



February 2024



Top Left Blue Angel's Plane at Rest Stop on I-10.  
Top Right: Catamaran arriving in Miami carrying wounded Italian and American Soldiers courtesy of WoW  
Bottom Left: Chapter 4 building before Home Depot Grant  
Bottom Right: Chapter 4 after Home Depot Grant.



## *DEPARTMENT COMMANDER BRENDA REED*

I would like to begin this month's column by thanking all those who attended the Mid-Winter Conference for CSO Training and for the Conference itself. I would especially like to thank all those who stayed for the Commander's Testimonial Dinner who made the night exceptionally special for me. I had prepared myself for the jokes and ribbing that usually comes with this dinner, but I was overwhelmed by all the wonderful things all of you had to say to and about me. I am so blessed to have been able to serve as your Commander and to have been able to meet so many of you. Thank you for your love and for your gifts. Especially your gifts of friendship.

The next few months will be very busy for the officers of our department. I will be traveling to DC twice in the coming months. I have been asked to represent DAV and women veterans February 27<sup>th</sup> during the release of DAV's latest report:

### ***Women Veterans – The Journey to Mental Wellness***

This event will be held at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center. It is an honor to have been asked.

March 7-10 many of us will once again travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with our Senators and Representatives to talk with them about issues concerning our nation's injured and ill veterans. National Commander Nancy Espinosa will be giving her testimony to the Veterans Affairs Committee on Thursday morning at 10:00 am. If you are planning to attend, please let our Department Adjutant know that you are attending and if you have any scheduled meetings with your Congressional Representatives during the Mid-Winter Conference.

Also remember, if you would like one of our Department Officers to come to your Chapter to install your newly elected officers, please let the Department Adjutant and the officer you would like to come know as soon as possible.

This is a large state and there are only a few officers but we will do our best to attend if you would like to.

Once again, I would like to remind you to reach out to veterans in your area who may be alone. It costs nothing to be kind. Please check on them even if it is just a text or email.

## **Women Veterans**

We urge Congress to enact legislation that is in line with the 45 key recommendations made in DAV's most recent women veterans report, Women Veterans: The Journey Ahead to ensure all federal programs are meeting the needs of women veterans, and equal in effectiveness and health outcomes when compared to the services provided to male veterans.

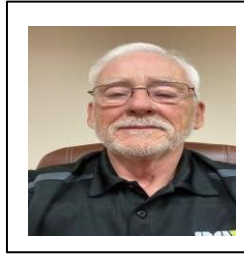
### **2024 Mid-Winter Conference**

*March 7-10, 2024 (Please see below regarding the 2024 Mid-Winter Conference change of dates)*

Crystal Gateway Marriott  
1700 Richmond Highway (formerly Jefferson Davis Hwy)  
Arlington, VA 22202  
Telephone: 1.800.266.9432 or 1.703.920.3230  
Group Name: Disabled American Veterans  
\$249 Single/Double

Don't forget to notify Department Adjutant Andy Marshall if you are attending the upcoming Mid-Winter Conference in March as well as advising if you have scheduled a meeting to discuss DAV's Critical Policy Goals for 2024 during the Mid-Winter Conference or before or after the Mid-Winter Conference.





## *DEPARTMENT SENIOR VICE COMMANDER LAYMOND ROSE*

### **Membership Update:**

Numerous chapters have reached their membership goal. Letters from National Commander Nancy Espinosa recently sent congratulatory letters to the following chapters:

- Orange Blossom Gardens 150
- Seminole Chapter 30
- Titusville 109
- Space Coast 123
- Jacksonville 1
- Crystal River 158
- Crestview 57
- Bay Area 112
- Tamarac 73
- Pembroke Pines-Miramar 29
- C W Byers 83
- Sun City Center 110
- Hernando County 67
- Clearwater 11
- Bay Pines Holiday Isles 13
- Ridge 49
- Manatee County 18
- Venice Gulf 101
- R L Cochran 82
- Belle Glades 144
- Port St. Lucie 113

**Chapter Visits:** With Chapter Service Officer training school and the mid-Winter Department Conference in the first part of the month, I was only able to make two-chapter visits in January – Chapters 86 and 109.

The Chapter 86 visit was to attend their "Volunteer Appreciation Night" on January 12<sup>th</sup>. This was a joint event for both the chapter and Auxiliary Unit 86 with over 50 members and guests in attendance. There was an impressive buffet enjoyed by all. The primary purpose of the event was to recognize volunteers and members for their service and contributions to the veteran community. Sixteen Certificates of Appreciation were presented to volunteer drivers, eleven Graduation Certificates for newly trained Chapter Service Officers, fourteen Certificates of Appreciation for Auxiliary members and volunteers. Numerous Years of Service Pins were presented to members including a 20-year pin to Ernie Morris, a 35-year

year pin to Paul Lint, a 40- year pin to Jim 'Chief' Dupuy and a 50-year pin to Unit 86 Commander Marty Feidler.

### **DAV Scholarship Program:**

Reminder, the cut off date to submit applications for the DAV Scholarship Program is every year on February 28<sup>th</sup>. Applicants must have a minimum of 100 lifetime volunteer hours. See complete details at [www.dav.org/scholarship](http://www.dav.org/scholarship). Every chapter should have at least one young person (age 21 or under) volunteering for the chapter to qualify so they can apply for this scholarship program (ten scholarships from \$5,000 to \$30,000.) If your chapter is not participating it is a terrible waste of a valuable resource.

### **National Salute to Veterans Patients Program:**

The purpose of the program is to:

- Pay tribute and express appreciation to Veterans.
- Increase community awareness of the role of the VA medical center.
- Encourage citizens to visit hospitalized Veterans and to become involved as volunteers.

This is a VA program that occurs every February. This year it is the week of February 12<sup>th</sup>. During the National Salute, the VA invites the public to participate in a variety of activities at the VA medical centers including special ward visits and valentine distributions; photo opportunities; special recreation activities and Veteran recognition programs.

The program also provides information for the community to become familiar with volunteer opportunities within the medical center. Hopefully, we can recruit new volunteers for our veterans.

Contact Voluntary Services within the VA Medical Center nearest you for more information. Chapter 16 (my home chapter) will be providing a luncheon for the residents of the Lake Baldwin Domiciliary on the 12<sup>th</sup> and with the participation of Unit 16 Auxiliary will operate a Comfort Cart in the Lake Baldwin clinic on the 15<sup>th</sup>.



## DEPARTMENT JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER CHIP HANSON



### Not all wounds of War are visible.

Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms may start within one month of a traumatic event, but sometimes symptoms may not appear until years after the event. These symptoms cause significant problems in social or work situations and relationships. They can also interfere with your ability to go about your normal daily tasks.

PTSD symptoms are generally grouped into four types: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions. Symptoms can vary over time or vary from person to person.

Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:

- Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event
- Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)
- Upsetting dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you **of the traumatic event**
- Symptoms of avoidance may include:
  - Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
  - Avoiding places, activities, or people that remind you of the traumatic event
- Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:

- Negative thoughts about yourself, other people, or the world
- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships
- Feeling detached from family and friends
- Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Difficulty experiencing positive emotions
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Symptoms of changes in physical and emotional reactions (also called arousal symptoms) may include:
  - Being easily startled or frightened
  - Always being on guard for danger
  - Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Trouble concentrating
  - Irritability, angry outbursts, or aggressive behavior
  - Overwhelming guilt or shame

#### 3 phone numbers to remember

- 211 non-emergency phone #
- 988 suicide hotline
- 911 emergency phone #



## DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN REVEREND JIM TAYLOR



### THE CHIEF PETTY OFFICER'S PRAYER

Dear Lord...

- So far today, God, I have lived my life as you would intend.
  - I haven't lost my temper.
- So far, I have not even grabbed the Chief's Mess Cook by the throat, like yesterday.
  - I have said nothing insulting or humiliating to any of the junior officers.
- I haven't bitched about the coffee, the ship's schedule, the watch bill, or Saturday's Personnel Inspection.
  - I have told no lies...
  - I have not cheated at poker.
- I have put no ship's tools in my personal toolbox.
- In short God, I believe that so far today I have committed no grievous sins.
- Thank you, God, for helping me to stay righteous so far. But Lord, it's almost 0600 and in a little while I'm going to roll out of my bunk and after that I think I will need a lot more help.

Amen...

I remember those days when this was my morning prayer. I don't mean just the times I was a Chief on a boat but even as a Chief Chaplain in the VA. As a chaplain I learned that the best thing about ministry is the people and the worst thing about ministry is people. Some folks are in crisis, and it is a privilege to help them through those times. Others, well I refer you to the junior officers in my morning prayer. God reminds me to not judge lest I be judged. Ok, ok, I get it.

The common denominator in all this is me, and how I chose to face the day. Prayer in the morning is a good thing because I have the hope it will influence the rest of my day. If I start the day by looking at the world, I can lose hope. That means I need to start from a different frame of mind. I need to start my day remembering God is with me and will encourage me after I leave my bunk. I know full well that as soon as I leave my bunk, I will encounter people. I want to be a positive influence on those I meet today. Notice this is a one-day-at-time proposition. So, as I pray for God to help me, I pray for God to help you.

### The Infantryman's Creed

*I am the Infantry.  
I am my country's strength in war, her deterrent in peace. I am  
the heart of the fight... wherever, whenever.  
I carry America's faith and honor against her enemies.  
I am the Queen of Battle.*

*I am what my country expects me to be, the best trained Soldier  
in the world. In the race for victory, I am swift, determined, and  
courageous, armed with a fierce will to win.*

*Never will I fail my country's trust. Always I fight on...  
through the foe, to the objective, to triumph overall.*

*If necessary, I will fight to my death.  
By my steadfast courage, I have won more than 200 years of  
freedom.*

*I yield not to weakness, to hunger, to cowardice, to fatigue, to  
superior odds,*

*For I am mentally tough, physically strong, and morally straight.  
I forsake not, my country, my mission, my comrades, my sacred  
duty.*

*I am relentless. I am always there, now and forever.*

**I AM THE INFANTRY**

**FOLLOW ME!**

As veterans, you may not call it a Chief's Prayer or Infantryman's Creed, but we all know the prayers above. I pray you will start your day with prayer or meditation in the mornings and as a result you will have a better day.

Blessings



## LVAP HOURS:

The timely and accurate reporting of LVAP hours will be one of my priority goals this fiscal year. Last year only 21 of our 52 chapters reported LVAP hours to the department monthly as required. It is my belief that every chapter is performing functions for which LVAP hours can be claimed – they simply are not reporting those hours. Consequently, we are significantly under-reporting the activity of the Department of Florida.

Reporting LVAP hours, by every chapter, is very important to the DAV organization. DAV is required to report volunteer hours to Congress, watchdog groups, members, and donors. Reporting 'ALL' of our volunteer hours can strengthen our lobbying capabilities in congress, elevate the favorable opinion of watchdog groups, and reinforce the trust of our members and donors.

The below chart will be updated and appear in this newsletter monthly going forward so that every chapter will know where they stand.

JULY 2023-JANUARY 2024 LVAP HOURS REPORTED BY CHAPTER											
Chap #	Current Month	YTD	Chap #	Current Month	YTD	Chap #	Current Month	YTD	Chap #	Current Month	YTD
1	2,144	3,609	23	196.5	196.5	83		2,395	112	640	640
4	602	7,420	29		0	84		725	113	203	1,426
5	317	1,056	30	366	1,190	85		351	123	2,806	7,394
6		0	32		747	86	1,580	3,602	125		0
7		0	38		2,096	87	192	836	126	162	162
11	454	1,852	42	239	504	90	42	258	129	1,795	1,795
12	150	150	49	38	38	94	128	128	133	570	1,805
13		0	57		713	97	125	125	144		0
16	1,520	7,031	63		0	98		0	148		0
17		0	67		347	101			150	653	3,859
18		5,719	70		0	108		2,864	158		396
20		0	73		0	109	2,865	13,068	159		486
22		249	82		705	110	201	578			

**TOTALS 7/1/23-12/31/23** 76, 515



# DEPARTMENT JUDGE ADVOCATE MICHAEL MICHELOTTI



The DAV Chapter Officers Guide (COG) is a valuable resource for any chapter officer, regardless of their level of experience. It is a must read for all new chapter officers who may be unfamiliar with the duties or expectations of their new role.

The COG contains a wealth of information on a wide range of topics, including membership recruitment, community outreach and advocacy. It also provides in-depth information and instructions on important administrative tasks and procedures such as conducting meetings, managing finances, and maintaining records. As well as other tips and best practices to effectively and efficiently carry out the duties and responsibilities of each chapter officer.

By utilizing the COG, officers can ensure they are well prepared to perform their duties and avoid potential pitfalls and mistakes. Instead, officers can focus on leading their chapter to success in fulfilling the DAV's mission of empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.

You can find the DAV Chapter Officers Guide at: <https://www.dav.org/member-resources/chapter-officer-guide/>

One of the main duties of the Chapter Adjutant is filing of various reports to include LVAP. I have been informed that we have numerous chapters who have not filed any LVAP reports since July 1 of 2023. The Department Adjutant posts the Department LVAP Reports in the Department Newsletter each month. Chapter Adjutants should ensure these reports are filed on a monthly basis. The form is available on the flash-drive that have been distributed to chapters.

February is National Salute to Veterans at VA Hospitals across the Country. See info in our Senior Vice Commander's column. Valentine's Day cards are a popular way to thank a veteran who is hospitalized. This would be a great opportunity for any Junior DAVA members to participate in.



I offer my congratulations to those chapters listed in Senior Vice Commander Roses' article above for reaching and/or exceeding their membership goal already this year.

I am sure National Membership Director Doug Wells is proud of your accomplishments.

Some members of the Department started a fund called "**Chapter to Chapter Assistance Fund**". This fund was started to assist chapters who do not have funds to send their chapter commander and/or adjutant to our Mid-Winter Conference each January and our Department Convention each June. Unfortunately, some of our chapters are small and need financial assistance to authorize their members to attend our functions.

Chapters who request funding to send their chapter commander and/or adjutant would of course, have their Chapter Financial Statements reviewed to ensure they need the financial assistance to authorize their attendance at these two annual functions.

If your chapter can donate to this fund, it would be greatly appreciated. Donations from Florida chapters only are accepted at Department Headquarters and should be designated for the Chapter Assistance Fund.





## Andy Marshall Department Adjutant

### Pending Veterans Legislation Florida

**SB 0172 Verification of Eligibility for Homestead Exemption by Polsky** Verification of Eligibility for Homestead Exemption; Requiring the Department of Revenue to establish an eligibility verification procedure for specified exemptions, etc.

Effective Date: 7/1/2024 Current Committee of Reference: Senate Community Affairs.

**SB 0174 Veterans' Long Term Care Facilities Admissions by Burgess** Veterans' Long Term Care Facilities Admissions; Revising eligibility for residency in the Veteran's Domiciliary Home of Florida to include specified individuals; revising the definition of "resident"; revising the admission eligibility for veterans' nursing homes to include specified individuals, etc.

Effective Date: 7/1/2024 Current Committee of Reference: Senate Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services.

**SB 0218 Property Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouses of Veterans by Killebrew** Property Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouses of Veterans: Authorizes production of certain letter by surviving spouses of veterans to property appraisers.

Effective Date: January 1, 2025 Current Committee of Reference: No Current Committee.

**SB 0346 Special Observances**; Designating each November as "Veteran Appreciation Month"; authorizing the Governor to issue a proclamation with specified information, etc. Effective Date: 7/1/2024

**SB 0308 Public Records/ServiceMembers by Trumbull** Public Records/ServiceMembers; Defining the terms "identification and location information" and "servicemember"; providing an exemption from public records requirements for identification and location information of servicemembers and the spouses and dependents of servicemembers; providing for future legislative review and repeal of the exemption; providing a statement of public necessity, etc.

Effective Date: Upon becoming a law Current Committee of Reference: Senate Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security.

**SB 0818 Military Leave by Avila** Military Leave; Providing that public officials and employees of the state, a county, a municipality, or a political subdivision, respectively, are entitled to their full pay for the first 30 days of military service, if such service is equal to or greater than a specified timeframe, etc.

Effective Date: 7/1/2024 Current Committee of Reference: Senate Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

**SB 1514: Medical Marijuana Use Registry Identification Cards for Veterans**

Providing a waiver of the issuance and renewal fees for a medical marijuana use registry identification card for veterans; providing requirements for proof of identification, etc.

Effective Date: 7/1/2024

Last Action: 1/10/2024 Senate - Introduced



## Adjutant's Column Continued

### VA's Allocation of Initial PACT Act Funding for the Toxic Exposures Fund

The PACT Act authorizes VA to deliver veterans' health care and benefits associated with exposure to environmental hazards during military service. VA may use the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF) to ensure proper claims processing by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the administration of health care for eligible veterans. Congress authorized an initial appropriation of \$500 million to set up the TEF for fiscal years 2023 and 2024 and required that VA produce a spending plan detailing funding allocation; it later appropriated an additional \$5 billion in TEF support through fiscal year 2027, which was not part of this examination.

As requested by the VA Secretary, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) examined the initial TEF appropriation. This memorandum focused on funds allocated to VBA, the Office of Information and Technology (OIT), and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Among its allowable uses, VBA, OIT, and VHA planned for 2,400 full-time employees. VA submitted a required spend plan to Congress. Estimation methodologies explaining specifically how funds will be used had been completed only for VHA, with the remaining methodologies anticipated in December 2023 and February 2024. This memorandum was issued to draw VA leaders' attention to identified weaknesses. These included that VBA and OIT had not yet provided methodologies to explain their plan estimates; some spending plans had to be amended to avoid violations of the Purpose Statute; and monthly spending reports contained minor calculation inaccuracies.

The OIG commends the Office of Management for proactively seeking legal guidance from the Office of General Counsel to ensure TEF allocations are used in accordance with their authorized purposes. No specific recommendations were made, but the OIG requested being informed of any additional actions taken to ensure proper use of the TEF once VBA and OIT finalize their estimation methodologies.

Issue Date

January 11, 2024

Report Number

23-02377-35

### Federal Legislation S. 3341

VA's fourth mission is to improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism national emergencies and disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans, as well as to support national, state and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security,

S. 3341 the Advancing VA's Emergency Response to (AVERT) Crises Act of 2023, would improve VA's response to natural disasters, pandemics and other emergencies to ensure continuity of VA care for veterans and ensure the Department is better prepared to activate its fourth mission authority in responding to national emergencies.

### Senate Bill 3598

A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a comprehensive standard for timing between referrals and appointments for care from the Department of Veterans Affairs and to submit a report with respect to that standard, and for other purposes.

Action: 2024-01-17 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

### Senate Bill 3526

A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to require a lactation space in each medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Action: 2023-12-14 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

### SB 3288

A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to reinstate entitlement to Post-9/11 Educational Assistance for victims of sexual assault or domestic violence, and for other purposes.

Action: 2023-11-09 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Chapters visited by Department Line Officers and Adjutant since Department Convention: 1, 4, 11, 18, 22, 23 (x2), 32, 57, 63, 70, 82, 84, 86, 87, 90, 97, 101, 109, 110, 119, 125, 129, 158

## Montana man sentenced to 3 years probation

Patrick John McKenna, of Helena, Montana, was sentenced to three years of probation, 180 days of home confinement, and ordered to pay more than \$46,000 in restitution after his August 2023 guilty plea to healthcare fraud. He falsely claimed to have served in the US Navy so he could receive healthcare benefits from the VA because of the high cost of insurance and health care. The VA OIG investigated this case.

## DAV's 2024 Critical Policy Goals

Correct inequities for veterans receiving compensation benefits and provide parity in benefits for survivors.

- Congress must enact S. 344/HR 1282, The Major Richard Star Act to repeal the inequitable offset between rightfully earned military retired pay and VA disability compensation for all veterans, including medically retired combat veterans.
- Congress must enact H.R. 3489, the Restore Veterans Compensation Act, which would afford justice for ill and injured veterans by eliminating the unfair practice of the VA recouping separation payments, which are based on military service, and differ from VA disability compensation.
- Congress must enact S. 414/H.R. 1083 the Caring for Survivors Act, to ease the eligibility criteria for DIC and increase the monthly benefit amount to match benefits provided by other federal survivor programs.
- Congress must enact S. 1266/H.R. 3651, the Love Lives Act, the Love Lives On Act, to eliminate the remarriage age for survivors in receipt of DIC.
- Congress must enact H.R. 4566, the Providing Radiation Exposed Servicemembers Undisputed Medical Eligibility Act, to remove the VA dos estimate requirement for radiation exposure.
- Congress must enact S. 2294/H.R. 4249, the Veterans Exposed to Toxic PFAS Act, to add presumptive diseases for PFAS exposure and to provide health care for veterans and their families.
- Congress must enact H.R. 5247 Expedited Hiring for VA Trained Psychiatrists Act of 2023.
- The VA must continue to maintain sufficient health care capacity to meet its fourth mission function during national emergencies while also ensuring that veterans continue to have uninterrupted and timely access to VA health care.

## US Congress Senate Bill 3490

A bill to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from providing health care to, or engaging in claims processing for health care for, any individual unlawfully present in the United States who is not eligible for health care under the laws administered by the Secretary.

Action: 2023-12-13 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

## US Congress House Bill 3581

To amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the family caregiver program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to include services related to mental health and neurological disorders, and for other purposes.

Action: 2023-12-05 - Received in the Senate and Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

## US Congress Senate Bill 3339

A bill to prohibit former members of the Armed Forces from accepting employment in positions involving training, consulting, advising, or instructing any government-associated individual or entity from the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Cuba, or the Syrian Arab Republic.

Action: 2023-11-15 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

## US Congress Senate Bill 2888

A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to authorize representatives of veterans service organizations to participate in presentations to promote certain benefits available to veterans during pre-separation counseling under the Transition Assistance Program of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes.

Action: 2023-09-21 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.



**TALLAHASSEE** - Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez hosted a roundtable discussion Jan. 19 regarding Senate Bill 174, which would allow veterans' spouses to qualify to live in state-run long-term care facilities for Veterans. Florida has nine State Veterans' Homes for eligible Veterans. The roundtable brought together Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs Executive Director James S. Hartsell and State Senator Danny Burgess, who is the senate bill sponsor.

The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs launched a series of outreach events featuring key state leaders in Panama City, St. Augustine and Land O' Lakes recently to introduce the *Hope Florida* initiative to local Veterans. First Lady Casey DeSantis announced the expansion of *Hope Florida* to FDVA in November 2023. *Hope Florida – A Pathway for Patriots* supports Veterans by connecting them to services, earned benefits and community resources through Hope Navigators. Unique to this expansion, Hope Navigators are coordinating with FDVA's State Veterans' Service Officers to assist Veterans in navigating their benefits.

The 2024 Florida Legislative Session began on Jan. 9 and is scheduled to run for 60 days. The Florida Department of Veterans Affairs is sponsoring two primary pieces of legislation this session.

Senate Bill 174 and House Bill 725 seek to allow admission of eligible spouses to our network of State Veterans' Homes.

Senate Bill 1004 and House Bill 727 seek to increase the property value tax exemption from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for service-connected disabled Veterans with a 10% or higher disability rating. You can follow the progress of all Veteran-related legislation and our agency's budget for the coming fiscal year by visiting the FDVA website at [www.FloridaVets.org](http://www.FloridaVets.org) and clicking on "Veteran Legislation."

### **S.3452 - Fred Hamilton Veterans' Lost Records Act**

A bill to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to determine the eligibility or entitlement of a member or former member of the Armed Forces described in subsection (a) to a benefit under a law administered by the Secretary solely based on alternative sources of evidence when the military service records or medical treatment records of the member or former member are incomplete because of damage or loss of records after being in the possession of the Federal Government, and for other purposes.

Action: 2023-12-07 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.



### **Veterans Are Receiving Concurrent Monthly Housing Allowance Payments while Participating in Certain VA Educational Programs**

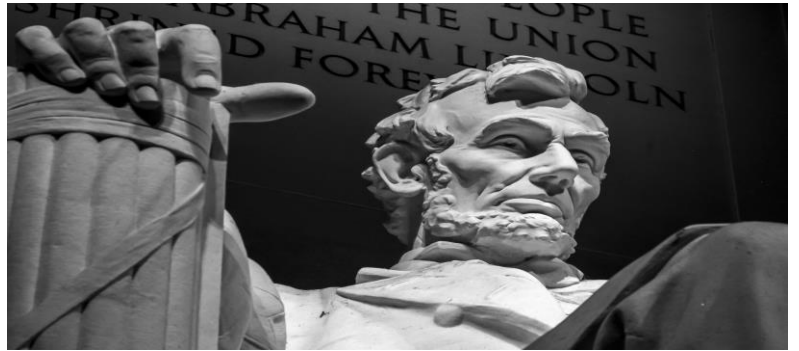
During a review related to VA's Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) pilot program, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) discovered VA is paying concurrent monthly housing allowance benefits to veterans who are simultaneously enrolled in Post 9/11 GI Bill and VET TEC educational programs. There is no statutory authority prohibiting concurrent payment to a veteran for Post-9/11 GI Bill and VET TEC educational benefits. However, the legislation that established VET TEC created an inconsistency compared to other VA educational benefits programs that prohibit concurrent payments of educational benefits. Congress introduced bills to continue VET TEC as a VA educational program in 2023. This memorandum is meant to convey the information necessary for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Congress to determine if additional actions are warranted to address this inconsistency before the continuation of the program. The OIG team selected a sample of 30 unique veterans who simultaneously attended Post 9/11 GI Bill and VET TEC courses and found that all received concurrent monthly housing allowance payments. Those veterans received a total of about \$164,500 in concurrent payments. Based on this sample, the team estimated about 208 veterans received concurrent payments from April 1, 2019, to February 28, 2023, for a total of \$1.1 million. With the VET TEC pilot program ending in April 2024 and legislation pending to continue it as a VA educational program, VBA and Congress have an opportunity to consider whether new iterations of the VET TEC program should continue to allow veterans to receive concurrent monthly housing allowance payments while simultaneously attending Post 9/11 GI Bill and VET TEC programs.

### **US Congress Senate Bill 2680**

A bill to require the provision of information and counseling regarding Federal food assistance programs as part of the Transition Assistance Program.

Action: 2023-07-27 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

February 12 Abraham Lincoln's Birthday



February 14 Valentine's Day



February 19 President's Day



February 22 George Washington's Birthday

