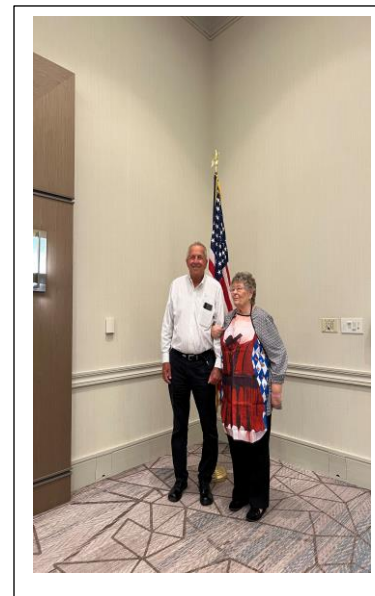
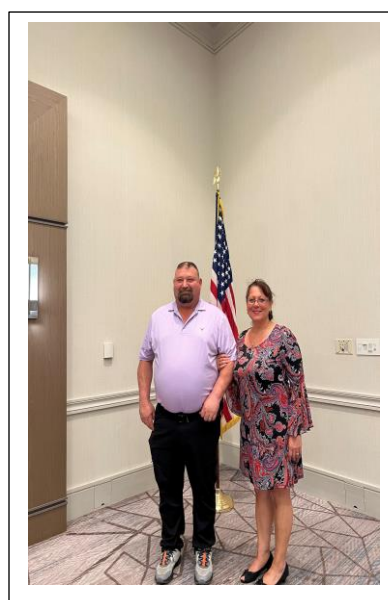


## Department of Florida August 2023 Newsletter



Top Left to right: Newly elected DAV & DAV Commanders Reed & Conklin; SVC's Rose & Caywood; DAVA JVC Evelyn Kopema with husband; Chaplains Taylor & Bouters

Bottom Left to right; Judge Advocates Michelotti & McLaughlin; Treasurers Marshall & Roussey; Immediate Past Commanders Raber & McGinnis; PNC Johnston escorting National SVC Ann Marie Hurley



## *DEPARTMENT COMMANDER BRENDA REED*

Thank all of you for electing me to serve as your Department Commander for the coming year. It has been an honor serving you and being your spokesperson the past eight months and I will continue to do so in the months to come. Thank you for your vote of trust and confidence. I will do my best to live up to it.

Thank all of you who attended our Department Convention. I would like to especially thank all those who attended the Memorial Service this year. It was the largest turnout we have had in a while. I hope the trend continues and we have even more attend in January for our Mid-Winter Conference. These are your opportunities to have a voice in Department business and to learn more about DAV and its mission.

Sr. Vice Commander Laymond Rose, Adjutant Marshall and I attended the annual DAV State Commanders and Adjutants Association orientation seminar just after our Department Convention. It is a fantastic opportunity to meet other department leaders and to share with each other ideas on how to improve attendance, membership, and other areas many departments are concerned with. It is a great learning experience, and I am honored to be a past president.

We have several things coming up in July. Chapters 11,13, and 18 are hosting a cookout at the Bay Pines VA. Unfortunately, the CDCE did not notify the appropriate divisions of the VA and the cookout wasn't a success. Chapter 83 is hosted a Veterans Appreciation Day and we conducted Chapter Officers Training the end of the month at Chapters 42 and 133 for Area 5. I hope all chapters can attend the Area training.

The first week in August we attended the DAV National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. This was a great learning opportunity with seminars being conducted on a variety of topics and issues. If you have not attended a national convention, you may want to consider it in the future. Next year the convention will be in Phoenix, Arizona.

Did you know Veterans can electronically access their VA decision letters online? The Decision Letter Download Tool allows Veterans to download their decision letters using [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov).

Any Veteran with a [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov) login can use this tool which provides instant access to decision letters. Veterans no longer have to speak with VA or wait for a paper letter in the mail to know the decisions made on their claim.

As always, remember you can be anything so just be kind. Please text, call or visit a veteran. It only takes a moment of your time, but that moment could mean the world to someone who is suffering in silence.

I look forward to seeing many of our members at the upcoming DAV/DAVA National Convention in Atlantic City. Our NEC Meeting will be held on Friday, August 4 from 2:15 pm to 3:30 pm in Avalon 10-12.

We will elect our NEC and Alternate NEC as well as delegates and alternates to the various convention committees.

**Meetings scheduled for Friday, August 4 as follows:**

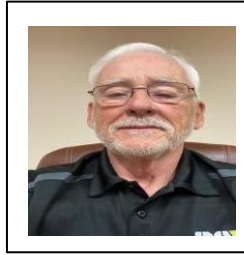
**DAV National Executive Committee 9 a.m. Avalon 5-7 (2nd Level Conference Ctr.)**

**DAV Board of Directors Meeting Immediately following Avalon 5-7 (2nd Level Conference Ctr.)**

**MyDAV.org/DAV Website Training 11 a.m. Avalon 4 (2nd Level Conference Ctr.)**

**Benefits Protection Team Seminar 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Avalon 10-13 (2nd Level Conference Ctr.)**





## *DEPARTMENT SENIOR VICE COMMANDER LAYMOND ROSE*

Last month this column space focused on the relationship between volunteerism, member participation, and involvement in chapter activities. This month is a continuation of that subject matter.

Volunteerism can be helpful in getting non-participating members involved. It is not enough to get them to show up for a meeting. If you want them to come back, they need to feel involved, feel needed, and appreciated. The same can be said for non-member volunteers. Getting them to volunteer may be as simple as asking them.

Developing a deliberate, focused, and sustained communication/outreach strategy is the most crucial element in recruiting new members, volunteers, and getting more of your existing members to become active and engaged.

Every chapter can download their complete membership list from National anytime. By downloading it as a csv file and then saving it as an excel file, you can sort, enrich, and manage the data. The information contained in these lists is not complete. Some names will have phone numbers, some will have email addresses, some will have both, some will have neither. You must work with what you have and utilize some, or all, of the strategies below to continually expand the data you have by adding phone numbers and email addresses.

The communication strategy should take several forms:

**Phone calls:** Sort your membership list by phone number. Break up the phone number list into units of 10 to 20 names. Then, ask each member attending your next meeting if they are willing to place a few calls each month to invite these current members to attend a meeting or ask them to volunteer for an upcoming function. These calls could also be positioned as 'welfare checks', especially when calling older members (your membership list does contain an 'age' column.)

This task of calling your non-active members could also be performed by members who can't attend meetings themselves because of transportation or mobility problems

but still want to help and feel involved. You may just need to ask. This function could also be handled by non-member volunteers such as the students you have recruited for our Scholarship Program. It is extremely important to continue this process until every member on your list with a phone number has been called at least once. Then, start over. Do it again.

**Email:** Essentially the same process as making phone calls except using email. One difference is that emails can be sent out in bulk, commonly called email blasts. There are numerous service providers available to automate this process. One example is: [www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com). The basic program with this service is \$12.00 per month for up to 500 emails. A potential advantage of email is the message can be lengthy and even include attachments. Many chapters use email blasts to distribute a newsletter. But it can also be utilized to send out monthly meeting reminders, event reminders or volunteer requests. Multiple emails should be sent each month.

**Text:** Same as email. Again, service providers exist to automate the process. Example: [www.simpletexting.com](http://www.simpletexting.com). The basic program offered by simple texting is \$29 per month for 500 texts (less on annual contract.) One caution – automated or bulk texts can become expensive if they are too lengthy – try to stay under 160 characters. **Texts are far more effective than email** with a much higher (often 90% or more) open and read rate. Of course, you would need the cell phone numbers. The phone numbers on your membership list may be landlines or cell phones. There are two ways to know. One, send them a text. If it fails, the number is a landline. Or, two, run your full phone number list through [www.phonevalidator.com](http://www.phonevalidator.com) (fees may apply).

**Direct mail:** If you don't have email addresses or phone numbers, snail mail or personal visits may be your only recourse to contact these members. But direct mail can be very expensive, and postage seems to go up every year. It may make more sense to use a service like [www.411.com](http://www.411.com) to find email addresses and phone numbers for these members. Again, fees may apply, but enriching your membership list with valid contact information and then using that information could be extremely valuable to the future of your chapter. The key to getting more members involved in your chapter meetings and activities is constant repetitive communication.





## DEPARTMENT JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER CHIP HANSON



I find the division of our Great Nation, abhorrent, that is our 247-year-old society is in a state of unrest to a point of anger, hatred, and even violence.

To all who reads this, please set aside all of our discriminatory feeling beliefs, anger, and hatred.

Whether you are a Jew, Christian, Agnostic or nonbeliever, Democrat or Republican, we are one Nation under God. Our Nation was formed for all who are Citizens of the U S A.

As Members of our Great American organization, we need to set an example of patriotism, loyalty, and love of the United States of America.

LINCOLN, HOUSE DIVIDED SPEECH (1858)

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.

It is stated in Matthew 12:25: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.”

I would like to take a moment and thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers. I have had some roadblocks this year. In the middle of March, I was at Lake Nona V. A. ER. It was discovered that the main artery known as the widow maker was almost completely blocked. A stent was inserted opening up the artery. In June at the D A V Convention During dinner, I had a heart attack. I spent the next 3 days between 2 Advent hospitals.

I am getting stronger each day. In the last week, I conducted a funeral and a graveside service, I am back at D A V Chapter 123 doing triage and conducting service officer work.

A special thank you to Jo Anne Ashton Dazuta the Commander of D A V Chapter 32 who tried to break my fall, then place her foot so I hit her instead of the pavement. Also Denise Johnson also from 32 for covering my dinner.

In conclusion, this is how we all should be as Americans. “Nothing is more noble, nothing more venerable, than loyalty.” —Cicero, Roman

Thank you for electing me as your Department Junior Vice Commander for the year 2023-2024. I look forward to serving you this year and will visit as many chapters as I can throughout the year.

It's not too early to book your hotel reservations for our January 2024 Chapter Service Officer Certification Training and Mid-Winter Conference at the Lake Mary Marriott. Don't wait until its too late to receive our DAV Discount at the hotel. Once the room block is full the rates increase greatly for January in Florida.

Unfortunately, I will not attend our upcoming National Convention in Atlantic City. For those attending, please ensure you attend all the informative meetings and training sessions during the convention.

Good luck to Maryann Keckler who is seeking to become our NEC for Florida at the NEC Meeting scheduled for Friday, August 4.

Congratulations to PDC John Raber for being elected the DAV's National Volunteer of h Year and Delores Roussey for being selected the DAVA Member of the Year. Both will receive their awards during the National Convention. Safe travels.



## DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN REVEREND JIM TAYLOR



### Passing on our Tradition

For many years, my wife and I have thought about taking our young grandson on a trip, just the three of us. We wanted an age where he would still be happy to be with us but old enough to remember the experience. This July was that summer. Of course, schedules, his and ours, had to be considered and where do we go. So, we found dates after school was out and before Boy Scout Camp. We gave him a choice between Hawaii and Alaska. Mary wants to go to Alaska so that would have been ok with me, I would get to check two things off our bucket list with one trip. He chose Hawaii and this turned out to be a wonderful choice and the reason behind this article.

On the trip our grandson experienced how big the earth is by how long it took to fly to Hawaii and the time differences between Hawaii and home. This started an ongoing conversation about military life and separation from family and friends. We spent our first few days on Hawai'i (the Big Island). There we stayed at the Kilauea Military Camp inside Volcano National Park. It was rustic and without tourist attractions, but it was a wonderful place to start. The camp was originally one of the internment sites for Japanese Americans after Dec 7, 1941. We walked in volcanos and ocean shoreline, went to botanical gardens, and went bowling since that and billiards (only for 15 years old and up) were all that was available. It was a genuine experience in military family life.

We then flew back to Oahu, where we stayed in the Hale Koa hotel and went to a luau. There we interacted with active and retired military. My grandson watched as I would interact with people about their service and my past. We watched fireworks on July 4<sup>th</sup> on base at Pearl Harbor and visited the north shore where the surfing competitions are held. On our last day we went to the museums and the Arizona Memorial. We walked through the USS Bowfin and saw the history of submariners in the museum. I was able to show him the electric panel and throttle control panel I stood watch on as a young submariner.

The trip out to the USS Arizona was solemn and walking on the USS Missouri with her big guns was special.

I speak of these events because they were just as powerful for me as they were for my grandson. I share them with you because I pray you would strive to add such opportunities to your life. We finished our last tour at the USS Missouri. My grandson said thank you pawpaw for bringing me on this trip, it has been very special. I thought about how he has always known I was in the military and then with the VA, and now the DAV. I believe he has moved a little closer to understanding why God, country, and military service are and have been so important in my life. I have the young people in a Bible study at our home to be very interested in my military past as well. One young girl said, "I wish our history teachers would teach history the way you do. It really comes alive when it is someone who has actually done those things." I say to each of you reading this, your story is important as well. Find a young family member or a neighbor and when the opportunity arises share your history. You will be surprised by their interest in your story, and you will be passing on your legacy and the heritage of our great country.



Thank you for electing me your Department Chaplain for the year 2023-2024. I look forward to serving you.



## MICHAEL MICHELOTTI DEPARTMENT JUDGE ADVOCATE



The duties of a Judge Advocate vary from being a chapter Judge Advocate, Department Judge Advocate or National Judge Advocate. The duties of the National Judge Advocate are spelled out in our National Constitution & Bylaws.

### Section 7.5 – National Judge Advocate; Duties

Para. 1: The National Judge Advocate shall be the legal advisor to this Organization. He or she shall, upon the request of the National Commander, the National Executive Committee, or the National Convention, render his or her opinion upon all questions arising out of National Organization, inter-chapter and inter-department matters. The 32 National Judge Advocate shall pass judgment on the provisions of chapter and department constitutions and bylaws and amendments thereto and approve them before they can be operative.

Para. 2: Upon receiving the opinion of the National Judge Advocate upon any question, the National Commander shall render a decision which shall be final unless a written notice of appeal to the National Executive Committee stating the grounds therefor is filed by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, with the National Adjutant within thirty days after mailing of the decision of the National Commander. In the event of such an appeal, the decision of the National Executive Committee shall be final, unless a further written notice of appeal to the National Convention stating the grounds therefor is filed by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, with the National Adjutant within thirty days after mailing of the decision of the National Executive Committee. Under any such appeal, the burden shall be on the appellant to demonstrate that the decision is clearly erroneous. In all such cases, the decision of the National Convention shall be final.

The Chapter Judge Advocate should render opinions to the Chapter Commander when requested on issues of procedures during meetings. He/she should also review the Chapter's Constitution & Bylaws to ensure they are not out-dated and current.

The Department Judge Advocate shall also render opinions on procedures during meetings as well as review all Chapter's Constitution & Bylaws when they decide to revise their own Constitution & Bylaws. The Department Judge Advocate will review all proposed changes to Chapter & Department Constitution & Bylaws before submitting them to the National Judge Advocate for his approval.

All Chapter Judge Advocates should be familiar with their own Constitution & Bylaws as well as Department and National Constitution & Bylaws. Each chapter was supplied a flash-drive that contains the aforementioned Constitution & Bylaws.





## Andy Marshall Department Adjutant

Governor Ron DeSantis announced that the Florida Hometown Heroes program has provided \$100 million in down payment and closing cost assistance to help Florida's hometown workers purchase homes in the communities they serve. Governor DeSantis announced the launch of Hometown Heroes in June 2022, and since then the program has helped 6,753 veterans, active-duty military members, nurses, teachers, and law enforcement officers purchase homes for their families.

"Florida's hometown heroes work hard to support our communities, and I am proud that we have supported over 6,700 of them as they purchased their family homes," said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. "Through the Hometown Heroes housing program, we are ensuring that our police officers, firefighters, teachers, nurses, and military members and veterans can afford to buy homes in the communities that they have dedicated their lives to serving."

Following the initial success of the Hometown Heroes program, the Florida Legislature allocated additional funding for the program through the Live Local Act. On July 1, the Hometown Heroes program will receive \$100 million for the 2023–2024 fiscal year to continue assisting Florida families in purchasing their first home. The maximum down payment assistance amount will increase to \$35,000, or up to 5% of the first mortgage loan amount. To get started, homebuyers must connect with one of Florida Housing's participating loan officers, have a minimum credit score of 640, be a first-time homebuyer, and earn less than 150% of the area median income, according to their local county data.

Gov. Ron DeSantis also announced on June 12 more than \$6.1 million in awards to military communities through the Defense Infrastructure Grant Program, the Defense Reinvestment Grant Program, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force Grant Program. Through the collaborative efforts of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and Enterprise Florida Inc., these programs provide grants to military communities to support infrastructure projects, economic diversification efforts, and military community relations. For more information, visit [bit.ly/430sGw8](https://bit.ly/430sGw8)

The 2023 edition of the Florida Veterans' Benefits Guides is now available in a second run of 75,000 copies, courtesy of the Florida Veterans Foundation. Click [here](#) to view their website. The full-color guides are a valuable tool, providing essential information on various benefits and services available to our Florida Veterans. To order or view the 2023 Florida Veterans' Benefit Guide, visit <https://floridavets.org/resources/va-benefits-guide/>

The Department's membership goal for 2023-2024 membership year is 63, 144. We need 2, 402 members to meet our 2023-2024 goal. We have 4, 189 part-life members and 56, 553 Full-life members. We have 5 chapters that need 10 or less members to meet their goal, Tri-County 63 needs 10 members; Tamarac 73 needs 9 members; Titusville chapter 109 needs 7 members; Suwannee Memorial Chapter 126 needs 9 members as does South Brevard Beaches Chapter 129 and Labelle Chapter 144.

Chapters should review their listing of partial life members and make contact with them to encourage them to pay off their remaining balance. Sometimes it is only less than 440.00 to complete their payment.





## Adjutant's Column Continued

### Supreme Court Accepts GI Bill Case That Could Affect 1.7 Million Veterans

The U.S. Supreme Court has decided to hear a case on the handling of [Post-9/11 GI Bill](#) benefits by the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) -- a proceeding that could provide additional education benefits for roughly 1.7 million veterans.

The court announced Monday that it would hear the case, Rudisill v. McDonough, which argues that service members enrolled in different versions of the GI Bill -- in Rudisill's case, the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill -- should be entitled to benefits under both programs up to a maximum of four years.

James Rudisill, while serving as an enlisted soldier, used 25 of his 36 months of eligibility under the Montgomery GI Bill to earn his undergraduate degree. He later became a commissioned officer and signed up for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but he never used it while on active duty.

After he left the [Army](#), however, he applied to Yale Divinity School, intending to [pay](#) for it with his Post-9/11 benefits, and return to the Army as a chaplain. He believed he had 23 months of additional education benefits under a Korean War-era law that allows veterans to use benefits from any individual programs or combination up to 48 months.

But the VA said he only rated nine additional months, for a total of 36 -- the maximum allowable amount for each program -- saying the law that created the [Post-9/11 GI Bill](#) limited entitlement to one program or the other, based on the veteran's choice.

Rudisill went to court, and a federal district court agreed. The VA appealed, and in 2021, a three-judge panel of the [U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit upheld the ruling](#).

The VA then petitioned for the case to be heard by the [full U.S. Court of Appeals, which overturned the previous rulings](#). The court issued an opinion saying that if a veteran has used some benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill program and elected to receive benefits under the Post-9/11 program, the benefits would be limited to one month, or a partial month, of entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill for each month of unused benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill.

In their decision, the judges wrote that the statute was "unambiguous."

But Rudisill's attorneys said judges weren't looking at the entirety of the law, and they filed a petition to the Supreme Court.

"The [Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit] missed the forest for the trees. They missed the core protections in the GI bills going back to the original, which is that those who served in multiple qualified periods of service get to have the benefits of full benefits from those two periods of service up to 48 months," Misha Tseytlin, an attorney with the national law firm Troutman Pepper, said during an interview with Military.com.

After the court announcement on Monday, Rudisill said during an interview with Military.com that he felt "relieved, elated ... a whole pot of adjectives I could probably choose from," and that he continued his suit for the veterans he served alongside in combat.

Rudisill, who served across three periods of active duty -- from 2000 to 2002 in the Army, 2004 to 2005 in the Army [National Guard](#) and from 2007 to 2011 as an Army officer -- lost his spot at Yale but continued his divinity education while working as a special agent for the FBI.

He estimates, by his calculations, that he may still have a year of education benefits left. But, he adds, he continued the fight for other veterans in a similar situation.

"It was just the right thing to do. Over and over again, the VA has shown me and my buddies that I went to Iraq and Afghanistan with ... that if they are not held to account, these kinds of transgressions they make against the demographic they supposedly support [will] continue to happen," Rudisill said.

Rudisill's legal team must submit a brief to the court in the next 45 days. The Justice Department then has an opportunity to respond. Timothy McHugh, also an attorney with Troutman Pepper working on the case, said he expects oral arguments to take place in November or December.





### July 2023 Legislative Update

The Major Richard Star Act, HR 1282, as of the last VAC had only 286 cosponsors. Since then, the bill has passed the 290-threshold required for the Consensus Calendar and is currently sitting at 326. The bill was added to the Consensus Calendar and, incredibly, was unanimously reported out of the House Armed Services Committee. The Congressman has been working with House Leadership to find the best legislative path forward.

While there are no assurances, there is enough positive momentum that the bill will hopefully be included in either the NDAA or another larger legislative package later this year.

The Retired Pay Restoration Act, HR 303, which allows individuals who were retired or separated after at least 20 years of military service due to a service-connected disability to be eligible for the full concurrent receipt of both veterans' disability compensation and either military retired pay or combat-related special pay, continues to have 2 cosponsors.

The VET CARE Act, HR 2410, which would expand Veterans' access to dental care, had 5 cosponsors and now has 8 cosponsors.

The PACT Act (Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act) was signed into law on August 10, 2022 and expanded VA Healthcare Eligibility and VA Compensation Benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

**Upcoming PACT Act Deadlines: August 9, 2023 – Deadline to file VA Compensation Claim or file Intent to File form to be eligible to receive compensation benefits backdated to August 10, 2022.**

**September 30, 2023 – Deadline for VA Healthcare Special Enrollment period for some Post 9/11 Veterans.**

The Florida Legislature unanimously passed legislation in 2012 establishing August 7 as *Florida Purple Heart Day* to recognize and honor recipients of our nation's oldest award given to combat-wounded Veterans. Many communities and organizations in our State are conducting ceremonies to honor these men and women.

**TALLAHASSEE** - Gov. Ron DeSantis highlighting the Freedom Summer Sales Tax Holiday, which runs through Labor Day weekend. The sales tax holiday was part of the Framework for Freedom Budget and is estimated to save Florida families nearly \$230 million over the summer. To read more, click [here](#).

### Tampa VA Improves Access to Exoskeleton Technology for Veterans

The center's mission is to enhance patient care through the development and application of advanced technologies for rehabilitation.

The Exoskeleton-Assisted Ambulation Program was introduced in April 2022 as the center's first clinic program. It employs the use of six different robotic exoskeleton devices to aid the rehabilitation and restoration of gait. The clinic treats Veterans who have suffered spinal cord injuries, strokes, or Veterans who have difficulty walking due to other neurologic injuries or illnesses. To read more, click [here](#).

### Veterans Set to See Cost-Of-Living Increase to Their Benefits

On June 14, 2023, President Joe Biden signed into law the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2023, which directs the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to provide a cost-of-living adjustment for Veterans benefits in 2024 equal to the COLA applied to Social Security benefits, as determined by the Social Security Administration. To read more, click [here](#).

The nonprofit Iraq and Afghanistan War Memorial Foundation is planning a monument to honor Floridians who served in our nation's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The planned location of the monument, scheduled for completion in 2024, is at Veterans Memorial Park in Port St. Lucie, Fla. To read more, click [here](#).

The 2023 edition of the Florida Veterans' Benefits Guides is now available in a second run of 75,000 copies, courtesy of the Florida Veterans Foundation. Click [here](#) to view their website. The full-color guides are a valuable tool, providing essential information on various benefits and services available to Florida Veterans. To order or view the 2023 Florida Veterans' Benefit Guide, visit <https://floridavets.org/resources/va-benefits-guide/>

The Major Richard Star Act (S. 344) is bipartisan legislation that would authorize concurrent receipt of Department of Defense (DoD) retired pay and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation for those injured in a combat zone and medically retired under Chapter 61 of title 10, United States Code.

In April of this year, we asked for your support on this stand-alone bill, now, we need you to contact your Senators to vote for adoption of Amendment 142—provisions from the Major Richard Star Act so it can be included in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

This benefit would eliminate this unjust offset of disability compensation for combat-injured military retirees.

Major Richard Star deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait with the U.S. Army Reserves. When he contracted stage 4 lung cancer as a result of burn pits and other damaging environmental conditions overseas, his wife Tonya quit her job to care for him full time.

Then Star encountered an unexpected financial surprise, when he learned that — because he hadn't reached 20 years in the military — his disability pay from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) would be deducted out of his retirement pay from the Department of Defense.

The Major Richard Star Act would allow any disabled veteran to receive both their full disability and retirement pay, regardless of how many years they served.

The Senate version was introduced on May 22 as [S. 344](#), by [Sen. Jon Tester \(D-MT\)](#). The House version was introduced two days later on May 24 as [H.R. 1282](#), by [Rep. Gus Bilirakis \(R-FL12\)](#).

### What supporters say

Supporters argue that the legislation honors America's commitments to its veterans, without letting some legal technicality cause additional hardship.

"The brave men and women who return from serving our country should be able to receive the benefits promised to them," Rep. Bilirakis [said in a press release](#). "Military retirement pay and service-connected disability compensation are two completely different benefits. One does not diminish the merits of the other."

"When it comes to our nation's disabled veterans, we've got to cut through the bureaucratic red tape that's prevented them from getting the full benefits they've earned," Sen. Tester [said in a separate press release](#). "[The bill] would fix the unfair offset that prevents thousands of veterans living with the wounds of war from accessing both their disability benefits and retired pay. And it honors the service and sacrifice of Major Richard Star, whose legacy lives on in our continued fight to ensure our men and women in uniform get the assistance they deserve."

### Odds of passage

The Senate version has attracted 45 bipartisan cosponsors: [28 Democrats, 16 Republicans, and one independent](#). It awaits a potential vote in either the Senate Armed Services or Veterans' Affairs Committee, the latter of which Sen. Tester [chairs](#).

Sen. Tester introduced a prior version in 2020 which attracted a somewhat smaller 31 bipartisan cosponsors: [21 Democrats and 10 Republicans](#). It never received a committee vote.

The House version has attracted 87 bipartisan cosponsors: [57 Democrats and 30 Republicans](#). It awaits a potential vote in either the House Armed Services or Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Rep. Bilirakis introduced a prior version in 2020 which attracted an even larger 101 bipartisan cosponsors, [67 Democrats and 34 Republicans](#), but never received a committee vote.

### VA Unveils Team to Study Racial Disparities in Benefit Payouts to Veterans

The [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) has a new team and office responsible for helping it address health and benefits inequities among veterans as a result of racial, sex or gender discrimination.

VA officials announced Friday that the agency's new equity team, directed as part of an executive order issued by President Joe Biden in February to address disparities across the federal government, will be responsible for helping "improve outcomes for historically underserved veterans" by creating and implementing a VA Equity Action Plan.

The panel, dubbed the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Council, or I\*DEA, also will strive to address disparities in recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention of VA employees, according to a department press release.

August 4 Coast Guard Birthday



August 4-8 DAV & DAVA National Convention



August 7 Purple Heart Day



August 19 National Aviation Day

