



# MAIL CALL



July 2025

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- District Meetings– Page 2
- Department Challenge Coin— Page 3
- Newly Elected State Officers—Page 3
- Community Service award– Page 3
- Membership Winner for June—Page 3
- Department's Membership Challenge– Page 4
- State Commander's Special Project– Page 5
- Conference/Convention Dates– Page 6
- Administration Contact information—Page 6
- State Commander's Article– Page 7
- Sr. & Jr Vice Cmdr's Articles– Page 8
- State Adjutant & Quartermaster Articles– Page 9
- State Surgeon & Chaplain Articles– Page 10
- State Judge Advocate's Article– Page 11
- Legislative Report– Page 12-15
- Louisiana Council Member Article– Page 16
- Desert Storm Donations– Page 16=7
- Historian—Page 18
- VFW National Convention Banquet & National Home Tour– Page 19
- Post Events– Page 20-21

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

### **National Convention**

August 9-13, 2025  
Columbus, OH

### **Council of Administration *School of Training***

August 22-24, 2025  
The Hotel Bentley  
Alexandria LA

### **2025 Southern Conference**

November 7-9, 2025  
Margaritaville Lake Conroe  
Resort  
Montgomery, Texas

*"One Team, One Fight"*

# DISTRICT MEETINGS

## DISTRICT 2 MEETINGS:

**July 24, 2025 Post 3750**

Registration 5:30 pm

Joint Meeting 6:00 pm

Dinner (\$7) **6:00 pm**

**Rep: Cmdr James Prestenback**

**Jan 29, 2026 Post 3750**

Registration 5:30 pm

Joint Meeting 6:00 pm

Dinner (\$7) 6:00 pm

**Apr 23, 2025 Post 3750**

Registration 5:30 pm

Joint Meeting 6:00 pm

Dinner (\$7) **6:00 pm**

**Rep: Adj Carl Karnish**

## DISTRICT 3 MEETINGS:

**Sept 13, 2025 Post 3665**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12:00 noon

**Rep: Sr Vice Sharee Arends**

**Jan 10, 2026 Post 3665**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12:00 noon

**Rep: Adj Carl Karnish**

**Apr 25, 2026 Post 3665**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12:00 noon

## DISTRICT 4 MEETINGS:

**Sept 6, 2025 Post 9822**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$8) 12:00 noon

**Rep: Jr Vice James Bourque**

**Nov 15, 2025 Post 1982**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$8) 12:00 noon

**Rep: Adj Carl Karnish**

**May 18, 2026 Post 9822**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$8) 12:00 noon

## DISTRICT 5 MEETINGS:

**Aug 30, 2025 Post 3619**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12:00 noon

**Rep: Cmdr James Prestenback**

## DISTRICT 5 MEETINGS:

**Mar 14, 2026 Post 3106**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12:00 noon

**May 2, 2026 Post 3802**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12:00 noon

## DISTRICT 7 MEETINGS:

**Sept 6, 2025 Post 9903**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

**Rep: Cmdr James Prestenback**

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**Oct 25, 2025 Post 2483**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**Rep: Adj Carl Karnish**

**May 9, 2026 Post 5153**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

## DISTRICT 8 MEETINGS:

**September 13, 2025 Post 4224**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$7) 12 noon

**Rep: Chief of Staff Jared Nolen**

**January 17, 2026 Post 3693**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$7) 12 noon

**Rep: Adj Carl Karnish**

**April 25, 2026 Post 3785**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$7) 12 noon

## DISTRICT 9 MEETINGS:

**September 27, 2025 Post 3652**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12 noon

**Rep: Cmdr James Prestenback**

**January 17, 2026 Post 8290**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12 noon

**April 25, 2026 Post 8720**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch 12 noon

## DISTRICT 10 MEETINGS:

**Sept 6, 2025 Post 1736**

Registration 10:00 am

Meeting 10:30 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**Rep: Sr Vice Sharee Arends**

**Feb 21, 2026 Post 3139**

Registration 10:00 am

Meeting 10:30 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**Apr 25, 2026 Post 8852**

Registration 10:00 am

Meeting 10:30 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

## DISTRICT 11 MEETINGS:

**Sept 13, 2025 Post 4317**

Registration 9:30 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**Rep: Cmdr James Prestenback**

**Jan 17, 2026 Post 3615**

Registration 9:30 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**May 16, 2026 Post 1809**

Registration 9:30 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

## DISTRICT 12 MEETINGS:

**Sept 6, 2025 Post 5187**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**Rep: Judge Advocate Max Arends III**

**Jan 10, 2026 Post 4588**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

**May 9, 2026 Post 5951**

Registration 9:00 am

Meeting 10:00 am

Lunch (\$10) 12:00 noon

# STATE COMMANDER'S MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE WINNER FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE!

The top recruiter for the month of **June** is **PAUL STONE** from  
**Post 5951** Congratulations!

## CHALLENGE COIN

We invite all of our Post to join us in honoring our local law enforcement officers, EMTs, and firefighters by purchasing Challenge Coins to show our appreciation to them.

Cost \$10.00 each + shipping

All Posts should check with their District to see if they have placed an order to distribute to Post!

*Click the link below to order yours today!*

<https://form.jotform.com/242673672339162>

### NEWLY ELECTED DEPARTMENT OFFICERS

**COMMANDER  
JAMES PRESTENBACK**

**SR VICE COMMANDER  
SHAREE ARENDS**

**JR VICE COMMANDER  
JAMES BOURQUE**

**QUARTERMASTER  
RAY BASS**

**CHAPLAIN  
PAUL STONE**

**JUDGE ADVOCATE  
MAX ARENDS**

**SURGEON  
JOE DUGRENE**

### COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Six Excellent Reporting Plaques were award to Post  
with Excellent Reporting Skills.

Scoring for Excellent Reporting included:

- VOLUNTEER HOURS
- PROJECTS
- NUMBER OF NON-VFW PERSONS BENEFITED
- PARTICIPATION IN DEPARTMENT PROGRAMS
- SUBMISSION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE BOOK

The following Post received this honor:

VFW POST 1736  
JOHNSON BROWN—ALEXANDRIA

VFW POST 1809  
RODNEY J HOBBS—MONROE

VFW POST 3665  
FREDDIE J FALGOUT—RACELAND

VFW POST 5735  
OZONE BELT—SLIDELL

VFW POST 7017  
DENHAM SPRINGS MEMORIAL—DENHAM SPRINGS

VFW POST 8720  
HOMER—WILLIAMS—ABITA SPRINGS

# Department of Louisiana

## Commanders 90 Day Challenge!

Win \$250 for Your Post and a  
Special Commanders award

Between July 1 and  
September 30, the Post  
with the **highest annual  
membership renewal  
percentage** wins! In case  
of a tie, the winner will be  
determined by the most  
new members.



Get ready to compete!

**Renew now  
and win!**



Exciting prizes

Support your post

Strengthen our  
community





# STATE COMMANDER'S SPECIAL PROJECT



## PROJECT 4 HOPE

Project 4 Hope is a Veterans tiny house community in  
Arcadia, LA.

**GOAL: RAISE \$10,000 TO BUILD A TINY  
HOME FOR VETERANS NAMED AFTER  
VFW DEPARTMENT OF LOUISIANA**

DONATIONS CAN BE MADE USING THE QR CODE OR  
BY MAILING A CHECK TO VFW DEPT OF LOUISIANA  
HEADQUARTERS: 10185 MAMMOTH AVE., BATON  
ROUGE, LA 70814



### **EVENT FLYERS:**

**Any District/Post that has upcoming events and would like to include a flyer in our monthly Mail Call, please send the information to [adj@vfwla.net](mailto:adj@vfwla.net)**

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE REPORTING:**

All reports should be submitted **MONTHLY** by logging onto the Department's Website - Members Only Section. It's very important that Community Service Activities are reported in the month that they take place!

### **Future National Convention Dates:**

**August 9-14, 2025**

Columbus, OH

**July 31-Aug 4, 2027**

Milwaukee, WI

**July 24-30, 2026**

Reno, NV

**Aug 5-10, 2028**

San Antonio, TX

### **VFW Department of Louisiana Headquarters CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Office- 225-928-5025 | [www.vfwdeptla.org](http://www.vfwdeptla.org)

**\*Please note the Department NO longer has a Fax Number!**

#### **State Quartermaster**

Elvin R. Bass

Email: [qtm@vfwla.net](mailto:qtm@vfwla.net)

#### **State Adjutant**

Carl Karnish

Email: [adj@vfwla.net](mailto:adj@vfwla.net)

#### **State Administrative Assistant:**

Tori LeBlanc

Email: [admin@vfwla.net](mailto:admin@vfwla.net)

#### **State Commander:**

James Prestenback

Email: [jprestenback302@gmail.com](mailto:jprestenback302@gmail.com)

### **Department Conference/ Convention Dates:**

**2025-2026**

**CofA/Officer Training**

August 22-24, 2025

**Mid Winter**

January 22-25, 2026

**State Convention**

June 18-21, 2026

**2026-2027**

**CoA/Officer Training**

August 28-30, 2026

**Mid - Winter**

January 28-31, 2027

**State Convention**

June 17-20, 2027

# From the desk of the State Commander...

Comrades,

It is truly an honor to serve as your VFW Department of Louisiana Commander. I am humbled by the trust and confidence you have placed in me to lead this incredible organization.

First and foremost, I want to recognize the hard work and dedication of our VFW and Auxiliary members. Your unwavering commitment to our mission of serving veterans, their families, and our communities is the backbone of the VFW.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge and remember those who are no longer with us. Their sacrifices, courage, and dedication continue to inspire us every day.

Our Mission and Purpose is to foster camaraderie among veterans of overseas conflicts, serve veterans, the military, and communities, and advocate on behalf of all veterans, ensuring they are respected, receive their entitlements, and are recognized for their sacrifices.

We are not just an organization; we are a family—united by our service and a shared sense of duty. We understand that freedom is not free, and it is our responsibility to honor that sacrifice by standing up for those who have served and continue to serve.

Over the past year, under the leadership of Commander Debbie McElhannon, we have accomplished great things together. We have advocated tirelessly at both the state and national levels for improved healthcare, better benefits, and more resources for our veterans. We have continued our tradition of community service through our programs, scholarship opportunities, and support for military families.

But there is still much work to be done. Moving forward, I am committed to:

- Expanding our membership by engaging younger veterans and ensuring that all who have served feel welcomed and valued in our ranks.
- Strengthening our legislative advocacy to protect and expand the rights and benefits of all veterans.
- Enhancing our community outreach efforts to make a lasting impact where it matters most.

Today, I ask each of you to renew your commitment to our mission. Let us stand united in purpose and action. Let us reach out to our fellow veterans, bring them into our family, and show them that the VFW is here to support them—just as they supported this great nation.

In closing, I am reminded of the words often spoken among us: “No one does more for veterans.” Together, we will continue to live up to that motto, ensuring that every veteran knows they are never alone.

Thank you all for your dedication, your service, and your continued support. May we move forward with strength, unity, and purpose.



**State Commander  
James Prestenback**



## A message from our State Sr. Vice Commander....

Dear Comrades,

I cannot begin to express how truly grateful and humbled I am to have been elected as your Sr. Vice Commander this past weekend. Thank you for placing your trust in me. I look forward to continuing to grow in this role each and every day, and to learning from the many mentors who have already offered their guidance and support.

Congratulations to all the newly elected Department, District, and Post officers. I'm excited for what lies ahead and look forward to a fantastic year of serving this great organization alongside each of you.

As we step into this new year, let's begin strong—and united. Membership remains, and will always be, the heart of our organization. Without members, we are nothing. Yes, it's important to set goals and challenge ourselves with the numbers, but let's never lose sight of our true priority: cultivating active, engaged members who make a real difference in our communities.

Let's jumpstart our community service now. Get out there—let your communities see what the VFW is and what we do! With school starting soon, now is the time to get Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen, and the artwork contests out to our schools so they can incorporate them into their curriculum.

Here's to a year of purpose, progress, and unity. Let's get to work!



**Sr. Vice Commander  
Sharee Arends**

## A message from our State Jr. Vice Commander....

Comrades,

Thank you for electing me as your Junior Vice Commander for the 25-26 year. This past year I've had the opportunity to meet and visit with some of you throughout the state, and want to thank the post and districts for your hospitality and support.

Congratulations to all the posts and districts who made All-State and All-American! What a great year the department had this past year. Congratulations PSC Debbie McElhannon on being an All-American Department Commander! With the closing of a great year, it's time we look forward to the 25-26 year which will be another great year with State Commander James Prestenback at the helm.

Now is a good time for posts to start looking at your rolls. It's never too early in the year to start chipping away at the unpaid roster as our greatest asset is our membership. Do those buddy checks and let them know we need their help to complete the membership goal of 101%.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone and safe and happy Fourth of July. I look forward to working with everyone this year.

James Bourque



**Jr. Vice Commander  
James Bourque**



# A message from our State Adjutant....

## I AM THE MEMBER WHO NEVER CAME BACK

It amuses me now to think that your organization spends so much time looking for new members when I was there all the time. Do you remember me? I'm the fellow who came to every meeting, but nobody paid attention to me. I tried several times to be friendly, but everyone seemed to have his own friends to talk to and sit with. I sat down among some unfamiliar faces several times, but they didn't pay much attention to me. I hoped somebody would ask me to join one of the committee or somehow participate and contribute, but no one did. Finally, because of illness, I missed a meeting. The next month, no one asked where I had been. I guess it didn't matter very much whether I was there or not. On the next meeting date, I decided to stay home and watch a good television program. When I attended the next meeting, no one asked me where I was the month before. You might say I'm a good guy, a good family man, that I hold down a responsible job and love my community. You know who else I am? I am the member who never came back.



**State Adjutant  
Carl Karnish**

**SISTERS AND BROTHERS – remember to make our new members and visitors welcome.**

# A message from our State Quartermaster....

Thank you to everyone who attended and supported our 94th Annual State Convention in June! It was an outstanding gathering of dedicated members focused on moving our mission forward.

### Convention Income Summary:

- Delegate dues: \$1,785.58
- Admission Fees: \$1,204.47
- Banquet tickets: \$8,500.98
- Vendor fees: \$1,193.40
- Challenge Coins- \$200.00

Donations & fundraisers (The following amounts are for cash collected during the State Convention)

- 50/50 Fundraiser: \$906.00
- Poker Tournament: \$240.00
- Ways & Means Items Sold: \$330
- Desert Storm Donations: \$741.00
- Hospitality Room Donations: \$100.00

All funds have been deposited into the Department account.

As we begin the new year, please remember to:

- Complete your Post audits on time.
- Submit any outstanding dues promptly.
- Keep accurate and up-to-date records in OMS.

### Important reminders:

- Department and Post bonds will be up for renewal on August 31st — please plan ahead to stay in compliance.
- 990 filings for the period July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025, can now be prepared. They are due by November 15th, so start early to avoid last-minute issues.

Your commitment to sound financial management helps us maintain strong support for our Department. Thank you for your continued dedication and teamwork!



**State Quartermaster  
Elvin Ray Bass**

## A message from our State Surgeon....

Dear Comrades,

I am truly honored to have been elected as State Surgeon.

I want to thank Larry Koons for having done an amazing job and I know that I have some big shoes to fill. I want to congratulate all the incoming State, District and Post Officers.

I have some plans for the coming year and those include visiting various Districts and attending meetings.

Looking forward to the future together!



**State Surgeon  
Joseph Dufrene**

## A message from our State Chaplain....

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you for the honor of electing me as your State Chaplain. I am both humbled and inspired by your trust and confidence. This is not just a position—it is a sacred responsibility, and I commit myself to serving our members and our mission with heart, compassion, and faith.

Throughout this journey, one constant has guided me: the power of prayer. I have leaned on it during moments of uncertainty and drawn strength from it in times of need. Prayer is more than words—it's a connection to something greater than ourselves. It reminds us that we are never alone, that even in our most difficult times, we are heard, held, and helped by a loving God.

But prayer doesn't end with a quiet "Amen." Often, God answers through people—through a helping hand, a listening ear, or a word of encouragement. As Chaplain, I pray not only to lift others up, but to be used by God to answer the prayers of those in need within our VFW family.

Thank you again for this opportunity. May we continue to serve each other in strength, in faith, and in the power of prayer.



**State Chaplain  
Paul Stone**

# A message from our Judge Advocate.....

First I would like to thank all for your confidence in electing me as your Judge Advocate. I will be traveling throughout the year not to inspect but to be available, if needed. Sec. 216 - all officers elected and appointed shall submit proof of eligibility to the Post Adjutant within 30 days of election or appointment. Failure to do so, the office shall be forfeited.



**State Judge Advocate  
Max Arends III**

# MONTHLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

These are the key Topics from this month. Please read through these and let me know your thoughts on how we can continue to show Louisiana, that our Elected Officials are committed to our Veterans.

**June 2nd: VFW Pays Respects to Fallen on Memorial Day:** The VFW remembers and honors the legacy of the men and women who served in our nation's military and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of freedom. VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt, VFW National Chief of Staff Jeff Carroll, and a delegation of staff from the VFW Washington Office honored the fallen by participating in commemorative events across our nation's capital over Memorial Day weekend. For the VFW, this is a truly sacred day.

**VA and DOD Sign Agreement to Improve Transition from Service:** In a joint video announcement, Secretary Doug Collins and Secretary Pete Hegseth signed a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) to improve the transition process for separating service members. Secretary Collins stated that this agreement would ensure a continuum of health care for veterans, a review of workforce development, and an assessment of transition programs. Secretary Hegseth expressed his commitment to strengthening collaboration between the two departments. Improving transition is a top legislative and policy priority for the VFW, including timely attendance at Transition Assistance Program classes, full and permanent access to accredited claims assistance for service members, and strong community connections for veterans. The VFW sees this formal partnership as a positive step forward.

**DOD 2024 Survey Results on Military Spouses:** The Department of Defense (DOD) has released the findings of its 2024 survey of active duty spouses. The report highlights both progress and ongoing challenges for military families. More spouses are participating in the workforce, but many still face financial strain and difficulties accessing reliable child care. Frequent moves continue to disrupt careers, family stability, and access to services. Spouses who feel dissatisfied with military life are much more likely to want their service members to leave active duty, showing how closely family welfare is tied to retention. While use of support programs like WIC and counseling services remains steady, concerns about child well-being and mental health persist. These findings underscore the importance of continued investment in policies and resources that strengthen family readiness and quality of life.

**Annual Report Shows Decrease in Military Sexual Assaults:** The Department of Defense annual report on sexual assault shows a decrease of 320 reported cases for fiscal year 2024 compared to the previous year. While the drop is notable, no prevalence survey was conducted to determine specific characteristics. A survey is planned for fiscal year 2025 to better assess progress and inform ongoing prevention efforts.

**VA Program Helps Veterans Protect Benefits Payments:** Bad actors sometimes prey on veterans by targeting their VA benefits. Direct deposit benefits payments are more secure and could help thwart these fraudsters. Recognizing that some veterans lack a bank account, VA established the Veterans Benefits Banking Program (VBBP) in 2019 that has assisted more than 530,000 veterans and other beneficiaries to open accounts and enroll in direct deposit. VBBP also offers a variety of financial education resources.

**June 9th: Initiative to End Veteran Overprescribing:** VFW Washington Office staff members participated in events with the Grunt Style Foundation's "War Cry for Change to End Veteran Overprescribing." This initiative aligns with the VFW's 2025 priority goals that focus on improving health care quality and ensuring access to evidence-based pharmaceutical alternatives. The VFW supports prioritizing whole health, mental wellness, and patient-centered care, rather than fostering a reliance on prescription drugs. VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci spoke at a press conference held on Capitol Hill that brought together advocates, veterans, and policymakers to push for more responsible and holistic approaches to veteran health care. [Watch the press conference.](#)

**Veterans Indicted in Puerto Rico Claim Shark Case:** A federal grand jury in the District of Puerto Rico recently handed down a 49-count indictment against 10 individuals, including veterans, a VA employee, and unaccredited claims agents that the VFW calls Claim Sharks. They have been charged with defrauding the government to illegally obtain VA disability compensation benefits. The charges specify that the claims agents coached the veterans on providing false information during medical examinations and for submitting claims to obtain maximum disability compensation, while the VA employee routed these claims to his subordinates for adjudication. The VFW has been warning veterans over the past few years that THEY could be held liable for fraudulent activity of these Claim Sharks.



**VA Foreign Medical Program Update:** VA has announced that veterans who receive care through the [Foreign Medical Program](#) (FMP) will now receive reimbursement payments through direct deposit instead of paper checks. This applies only to payments made to U.S. bank accounts, but VA is working to add international bank accounts. FMP covers health care for service-connected disabilities and related conditions for veterans living or traveling abroad. Improvements to this program, including faster reimbursements, is a VFW priority. This change to direct deposit is a positive step. [Read more.](#)

**VA Pacific Region Virtual Town Hall and Claims Clinic:** VA is inviting all veterans residing in Indochina to join a virtual town hall and claims clinic seeking to address needs unique to individuals living outside of the continental United States. The virtual event will be held on Wednesday, June 11, at 5:00 p.m. Indochina Time (ICT). [Registration is required.](#) Two claims clinic sessions are available -- 7:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (ICT) -- for those who want to [schedule an appointment.](#)

**Join VFW and ZeroMils for Conversation on Thriving After Service:** On Thursday, June 12, leaders from the VFW Washington Office will join ZeroMils for its second annual Military Thriving@ Change Forum at Georgetown University as it convenes corporate, nonprofit, and community partners to discuss ways to create cultures and communities in which veterans thrive after service. The transition from military to civilian life is a top priority for the VFW and we are excited to be a part of this important discussion. With this in mind, ZeroMils also invites VFW members and supporters to [tune in to the live stream](#) of the event on June 12 from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

**Seeking Veterans for Perimenopause and Menopause Survey:** The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is seeking input from veterans about VA care related to perimenopause and menopause. Veterans between the ages of 35 to 64 who are enrolled at a VA medical center and have accessed any care at VA or through community care related to perimenopause or menopause in the last 24 months are eligible to participate. Please take the brief and anonymous [GAO survey](#) by June 15, 2025.

**June 16<sup>th</sup>: Press Conference on Care for Military Sexual Trauma Survivors:** The VFW Washington Office hosted a press conference during which leading veteran organizations called on Congress to support [S.1245/H.R. 2576, Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support \(SAVES\) Act of 2025](#). This bipartisan, bicameral bill would take a multi-faceted approach to enhance access to health care and benefits for military sexual trauma survivors, improve communications with VA, and ease the burden of filing MST-related disability compensation claims. It would also ensure that all former National Guard and Reserve members receive MST-related care and counseling. [Watch the press conference](#), which begins at the 4:58 mark.

**Veterans Indicted in Puerto Rico Claim Shark Case:** A federal grand jury in the District of Puerto Rico recently handed down a 49-count indictment against 10 individuals, including veterans, a VA employee, and unaccredited claims agents that the VFW calls Claim Sharks. They have been charged with defrauding the government to illegally obtain VA disability compensation benefits. The charges specify that the claims agents coached the veterans on providing false information during medical examinations and for submitting claims to obtain maximum disability compensation, while the VA employee routed these claims to his subordinates for adjudication. The VFW has been warning veterans over the past few years that THEY could be held liable for fraudulent activity of these Claim Sharks. [Read more.](#)

**VFW Provides Statement for House Subcommittee Hearing:** VFW National Legislative Director Kristina Keenan provided a statement for the record for a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity pending legislation hearing. The topics include improvements to property protections for activated service members, VA communications, transition assistance, education and employment benefits, and programs for homeless veterans. Regarding [H.R. 3387, Enhancing the Transitioning Servicemember's Experience \(ETS\) Act](#), Keenan wrote, "Improving transition programs is one of the VFW's top priorities, and we see this proposal as directly supporting the intent of the current DOD and VA memorandum of understanding to enhance coordination between the two departments on these efforts." [Read the testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 18:26 mark.

**VFW Statement on Pending Health Legislation:** VFW National Legislative Associate Director Meggan Coleman submitted a statement for the record for a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing on pending legislation. Included in the bills being considered is [H.R. 2605, Service Dogs Assisting Veterans \(SAVES\) Act](#), which would create a five-year pilot program for VA to provide grants to nonprofit organizations to furnish eligible veterans with service dogs and veterinary insurance. Coleman stated the VFW's strong support of this legislation and explained, "Service dogs assist with various physical, auditory, and trauma-related disabilities. They help empower veterans to regain their independence, pride, and hope. While they are typically provided free of charge, the medical care involved can be costly. This legislation would enable more veterans to receive support animals with less of a financial burden." [Read the testimony](#), or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 20:50 mark.

## **June 23rd:**

**Claim Shark Organization Founder and Staff Indicted in Fraud Case:** A county grand jury in Ohio has handed down an indictment charging Senior Veterans Administration Services (SVAS), the SVAS founder, and four SVAS employees with exploiting veterans and fraudulently obtaining \$20 million in VA benefits. The VFW considers SVAS to be a predatory Claim Shark company. The investigation was conducted by the VA Office of Inspector General, the Ohio Attorney General's Office, and the Ohio Department of Commerce as part of Operation No VA SCAMs (No VA "Service-Connected Account Manipulation"), which is a nationwide initiative led by VA in collaboration with state and federal prosecutors. [Read more.](#)

**Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Veterans in Class-Action Suit:** In a unanimous 9-0 decision, the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of certain veterans represented in a class-action suit regarding Combat-Related Special Compensation. The ruling states that the Barring Act's time limit of six years during which a veteran can file a disability claim for combat-related injuries following a VA disability rating decision does not apply. This is a major win for approximately 9,000 medically retired veterans that now clears the way, dating back to January 2008, for them to retroactively receive previously capped disability compensation. [Read more.](#)

**Free Connections to Resources:** The National Resource Directory (NRD) gives service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers the ability to find and connect with organizations that can assist with specialized recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration needs. The NRD is the product of a partnership with DOD, VA, and the Department of Labor. This program is meant to facilitate free connections between individuals and stringently vetted resources that provide support in many areas such as employment, education, veteran benefits, caregiver support, housing, and the Military Adaptive Sports Program. [Read more.](#)

**Mental Health Care Services During Transition:** The Military Health System inTransition program aids service members, veterans, and retirees — regardless of component, time served, or discharge category — to establish or transfer mental health care during times of transition. This program is a free service that is not time limited. It is staffed with qualified coaches familiar with military culture who stand ready to assist individuals to connect with the care they need. [Read more.](#)

## **June 30th:**

**VFW Speaks at Roundtable with House Leaders:** VFW National Legislative Director Kristina Keenan participated in a veterans organization roundtable hosted by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (NY-8) and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Mark Takano (CA-39). When asked what members of Congress could do to better understand the issues that veterans face, Keenan replied they should host town hall meetings during the August congressional recess to hear directly from veterans in their districts. Leader Jeffries committed to communicating to his caucus that every member should hold at least one veteran town hall this summer. Keenan also encouraged the House leaders to include Veterans Service Organizations in upcoming congressional hearings on VA's budget. The VFW, DAV (Disabled American Veterans), and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) have analyzed the budget needs through our annual report, [The Independent Budget](#), and would like to have an opportunity to comment in a public forum.

**VFW Testimony on Subcommittee Pending Legislation:** VFW National Legislative Associate Director Nancy Springer submitted a statement for the record for a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs hearing on pending legislation. The hearing reviewed 12 bills addressing issues including burial and survivor benefits, an annual report on veterans' causes of death, enhanced access to benefits for rural veterans, hiring preferences for Veterans Law Judges, and improvements to the VA claims and appeals processes. A key piece of legislation that includes provisions that the VFW has asked for and commented on in previous testimony is [H.R. 3983, Veterans Claims Quality Improvement Act of 2025](#). It would enhance the accuracy, efficiency, and overall effectiveness of the claims and appeals processes through data-driven training initiatives and strengthened quality assurance protocols. [Read the testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 12:38 mark.

**VFW and Gold Star Spouses Champion Survivor Benefits:**VFW National Legislative Associate Director Nancy Springer joined Gold Star Spouses of America, Inc. members on Capitol Hill during their inaugural legislative fly-in to advocate for critical improvements to survivor benefits. During her meetings, Springer advocated for [H.R. 2055/S. 611](#), *Caring for Survivors Act of 2025*, a top legislative priority for the VFW. This proposal would seek to increase the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) rate from 43 to 55 percent of the compensation awarded to a veteran rated 100 percent disabled by VA, which would make it on par with other federal survivor benefits programs. Except for standard cost-of-living adjustments, the amount of DIC has not increased appreciably since the program's 1993 inception.

**VFW Joins Roundtable on VA Home Loan Program:**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Mark Takano convened a roundtable with veteran organizations and industry groups to discuss the VA Home Loan Guaranty program. Experts explained the program's health, its functions, and its future outlook. VFW National Legislative Director Kristina Keenan emphasized the importance of VA communicating changes to the program in advance, allowing veterans the opportunity to be informed of their options. VA ended the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase (VASP) program in May, which was a last-resort loss mitigation option to prevent foreclosures. The VFW supports Rep. Van Orden's legislation, [H.R. 1815](#), *VA Home Loan Program Reform Act*, to provide VA the authority to stand up a partial claim program. The VFW sees this as a useful tool that could help veterans avoid foreclosure.

**Commission Seeking Input from Afghanistan War Veterans:** The Afghanistan War Commission is a bipartisan entity established by Congress in 2021 with the mandate to examine the strategic, diplomatic, and operational decisions made during the war in Afghanistan. The commission is seeking input from veterans who served there between June 2001 and August 2021. The information and views you share will be considered in recommendations to Congress and policymakers for shaping future decisions regarding national security. [Read more](#) or [submit your comments](#).

Respectfully,

*Matthew J. West*

Matthew J. West  
VFW, Department of Louisiana  
National Legislative Committee Member 2020-2026

## COMMITTEEMAN'S CORNER

Good-bye 2024-2025 and HELLO 2025-2026, we have celebrated the accomplishments of last year's achievements, now we need to refocus and get kick started making 2025-2026 a success. Do not wait until the Departments SOI to begin your year, if you do you are already behind the power curve. The New Year started July 1, 2025 so press on and get the ball rolling.

I want to remind everyone about the open challenge that each Post donate a minimum of \$75.00 to the NDSWM fundraiser. At the Department Convention, we collected right at \$2000.00 with the donations and the matching contribution of \$1000.00. Please see the flyer included in this edition of the Mail Call. As the Department's representative on the NDSWM, I look forward to the day we can visit this Memorial in Washington DC along with the many other memorials. We have also challenged all other Departments to match or exceed our donation. This would allow VFW National to reach the Million Dollar donor level and be recognized on the Memorial as such. Let's bust down the door, overshadow the \$5000.00 mark, and raise Louisiana's overall donation to over \$20,000.00.

The 127th National Convention originally scheduled for Salt Lake City, Utah has been moved to Reno, Nevada beginning July 24, 2026 to July 30, 2026. Make your plans to attend early so we can have a good presence in Reno.

Looking forward to seeing all of you in Columbus at the National Convention and seeing what our incoming Commander in Chief Carol Whitmore has in store for her year.

Until next month, let us keep pushing forward to improve our Department and raise the numbers back up by renewing, reinstating or recruiting new members.



## COMMITTEEMAN'S CORNER



### Department of Louisiana VFW Desert Storm War Memorial Fundraiser 2025

As the construction of this Memorial has begun with an anticipated completion date in 2026, let's step up once again and do our part to help honor those who served during this War.

The goal is to raise another \$5000.00 from the Department to bring our total to \$20,000.00. To accomplish this the Challenge is for each Post in the Department to donate a minimum of \$75.00 earmarked for this fundraiser, Auxiliaries are also welcome to donate as well. Send all donations to the Department Quartermaster earmarked for the Memorial.

We are also going to issue a challenge to all the other Departments to match or beat our donation to help the VFW be recognized as a Million Dollar donor on the memorial.

# HISTORIAN

July 2025

## The Historian

**Mitchell Cota, Department Historian**

Comrades,

As the 2025-2026 VFW year kicks off and we tuck away the convention scripts until next June, I would like to congratulate this year's newly elected and appointed officers. I would also like to welcome Debbie McElhannon, our newest and Junior Commander to the Past State Commander's Alumni, she will add her experiences to ours as we try to guide those who will come after us and adding to our department's history.

As each year is peeled off the calendars, our collected Post and District experiences create unique memories, each from different points of view. At the Post level, where the bulk of the work is done, with each event, each program, and with many of your members. This is where the members pour their time, sweat, and love into what they are doing for the VFW, our veterans, and yes, each other. Most times, these moments go by and are lost in our fading memories as the months as years quickly pass. We must all strive to be good stewards of our VFW past.



I am asking each officer at the Post, District, and State levels to documenting their meeting if you have a state representative, Post functions, and public events where we are invited.

1. Jot down the members' names who participate in the event.
2. Take pictures of the members and the event.
3. Write down, the Who the event benefited (Veterans, their families).
4. Write down, the What the event was for.
5. Write down, the When the event took place.
6. Write down, the Where the event took place.
7. And write down, the Why the event took place.

Accomplish all seven and your Post and District Community Service reports complete themselves. We are doing the work! Let's document the service! And by doing this, we can save our history for generations to come to know our great deeds we provided for our fellow veterans and their families.

Thank you and if you have any questions. Please contact me, at [mitch@mrcota.com](mailto:mitch@mrcota.com).

**Mitchell R. "Mitch" Cota**, PSC 14-15  
District 9 Commander 2025-2026  
State American Chairmen 2025-2026

## VFW National Convention Formal Banquet

Join us for an elegant evening at the **National Convention Formal Banquet!** This exclusive event will celebrate our 125 years of history and to recognize some of our more prestigious awards from the VFW and the Auxiliary.

**Date:** August 11, 2025

**Time:** 5:30 PM - 9:00 PM

**Tickets:**

- The Department has purchased **30 tickets**
- \$125 per person
- Limited availability – first come, first served!

**How to Reserve Your Spot:**

- Email: [lastatevfw@yahoo.com](mailto:lastatevfw@yahoo.com)
- Submit payment promptly to secure your ticket

**Don't miss this opportunity to connect with fellow members and honor our organization in a formal setting. Reserve your ticket today!**

## VFW & VFW Auxiliary Bus Trip to the VFW National Home

Join a special day trip to the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, MI on August 13, 2025. See firsthand the vital work being done to support Veterans and their families.

**Trip Details:**

- Date: August 13, 2025
- Departure: 7:00 a.m. EST from the Columbus Convention Center
- Return: 7:00 p.m. EST
- Cost: \$75.00 per person (includes transportation, meals, and snacks)

**[Visit https://vfwnationalhome.org/news-and-events/events/anniversary-bus-tour/ to register today!](https://vfwnationalhome.org/news-and-events/events/anniversary-bus-tour/)**



BOOGIE DOWN THE BAYOU  
July 13th  
11 AM - 6 PM  
TICKETS - \$30 IN ADVANCE / \$35 AT THE DOOR  
NON-REFUNDABLE  
★★★★★★★★★★  
Let's party for a purpose!



Sponsored by  
Louisiana VFW District 8

*50/50 Raffle*

*Food*

*Live Auction*

*Dancing*

*Cash Bar*

No outside food  
or drink allowed



*Live Music by:*

**Mike Broussard  
& Night Train**

*followed by*

**The Mojos  
& Guests**

Gonzales Memorial VFW Post 3693 - 42430 Churchpoint Rd Gonzales, La. 7073





DREW HERNANDEZ

COMEDY SHOW

A COMBAT  
VETERAN

AUG  
02

COLE-MIERS VFW POST 3619

1115 LA-27, DERIDDER, LOUISIANA

TICKETS ON  
SALE NOW!

VIP \$50 GA \$25



[WWW.EVENTBRITE.COM/E/DREW-HERNANDEZ-COMEDY-NIGHT-TICKETS](http://WWW.EVENTBRITE.COM/E/DREW-HERNANDEZ-COMEDY-NIGHT-TICKETS)

## EVENT SCHEDULE

Doors Open 6PM

Food and Drinks 6-8PM

Drew Takes the Stage 8PM