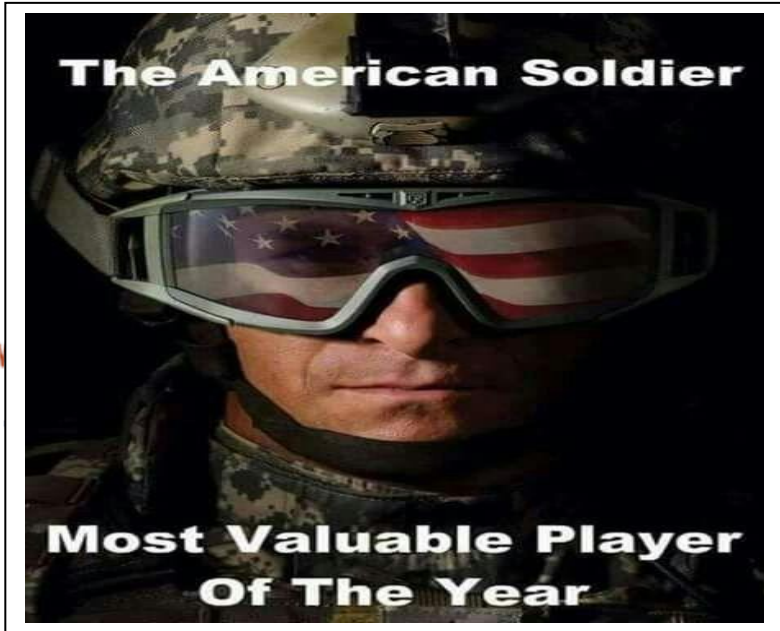


Department of Florida  
December 2020  
Newsletter



**CSO Training has been rescheduled to begin on Wednesday, June 16 with testing Friday morning, June 18, 2021. Our Midwinter Conference has been cancelled.**

Top Left The American Soldier  
Top right Newest License Plate available now thru preorder.  
Bottom Left Chapter 11 Commander Wally Tyson and Adjutant Mike Gaspar at chapter meeting.  
Bottom Right Cancellation of Midwinter Conference.

## Department Commander Thomas Ayala



This month starts the beginning of the Holiday Season, a time spent with family and friends. Many Chapters may want to have their Thanksgiving or Christmas Dinners during this time. As most of you are aware Covid-19 is on the rise again here in Florida. Please continue to follow CDC guideline by wearing a mask or social distancing during these events, while out in the community, at a Chapter meeting or just when hanging with friends. We have had several members and family members in our Department who have survived from Covid-19, but also members died from it as well.

At the Department, we are abiding by the CDC rules by taking temperatures of each individual coming into the office; wearing our masks when helping Veterans; if the Veteran does not have a mask, we provide one for them; and cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces in the office between interviews to include our main entrance door handles.

I had the honor of visiting two chapters this month: Orange Blooms Gardens Chapter 150 in The Villages and Clearwater Chapter 11. Both Chapters have great ideas for membership drives, fundraising, and other events that I would like them to share with all the other chapters at the Midwinter Conference in January 8-9, 2021 provided it will be held. **We are awaiting word from hotel to cancel both CSO Training and Midwinter Conference.**

Orange Blooms Gardens Chapter 150 meet at Saddlebrook Recreation Center in The Villages. Chapter 150 are very active in their community. They participant in parades including golf carts, community functions, and many other events in their communities.

The Villages has the highest amount of golf carts in Florida with 3,321 and climbing. The Villages also have a total of 96 recreation centers located throughout community. Thank you, Chapter 150, and Acting Commander Dennis Storey for your warm welcome, the amazing work you are doing and continue to do in your community.

On November 19, 2020, I visited Clearwater Chapter #11. They meet at the Clearwater Fire Training Facility. Chapter 11 is a very active chapter with 1,628 members. They have membership drives at their local Triple A Baseball games during the season and Shred for Donation program were the community can shred their documents for a small donation to help Veterans in their community. I would also like to Congratulate the new Chapter Commander Michael Gaspar for all you do for Veterans and their families.

Midwinter Conference is fast approaching. Some important training sessions will be held at the conference to include Chapter Commander, Adjutant, Treasurer, and Chaplain. This training provides information on duties of chapter officers and is especially beneficial for all new Chapter Officers like Adjutant's and Treasurers. We hope to see you there.

On behalf of the Department Line Officers, Staff, and my family, we would like to wish you and your family – Happy Holidays and Happy New Year.

**Unfortunately, National Senior Vice Commander Donald Day recently resigned his position and according to National Bylaws, our National 1<sup>st</sup> Junior Vice Commander Andy Marshall, is now our National Senior Vice Commander.**





## Department Senior Vice Commander Duane Godfrey

Hope all are doing well and staying safe. This has been a rough past 3 months at Chapter 67. We have had 3 cases of COVID that I know of and 2 of them have been fatal, our prayers go out to Commander Steve Greco and Senior Vice Commander Sal Orlando. Our prayers are with their families. The third one was Past State Commander Mary Ann Keckler who got treatment and is doing well.

To all the Chapter that are back to having meetings, I ask you to follow the CDC Guidelines and check the members temperature at the door and use hand sanitizer. If you are doing service work in-person you should have a sneeze shield between you and clients and make sure all surfaces are sanitized between uses.

As of this posting the National Mid-Winter Conference in Arlington, Virginia scheduled for Feb. 21-24, 2021 has been canceled.

Now is the time us gardeners start getting our gardens ready for the winter gardening season our onions set will be planted the 1st week of Dec. and our Sweet peas, radishes and carrots will be planted in December. It is also a good time to prepare your strawberry beds for planting. These are all cold crops and do well this time of year.

As we are getting ready for Thanksgiving and preparing for our family gatherings, please remember those that are homeless and less fortunate in your communities and try to donate to your local food pantries and shelters and above all have a happy and safe Thanksgiving.

Now that our National elections are behind us we need to urge our elected officials to pass the COVID relief bill and stop all the partisan fighting and actually help the people of our nation that are without any income due to this pandemic, it is time for us as citizens of the United States of America to call your Senators and Congressmen and demand they act for the people and not their party affiliations.

A review of the DAV Membership Report dated December 3, reveals the Department is well short of our 2020-2021 membership goal. We are 1, 742 members short of our assigned goal. The only chapter meeting its goal is our At-Large Chapter. We do have several chapters who need 10 or less members to meet their goal:

- Chapter 129 needs 1 member to reach goal
- Chapter 101 needs 5 members to reach goal
- Chapters 49, 82 and 49 and 126 each need 7 members to reach goal
- Chapters 63, 70, 83, 109 and 144 each need 8 members to reach goal
- Chapter 86 needs 9 members to reach goal
- Chapters 20 and 73 each need 10 members to reach goal

Our top 5 recruiters this membership year are:

Naomi Mathis recruited 16 members. Liza Perez recruited 12 members. Dana Beck recruited 11 members. Jackie Graham recruited 10 members. Richard Hutchins has recruited 7 members.





## Department Junior Vice Commander John Raber

This month has been an adventure. I was surprised when my wife and I were invited to the Military Ball hosted by the Knights of Columbus. As a service Officer, I helped a few individuals file paperwork, they mentioned my name and in turn I was selected as the veteran of the year. I was humbled and very thankful. Many of you in our Organization don't always get the credit you deserve, its not that it isn't noticed, so I take this time to thank all of you for making the DAV number one. This was the first time I ever attended a Ball, so I'd like to explain how it was performed. It starts with the introduction of the Head table then the presentation of colors. After the pledge and the National Anthem, they did the presentation of the POW table. When this was completed, they have a table for local fallen soldiers who have made the supreme sacrifice. There are three table cloths; white table cloth to show purity, the blue for patriotism and the red for their blood shed. Each color and what they represent are announced as they are placed in a diamond pattern. The names of the soldiers in our community were placed on the table one by one with the date the Soldier made the Supreme Sacrifice. The dinner is served and finally they have an awards ceremony. No dancing, totally different from what I was expecting but a great experience.

What a difference November 11 was this year, Veterans Day always consisted of working at Golden Coral. Our Honor Guard doing pledge in the restaurant. A long line outside with people waiting to receive their meal. The morning Parade that Chapter and Unit 18 Officers rode in and has been a tradition for decades was also canceled. You sit back and wonder wow what a year. In our community we are seeing a lot of organizations starting to suffer some do to the inability to create an income either by donations and forget me not drives. If anyone has any ideas to generate income, please spread the word or give me a call and I will get it into the next News Letter.

I want to take the time to let people know that I lost two good friends in the DAV this month. My buddy Wink, Ron Shull, who I played golf with every Friday for years and Hilary Davis a two-time Vietnam Veteran who was awarded a Purple Heart, a Silver and a Bronze Star. I will miss both dearly and thank you for all the work you have done for our Organization.

Also, this month some of the Officers in our Chapter took our Auxiliary State Commander to Fort Myers Beach for her birthday. She had a fabulous time! We will be doing it again next year. Finally, our Christmas party is on December 12 this year. I invite anyone to attend. We have a gift exchange between 25 and 30 dollars. If you bring a gift you can participate. Anybody with questions can call the Chapter at 941-755-5425.

Back to service office news. It seems that DIC claims are going through quicker, around 30 days tops. One thing to be sure is, if its less than 10 years T&P make sure the death certificate has one of their service-connected disabilities as a primary or secondary cause of death. This will make the process go smoothly. There is a way to get a death certificate amended because in some cases the Coroner isn't aware of the disability and it could be a contributing factor.

Also, I want to bring up the MID-Winter Conference in Washington in February has been Canceled, due to the Corona Virus. Please keep in touch with Andy Marshal and our Commander on the status of our Mid-Winter Conference here in Florida.

I also want to Congratulate our Department Adjutant, Andy Marshall, on becoming our National Senior Vice Commander. Well deserved for a man who works so hard for this Organization.

Again, thank you for your Support. We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.





## Department Chaplain Chip Hanson

I hope all of you had a Blessed Thanksgiving.

Remember Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, Japan attacked America killing thousands.

At Sundown December 10th begins the seven-day eight-night celebration of Hanukkah, which celebrates two things: a miracle in which one day's worth of oil burned in lamps for eight days, and the victory of the Jewish freedom fighters over the Syrian-Greek forces that tried to wipe out Judaism.

In a larger sense, then, Hanukkah celebrates a reaffirmation of freedom and a recommitment to the spiritual quest.

December 25th, is the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The current celebration as we know it began under the Roman Emperor Constantine (his Mother was a Christian). Through her, he had accepted the one true God, and Jesus Christ as his Savior. The population of Rome was not converting easily. Constantine met with Christian leaders and together they agreed to change the celebration of the winter solstice to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Thus, began Christmas, as we now know.

Matthew 2:11

After coming into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

What you have just read is my traditional December message. This year I would like to add just a little. We all have been through some very hard times this year. 2020 somewhat reminds me of 1968, the year I was in Vietnam. By December My unit(3/26Marines) were all but destroyed the unit was given orders to the Philippine's to rebuild and retrain. All marines who had less than six months left in country were not allowed to remain with our unit (which was most of us) we were scattered to other units across the country. I was given 10 days to report to my new unit. I found a convoy that was headed to the 1Rst Division Headquarters. There was no room for me in the convoy, so they gave me a place in the back of a truck. When we stopped for the night, I was not fond of the idea of sleeping on the bed of a truck. I noticed that we were in front of a Navy Seabee Camp. Of course, as a Marine I was a little nervous about asking the Navy for a place to sleep. I knew all they could say was no. It was late when I found the Headquarters tent, I spoke to the Master Chief, He not only welcomed me, he had the cook make me a steak, let me take a hot shower and gave me a bed with a mattress and pillow with sheets. The next morning, I again rejoined the convoy. By afternoon I was at the First Division Headquarters. I reported in and I was told to stow my gear, and Staff Sargent said, "let's go for a ride". We drove to Danang, where I and several thousand others were treated to the Bob Hope Christmas show.

Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.





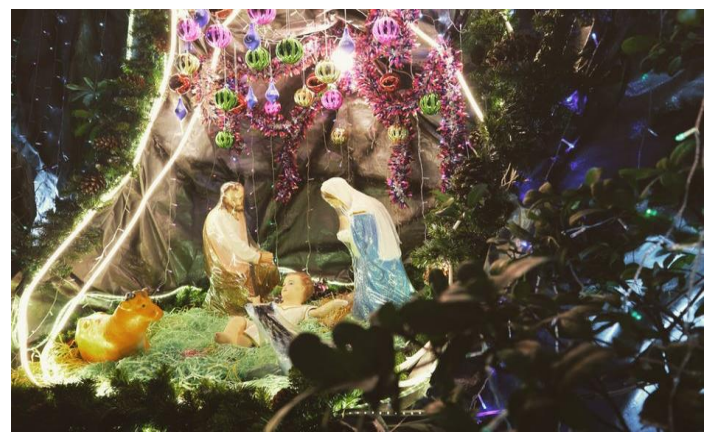
## John Markiewicz Department Judge Advocate

Back in early March of this year, when the COVID-19 Pandemic first became noticeable and we wound up shutting everything down for 14 days to flatten the curve, nobody would have believed that we would still be isolating, wearing masks and social distancing for the rest of the year. Yet here we are in the tenth month and third wave, which some are saying is even worse than the first and second waves. We are told a vaccine is on the way very soon and, hopefully, things will be back to some sort of normal in early 2021. In the meantime, I have received notice of several events that have already been cancelled during the first quarter of 2021. So, be on the alert for notices of the status of upcoming events, stay flexible and plan accordingly. As of right now, I am told, the DAV Florida Service Officer Training and Mid-Winter Conference are still on for January, though the DAV National Mid-Winter Conference in Washington DC in February has been cancelled.

Here in Jacksonville, our Mayor has extended the mandatory wearing of masks and social distancing through the end of the year and we are seeing a lot of small businesses and chain restaurants closing, some temporarily and even more permanently. We are seeing a lot of our Veterans being laid off or terminated from their employment. I am sure that Jacksonville is not unique in this and that many other communities here in Florida are similarly impacted. This year is worse than most previous years due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the DAV is here to help. Keep abreast of what relief and assistance is available by checking in on the DAV National Website and make yourself available to help if you can or seek assistance if you need it.

While volunteering and visiting the veterans in the VA Hospitals is not currently being allowed, there are many other avenues for you to help our veterans with your time or your donations. Make sure you document your hours spent assisting the veterans and report them to your Chapter LVAP coordinator so that your volunteer hours are reported to DAV National. If your Chapter has not participated in LVAP reporting in the past, now is an excellent opportunity to start doing so. Here is a volunteer opportunity for you, volunteer to collect and report the LVAP hours for your Chapter each month, I am sure that the Chapter Adjutant would appreciate someone taking this on for them. Also, the DAV Vans are currently not running due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and I know that many of our veterans are transportation disadvantaged and could use some help getting to their appointments or other assistance.

I hope that you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday, whether you celebrated at home or traveled to be with family. As I write this, we are down to 30 days before Christmas and I wish you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in whatever manner that you are able to celebrate the holidays this year.





## Andy Marshall Department Adjutant

### Changes coming soon for some TRICARE Select retired beneficiaries

Starting on January 1, 2021, TRICARE Select Group A retired beneficiaries must pay monthly enrollment fees in order to maintain their TRICARE health coverage. This is a change, and for the first time this beneficiary group will pay enrollment fees. If you or your sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurred before January 1, 2018, you are in Group A. This change was mandated by Congress.

What do you need to do if this change applies to you? You must set up a monthly allotment through your DoD pay center, where feasible for your monthly payments to start on January 1, 2021. For sponsors who don't receive funds through a DoD pay center, you can establish payments via electronic funds transfer, credit or debit card. Your regional contractor will soon issue instructions to set up payment.

He enrollment fees will be collected via monthly installments from the sponsor's military pay system where retired pay is Disbursed. Individual plan: \$12.50 per month—Family plan: \$25.00 per month.

Visit the TRICARE Select Enrollment page at: [https://tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll/Select/Enrollment Fees](https://tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll/Select/Enrollment%20Fees) for updates and enrollment alerts.

TRICARE Open Season applies to beneficiaries eligible to enroll in TRICARE Prime (including the United States Family Health Plan) TRICARE Prime Remote or TRICARE Select. TRICARE Open Season doesn't apply to active duty service members. It also doesn't apply to TRICARE for Life (TFL). TFL coverage is automatic if you have Medicare Part A and Part B. Open Season also doesn't apply premium-based plans.

Federal Benefits Open Season allows you to enroll in the Federal Employees Vision and Dental Insurance Program (FEDVIP). This program is managed by the United States Office of Personnel Management. It offers eligible TRICARE beneficiaries a choice between multiple vision and dental plans and carriers.

If you're already enrolled in FEDVIP dental and/or vision plan, your enrollment will automatically continue in 2021. If you wish to make changes to your existing plan, you must do so during the open season. Learn more about FEDVIP eligibility to see whether this program is an option for you and your family.

To get ready for the Open season, you can use tools on the TRICARE website, like the TRICARE Plan Finder and TRICARE Compare Cost Tool. If you want to get updates about open season and other TRICARE News, sign up for email alerts at:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USMHSTMA/suscriber/new>.

#### You need a DS Logon and here's why...

A DOD Self-Service Logon, is a guarantee for secure, self-serviced access for Retired Soldiers, surviving spouses, and families to several informative government partner websites. The free DS Logon ID account allows its members access to all sites using a single username and password. It can be used for unlocking personal profiles, health information, pending applications, open claims, full records, and custom benefits. The DS Logon can be used 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All individuals requesting a DS Logon must be enrolled in DEERS because new user accounts are verified through DEERS.

In order to obtain a DS Logon, all applicants must be affiliated with the DOD or VA and have a listing in DEERS under one of the following categories: active duty, Reserve Component, retiree, or veteran; eligible family members over age of 18; DoD civilians and contractors. There are many ways in which a potential user can apply depending on their applicable category. Retired soldiers and family members can find a link to obtain a DS Logon Premium Account on the MyArmyBenefits homepage. Alternatively, retired soldiers can sign up using their Defense Finance Accounting Service (DFAS) myPay Login ID; using their email on file with DEERS when registering and selecting the "I have and active DoD card and email on file with DEERS" option; requesting a DS Logon when getting a DoD ID card issued at a RAPIDS facility; or by visiting the VA Regional Office to establish a DS Logon account. Veterans must contact the VA Regional Office or the

## Adjutant's Column Continued

### Department of Veterans Affairs.

Once you have a DS Logon established you can save time accessing your personal information and benefits when visiting these popular sites:

- MyArmy Benefits
- MyAirForceBenefits
- MyHealthVet
- eBenefits
- milConnect
- RAPIDS Self-Service
- Transition GPS
- Military OneSource
- TRICARE online
- TRICARE Beneficiary Web Enrollment
- TRICARE West (Health Net Federal Services)
- TRICARE East (Humana Military)
- DoD Spouse education and Career Opportunities
- Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance
- Army TAP (Transition Assistance Program)
- ID Card office Online.

Register for a DS Logon today:

<https://myaccess.dmdc.osd.mil/identifymanagement/consent?continueTOURL=%2Fidentifymanagement%2Fregistration.do%3Fexecution%3De4s2>.

## Information for all CSO's

The following message was received from VA Regional Office

Good morning All.

You have likely heard this through other channels, but just in case you haven't I want to ensure that you are aware. **Effective January 1, 2021**, all fax lines used for incoming claims submissions will be decommissioned. VBA is working now to remove all fax information on websites, letters, correspondence, forms, other forums to remove conflicting information. After January 1, 2021, claims can still be submitted electronically through Direct Upload or Benefits Intake API (VA.gov connection).

Why are incoming claims submission fax lines being decommissioned?

- Enhanced Security
- Higher image quality
- Ultimately faster processing time

### Department of Florida top 10 VAVS Hours 2020

Theodore Witsche	395 Hours
Larry D'Angelo	305 Hours
Orville Sweet	272 Hours
Willie Merrell	209 Hours
Robert O. Wigersma	90 Hours
Maryann Keckler	59 Hours
Willie J. Reddick	44 Hours
Richard Tolfa	42 Hours
Daniel Propp	10 Hours
Larry Kyser	5 Hours

### Department of Florida top 10 Transportation: Transportation Non-Driver Volunteers

Walter Heinlein	90 Hours
Jack S. Shoultz	75 Hours
Frederick A. Norton	64 Hours
Jake Jakuboski	64 Hours
Robert Garlanger	62 Hours
Floyd E. Bubb	57 Hours
Jimmy Curry	32 Hours
Steven D. Tiefel	23 Hours
Roderick J. Langevin	12 Hours
Mark W. Probandt	8 Hours

Thank you for your volunteering on behalf of DAV. We know many of you could not volunteer since April. Please ensure you report all volunteer hours to your VAVS Representatives.



### Chapters visited by Department Line Officers & Adjutant Since Department Convention June 2020

4, 6, 11, 16, 18, Unit 18, 30 (x2), 90, 97, 109 (x2), 150, 158



## Calendar of Events

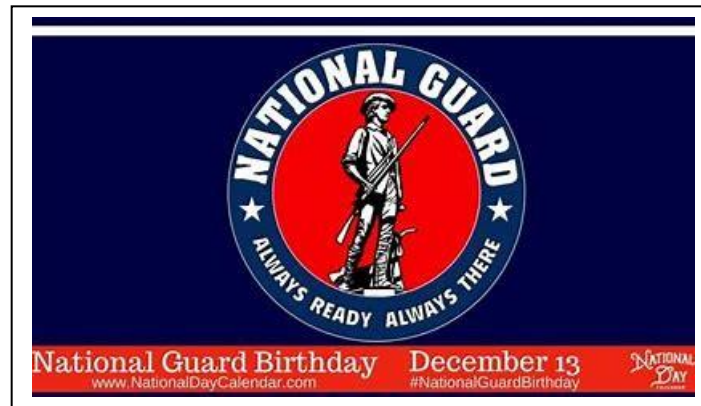
December 7  
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day



December 10 Hanukkah Begins



December 13 National Guard Day



December 25 Christmas



## Adjutant's Column Continued

**S. 4594** Caring for the Survivors and Families of Veterans Act of 2020

**Sponsor:** [Sen. Tester, Jon \[D-MT\]](#) (Introduced 09/16/2020)

**Committees:** Senate - Veterans' Affairs

**Latest Action:** Senate - 09/16/2020 Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

**H.R. 6933** is the companion bill

This Bill, the Caring for Survivors and Families Act would expand eligibility for DIC by replacing the "10-year" rule with a graduated scale of benefits that begins at 5 years for initial eligibility at 50%, and gradually reaches the full benefit at 10 years after determination of disability. For example—if a veteran is rated as totally disabled for 5 years and dies of a nonservice-connected cause, their survivor would be entitled to 50% of the DIC benefit. Presently, DIC pays \$1, 340.14 monthly thus they would receive under the proposed legislation \$670.00 monthly. In addition, the Bill would reduce from 57 to 55 years, the age a surviving spouse may remarry and maintain their benefits, consistent with eligibility for other federal benefits for survivors.

**S. 4790**

A bill to improve the ability of separating or retiring members of the Armed Forces to seek services provided by accredited veterans service officers, and for other purposes.

**Status:** (Introduced) 2020-10-01 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

**HB 7795****Veterans Benefits Fairness and Transparency Act of 2020**

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to publish on its website the disability benefit questionnaire forms for non-VA medical providers submitting evidence regarding a disability of a claimant for purposes of VA benefits. If the VA updates the questionnaire form, previous versions of the form filed by claimants must be accepted for up to one year after the form was updated. The VA may waive interagency approval processes required to approve a modification to a form if such requirement applies by reason of the form being made public on the website as required by the bill. The Inspector General of the VA must, through 2026, annually report on the use of such forms.

**H.R. 6092****Veteran's Prostate Cancer Treatment and Research Act**

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement programs and resources related to the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer. Specifically, the bill requires the VA to establish in its National Surgery Office a national clinical pathway for all stages of prostate cancer that includes specified elements. A clinical pathway is a health care management tool designed around research and evidence-backed practices that provides direction for the clinical care and treatment of a specific episode of a condition or ailment. The VA must publish the proposed clinical pathway in the Federal Register for public comment. Additionally, the bill requires the VA to publish the established clinical pathway on a public VA website and to update the clinical pathway at least annually. Under the bill, the VA must submit (1) a plan to establish a comprehensive prostate cancer program, and (2) a plan that provides for continual funding for supporting prostate cancer research through the VA Office of Research and Development. The VA must also establish a program evaluation tool to learn best practices of multidisciplinary disease-based implementation. Finally, the VA must establish a real-time, actionable, national prostate cancer registry that is accessible to clinicians and researchers.

Action: 2020-09-23 - Received in the Senate and Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

**S. 4572****Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act of 2020**

To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for a presumption of service connection for certain diseases associated with exposure to toxins, and for other purposes.

**PRESUMPTION OF SERVICE CONNECTION.**

For the purposes of section 1110 of this title, and subject 11 to section 1113 of this title, a disease specified in paragraph (2) becoming manifest in a veteran described in paragraph (3) shall be considered to have been incurred in or aggravated during active military, naval, or air service, notwithstanding that there is no record of evidence of such disease during the period of such service.

The diseases specified in this paragraph are the following:  
(A) Asthma that was diagnosed after service in a country or territory listed under paragraph (4)(B).

- (B) Cancer of any type.
- (C) Chronic bronchitis.
- (D) Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- (E) Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis.
- (F) Emphysema

## Adjutant's Column Continued

- (G) Granulomatous disease.
- (H) Interstitial lung disease.
- (I) Lymphoma.
- (J) Pleuritis.
- (K) Pulmonary fibrosis.
- (L) Sarcoidosis.
- (M) Any other disease with respect to which final regulations have been prescribed under subsection (c)(3).

A veteran described in this paragraph is any veteran who—

(A) on or after August 2, 1990 served as a member of the Armed Forces in support of a military operation described in paragraph (4); and “(ii) was present for 15 or more cumulative days in a country or territory listed under subparagraph (B) of that paragraph; or

(B) was awarded any of the following: “(i) The Southwest Asia Service Medal. “(ii) The Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

### S.4166

Ensuring Survivors Benefits during COVID-19 Act of 2020

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to get a medical opinion to determine if a service-connected disability was the principal or contributory cause of death in situations where a veteran with a service-connected disability dies from COVID-19 (i.e., coronavirus disease 2019), or complications from COVID-19, and the death certificate does not clearly identify the service-connected disability as the principal or contributory cause of death.

Action: 2020-07-02 - Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Pending: [Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee](#)

### S.4086

Forgotten Vietnam Veterans Act of 2020

This bill revises the definition of Vietnam era for purposes of the laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Specifically, the bill adjusts the start date of the era to November 1, 1955 (currently February 28, 1961), when relating to veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam.

On October 17, the President signed into law S. 785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act. Public Law 116-171

This comprehensive bipartisan bill, in line with DAV Resolution No. 370, will help increase outreach and services to veterans at risk for suicide and improve VA mental health services by:

- Strengthening VA's mental health workforce to serve more veterans by offering scholarships to mental health professionals to work at Vet Centers, and placing at least one Suicide Prevention Coordinator in every VA hospital;
- Directing the department to develop a staffing plan for increasing the number of mental health counselors and region-specific incentives needed to hire them; Improving rural veterans' access to mental health care by increasing the number of locations at which veterans can access VA telehealth services;
- Implementing a pilot program to expand veterans access to complementary and integrative health programs through animal therapy, agriculture therapy, sports and recreation therapy, art therapy and post-traumatic growth programs;
- Studying the health benefits of providing integrative health treatments such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture, chiropractic care;
- Establishing a grant program that allows VA to better collaborate with community organizations already serving veterans with a goal of early identification and supportive prevention services for veterans at risk of suicide;
- Studying the impact of living at high altitude and associated suicide risk factors for veterans and implementing a precision medicine initiative to identify and validate brain and mental health biomarkers among veterans to better identify and treat depression, anxiety, PTSD, and traumatic stress disorder.
- The bill also includes provisions, supported by DAV Resolution No. 020, to improve services to women veterans by:
  - Expanding the capabilities of the VA women veterans call center, to include text messaging; and
  - Creating a centralized website that includes information about all the benefits and services available to women veterans, the name and contact information for each women's health coordinator, and specific services available for women veterans at each medical center and community-based outpatient clinic throughout a designated VISN—Veterans Integrated Service Network.

### New Florida laws in effect as of October 2020

**HB 205 - Unlawful Use of Uniforms, Medals, or Insignia** - Prohibits certain misrepresentations concerning military service when made for specific purposes.

**SB 294 - Crimes Against Veterans** - Citing this act as the "Florida Veterans Protection Act"