

**LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**  
**OF THE**  
**JEWISH WAR VETERANS**  
**OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**



**Presented by**  
**Jerome Blum, JWV National Commander**

**Before a Joint Session of the**  
**Senate and House Veterans Affairs' Committees**

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## **National Commander Jerome Blum**

Jerome Blum is the National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV) and a life member of John L. Levitow Post 45 in Connecticut.

Jerry graduated from the Albert I. Prince Regional Technical Vocational High School in June, 1962, and a week later was on his way to the Great Lakes Naval Station. He attended the Class A Engineman School and upon graduation was assigned to the USS Vance, a Destroyer Escort Radar Picket Ship, out of Pearl Harbor. After several potentially dangerous trips to the North Bering Sea, the Vance was chosen to go to Vietnam. The Vance's home port then became Subic Bay, Philippines. While aboard the Vance as a Third Class Petty Officer, Jerry had, among other duties, the responsibility of the fresh water distilling operation (the evaps).

Jerry has held numerous JWV positions, including Post Commander, Department Commander, and Department Quartermaster. He also publishes *The Shout Out*, which is the Department of CT's newsletter. He continues to serve the National Organization on many committees and actively participates in JWV's monthly teleconferences.

Jerry is also a member of many other veterans' service organizations, including the VFW, American Legion, AmVets, Ct. Military Veteran's Coalition (CVMC), and recently The Antique Veterans – a group dedicated to attending and supplying gun volley salutes at veteran's funerals. He is also active at his synagogue, where he served as President and is on the Board of Directors. Jerry and his wife are very involved in the Relay for Life, which raises funds for the American Cancer Society for research towards 'The Cure.'

Jerry is married to Past National JWV Auxiliary President, Joanne Blum. They have raised two daughters, and have 3 wonderful grandchildren.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Isakson, Chairman Miller, and Members of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs, my fellow veterans and friends, I am Jerome Blum, the National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV). JWV is Congressionally Chartered and the oldest continuously active veterans' organization in the nation. JWV also provides counseling and assistance to members encountering issues dealing with the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other government agencies. JWV is an active participant in The Military Coalition, a select group of over 30 military associations and veterans' organizations representing over five million active duty, reserve and retired uniformed service personnel, veterans, families, and survivors on Capitol Hill.

On February 10 and 11 our members were here in Washington to meet with their Senators and Representatives as part of JWV's Capitol Hill Action Day(s). Our members prepared diligently for these important meetings and successfully presented many of JWV's legislative priorities to your colleagues, their members of Congress and congressional staff.

Mr. Chairman, yesterday, on March 15th we at JWV celebrated the 120th anniversary of our founding. For all of these 120 years JWV has advocated for a strong national defense, and just and fair recognition and compensation for veterans. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA prides itself in being in the forefront among our nation's civic and veterans' groups in supporting the well-earned rights of veterans, in promoting American democratic principles, in defending universal Jewish causes and in vigorously opposing bigotry, anti-Semitism and terrorism both here and abroad. Today, even more than ever before, we stand for these principles. The Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. represents a proud tradition of patriotism and service to the United States of America.

As the National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV), I thank you for the opportunity to present the views of our members and supporters on issues under the jurisdiction of your committees. At the conclusion of JWV's 120th National Convention in Tampa, Florida, our convention delegates adopted our resolutions for the 114th Congress. These mandates establish the legislative agenda for JWV during my year as National Commander.

JWV believes Congress has a unique obligation and most compelling opportunity to ensure that veterans' benefits are regularly reviewed and improved to keep pace with the needs of all veterans in a changing social and economic environment. JWV salutes the Chairs and Members of both the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees for the landmark veterans'

legislation enacted over the past several years. Eligibility improvement, patient enrollment, long-term care, access to emergency care, presumptive Agent Orange disability, enhanced VA/DoD sharing, improved preference rights of veterans in the federal government and other actions recognize the debt this great country owes to those who have so faithfully served.

We must continue to improve access to veterans' quality health care, increase timeliness in the benefit claims process, and enhance access to national cemeteries for all veterans.

### **NO GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

For the record, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Inc. does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government. This is as it should be.

### **THE MILITARY COALITION**

JWV continues to be a proud member and active participant of the Military Coalition (TMC). PNC Robert M. Zweiman, JWV's National Chairman, serves on the Board of Directors of the Military Coalition and, again, our National Executive Director, Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth, USA (Retired), continues to serve his fourth term as the President of the Military Coalition and as Co-Chair of the Coalition's Membership and Nominations Committee.

JWV requests that the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs do everything possible to fulfill the legislative priorities of the Military Coalition which are applicable to your committees. These positions are well thought out and are clearly in the best interests of our military personnel, our veterans and our great nation.

### **VETERANS DESERVE MORE FROM THE VA**

While the overwhelming majority of VA employees are honest, dedicated and hardworking, the VA continues to receive bad press.

The national news repeatedly runs negative stories on the VA. In late February, ABC evening news with David Muir carried a segment about a veteran who could not schedule an appointment at the VA. A week before that, CBS carried a story of the VA suicide hot-line not being answered and calls were going to voicemail. This is shameful! It is estimated that 22 veterans each month commit suicide. There is no acceptable reason whatsoever, for the VA suicide hot-line not to be answered.

Timely processing of disability claims continues to embarrass the VA. For a long time the VA has promised to overcome the huge disability benefits compensation claims backlog. In fact, the VA promised to end this backlog in 2015. It is now 2016 and there is still a backlog.

A September 2015 report from the VA's Office of Inspector General says that costs for the development of VA's Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) increased from nearly \$579 million in September 2009 to almost \$1.3 billion in January 2015. The VA's own IG cited the huge cost increase to "inadequate cost control, unplanned changes in system and business requirements and inefficient contracting practices." In a September 2015 report, the Government Accounting Office arrived at similar conclusions.

Obviously the VA is not effectively managing or controlling its own Veterans Benefits Management System. Nor is the VA processing disability claims to the satisfaction of many veterans.

There are seemingly endless reports of the VA's mismanagement and bureaucratic dysfunction. Some of these reports are probably exaggerated or completely false. However, there are far too many such reports to ignore them.

There are repeated discrepancies in the answers the VA gives about the number of employees fired for cause or misconduct. The variations are not even close. The Washington Examiner reports that the "VA employees accused of stealing money from the government and others found guilty of posting veterans confidential medical information on social media have kept their jobs."

In January, the Wall Street Journal had an article entitled, "Chronic Indifference at Veterans Affairs." A recent CNN article says, "Veterans still facing major medical delays at VA hospitals." And a December 16 Washington Post report says, "VA's own internal probe finds impunity of agency leaders at scandal ridden hospital."

Reports of failure to control finances frequently appear. In Denver, a hospital construction project is more than \$1 billion over budget. The VA has overspent, possibly even wasted, millions of dollars on lavish art projects, exorbitant relocation benefits and bonuses for failing employees. Last July, the VA threatened to shut down hospitals because of a budget shortfall, prevented only by Congress providing an additional \$3 billion.

Unfortunately, each of these negative reports is ammunition for those who want to see the VA privatized. Which is another word for closed. JWV strongly believes veterans are best served



by the VA. JWV believes the VA shall be strengthened. JWV strongly believes the VA can best deliver comprehensive services to veterans.

Many of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) achievements are often forgotten. VHA researchers are often forgotten. VHA researchers have helped develop many innovations that have improved medical care to both veterans and all Americans. These include the implantable cardiac pacemaker, the first liver transplant and the shingles vaccine.

JWV wants VA hospitals to stay open! VA physicians are best qualified to understand the veterans' physical and emotional problems. As President Theodore Roosevelt said, "A man who is good enough to shed his blood for the country is good enough to be given a square deal afterwards."

Several excellent studies have shown that the VA provides the best care for veterans. JWV strongly supports the VA!

### **ACCESS TO VA FACILITIES FOR ALL VETERANS**

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has long called upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to promptly and appropriately see and treat all veterans with the utmost respect and optimum service. Recent revelations have clearly demonstrated that the Department has failed miserably at its mandate to serve all those who have served.

### **TIMELY ACCESS TO QUALITY VA HEALTH CARE**

JWV urges Congress to extend the combat theatre vet enrollment window from 5 to 10 years; provide enrollment opportunity to certain 0% service-connected veterans with no private health insurance.

Ensure full implementation of all provisions of the VA Caregivers Law (P.L. 111-163) provisions, including measures supporting women veterans. Extend the VA Caregivers Act to full-time Caregivers of catastrophically disabled veterans of conflicts before Sept. 11, 2001. Align the DoD' VA definitions for caregiver support and services to include qualifying "illnesses."

JWV urges training and cultural awareness in the VA healthcare system of the unique health needs of women veterans. Ensure veterans with catastrophically disabling reproductive organ injuries have access to the same reproductive services as are available in the DoD health system. JWV urges appropriate investment to meet these vital needs.

JWV strongly opposes fee hikes for currently enrolled veterans in all enrollment priority groups.

## **ELIMINATE CLAIMS BACKLOG AND IMPROVE CLAIMS' SYSTEM EFFICIENCY**

JWV supports initiatives to upgrade the claims processing system. JWV supports needed investment in software / hardware upgrades for claims management.

JWV will work with its Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) partners to develop improved process, procedures and resources to reduce backlog of claims on appeal.

JWV supports dissemination of “blue” water Navy ship logs as they become available for all veterans to apply for Agent Orange-related diseases. JWV supports legislation to establish eligibility for presumptive service-connection for “blue water” Navy Vietnam War service members. JWV asks Congress to ensure fair and consistent application of standards and procedures for adjudicating Agent Orange claims.

## **TRANSITIONING FROM THE MILITARY TO THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

When an individual completes his/her military service the individual must seek out and enroll in the Department of Veterans Affairs benefits programs for any benefit whether it be for education benefits, VA backed housing loans or medical treatment. Many veterans too often suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury Disorder, or Military Sexual Trauma either do not trust the VA or cannot navigate the paperwork required to obtain treatment. These veterans are among that population most in need of assistance.

This situation could be remedied by enrolling all veterans in the VA system before they separate from the active component with all their records being transferred seamlessly between the two departments within the Executive Branch of the government. The simple act of enrolling the service member into the VA system without some form of follow-up would be a hollow and meaningless gesture.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to adequately fund, regardless of cost, a system that would enroll all men and women into the VA with their military records following them.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA requests that the DoD ensure that each person leaving active service be included in an appropriate transition program.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to provide the necessary funds for the VA to hire a sufficient number of personnel to personally contact each of these veterans at regular intervals to insure that they are actively seeking any treatment they may require rather than simply waiting for the veterans to contact them.

## **MAINTENANCE OF THE VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

There is a distinct possibility that the Department of Veterans Affairs, due to mismanagement and Congressional limitations on how and where certain funds must be applied, could be downsized.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has a proud history of providing outstanding research and development in the areas of prosthetics, spinal cord injuries and mental health.

There are few, if any, providers of research centers that can equal, let alone surpass, the work of the VA in these areas of expertise.

There is a sense among some in the Congress to strip the VA of its funding for research and to privatize those functions as a cost savings device.

Such “budget savings” would be at the expense of services to the injured veterans.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands that the Department of Veterans Affairs be fully funded to permit the continued research and development of programs of which it is uniquely qualified as demonstrated in its history of successes.

## **TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**

Traumatic brain injury has been the signature wound of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Traumatic brain injury, or TBI, can occur when there is an impact to the head. In many cases service members have suffered multiple injuries in addition to TBI, this is termed “polytrauma.”

JWV applauds the VA for implementing an integrated nationwide system of care for veterans and active duty service members recovering from TBI and polytrauma. This care consists of more than 100 VA medical centers each offering specialized rehabilitation care by an interdisciplinary team. Due to the range in severity and complexity of injuries, veterans and

active duty service members with TBI and polytrauma require a specialized model of care coordination and integration of clinical and other support services.

Support programs and funding to expand / improve care, rehabilitation and applications for research for veterans suffering from PTSD / TBI. Increase behavioral health staff and resources including outreach to address rising suicide rate among veterans.

JWV strongly requests the Congress fully fund VA's TBI research and costly care for these patients. They deserve our nation's full support.

## **MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA**

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has long called for fair and complete investigations of allegations of sexual harassment and criminal sexual assault made by members of the military. This still remains a high priority of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA. Although efforts appear to be moving forward to change the culture within certain areas of the military, still in many instances, "boys will be boys" mentality prevails. A victim's prior sexual activity is irrelevant to the individual's current allegations.

Military sexual trauma can be absolutely destructive to the victim's mental and physical wellbeing for the rest of his/her life. America's military strength and future depend upon young men and women stepping forward to enlist without fear of being victimized by military sexual trauma.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress and the Department of Defense to insure that every allegation of harassment and sexual assault is thoroughly investigated and that any findings of wrong doing are prosecuted regardless of the rank, status or position of the perpetrator.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA requests that the victim's rights to privacy and dignity are fully respected and given their proper deference.

## **PROSTATE CANCER RESEARCH AND TREATMENT**

Prostate cancer afflicts approximately 200,000 American men each year with some 30,000 passing as a result of their cancer.

Men exposed to dioxin and certain other toxins have a younger onset date of their cancer, higher Gleason scores and a greater likelihood of the cancer metastasizing than the non-exposed population.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) is a major provider of medical services to the veterans' population and in a position to educate that population of the dangers arising out of prostate cancer.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement the National Vietnam Veterans Prostate Cancer Protocol at all DVA facilities.

Furthermore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the DVA to provide early screening, detection and treatment for prostate cancer.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the DVA to develop additional modalities of treatment beyond those available today and to take the lead into the detection and treatment of this deadly form of cancer.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA also calls upon the DVA to make available to the veteran the full gamut of treatments and the pros and cons of each, letting the veteran select from all possible treatments the one he believes to be the best for him.

Furthermore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands the Department of Veterans Affairs to routinely preform a PSA test on all male veterans.

## **SUICIDE PREVENTION**

The issue of military suicide has not abated despite the recent efforts of the Department of Defense. As previously noted, the VA suicide hot-line has fallen short. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has long advocated that the Department of Defense commence its suicide prevention efforts at such time as the enlistee first enters the military and continues almost daily thereafter.

A high percentage of those who attempt suicide are members of either the Reserve or the National Guard rather than the Active component and their needs and issues are not being addressed with the same level of concern as those who are on active duty. The members of the Individual Ready Reserve also appear to be overlooked, or at least, not confronted as directly as others. It is manifestly obvious that more and better programs must be instituted to confront this problem. We are still losing more men and women to suicide than to hostile enemy action.

The Department of Defense for all its good efforts has yet to stem the tide of these suicides. The culture of the military remains that those with psychological difficulties are viewed as weak and unworthy of consideration for leadership positions and promotions.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Defense to vigorously pursue a course of action to reeducate the members of the military so that issues such as the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Injury and Traumatic Brain Injury be addressed rather than hidden.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA encourages the Department of Defense to obtain the timely services of psychologists and psychiatrists who will be embedded in military units not only in combat units but in support units as well. Whether these medical professionals are members of the military or contract employees they need to assist in the suicide prevention program at its source rather than after the individual arrives at the next duty station.

### **FUNDING FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION HOT LINE**

As previously noted, veterans are committing suicide at a rate of 22 or more per day. Some, if not many, of these suicides could be prevented by the veterans having trained counselors available to them 24/7/365.

New Jersey developed, in partnership with Rutgers University the Vets4Warriors program with trained veteran counselors who will pick up a phone call within 25 seconds of the first ring and have been successful talking a veteran in crisis through the immediate problem.

This program is being emulated in other states throughout the country with a high degree of success.

These programs are unfunded or underfunded by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs to fully fund these programs and encourage those states that do not have a similar program to create one immediately.

### **MEDICAL TREATMENT FOR WOMEN VETERANS**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has made great strides in providing appropriate medical treatment for women veterans and is deserving of accolades for that progress.

Currently, approximately 16.5% of the current force is female. Women service members are a vital part of the military and deserve appropriate medical care.

It is reported that fully one-third of the Department's Medical Centers do not have a gynecologist on staff.

The number of women veterans utilizing the DVA medical system has increased by some 80% over the course of the last decade.

All too often, women cannot obtain information and counseling through the VA on issues of reproductive health care.

An increasing number of women suffer from Military Sexual Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress as a result of their service.

There are situations wherein the women veterans may be more open and candid speaking to a female medical and mental health provider.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to:

- a. Provide women veterans with comprehensive health care in a timely and geographically accessible manner.
- b. Provide women veterans with reproductive information and counseling, as appropriate.
- c. Hire sufficient gynecologists to have services available to women veterans.
- d. Have available a sufficient number of female medical and mental health trained professionals so as to be able to meet the needs of women veterans who would prefer services provided by a female provider.
- e. Have every woman veteran screened to detect if the veteran suffered Military Sexual Trauma during the course of her service regardless of whether she reveals that assault or harassment and divert her to appropriate services and counseling.
- f. Create a long-term plan to address the future needs unique to women veterans in anticipation of a growing percent of women in the military and the increased deployment of women serving in the National Guard and Reserve components.
- g. Make available for women veterans, Women's Clinics at all VA facilities, regardless of size.

h. In situations where there are no appropriate services within 40 miles of the nearest VA facility or an appointment cannot be made within 30 days, allow the veteran to utilize the medical services of a pre-authorized provider.

## **HOMELESS VETERANS**

There are tens of thousands of homeless veterans on any given night scattered throughout the Nation. The Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledges that twice that number will experience homelessness during the course of a year.

The Department of Veterans Affairs reports a decrease in the number of homeless veterans since 2012. However, the number of homeless women veterans often together with their children is increasing. It is clear that progress has been made in reducing the number of homeless veterans, but that there is still much more to do. No one, especially veterans who served this Nation, should wind up on the streets or in the woods due to the inability to afford safe and sanitary housing, or due to a mental disability caused in whole or in part by their military service.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue its good efforts to reduce the number of homeless veterans and to improve its programs, particularly those aimed towards at-risk women veterans and their children.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the President and the Congress to adequately fund efforts to end homelessness among veterans.

## **CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES**

It is a sad reality that family members or other loved ones often become the full-time caregivers of the most seriously ill or injured service members. Many of these now full-time caregivers must give up their own jobs, their homes, their careers, and even their entire life savings to care for the ill or injured service members. Obviously, this is an incredible burden on both the caregiver and the extended family. These caregivers are not prepared to assume their new roles in terms of training, loss of income and careers, and the everyday burden of caring for their loved one.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to fund and the DoD/DVA to equip the caregiver and the extended family with the tools and training to provide care and comfort to the ill or injured members.



The Jewish War Veterans of the USA requests the DoD/DVA to incorporate the caregiver and the family in the rehabilitation program and recovery team of the member. The

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls on the DoD/DVA to provide respite care for the caregiver and extended family so that the caregiver and the family may enjoy a period of time away from the duties of caring for the seriously injured or ill family member.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to fund and the DoD/DVA to provide aid and attendance benefits immediately upon application and then audit its provision.

### **DOD MISSION IN DANGEROUS TIMES**

The Department of Defense is facing large cuts in the near future. JWV remembers the lessons of history and thus believes this nation must maintain adequate force levels and adequate equipment levels. Military readiness does not come cheaply or quickly. Our military personnel should all have a reliable benefits package that will never be reduced.

Today's active-duty service members and those who serve in the National Guard and Reserve components have volunteered to stand watch in this nation's defense. Yet few stand watch for them. Basic benefits of their service, from retirement to TRICARE, are under assault. The defenders of the country need to be able to focus on defending this country. They must not worry that their benefits will be pulled out from beneath them while they are focused on more pressing concerns such as terror plots, IEDs, and insurgents seeking to undermine hard-fought gains. Less than one half of one percent of our population is currently serving in the military. They must not be forgotten!

The Congress must insure that DoD is funded to meet all its missions including possible overseas threats from Iran, North Korea, and even China.

### **BACK-UP TO DOD HOSPITALS**

VA Hospitals must be adequately funded, staffed and equipped to perform their vital role as this nation's only back-up for DoD medical facilities. U.S. military personnel could possibly suffer casualties exceeding the capacity of the combined military medical treatment facilities. In such a case the VA would be vital to the nation. JWV again strongly urges the Congress to fund the VA to fully handle this potential workload.

## **HAZARDOUS WASTE AT MILITARY INSTALLATIONS**

There are some 140 stateside military installations on the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund list. The very definition of a "Superfund" site is that it is seriously polluted and a danger to be near and has or will shortly contaminate the local ground water.

Additionally, there are numerous locations that have not found their way onto the "Superfund" list but are, nevertheless, contaminated and in need of remediation. Over the many years military installations have been sites of storage, testing and use of known toxins, cancer causing chemicals resulting in reproductive disorders, birth defects and a multitude of other serious side effects. These same military installations are and were the home to numerous military families and a civilian population that lived near-by. The Department of Defense has rarely admitted culpability nor taken full responsibility to clear up the Superfund sites as well as other contaminated locations.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Defense to immediately identify all contaminated sites and completely remediate those locations to the standards of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services to immediately establish a protocol to register all individuals possibly exposed to these toxins and dangerous chemicals and to test each for possible side effects and, where appropriate, treat and compensate these same individuals.

## **ILLNESS CAUSED BY DEFOLIANTS, TOXINS AND OTHER HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES**

In our Nation's wars, members of the military have been exposed to numerous toxic and hazardous substances, many which have long term ill-effects on our service members and their progeny. Members of the military were exposed to chemicals and defoliants such as Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

Servicemembers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and southwest Asia, were exposed to a cocktail of poisons and other hazardous substances from "burn pits" and other sources.

The long-term effects of these poisons, toxins and other hazardous materials not only causes illness in the veterans but, also causes birth defects in the offspring of the veterans spanning more than one generation.

The true extent of the use and exposure to these toxic chemicals is still unknown as to how they were transported and sprayed in Korea, the Philippines and other locations, both stateside and overseas.

Sailors aboard the “Blue Water” Navy ships’ as well as numerous members of the Marines and Air Force flight crews were exposed by airborne and drinking water contaminants that the Department of Veterans Affairs denies occurred.

JWV supports legislation to establish eligibility for presumptive service-connection for “blue water” Navy Vietnam War servicemembers. JWV asks the Congress to ensure fair and consistent application of standards and procedures for adjudicating Agent Orange claims.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands that the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs acknowledge the true extent of the use of chemical and defoliants.

Furthermore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to provide adequate funding for further research into the effects of these toxins and other hazardous substances on the veterans and their families.

## **RECOGNITION OF MILITARY TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE**

Our members of the military acquire a unique set of job skills such as leadership, strength of character and physical well-being. Those who received specialized training such as medics had the opportunity to hone their occupational skill sets under trying conditions and in stressful environments. These skill sets, training and education often meet, and frequently exceed, the requirements of similar civilian occupations. Recognition by state and local governmental licensing and accreditation bodies should facilitate the transition from the military sectors to civilian life for those leaving the military.

The licensing and credentialing of these qualified members of the military would provide the civilian workforce with highly skilled, talented and motivated workers. Members of the all-volunteer military dedicated themselves to defending this great Nation and may have lost the opportunity to enter the civilian workforce at entry level positions but have acquired similar skills in a military/alternative environment.

## **UPGRADE VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS**

JWV urges the extension of the de-limiting employer tax incentives under the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act. Veterans should be allowed to enroll in the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) to complete their requirements for licensure / certification. JWV recommends that transfer-of-benefits be authorized under the P911 GI Bill from catastrophically disabled veterans to their full-time Caregivers in cases in which a transfer action did not occur prior to the veterans' medical discharge or retirement.

JWV urges proportional upgrades to the Title 10 Montgomery GI Bill (Chap. 1606, 10 USC) program to keep pace with the rising cost of education.

## **SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE**

It has appeared in the media that the Department of Defense will be continue to rely heavily on the members of the National Guard and Reserve to supplement and complement the active component of the military services. Any diminution in benefits and/or pay may result in a lower number of men and women volunteers entering and remaining in the National Guard and Reserve.

The National Guard and Reserve must be as prepared as the active component with the latest equipment in the military so as to enable the men and women in the National Guard and Reserve to move from their role as citizen-soldier to war fighter without the necessity of up-training after activation but prior to taking their place in the field.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to resist and defeat any efforts placed before it by the Department of Defense to decrease the pay and benefits now received by members of the National Guard and Reserve and to ensure that the members of the National Guard and Reserve are trained and equipped with the same tools of war that the members of the active component rely upon as warfighters.

## **POW-MIA**

JWV continues to strongly support the need for this country to account for all the missing POW-MIA individuals. There are still 1,624 personnel listed by the Department of Defense as missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

The number of Americans now listed by DoD as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War, is 9061. This is a step in the right direction, providing comfort to families and the honor due our fallen military comrades.

JWV remains committed to supporting the National League of POW-MIA Families in general and our dear friend, Ann Mills Griffiths, Chairwoman of the National League of POW-MIA Families, in particular, to gain a full accounting of those still missing.

### **NAMING OF VA HOSPITAL FOR TIBOR RUBIN**

Medal of Honor recipient Corporal Tibor Rubin, a member of Jewish War Veterans' Orange County Post 760, in Anaheim, California, passed away on Saturday, December 5, 2015, near his home in Garden Grove, California. Now, more than ever, we should honor his name, his memory, and his service as part of the official name of the Veterans Administration Medical Center Long Beach, CA (VMAC).

We believe it is fitting that a tireless former POW and Korean War Medal of Honor recipient who continued to "soldier on" on behalf of other veterans be officially recognized for his extraordinary community service "above and beyond the call of duty." The justifications for our re-request are many. Medal of Honor recipients are rare. In this era of cynicism, renaming VAMC Long Beach for Tibor Rubin will be a lasting testament to his selfless service to his countrymen.

According to his Medal of Honor citation, Tibor Rubin was recognized for his selfless devotion to sick and infirmed soldiers by caring for them while in the POW camp. He used his survival skills gained in Mauthausen to treat them, and he risked his life to steal food from local farms to feeds his fellow, and starving, POWs. He is well-known in both the Jewish and Long Beach communities and was highly regarded as a selfless servant to veterans, and logged thousands of hours of hands-on moral support to returning veterans.

By renaming VAMC Long Beach in Tibor Rubin's honor, California has an opportunity to put forward a non-controversial bi-partisan bill which will stand as a testament to our community, our state and our nation that Congress continues to be supportive and appreciative of our selfless and devoted veterans who sacrifice so much for so little.

## **OPPOSITION TO THE CONCERNED VETERANS FOR AMERICA'S "FIXING VETERANS HEALTH CARE: THE PLAN TO DISMANTLE VA HEALTH CARE"**

The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America supports expanding the VA Health Care System to all veterans who served honorably.

Independent analyses have shown that the VA Health Care System is the best hospital system in the United States including Phillip Longman's Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care is Better than Yours.

The Congressional Budget Office in 2014 issued a report which showed the least-expensive means for administering veterans' health care is through the VA Health Care System.

The Concerned Veterans for America [CVA] of Arlington, Virginia, in 2015 published a report titled "Fixing VA Health Care."

CVA is a political organization [staffed by veterans] which receives millions of dollars in secret private funding and involves itself in partisan political direct mail campaigns as reported by the *Washington Post*, *Arizona Republic* and *dailykos.com*.

Spokesmen for CVA reportedly often misstate information as reported by *Stars and Stripes*.

Ideas in said report [pp. 43-44] would [1] limit VA health care only to those veterans who have a service-connected disability, [2] allow those still eligible for VA health care to opt for private care with co-pays and deductibles, and [3] drastically reduce the number of VA health-care facilities.

The enactment of the proposed changes by CVA would result in the eventual dismantling of the VA Health Care System by reducing the number of eligible veterans, reducing the number of those veterans still using VA facilities through privatization and by limiting available VA facilities.

The American Legion opposes privatization and vouchers for veterans' health care.

The American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars want the VA for its expertise and resources caring for veterans as reported by *USA Today*.

The Paralyzed Veterans of America questions how specialized-medical services can be maintained should the CVA proposals ever be enacted.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America [JWV] joins with the American Legion in its opposition to privatization and vouchers; and joins with the American

Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars in support of maintaining VA health-care service as reported by USA Today.

Therefore, JWV opposes the idea of any political organization masquerading as a veteran's organization.

Therefore, JWV urges Congress not to treat CVA as a veterans' organization.

## **SERVICE CAMPAIGN RIBBON**

Federal regulations allow the awarding of the Korean Service Campaign Ribbon to veterans who served in the Korean Theater during the period June 27, 1950, and July 27, 1954.

There were many other service personnel who served in our military in support of the Korean conflict during the same time period who did not serve within the Korean Theater.

The importance of these service personnel in other locations were considered as supporting the war efforts.

As a specific example, it has been documented by many sources and supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in April, 1988 that stated the rigors of services in the Alaskan Air Command were harsh and considered by the United States military as an overseas theater during the Korean War.

This request is similar to the American Campaign Ribbon awarded by the Departments of the Army and the Navy for service during the period December 7, 1941 and March 2, 1946 in the American theater area.

Therefore, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA requests that the Department of Defense and all the Departments of the Military branches consider establishing an appropriate campaign ribbon to those military personnel who did not serve in-country during a time of the Korean conflict, but were on active duty in support of the conflict in other locations. The eligibility definition to read "... Campaign ribbons shall be awarded for service in the armed forces of the United States in any foreign war, insurrection, or expedition during a time of conflict recognized by the Government of the United States of America and/or as set forth in the Congressional Charter..."

## **CONCLUSION**

Chairman Isakson and Chairman Miller our great nation must care for its veterans. Our country must, therefore, pay the costs involved.

JWV believes that veterans' benefits are earned through service and sacrifice in defense of the nation and are not "entitlement" or "social welfare" programs. Oppose deficit-driven political decisions that would lump earned veterans' benefits with un-related civilian entitlement programs. At our annual national convention our members work assiduously to develop our legislative priorities. Our dedicated resolutions chairman, Past National Commander Michael Berman, works diligently to develop our resolutions and to bring them before our convention delegates. Following further fine-tuning by our convention delegates our resolutions are finalized, and become our legislative priorities for the coming year. We thank you for the opportunity to present them to you today.



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## **Veterans Helping Veterans**