



AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

JUNE 1, 2020

News Driving the Week

- The stress, anxiety, and forced isolation because of the coronavirus pandemic may have increased [American's risk of suicide](#), including for veterans. But that risk could continue to grow even as the pandemic begins to lessen, experts warn. Veterans struggling financially because of the pandemic -- who lost work, took pay cuts or furloughs or who became homeless or were at risk of losing their homes -- could continue to carry those burdens, complicated further by existing health issues and an expectation their stress and other mental health concerns will disappear when the crisis ends. In mid-March, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie told veteran service organizations calls to the Veteran Crisis Hotline rose 12 percent. That's why researchers said they're sounding the alarm now, to try to get resources to veterans hopefully in time to save lives. One of those resources is telehealth. The VA has moved much of its mental health care online or over the phone as its hospitals and clinics shuttered or limited patients during the outbreak.

- Veterans have been denied benefits during the coronavirus pandemic because their [compensation and pension exams at the Department of Veterans Affairs](#) have been canceled. A backlog of compensation and pension exams is growing -- with more than 230,000 delayed during the pandemic so far -- and VA has yet to communicate its plan to address that backlog. One day after the forum, VA announced that in-person exams would begin to resume at some of its hospitals. VA officials said the department is working to review wrongly denied claims, but Matthew Doyle, Veterans of Foreign Wars national legislative service associate director, said the veterans VFW is working with are being required to file supplemental claims or go through higher-level reviews. "We need to provide veterans with more choice of how their exams are scheduled" or allow them to cancel their appointments without penalty, Doyle said.

- House lawmakers passed a [cost-of-living increase for veterans](#) benefits in 2021, so long as Social Security officials approve one, too. The legislation now heads to the Senate, where the normally routine bill could face more challenges



this year as lawmakers on Capitol Hill juggle regular business with responding to the coronavirus pandemic, which has delayed other votes and committee hearings. The bill, sponsored by Navy veteran Rep. Elaine Luria, was approved by voice vote in the House and affects disability and dependent compensation, clothing allowances and dependency and indemnity compensation to surviving spouses and children and more.

- According to the Marijuana Policy Project just under 2 million Californians, or around 3.4 percent of the state's population, get prescriptions for medical marijuana each year. But because of federal drug laws that still consider marijuana to be as dangerous as heroin, the [Department of Veterans Affairs will not prescribe marijuana to its patients](#). Even as marijuana legalization continues to expand across the country (33 states have some form of legal marijuana on their books and well-known former politicians have become spokesmen for the cannabis industry), many of the nation's 18.2 million veterans occupy an uncomfortable limbo between rapidly liberalizing cultural attitudes and an unbending federal standard that hasn't changed since the 1970s. Veterans looking for alternatives to addictive and dangerous opioids and other pharmaceuticals are effectively prevented from using marijuana, by price, policy and quite often the ongoing stigma that marijuana still carries.

AMVETS in the News

[Retired U.S. Marine salutes, stands on DC median for 24 hours to raise awareness for veteran suicide](#)

A retired U.S. Marine walked onto a concrete median in Washington D.C. on Sunday and stood for a period of 24 hours -- with the hope of bringing awareness to veteran suicide. Retired U.S. Marine Staff Sgt. Tim Chambers, 45, held a salute for 22 minutes at the beginning of the first hour to symbolize the American veterans who take their own life each day. For each hour after, the salute dropped by one minute before it eventually counted down to zero. The specific event -- which highlighted veteran suicide for the first time this year -- is now called Rolling To Remember. While the Memorial Day weekend ride was canceled in D.C. due to the coronavirus, more than one hundred riders still showed up to watch Chambers.

Upcoming Events

House Veterans Affairs Committee

Health Subcommittee

Mission Readiness: VA's Preparedness for Natural Disasters During a Pandemic
Wednesday, June 3 2:00 PM

Watch [here](#)

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Review of the FY2021 and FY2022 Advance Appropriations Request and Oversight of CARES Act Supplemental Appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs

Wednesday, June 3 3:00 PM

Watch [here](#)

AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV



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