulder to shoulder with, assisted, and protected U.S. military servicemembers, U.S. diplomats, and government agents, non-governmental organizations and media organizations during U.S. involvement in those countries.”**

- Resolution No. 12: Afghan War Commission, 2023<sup>3</sup>

- “RESOLVED, That The American Legion recognizes the faithful and selfless service of the millions of servicemembers, allies, and partners who served in Afghanistan.”

The American Legion has **NEVER** publicly gone on the record as not supporting AAA.

2. *Concern: It is actively being discussed for inclusion in the defense supplemental.*

**TRUE.**

*Response:* Per the reference Chapter 3; Subtitle C – Fulfilling Promises to Allies; Sec. 3331-3338 of H.R. 815: Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, a similar provision to the Afghan Adjustment Act was added to the bill:

Summary from the National Immigration Forum: Fulfilling Promises to Afghan Allies

The bill would adjust the status of Afghan nationals who were admitted or paroled into the U.S. after July 30, 2021, following completion of a vetting process. This section is similar, but not identical, to the Afghan Adjustment Act of 2023.

- Legal Pathway to Status. Under this section, the legal pathway for Afghan evacuees begins with conditional status, with an opportunity to move into permanent legal status and eventual citizenship. The conditional status will remain in effect for four years based on the date the individual was paroled in (i.e. admitted) to the U.S. or on July 1, 2027. At that point, the government has no more than 180 days to remove the conditional status. The expiration date of an individual’s parole will not apply to someone under consideration for conditional status.
- Robust Vetting. The vetting of qualifying Afghan evacuees must be equivalent to that utilized for refugee admissions.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Resolution No. 16: Recognition for Afghan and Iraqi Combat Translators | Digital Archive \(legion.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Resolution No. 12: Afghanistan War Commission | Digital Archive \(legion.org\)](#)

- Mechanism. Rather than expand those who would qualify for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) status (as found in the Afghan Adjustment Act), this section would make eligible many, if not all, the same groups through the United States Refugee Admissions Program.

This section provides for periodic non-adversarial meetings with Afghan evacuees to evaluate their conditional permanent status. The meetings are to be conducted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) no later than 180

---

days after the Afghan evacuee has been granted conditional status and periodically thereafter. The conditional basis of the status may be removed, unless the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determines, on a case-by-case basis, that the Afghan evacuee is subject to a specified ground of inadmissibility. Afghan evacuees are to be provided information and support through the application process for HHS benefits they might be eligible for.

There are also provisions to improve the efficiency and oversight of both the refugee program and the SIV program. An additional 2,500 SIVs will be made available for five years totaling 10,000 additional SIVs.<sup>4</sup>

3. Concern: *Senator Moran reached out directly to the DC office and requested support on the issue.*

**TRUE.**

Response: Senator Moran's office reached out to multiple organizations who support the Afghan Adjustment Act and related legislation to ask that they share his Op-Ed on January 29, 2024. After a 24-hour review by Director Marquez, The American Legion shared his article on our weekly media roll-up and shared in The American Legion's "X" Social Media account.

4. Concern: *Had it not been for a loud outcry from members, they would've swept [AAA] under the rug completely.*

**FALSE.**

Response: The National Security and Legislative Divisions, supported by the Executive Director and NS Commission Chairman, determined that issues related to immigration would be highly politicized by both sides of the aisle. Additionally, legislation on this issue was not likely to pass into law during a year that involves a Presidential election, so AAA was not added to the Legislative Agenda for 2024. However, advocacy on Afghan Allies-related matters by the Legislative and National Security Divisions never ceased after the decision was made in October 2023. In fact, between January of 2023 and January of 2024, the following actions were taken:

- Legislative Division attended at least 59 meetings on Capitol Hill with staff or the Member where AAA was discussed as a priority or during the meeting.
- NS Staff attended 34 meetings with allied organizations tied to the AAA issue (avg 2 x per month).

---

<sup>4</sup> "Border Security and Asylum Reform in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024: Bill Explainer, National Immigration Forum, Feb. 6, 2024: <https://immigrationforum.org/article/border-security-and-asylum-reform-in-the-emergency-national-security-supplemental-appropriations-act-2024-bill-explainer/>

- Legislative Division attended 20+ hours of meetings since September 2023.
  - Legislative/ NS Divisions have recommended TAL sign onto no fewer than three joint letters and attended a Press Conference alongside four Senators and VFW, With Honor and No One Left Behind in January 2024.
  - Legislative Division staff attended a AAA press conference with allied organizations and Members of Congress in October 2023.
- 
- NS Division Staff missed one meeting during the previous 12-month period, and only after the responsible NS Staff member was terminated for cause during January 2024.
  - Since August 2022, Legislative staff sent out 4 action alert messages, and Legion members have sent 27,273 email messages to Capitol Hill, and the information was shared 260 times on social media platforms by Legion members.

#### Additional advocacy and support:

- NS Division helped write and edit a [National Commander's Message](#) on supporting the Afghan Adjustment Act in January 2023.
- AAA was included in 2023 Commander's Testimony and Legislative Priorities
- NS Division attended bi-monthly "Evacuate Our Allies" (EOA) coalition meetings with VSOs, immigration groups, and humanitarian no-profits
- NS hosted the members of With Honor, PenFed, and veterans of the Afghan Female Tactical Platoon (FTP) at our National HQ in Washington, DC before their meetings on the Hill in July 2023.
- NS and Legislative Division attended an Afghan Allies Event on behalf of the Female Tactical Platoon (FTP) hosted by the Women's Foreign Policy Group in July 2023.
- Hosted US Army Afghan Veteran, Rebekah Edmonson, who was embedded with the Female Tactical Platoon along with her Afghan counterpart, Commander Mahnaz Akbari of the FTP during the National Security Commission meeting during the 2023 National Convention in Charlotte, NC.
- In total, the NS Division and NS Commission spent more than 200 hours on AAA-related efforts during the past year, the most work carried out for any portfolio, second only to military quality of life which is our top legislative priority.

## Strategic Approach

The American Legion developed its position in support of our Afghan Allies immediately after the devastating withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2012. Since then, TAL has not ceased efforts to support a legal pathway be given to our Afghan allies who fought and bled alongside American troops in the 20year war. Congress' failure to decouple the Afghan-related matters from the broader immigration problem continues to derail efforts that would grant our allies the legal status they deserve. Like many other items not on the Legislative Agenda, Washington DC Staff has continued to engage on this issue.



# The American Legion Legislative Agenda for the 118th Congress, 2nd Session

The American Legion is the voice of U.S. military veterans and servicemembers. A resolution-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its nearly 1.6 million members and shape the organization's legislative priorities for the 118th Congress:

## Suicide Prevention & Mental Health

Suicide remains a top issue in the veteran community. The suicide rate among veterans is nearly double that of civilian counterparts. It is imperative that we simultaneously destigmatize mental health assistance, while increasing access. The American Legion encourages Congress to robustly fund VA's suicide prevention outreach budget and peer support programs. We encourage all Americans to "Be the One" who is willing, ready, and able to have a difficult conversations about suicide and other mental health issues.

## Alternative Treatments

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows that in 2021, approximately 2.8 million veterans experienced an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder, with 92.4 percent not receiving treatment. More must be done to ensure veterans have access to the effective treatments they desire. This includes expanding research and access into alternative treatments and emerging therapies.

## VA Healthcare Modernization

The biggest issue in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare Modernization is the implementation of the new electronic health record modernization program (EHRM). VA has experienced difficulties as the EHRM rollout has progressed. Some issues identified were the differences in the training software compared to end-user software, along with inexperienced instructors providing the training to VA staff. VA made improvements on these identified issues. As the EHRM rollout is set to resume in 2024, The American Legion continues to call on Congress to provide oversight and to hold VA and other relevant parties accountable for the implementation and functioning of the EHR system.

## PACT Act: Implementation & Oversight

Since the implementation of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, VA has screened more than 5 million veterans for toxic exposure. The average time to complete a PACT Act-related claim is 157 days. It is imperative that VA fully leverage the resources made available in the PACT Act to assist in the continued modernization of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) information technology systems as well as the hiring of additional employees to ensure claims are adjudicated in a timely manner. The American Legion urges

Congress to provide the necessary oversight and funding to ensure VA has the resources to properly implement this legislation.

## Safeguard Veteran Benefits

Veterans are facing a growing threat from exploitative entities aiming to capitalize on the benefits rightfully earned through military service. These predatory actors range from claims companies charging exorbitant fees to lawyers seeking sizable portions of VA disability benefit payments. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to: restore criminal penalties for persons or companies that represent or charge veterans fees to file, prepare or prosecute initial VA claims without VA accreditation; and to oppose any legislation that would allow unaccredited parties to become legal representatives without completing the accreditation process. The American Legion's advocacy role remains focused on safeguarding the well-deserved benefits of those who have served.

## Concurrent Receipt

There are currently 42,000 military retirees with combat-related injuries who are eligible for retirement pay from the Department of Defense (DOD) and compensation for service-connected disabilities from the VA. However, retired veterans with a disability rating below 50-percent have their VA compensation deducted from their DOD retirement pay. The American Legion strongly supports ending this inequitable policy, where many military retirees must forfeit their retired pay to receive equal amounts of disability compensation.

## Guard & Reserve GI Bill Parity

National Guard and Reserve servicemembers are being deprived of education benefits that active-duty servicemembers enjoy, despite completing the same duties. According to current law, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers only accrue GI Bill entitlement when called to active duty under federal orders. When Guard and Reserve servicemembers are activated under state orders, they do not accrue eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits like their active-duty counterparts do. The American Legion believes that every day in uniform counts and urges Congress to recognize the service of Guard and Reserve servicemembers as eligible for the GI Bill.

## GI Bill for Honorable Service

To receive most VA benefits, a veteran's character of discharge or service must be "under honorable conditions." However, GI Bill education assistance benefits have a requirement that servicemembers receive an "honorable discharge." If the character of service is "general under honorable conditions," this benefit remains out of reach for these veterans. The American Legion urges Congress to correct this statutory incongruity by amending U.S. Code to allow access to VA educational assistance to veterans with general under honorable conditions discharges.

## Military Quality of Life

The U.S. military's greatest resources are servicemembers and their families. Without highly qualified and committed men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrence necessary to defend our nation. Factors contributing to quality of life include proper compensation,

appropriate housing, quality healthcare, reasonably priced commissaries, and access to childcare services. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to expand access to affordable childcare, increase appropriations for military construction projects (including barracks and family housing), and ensuring timely access to mental healthcare.

## Pay the Coast Guard

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out vital national security missions. Still, because the Coast Guard is under the Department of Homeland Security instead of DOD, its members are more likely to experience pay interruptions during prolonged government shutdowns. The common threat of shutdowns brings severe and unnecessary hardship on these men, women, and their families. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that would guarantee that Coast Guard personnel are paid in case of a shutdown.

## Access to healthcare for overseas military and families

Military personnel stationed overseas in support of U.S. interests and our alliances provide a key role in deterring adversaries from a myriad of actions. However, even after the realignment of medical services in overseas and remote locations under the Defense Health Agency (DHA), major issues involving access to various types of healthcare continue. Additionally, the lack of access to certain types of care limits overseas assignments and contributes to military families being separated for extended periods of time.

## Improving the military TAP

The American Legion urges Congress to direct the modernization of Transition Assistance Program (TAP) delivery using technology and performance data to ensure the DOD delivers a successful program. The creation of a mobile application, providing servicemembers with an extensive toolkit of on-demand transition-related content would improve participation and increase the benefit

of transition resources available. Delivering effective transition assistance will ensure a veteran's proper reintegration from active duty to civilian life and reduce negative experiences. Improved TAP instruction will support our servicemembers in finding education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities and send successful citizens back to our communities.

## Protect the American Flag

The American Legion urges Congress to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag. Additionally, The American Legion urges Congress to pass the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021 to amend the U.S. Flag Code to codify common patriotic customs and practices as described in The American Legion Resolution No. 19: Flag Code Amendment.

To download a PDF of The American Legion Legislative Agenda for the 118th Congress brochure visit the AL National Website.

