

Mail Call

Department of Louisiana

December 2024 | Issue 6



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UPCOMING EVENTS:

**National Pearl Harbor
Remembrance Day**
December 7, 2024

Mid-Winter Conference
January 23-26, 2025
The Bentley Alexandria

**State Commander's
Testimonial**
March 22, 2025
Post 9854

****More information to come!**

VFW Day of Service
May 3, 2025

State Convention
June 26-29, 2025
The Bentley Hotel Alexandria &
Convention Center

"Generations Continuing to Serve"

DISTRICT MEETINGS

DISTRICT 2 MEETINGS:

Feb 22, 2025 **Post 3750**
 Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch (\$10) 12:00noon

State Rep, JVC, Sharee Arends

April 26, 2025 **Post 3267**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch (\$10) 12:00noon

State Rep, QM, Elvin "Ray" Bass

DISTRICT 3 MEETINGS:

Jan 11, 2025 **Post 4222**

Registration 9:00 am
 Joint Meeting 10:00 am
 Meeting 10:30 am
 Lunch(\$8) 12:00noon

State Rep, JVC, Sharee Arends

April 26, 2025 **Post 4222**

Registration 9:00 am
 Joint Meeting 10:00 am
 Meeting 10:30 am
 Lunch(\$8) 12:00noon

St. Rep, SVC. James Prestenback

DISTRICT 4 MEETINGS:

Feb 15, 2025 **Post 1982**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch(\$8) 12:00noon

State. Rep, ADJ, Carl Karnish

May 3, 2025 **Post 9822**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch(\$8) 12:00noon

State Rep, QM, Elvin "Ray" Bass

DISTRICT 5 MEETINGS:

April 26, 2025 **Post 3619**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 12:00noon

St. Rep, Cmd Debbie McElhannon

DISTRICT 7 MEETINGS:

May 17, 2025 **Post 6720**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch(\$10) 12:00noon

State Rep, QM, Elvin "Ray" Bass

DISTRICT 8 MEETINGS:

Jan 18, 2025 **Post 3785**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 12:00noon

State Rep, QM, Elvin "Ray" Bass

April 26, 2025 **Post 3784**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 12:00noon

DISTRICT 9 MEETINGS:

Feb 15, 2025 **Post 5735**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 11:00 am

St. Rep, SVC. James Prestenback

April 26, 2025 **Post 3652**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 11:00 am

State Rep, ADJ, Carl Karnish

DISTRICT 10 MEETINGS:

Feb 15, 2025 **Post 3139**

Registration 10:00 am
 Meeting 10:30 am
 Lunch (\$10) 12:00noon

State Rep, JVC, Sharee Arends

May 3, 2025 **Post 7643**

Registration 10:00 am
 Meeting 10:30 am
 Lunch (\$10) 12:00noon

State. Rep, ADJ, Carl Karnish

DISTRICT 11 MEETINGS:

Jan 18, 2025 **Post 3615**

Registration 9:30 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 12:00noon

State Rep, JVC, Sharee Arends

May 10, 2025 **Post 1809**

Registration 9:30 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch 12:00noon

St. Rep, Cmd Debbie McElhannon

DISTRICT 12 MEETINGS:

Jan 11, 2025 **Post 4588**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch (\$10) 12:00noon

State Rep, JPC, Ron Delaney

May 10, 2025 **Post 5951**

Registration 9:00 am
 Meeting 10:00 am
 Lunch (\$10) 12:00noon

State Rep, JVC, Sharee Arends



**The Department Headquarters Staff would like
 to wish everyone a Merry Christmas & Happy
 New Year!**

State Commander, Debbie McElhannon
 State Quartermaster, Elvin R Bass
 State Adjutant, Carl Karnish
 Administrative Assistant, Tori LeBlanc

ALL AMERICAN ELIGIBILITY

To qualify for All-American, a minimum donation of \$125 must be donated to VMS by June 30, 2025. VMS donations will only be handled through the Dashboard. All Posts must click on the "VMS Donation" tab on the Dashboard to donate. The link will point them to OMS. Please do not send checks to the National Headquarters. If a Post does not use a credit card, the Post will send their donation to their Department HQs and the Department HQs will submit the donation for their Post. Credit will automatically update on the Dashboard daily. Overseas Departments will donate to the other programs through the link also in lieu of participation. This will automatically update daily. When you make your \$125.00 or more donation, all that needs to be entered into the box is 125 or more. The \$ and .00 are not required in the donation amount box.

MID WINTER CONFERENCE January 23-26, 2025 The Bentley Hotel

REGISTRATION:

Submit your Registration and Payment online by visiting www.vfwdeptla.org under Events - Mid Winter Conference

****PLEASE ONLY REGISTER THE MEMBERS FROM YOUR POST THAT WILL BE ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE!**

BANQUET TICKETS:

Purchase your Banquet Ticket now! See form in this Mail Call or visit our website to purchase online. (www.vfwdeptla.org under Events - Mid Winter Conference) Tickets are \$30.00 per person!

IMPORTANT REMINDER ABOUT OMS:

Please be advised that the Online Membership System (OMS) will be shutting down at 4:00 p.m. CST on Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024. Any transactions that are submitted through OMS on Dec. 31, up to the closing time, will be posted to Memstats and Post Query later that evening and available for viewing the morning of Jan. 4, 2025.

VFW 125TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE POST PROGRAM SIGN UP

We encourage as many of our VFW posts to get signed up to become a 125th Anniversary community service Post. To date, we have forty-three. Please help us spread the word. Our birthday was a couple of days ago, but our celebration will last the rest of the year and conclude at the National Convention in Columbus. The VFW National Commander invites all VFW Posts to be the catalyst to get their communities involved in commemorating the contributions of all veterans and their family members to our country during the VFW 125th Anniversary year. In addition, it is hoped you will encourage your community to study the history of this era to help ensure a safer and better tomorrow. Have our posts click this link <https://vfw125.org/get-involved/> and click on the red Accept Invitation icon for further information.

YOUTH PROGRAMS DEADLINE

AMERICANISM, PATRIOT'S PEN, & VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

Posts should submit their first place entries to their Districts by **December 5th**.
DISTRICTS SHOULD HAVE JUDGING COMPLETED AND FIRST PLACE ENTRIES SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT BY **DECEMBER 16th!**

SPIRIT AWARD NOMINATION

Do you know someone in our Department that has gone ABOVE AND BEYOND the call of duty? Maybe that person has dedicated a good bit of their time to helping Veterans, no matter the task. If so, then submit their name and a brief description of what they have done to the Department for our Spirit Award nomination. You can email the nomination to Tori: lastatevfw@yahoo.com.

We are looking forward to any nominations we receive. It's such an honor to present this award each year!

STATE COMMANDER'S MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE/TOP RECRUITER AWARD FOR DECEMBER

****SEE PAGE 5 FOR MORE DETAILS!**

STATE COMMANDER'S MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE WINNER FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

The top recruiter for the month of November is Paul Stone from Post 5951!



COMMANDER IN CHIEF'S CHALLENGE

The monthly Commander's Challenge is rolling along as we see our Posts making great strides in recruiting and upgrading members to Life membership! To remind everyone, every month during the 2024-25 membership year, we will reward our Posts who lead their divisions in recruiting as well as Life Member upgrades.

Every month, we will award points to our Posts as follows:

- Recruit a new annual member into the Post: 1 point
- An annual or lapsed member converts to Life: 5 points
- Recruit a new Life member into the Post: 10 points

Every month a different award will be given out to the Posts that lead their divisions, and at the end of the year at our National Convention, each Post will be recognized for their achievement on a video display at the Membership booth.

NOVEMBER'S winners will receive a 3' x 5' VFW outdoor flag to fly proudly at the Post, parades, and events.

100 % POST

Congratulations to the Districts & Post that have reached 100% already this year!

1982	2885	3665	3693
3793	4201	4215	4224
5187	5442	5951	7017
9608	9822	12065	12182
12203			
Dist 4			

MEMBERSHIP MONDAY WEBINAR VIA ZOOM

Membership Monday training webinar will be on **DECEMBER 2ND @ 2:00 P.M.** Topic: "The Importance of Buddy Checks". This time of year, we need to be diligent about checking in on our comrades and strengthening those bonds that hold the VFW together. Join us for this online training and learn how to reach out and make sure we're all taking care of each other. Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/VFWMembership> to learn how to attend this online training.

TOP RECRUITER
DECEMBER
AWARD



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@vfwdeptla.org!

Future National Convention Dates:

August 9-14, 2025

Columbus, OH

July 31-Aug 4, 2027

Milwaukee, WI

Aug 15-20, 2026

Salt Lake City, UT

Aug 5-10, 2028

San Antonio, TX

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!

VFW Department of Louisiana Headquarters CONTACT INFORMATION:

Office- 225-928-5025 | www.vfwdeptla.org

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

State Quartermaster

Elvin R. Bass

Email: lavfwqm@yahoo.com

State Adjutant

Carl Karnish

Email: adj@vfwdeptla.org

State Administrative Assistant:

Tori LeBlanc

Email: lastatevfw@yahoo.com

State Commander:

Debbie McElhannon

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Department Conference/ Convention Dates:

2024-2025

Mid Winter

January 23-26, 2025

State Convention

June 26-29, 2025

2025-2026

CofA/Officer Training

August 22-24, 2025

Mid Winter

January 22-25, 2026

State Convention

June 18-21, 2026

CoA/Officer Training

August 28-30, 2026

State Commander's Special Project Brothers and Sisters in Arms

[Click here for more information, please visit https://www.brotherandsisterptsddogs.org](https://www.brotherandsisterptsddogs.org)

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>



From the desk of the State Commander...

Thank you for what you do for veterans. So many posts are doing great things to serve veterans. Make sure you give yourself credit in the community service dashboard for everything that you are doing. The end of this month marks the halfway mark for this program year. Now is a good time to take out your checklist for All-State and All-American and make sure you are on track if you want to make either. Districts remember that you must have your PP and VOD entries uploaded in the Scholars App by 16 December. I want to congratulate Paul Stone for earning the November membership award. That makes two months in a row. Congratulations Paul and great job. Who will get the December membership award? I appreciate everyone's hard work.

December is a time for celebration, spending time with family and remembering the true meaning of Christmas. Unfortunately, many people are alone this time of year when they see everyone else celebrating. Check on your comrades and neighbors; maybe even, invite them over or out to lunch, so they don't feel alone. I have decided to have a get together later in the year instead of having a Christmas Party. I hope each of you enjoy your Christmas and celebrations with family and friends. I am only a phone call away for anyone who needs to talk or wants to meet.

Districts should be close to completing all inspections. Remember, any discrepancies that are found during your annual inspection, need to be corrected, as soon as possible, to ensure your post can still vote on any elections. Make sure your trustees are completing all parts of the trustee reports. During my visits to the posts and district meetings, I have noticed that some posts are not following the VFW Rituals when holding meetings. Opening post ceremonies starts on Page 14, and the order of business can be followed using the traditional or contemporary order of business, followed by the closing ceremonies starting on page 20. Also, remember the initiation ceremonies, brief or ceremonial, for new members

Mid-Winter Conference (MWC) is just around the corner. We have many activities happening during MWC. You will need to register for most of them ahead of time and spaces are limited. Call the Department to register. We will have a tour of the Bentley on Friday. Each tour will last about 30 minutes and can only have 10 people each. District 8 members to include Tim and Robert volunteered to do oral interviews for members to tell their stories. You can sign up for times on Friday and Saturday from 9-12 and 1-5. We also have training and suicide prevention classes on Friday. Friday night is a karaoke contest, and Saturday is a card tournament; depending on how many registers for the card tournament, we may have to start on Friday. I look forward to MWC where we get to celebrate many achievements with comrades and students. Come out to MWC and celebrate everyone's achievements that they have worked so hard for. We will also announce the winners of the student programs. I look forward to seeing the entries and hearing the great essays.

My Commander's Testimonial will be 22 March. If anyone would like a ticket to the upcoming Commander's Testimonial see the flyer below and give us a call. Hotel rooms can be booked at The Cobblestone Inn and Suites. We also have Delta Downs Racetrack and Casino right down the road. We will have some really good food, auctions (bucket, silent and live) and a DJ. Come out to the big town of Vinton and enjoy some comradery.

Again, thank you for your hard work and dedication to serving and helping veterans.



**State Commander
Debbie McElhannon**

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

Comrades,

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving Day. Great time of the year to spend with family and friends.

As we approach Christmas, please check on all our members. A simple phone call to check on how they are doing can make the difference.

All VFW Programs should be finished judging by December 5th and forwarded to the State Chairman. If anyone needs assistance, please reach out to the Department.

Great job with recruiting! Let's continue our recruiting efforts and build our organization even stronger. Please don't just recruit and forget about them. Make sure you are educating and mentoring our new members. COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY! FOSTER COMRADSHIP!

Great job to all posts who are staying active in their communities and visiting our Veteran Homes!



**Sr. Vice Commander
James Prestenback**

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

Greetings Comrades,

November came and went in a flash! I hope everyone had a Blessed Thanksgiving with family and friends!

I know all VOD, Patriot's Pen and Americanism entries have been collected and should now be at District level! I'm excited for these kids to get the recognition and their winnings!!!

Keep working hard on membership! Remember, its not just a number when you treat them like they belong. Be welcoming, invite them to your Post and District activities so they can see what we do! If you sign up a member at large, provide them the contact information of the Post they are closest too, even provide that members contact information to that Posts commander so that they may reach out to that new member and invite them to an event.

While working on membership, do not forget there are other areas that will need to be accomplished if you are looking to obtain All-American and All-State. Keep up the great work!

I look forward to seeing each of you during my travels to the District meetings!



**Jr. Vice Commander
Sharee Arends**

A message from our State Adjutant....

Do You Seek To Understand Before Being Understood?

Communication. How important is Communication? I feel we all agree that communication is one of the most important skills in our lives. Many feel that communication is “me talking and you listening”. This has been a learned habit. We have been taught to read and write, taught how to speak and yet the one thing that impacts all of this is our ability to listen and understand the other person point of view.

To move your post forward into the 21st century we all need to listen to what our members are saying and what our community is saying. One of the greatest needs a person has is to have the feeling that they were listened to and understood. Please do not misunderstand “you are listening and understanding the other person feelings from THEIR purview with agreement”.

To solve problems or issues you must understand why or what is happening. We all have our ideas of what the issue is and we are all wanting a quick fix, but if we listen and understand and dive into the real reason something was done or what happen we then can influence the outcome and results. To have influence you need to be able to be influenced. So how do you become an influencer?

1. Listen first to understand. (Listen with the intent to understand not with the intent to respond.)
2. Repeat or paraphrase what the other person said. (Shows you listened to and understand their point of view)
3. Now It is your turn to be understood. (The other person listens to your point of view.)

How do you listen? Do you listen to understand or do you listen to respond?



**State Adjutant
Carl Karnish**

A message from our State Quartermaster....

Comrades,

I hope that you all enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday with your families. As you all know our State was hit by two hurricanes in September and November.. Several other States were also hit by Hurricanes as well. On behalf of our Department, I am honored to say that as of today we have received \$10,048.95 in donations for Disaster Relief from the VFW Districts and Post in our State. We have distributed \$2,425 to members in our Department that have sent in applications for disaster relief, and we have donated a total of \$13,000 to the Department's of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida for the disaster relief efforts in their state from Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton. Thank you to all of the Districts and Post in our Department that have helped make this Disaster Relief program possible.

Our Mid Winter Conference is a little over a month away. Post can register the members that will be attending the Conference on the Department's website. www.vfwdeptla.org under News - Mid Winter Conference. We have increased the cost of Banquet tickets to \$35.00 to help cover the cost of catering for the Saturday Night Banquet. I encourage all that plan to attend the Banquet to purchase their tickets ahead of time. Tickets can be purchased on the Department's website as well.

Department Headquarters will be closed Monday, December 23rd through Wednesday, January 1st for the Christmas and New Year Holidays. We will resume normal operations on Thursday, January 2, 2025.

I hope that you all have a blessed Holiday Season.



**State Quartermaster
Elvin Ray Bass**

A message from our State Surgeon....

Comrades,

As November blew us and we move into the holiday season, please keep all of our Brothers and Sisters in your thoughts. This is the most difficult time of the year for many people and our family isn't immune to this. We need to reach out and do BUDDY CHECKS on those members and friends that we don't see or hear from regularly. That could be the one thing that keeps them from making a terrible decision this holiday season.

VFW Post 3619 is hosting Assist Training this week with the help of the SaveCenla organization. If you feel like this is something you would like to host in your district or post, please get with me or them to schedule something. It is free! And, it could help us save a life. As stated above, this is the toughest time of year for some.

If you do decide to reach out to me, both my phone number and email are below. However, if you call, please leave a message as I don't answer my phone during my work day...my Boss doesn't like that.



**State Surgeon
Lawrence Koons**

A message from our State Chaplain....

Growing up, as a kid, I always looked forward to the holidays. Be it Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, or the fourth of July. As a child it was more about the gifts I would receive, family members I would have seen, or simply being out of school. As I have grown up the same things apply but for difference. I could care less about the presents I receive now but get immense joy seeing how the right gift can make my children's day. It often reminds me of the times when I was in Iraq and the gift of a bottle of water or a MRE would make the same difference in the locals. Heck even my platoon soldiers would get a bigger smile every time I would show up at the staging lanes with a pallet of rip-its.

In the same way the job we do for our local VFW communities this holiday season should give each of you those similar feelings. As we give extra time at our posts, hold toy drives, distribute toys to children, or just contribute to the USMC toys for tot's drive. We never do these things for ourselves but rather to give to others what otherwise they would do without. Often times the things that physically cost the least make the biggest impact. The gift of time. Time is the gift that doesn't have an earthly price but when we think of the fact that each day when we go to sleep, we have less of it than the day prior and no amount of money can buy anymore. When we think of things in those terms, we truly appreciate the cost of the jobs we undertake. Therefore, hold your heads a little higher and smile a little more. Often since my accident a few years ago I have told people to concentrate more on the things you have than on the things you want. I wish each of you a blessed holidays and don't hesitate to call on me.



**State Chaplain
David Fields**

COMMITTEEMAN'S CORNER

Season's Greetings from your Louisiana National Council of Administration Member. As I have been reviewing the daily membership reports from National it shows that Louisiana is ahead of where we were last year which is a good thing. One thing that does concern me is whether we are following the National By-Laws on vetting members into Post. Seeing members put into Post when there has been **NO** Post Meeting is not the way to do things, Section 102-103 of the Manual of Procedure is very clear on the correct way to handle this. Below are those 2 sections for everyone to have at their disposal.

Sec. 102 - Applications - Affiliation of New Members. Every application for membership must be submitted on an approved, signed application outlining the applicant's honorable service, eligibility and other pertinent information. Proof of service to establish eligibility for membership rests with the applicant. The Post is responsible for assuring the eligibility of every member accepted to membership. With respect to active duty military personnel currently performing service qualifying for membership, applications may be submitted on their behalf by a member who shall certify the requisite qualifications for membership based on personal knowledge concerning the applicant and shall be acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Section 103. Active duty military personnel admitted to membership under such procedure shall, within a reasonable time, sign the application, personally certifying eligibility and subscribing to the obligation of membership. The application shall bear the name and the ID number of the member recommending the applicant and the recommendation of the Post Reviewing Committee.

Sec. 103 - Election. Applications. After the applicant has filled out the application card, it should be provided to the Post Adjutant or Quartermaster, together with the dues (and admission fee, if applicable). A receipt shall be given to the applicant. An applicant may be recommended after eligibility has been fully determined by the Post Reviewing Committee. With respect to a Department Member-at-Large, the National Organization and/or the Department Headquarters will be responsible for eligibility determination. The original application of every member will be retained on file with the Adjutant. Balloting on Applications. Before voting on the application during a Post meeting, the Commander shall allow the members present an opportunity to state their objections, if any, to the admission of the applicant. Unless one member present shall request a written ballot, a vote shall be taken and a majority of the votes cast shall decide acceptance or rejection of the application.

The 2024 Southern Conference in Nashville was a very successful one as those in attendance can attest, next year we will be heading to Conroe, Texas from 7-9 November for the 2025 Convention. During the SC Convention Ken Corr from Florida suspended his campaign for NJVCIC so that now leaves 3 of us in the race. I cannot THANK the men and women of the Department of Louisiana enough for your support throughout this campaign. We are in the home stretch now and with 8 Endorsements, the Departments of Florida and South Carolina both endorsing it puts my campaign in a good position. Lets keep the push going until August 9, 2025 when the vote will finally takes place.

The monthly Council Updates are sent to all of the District Commanders for distribution to the Posts, if you are not receiving them please contact your District Commander or send me an email and I will send them to you.

I hope each of you have a very blessed Christmas and get to relax and spend time with family and friends. As we approach the Holiday Season, take time to contact those members you have not heard from in a while and make sure they are doing ok. Do not just wait until it is time to collect dues to contact your members, do it on a regular basis. Until next month, let's continue to renew, reinstate and recruit members into the Department of Louisiana VFW.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Louisiana Legislative Report NOVEMBER 2024

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.

November 4th:

Veterans Volunteer to Vet the Vote: VFW National Legislative Associate Director Joe Grassi participated in a veterans-service leaders meeting hosted by the nonpartisan organization We the Veterans and Military Families. To date, more than 162,400 veterans and military family members have answered the Vet the Vote program's call to serve as poll workers for the 2024 presidential election. "The integrity of the election is strengthened because of the selfless patriots who volunteer to safeguard and facilitate this process which is vital to our way of life," Grassi said. "We congratulate and thank all our outstanding veterans and military family members who have volunteered to serve as poll workers for the 2024 presidential election. If you haven't already, be sure to vote!" [Learn more.](#)

VA Secretary Briefs National Press Club Audience: VFW staff members attended an event held at The National Press Club in Washington, D.C., to hear remarks from VA Secretary Denis R. McDonough. The Secretary complimented veterans for their dedication to our nation's defense, praised VA employees for record-breaking performance caring for our veterans, provided an implementation update on the PACT Act, and recognized the plight of those who served at Karshi-Khanabad (K2). Acknowledging K2 veterans as some of the first to deploy after the 9/11 attacks, he noted the unhealthy environment to which they arrived in Uzbekistan, their consequent adverse medical conditions, and VA's actions to ameliorate their suffering. [Read](#) the transcript or [learn more](#) about K2 veterans.

TRICARE Open Enrollment: The annual TRICARE open enrollment season kicks off on Nov. 11, bringing important updates to beneficiary enrollment and premium payments. Starting on Jan. 1, 2025, TriWest Healthcare Alliance will take over as the new regional contractor for the TRICARE West Region. Payments currently made through military allotments will be automatically transferred to TriWest, but it's crucial for affected veterans to set up their recurring monthly payments directly with TriWest before the new year. Failing to do so may result in disenrollment from their TRICARE health plan. Notably, the TRICARE West Region will now encompass [26 states](#), an increase of six from the previous coverage. Be sure to check your state's status and find out more details.

Take VFW Health Care Survey: The VFW has developed a new survey to evaluate your health and your experiences navigating health care. Your feedback is vital to our advocacy efforts and to compile a report on this important topic. Help the VFW hold VA and Congress accountable by taking this short survey no matter where you receive care. [Take the survey.](#)

Honoring Past and Preserving Future: As Veterans' Day approaches, attention will focus on VA organizations, service members, and individuals to assist with the smooth functioning of these hallowed grounds and to learn about the sacrifices of those interred. Possible volunteer activities include laying holiday wreaths at gravesites, participating in beautification and restoration projects, playing live "Taps" at military funerals, and providing walking tours to visitors, among many others. [Learn more](#) about volunteering at a VA national cemetery and [locate one](#) near you.

November 11th:

FW Participates in Veterans Day Events: VFW National Jr. Vice Commander Tim Peters participated in activities in the Washington, D.C., area on Veterans Day, Nov. 11., beginning with a visit to the White House. From there Peters headed to Arlington National Cemetery where he and VFW Auxiliary National President Brenda Bryant presented a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt visited VFW comrades in eastern Tennessee affected by Hurricane Helene, then followed up with a visit to soldiers on U.S. Army installation Fort Campbell for Veterans Day.

United States Marine Corps Birthday: On Nov. 10, the United States Marine Corps celebrated its 249th birthday. Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric M. Smith, published a [birthday message](#) urging Marines to reflect on their legacy of sacrifice and commitment to freedom since 1775. He stressed the need for exceptional standards and discipline to prepare for future threats, and asserted that while technology may evolve, the Marines' ethos remains steadfast. Happy Birthday, Marines!

VA Cares for Veterans in Any Clime or Place: Natural disasters can happen anywhere at any time, but usually without substantial warning. VA benefits continue in these chaotic conditions, but unorthodox methods may be needed to ensure uninterrupted support. Mobile clinics, special one-time payments, additional months of certain benefits, instant loan approvals for life insurance, and extended grace periods for premiums are some of the tools VA uses to aid veterans in dire circumstances. Additionally, Public Contact Teams deployed to local shelters or Disaster Recovery Centers enable on-site VA assistance to connect veterans with health care and other services including housing case management. [Learn more.](#)

Military Recruitment Rises Despite Ongoing Challenges: The Department of Defense (DOD) has reported it successfully recruited 12.5% more personnel in fiscal year 2024 than the previous year, increasing the number of recruits from 200,000 to 225,000. The armed services saw a rise in written contracts and a larger pool of candidates entering the delayed entry program. However, despite these gains recruitment remains challenging due to low interest among youth, a competitive job market, and a decline in eligibility of young adults. Many people who are 17-24 years of age have little to no connection to military service, and the majority would need waivers to serve. To improve awareness and understanding, DOD is launching campaigns on military service value and opportunities. [Read more.](#)

November 18th:

Call to Action for Dole Act: H.R. 8371, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, would provide enhancements to critical health care services for veterans and caregivers who need help now and cannot wait any longer. It has bipartisan support in the Senate but is not supported by Democrats in the House. Contrary to certain opposing voices, this IS a good piece of bipartisan-negotiated legislation that had input from numerous organizations representing veterans, caregivers, and survivors from around the country. [Tell your representatives to pass H.R. 8371](#), Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, to enhance health care services for veterans, caregivers, and survivors.

VFW Statement for House Subcommittee Hearing: VFW National Legislative Associate Director Nancy Springer provided a statement for the record for a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs' hearing on a review of funeral operations at VA national cemeteries. She commented on the National Cemetery Administration's goal to provide 95% of veterans with reasonable burial options within a 75-mile radius of their homes, the status of memorial affairs technology modernization, and the indefinite suspension of military caisson support at Arlington National Cemetery. [Read the testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 19:20 mark.

VFW Speaks on Panel for Transitioning Service Members: VFW National Veterans Service Assistant Director of Field Operations Cindy Noel participated in a Veterans Voices program event in Washington, D.C., hosted by *The Hill*. She spoke on a panel titled "Saluting Our Heroes: Transitioning from Military to Civilian Life" along with other representatives from veteran organizations. Noel spoke about how it is critical that transitioning service members have access to accredited claims representatives, like VFW Service Officers, to file for VA disability benefits before leaving the military. She explained that this is a key part of the transition process to ensure veterans have access as early as possible to the benefits they have earned. [Watch the video.](#)

TRICARE Open Enrollment Now: Veterans have until Dec. 10 to take advantage of TRICARE's open enrollment season. The health care provider is bringing important updates to beneficiary enrollment and premium payments. Starting on Jan. 1, 2025, TriWest Healthcare Alliance will take over as the new regional contractor for the TRICARE West Region. Payments currently made through military allotments will be automatically transferred to TriWest, but it's crucial for affected veterans to set up their recurring monthly payments directly with TriWest before the new year. Failing to do so may result in disenrollment from their TRICARE health plan. Notably, the TRICARE West Region will now encompass [26 states](#), an increase of six from the previous coverage. Be sure to check your state's status and find out more details.

Military Environmental Exposure Evaluations Program: Veterans Exposure Team-Health Outcomes Military Exposures (VET-HOME) is a new VA program that uses telehealth to perform military environmental health registry evaluations. VET-HOME VA clinicians will create a detailed exposure history, record symptoms or abnormalities potentially related to the military environmental exposures, conduct a physical examination (or review the results of a previous examination), and inform veterans of their eligibility for one of VA's six environmental health registries. [Read more](#) about VET-HOME or locate an [accredited representative](#) for help filing a claim.

Changes Coming to VA Secure Sign In: VA has issued changes for signing into your VA.gov or My HealtheVet accounts. Currently, there are four ways to sign in to your VA accounts: LOGIN.GOV, ID.ME, My HealtheVet, and DS Logon. Both My HealtheVet and DS Logon will be discontinued for accessing VA accounts. My HealtheVet sign in will be available until Jan. 31, 2025. Veterans, family members, caregivers, and survivors with VA accounts are encouraged to transition how they sign in to access these accounts prior to that date. [Read more.](#)

November 25th:

House Passes Dole Act: *The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*, [H.R. 8371](#), passed in the House with a bipartisan vote of 389-9. This [legislative package](#), known as the Dole Act, is being slated for a vote in the Senate. If signed into law, it would fund a range of enhancements vital to critical health care services for veterans and caregivers who need help now and cannot wait any longer. See how your member of Congress [voted](#).

VFW Speaks at Women Veteran Caucus Event on Transition: VFW National Legislative Deputy Director Kristina Keenan spoke at the final event of the Servicewomen and Women Veterans Caucus of the 118th Congress, led by Reps. Chrissy Houlahan, Jen Kiggans, Derrick Van Orden, and Brad Wenstrup, all of whom are veterans. The discussion centered around the unique challenges that women face when transitioning out of the military such as service-connected injuries that affect fertility, mental health effects of military sexual trauma, and barriers to accessing benefits due to child care constraints. Keenan explained that it is critical that all transitioning service members have access to a service officer to file their pre-discharge VA disability claims. "We know that veterans are vulnerable to suicide during the first year after separation from the military. We also know that veterans who use their VA benefits and health care have a lower risk of suicide. Eliminating the gap between service and access to VA is incredibly important and our service officers can facilitate that transition." She cited VFW-supported legislation -- [H.R.3933](#), *TAP Promotion Act*, and [H.R.4157](#), *Not Just a Number Act* -- that would improve the transition process and gather data regarding women veterans and suicide risks.

VFW Speaks on Panel for Transitioning Service Members: VFW National Veterans Service Assistant Director of Field Operations Cindy Noel participated in a Veterans Voices program event in Washington, D.C., hosted by *The Hill*. She spoke on a panel titled "Saluting Our Heroes: Transitioning from Military to Civilian Life" along with other representatives from veteran organizations. Noel spoke about how it is critical that transitioning service members have access to accredited claims representatives, like VFW Service Officers, to file for VA disability benefits before leaving the military. She explained that this is a key part of the transition process to ensure veterans have access as early as possible to the benefits they have earned. [Watch the video.](#)

Holiday Overseas Mail Deadlines Approaching: The U.S. Postal Service is preparing for the holiday season as many families spend holidays apart due to military service. In order to ensure overseas packages are delivered before Dec. 25, it has provided the following deadlines: Dec. 9 for all Air/Army Post Office (APO), Fleet Post Office (FPO) and Diplomatic Post Office (DPO) addresses with AE zip codes using Priority Mail and First-Class Mail; and Dec. 16 for APO/FPO/DPO addresses using USPS Priority Mail Express. Actual delivery dates may vary. [Read more.](#)

Annual Report on Military Suicide: The Department of Defense has released its [Calendar Year 2023 Annual Report on Suicide in the Military](#) that provides data on suicide rates among service members and their dependents, along with details of ongoing prevention efforts. The report indicates a total force rate increase in 2023 of 9% in suicide deaths per 100,000 service members compared to 2022, primarily involving young, enlisted men and the use of firearms. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin launched a suicide prevention campaign in September 2023 that focuses on five key areas: fostering a supportive environment, improving mental health care, addressing stigma, revising training, and promoting lethal means safety. [Read more.](#)

Updated Procedures Facilitate Base Access: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DOD) have announced an improved base access process. Since Nov. 1, entering DOD installations became easier for veterans and their caregivers. In the words of VA Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher, "DOD installations provide numerous benefits and critical services to our nation's Veterans, including health care. We are grateful for our partnership with DOD and the ability to implement these updates to make military installation access easier for Veterans and their caregivers." This partnership also recently facilitated obtaining health care for some veterans in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, New York, Tennessee, and Virginia. [Read more](#) about DOD access requirements

Respectfully,

Matthew J. West

Matthew J. West

VFW, Department of Louisiana

National Legislative Committee Member 2020-2026

**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS, DEPT OF LA
TENTATIVE MID WINTER CONFERENCE AGENDA
JAN 23, 24, 25, 26, 2025
THE BENTLEY HOTEL
200 Desoto St., Alexandria, LA.**

VFW

Thursday – January 23, 2025

4:00pm – 5:30pm	Registration	TBD (2 nd Floor)
6:00 pm	Convention Committee MTG	Board Room

Friday – January 24, 2025

(Officers dress is Business Casual or Cmdr.'s Polo)

7:00am – 9:00am	Breakfast	Bayou Chicou
9:00am – 11:30am	Registration	Lobby
9:00am – 12:00pm	Interviews	Boardroom
11:00	Cook Off (Any soup or gumbo)	Outside
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	
12:30pm – 4:00pm	Registration	Lobby
1:00pm – 3:00pm	Workshop/Training (QM/CDR)	Ballroom 1 st Floor
1:00pm – 5:00pm	Interviews	Boardroom
2:00pm – 3:00pm	VA Benefits Seminar (Possible)	Bayou Robert
3:00pm – 5:00pm	Tour of Bentley Hotel (30 mins ea.)	10 ppl ea. tour
3:30pm – 4:30pm	Suicide Prevention (limited seats)	Bayou Robert
4:00pm - 5:00pm	Council of Administration	Ballroom 1 st Floor
5:00pm – 6:00pm	Suicide Prevention (limited seats)	Bayou Robert
NOTE Must Register ahead of time for Tour and Suicide Prevention		
5:00pm – 6:00pm	Budget Meeting	Ballroom 1 st Floor
6:00pm – 8:00pm	Buddy Poppy Hat Contest	Lobby 1 st Floor
	Auxiliary Fundraiser Dinner	
8:15pm	Karaoke Contest	Ballroom 1 st Floor
9:00pm	MOC & MOCA Meeting	Bayou Robert 2 nd Floor

Saturday – January 25, 2025

(Officers dress is Blues & Grays and/or Suit for Joint Opening)

7:00am – 9:00am	Breakfast	Bayou Chicou
8:45	VFW & Aux Officers Line Up	Lobby 1 st Floor
9:00am – 11:30am	Joint Opening	Ballroom 1 st Floor
9:00am – 11:30am	Registration	Lobby
9:00am – 12:00pm	Interviews	Boardroom
10:00am – 2:00pm	Blood Drive	Valet Area
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch(2 food trucks BBQ, hotdogs)	Valet area
12:00pm – 1:00pm	PSC Luncheon	Bayou Robert 2 nd Floor
12:30pm – 3:00pm	Registration	Lobby
1:00pm – 5:00pm	Interviews	Boardroom
1:15pm – 3:30pm	VFW Business Session	Ballroom 1 st Floor
6:30pm	Banquet (Dress is Banquet Attire)	Ballroom 1st Floor
8:15pm	Card Tournament	Ballroom 1 st Floor

VFW NATIONAL REP: NATIONAL ADJUTANT DAN WEST

Sunday – January 26, 2025

7:00am – 9:00am	Breakfast	Bayou Chicou
9:00am – 11:00pm	Final Business Session (if needed)	Ballroom 1 st Floor

HOSPITALITY ROOM – BEAUREGARD – 2ND FLOOR



MID-WINTER CONFERENCE

DATE: FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2025

TIME: 6pm-9pm

**PLACE: THE HOTEL BENTLEY
ALEXANDRIA, LA.**

PRICE: \$10/PERSON

(Send reservations to Department Treasurer Margaret Nixon at 3526 Anthony Rd, Florien, LA 71429)

COME CELEBRATE VFW NATIONAL HOME'S 100TH BIRTHDAY PARTY WITH US IN STYLE. COME DRESSED IN YOUR BEST 1920'S ATTIRE, HAVE DINNER AND DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY WITH MUSIC PROVIDED BY A DJ. THIS IS A FUNDRAISER FOR THE AUXILIARY.

SPECIAL PRIZES FOR BEST DRESSED WILL BE AWARDED. ALSO DON'T FORGET THE TABLES WILL BE JUDGED AS WELL.

2024-2025 Commander Shirts



\$50.00 EACH

VFW Members– Cash, Check (Made payable to Debbie McElhannon), Venmo (@debbiemc01), or CashApp (\$Debbie McElhannon)

VFW Auxiliary Members– Cash, Check (Made payable to Ella Wilson), or Venmo (ejwilson_72)

Additional questions contact Debbie @ 337-526-3695

SAVE THE DATE



TESTIMONIAL

STATE COMMANDER, DEBBIE MCELHANNON

March 22, 2025

Harrington LeBouef VFW Post 9854

2292 Highway 109 S

Vinton, LA 70668

Ticket Presale \$20.00

At the Door \$30.00

Doors Open at 4:00 P.M.

Auctions



Food



Music



Door Prizes and much more

Tickets may be purchased from District Commanders, at Mid-Winter Conference or by calling 337-324-0670 or 337-515-0811

Hotel reservations can be made at Cobblestone Inn & Suites, by calling or 337-589-9420 or 337-313-5014 and using the code "testimonial", a block of rooms has been reserved for those coming in for the event. We were blessed to get a great deal at \$85.00 per night, which includes a hot breakfast. Limited number of rooms downstairs for those who may need, please call ASAP.



Learn the skills. Help save a life.

Suicide is preventable. Anyone can make a difference.

- Two-day workshop in suicide intervention skills
- Learn and practice a life-saving intervention model
- Widely used by professionals and the general public

| Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training for Everyone 16+

Where: VFW Post 3619 Time: Day 1 - 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
1115 Hwy 27 Day 2 - 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
DeRidder, La

When: December 5-6, 2024

Cost: FREE (Must attend both full days)

REGISTER and more information: SAVECENLA.COM
Inquire: 337-519-1888; 337-288-0973

ASIST works. Learn more and see the evidence at www.livingworks.net/asist

