



2018-2019

NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



Since 1944, AMVETS (American Veterans) has been one of the largest Congressionally-chartered veterans' service organizations in the United States and includes members from each branch of the military, including the National Guard, Reserves, and Merchant Marine. We provide support for the active military and all veterans in procuring the benefits they have earned.

Annually, at our National Convention, AMVETS delegates vote on Resolutions that cover a variety of health care, benefits, and other military and veterans related issues. When passed, the Resolutions become part of the AMVETS legislative agenda for two years. As an organization, we advocate and lobby for all legislative agenda items, and from them, develop four key legislative priorities.

This compilation is organized by subject matter. Resolutions beginning with 18 expire after the 2019 National Convention; those beginning with 19 expire after the 2020 National Convention. I encourage each member of AMVETS to review the Resolutions set to expire after the 2019 Convention in Louisville, and consider resubmitting them so they can continue to be on our legislative agenda. Additionally, please consider other areas where AMVETS can make a legislative impact in the lives of those who have served this great nation. It is never too early to do submit a Resolution or Constitution & Bylaw Amendment to me.

As I work each day at AMVETS with the goal of improving current systems and our impact as an organization, the AMVETS mission statement is never far from my mind: *"To enhance and safe-guard the entitlements for all American Veterans who have served honorably and to improve the quality of life for them, their families, and the communities where they live through leadership, advocacy and services."*

I look forward to working with AMVETS members, other veterans' service organizations, and Congress to support and create legislation that works towards fulfilling our mission statement and legislative goals.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy Webb'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Amy' and last name 'Webb' clearly distinguishable.

National Legislative Policy Advisor
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AMVETS National Legislative Agenda

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BENEFITS

RESOLUTION 18 – 1

INCREASE VETERANS BURIAL BENEFITS

WHEREAS, the VA pays a higher level of burial benefits upon the death of a veteran who dies from a service-connected illness or disability and lesser burial benefits upon the death of a wartime veteran who dies from a non-service-connected illness or disability; and

WHEREAS, the current VA burial expense payment for a service-related death is up to \$2,000 for those occurring after September 11, 2001, or up to \$1,500 for deaths prior to September 11, 2001. For non-service related deaths VA will pay up to \$749 toward burial and funeral expenses for deaths on or after October 1, 2016 if hospitalized by VA at time of death, or \$300 if not hospitalized by VA at time of death. Due to the dramatic increase in private sector funeral expenses, this benefit has been seriously eroded over the years; and

WHEREAS, while these benefits were never intended to cover the full costs of burial, they now pay for only a small fraction of what they covered in 1973 when the federal government first started paying burial benefits; and

WHEREAS, the VA should provide the resources needed to meet increasing private-sector costs of burial; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS believes there is still a serious deficit between the original value of the plot allowance benefit and its current value. Congress should increase the plot allowance for all eligible veterans and expand the eligibility for the plot allowance for all veterans who might be eligible for burial in a national cemetery, not just those who served during wartime; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges Congress and the Administration to provide the resources required to meet the critical and sensitive nature of the National Cemetery Administration's mission thereby fulfilling the nation's commitment to all veterans who have served their country so honorably and faithfully.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 19 – 3

FIXING THE VBA CLAIMS PROCESSING & APPEALS SYSTEMS

WHEREAS, due to a growing backlog of disability compensation claims and appeals the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) set out to transform & modernize their benefits processing systems; and

WHEREAS, dramatic transformation of the claims and appeals processing systems have since occurred and significant progress can be measured towards shortening claims and appeals processing times; and

WHEREAS, additional resources are necessary for VBA to properly process claims and appeals; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS continues to monitor the progress in the veteran claims and appeals processing system and work as a stakeholder, seeking to address any shortcomings through legislation.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 3

CONCURRENT RECEIPT

WHEREAS, military retirees are paying for their own disability with their military retired pay. This unfair policy has adversely impacted disabled veterans and their families for more than a century, but was partially repealed by Congress in 2004.

WHEREAS, under current law disabled veterans with 20-plus years of active military service who are also in receipt of a VA disability determination of 50 percent or higher may retain both military retirement pay and their VA compensation; and

WHEREAS, the law did not provide the same equity to service-connected disabled military retirees with VA ratings of 40 percent or below, or Chapter 61 retirees who were medically retired with less than 20 years, regardless of VA disability rating; and

WHEREAS, a disabled veteran who does not retire from military service but elects instead to pursue a civilian career after enlistment expires can receive full compensation and full civilian retired pay. AMVETS believes that a veteran who has served this country for 20 years should have that same right and not be penalized for choosing a military career rather than a civilian career; and

WHEREAS, no other category of federal employee faces the same restriction on disability and retirement pay; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS supports legislation that would provide for the full and immediate concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability compensation, without offset, regardless of their VA rating percentage in order to end the unfair policy of forcing many military longevity retirees to forfeit some of their retired pay in order to receive equal amounts of disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 19 – 16

NEW PRESUMPTIVE CONDITIONS DUE TO VIETNAM SERVICE

WHEREAS, it has been well established by medical research that American veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam have experienced illnesses such as diabetes mellitus, chloracne, and ischemic heart disease that are considered presumptive conditions resultant from their service in Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, it took the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) more than a decade to accept medical research findings and recommendations, comparing Vietnam veteran deaths and illnesses to their non-Vietnam veteran counterparts, finally declaring those same conditions officially “presumptive” for VA medical care, and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Institute Of Medicine (IOM) issued its fourth and final directed research report to the VA, again finding that there is significant evidence to show that four additional medical conditions - hypothyroidism, bladder cancer, stroke, and hypertension - have been determined to meet the rigorous standards of probability of causation due to environmental exposures in the Republic of Vietnam, and

WHEREAS, the majority of Vietnam veterans are now in their sixties, seventies and beyond, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS petitions the U.S. Congress to urge expeditious adoption of the IOM recommendations to include hypothyroidism, bladder cancer, stroke, and hypertension as presumptive conditions for Vietnam veterans, and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS petitions the VA Secretary to expeditiously adopt the IOM recommendations and incorporate them into the standing rules and regulations of the Department, to the benefit of Vietnam veterans.

RESOLUTION 19-17

OPPOSE TRICARE INCREASES

WHEREAS, this nation has a moral obligation to provide quality health care to those who serve in the military; and

WHEREAS, there has been several attempts to shift health care costs from the Federal government to active duty, reserve, and retired military personnel and their families; and

WHEREAS, military retirees' premiums have already been paid by 20-plus years of service; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS oppose all efforts to increase TRICARE premiums; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS supports legislation that would protect the grandfathering provision for those currently serving and retirees, and that prohibits increases in health care costs for members of the Armed Services.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 4

SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN (SBP)

WHEREAS, military retirees can receive both military retired pay and VA disability compensation at the same time. Two types of benefits provide this dual receipt of pay: Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP), and Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC); and

WHEREAS, upon the retirees death their retired pay stops and if the retiree has elected to purchase a Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) by deductions from their retired pay then an annuity is paid monthly to eligible beneficiaries under the plan; and

WHEREAS, if the retiree has a VA disability and whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease eligible survivors of the retiree receive a benefit called Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC); and

WHEREAS, the AMVETS believes that a retiree who has served their country should not have their SBP offset against DIC it is inequitable because it discriminates and penalizes eligible beneficiaries of military retirees whose deaths are service connected warranting indemnification from our government separate from the annuity already paid for by the deceased from premiums deducted from their retired pay; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS petition Congress to enact legislation that would provide for the full and immediate concurrent receipt of SBP and DIC payments to all eligible survivors or beneficiaries without offset.

SOURCE: Departments of SC, WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 5

TINNITUS & HEARING LOSS PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE-CONNECTION

WHEREAS, many veterans, whether or not they served in combat or worked in certain occupational specialties, have higher than average incidences of hearing loss or tinnitus as a result of their time in service; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, the second highest service-connected disability granted by the VA has been for hearing loss and tinnitus; and

WHEREAS, various studies indicate that the majority of servicemembers are exposed to some form of auditory trauma, including high-level repetitive noise, during their time in service leading to some level of hearing loss and/or tinnitus and given these findings, reasonable doubt must be resolved in favor of veterans who suffered hearing loss and/or tinnitus as a result of their service in the military; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urge Congress and the VA to grant service-connection on a presumptive basis for any veteran diagnosed after discharge with hearing loss and/or tinnitus when there is evidence that the veteran:

- participated in combat operations;
- worked in a position or occupational specialty likely to have damaged the veteran's hearing;
or
- was exposed to any form of auditory trauma.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 2

VA CLAIMS & APPEALS

WHEREAS, as of April 2017 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has 373,519 claims pending for disability compensation and pension claims in addition to 97,592 that have been pending for more than 125 days, often referred to as backlogged claims; and

WHEREAS, due to the increasing complexity of both VA claims and appeals, the need for compliance with Court of Veterans Appeals claims decisions, continued VA requirements for repetitive and unnecessary examinations and the severe staffing shortages, progress on cases remains slow and unsatisfactory; and

WHEREAS, due to the impending drawdown, the demand for VA services and resources will continue to rise and is expected to remain high for the foreseeable future; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urge Congress to ensure adequate funding and trained staff levels for the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve upon the timeliness and accuracy of all claims and appeals being filed; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS push for the Veterans Benefit Administration to process timely and accurate claims the first time they are reviewed, as well as the immediate implementation of a uniform data claims processing system, as well as, improved training for both VA claims and appeals processors to ensure a timely and accurate claims and appeals process for every veteran.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

EMPLOYMENT & HOUSING

RESOLUTION 18 – 6

CIVILIAN CREDENTIALS FOR MILITARY TRAINING & EXPERIENCE

WHEREAS, AMVETS recognizes that it is in the best interest of our nation to have a strong and viable veterans' employment and training system in place. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate among our nation's veterans continues to be an area of intense focus and concern, much of which is related to issues of post-service licensure and credentials; and

WHEREAS, Congress has begun to recognize the fact that veterans of all eras, especially recently separated and older veterans, find it difficult to obtain meaningful, living-wage employment. The importance of licensing and credentialing, as an integral part of the overall veteran transition process, cannot be overemphasized; and

WHEREAS, while there are certain employment programs in place for veterans, such programs must have a pro-active, long-term career focus which, not only recognize the problems of licensing and credentialing, but develops workable solutions; and

WHEREAS, every year between 240,000 and 360,000 military members make the transition from military to civilian life and employment, and as the drawdown continues, more than a million service members are expected to transition over the next few years; and

WHEREAS, as a nation we need to be prepared to do our part to assist our transitioning service members with living-wage employment opportunities so that they become valued additions to our society and economy and are able to adequately support their families; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS should encourage Congress to engage in a national dialogue to include the Administration, DoD, VA, DOL, governors, state adjutant generals, employers, trade and professional associations, and licensing and credentialing entities, to establish a process so military training meets civilian certification and licensing requirements for states in which veterans choose to live once they leave the military.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 7

SUPPORT FOR VETERANS & SERVICEMEMBERS EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS & HOUSING

WHEREAS, AMVETS has become increasingly aware of veterans and military members being negatively impacted by unfair and prejudicial employment and housing practices; and

WHEREAS, American veterans comprise about 7 percent of the population of the United States, this means that much of the remaining 93 percent have no personal knowledge or experience with veterans or the military. Many of these individuals, whether consciously or unconsciously, have based their opinion of veterans and the military on the overwhelmingly negative stories portrayed in the media; and

WHEREAS, not only are many American veterans behind their contemporaries in education, employment and housing solely due to their service to our nation, but large numbers of National Guard and Reserve members are unemployed, in part due to preconceived prejudices surrounding the military; and

WHEREAS, there are currently numerous laws/programs on the books meant to assist veterans in their search for employment, education and housing, those laws/programs are not meeting the needs of American veterans; and

WHEREAS, many of the laws and programs currently in place are limited to assisting very specific groups of veterans, rather than all veterans – including National Guard/Reserve members who have been deployed – and there are sufficient legal options available to veterans who experience employment, education and/or housing discrimination; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS uses every resource at its disposal to ensure passage of legislation supporting veterans and servicemembers in securing equitable treatment in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 8

CONTINUE FIGHTING TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

WHEREAS, the streets of many American cities continue to be inhabited by veterans who lack adequate food and housing; and

WHEREAS, veteran homelessness has decreased over the last few years thanks to multi-agency efforts at the federal level; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of female veterans, many with dependent children, are joining the ranks of homeless veterans; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS ensure that the issue of veteran homelessness remains a priority for both the Administration and Congress; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages Congress to increase the availability of affordable housing; expand education/training programs; and provide employment opportunities until all veterans are properly housed and gainfully employed.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 9

HOMELESS WOMEN VETERANS' WITH CHILDREN

WHEREAS, women veterans are two to three times more likely to be homeless than any other group in the United States adult population; and

WHEREAS, the primary causes of homeless women veterans included unemployment, disability, poor health and lack of treatment for PTSD and/or anxiety problems; and

WHEREAS, a recent study done by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that more than 60% of organizations with Grant and Per Diem programs (GPD) did not have sufficient resources to provide housing for the children of veterans. Of the 52 that did provide housing, 70 percent had major restrictions, including the number of children per veteran and age limits; and

WHEREAS, homeless women veterans have traditionally had difficulty accessing housing services due to safety and security concerns. The GAO study found that over 25 percent of existing GPD programs providing transitional housing to homeless women veterans cited safety concerns as a barrier to service delivery. Without gender-specific safety and security standards for GPD programs, nearly one in 16 programs surveyed by the GAO reported incidents of sexual harassment or assault on women residents in the last five years prior to the study; and

WHEREAS, as a result of trying to implement gender-specific safety and security standards for homeless women veteran programs, those who have male children are further restricted from accessing available resources due to the fear that male children over a certain age present a safety threat; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges VA to implement programs for homeless women veterans that do not discriminate based on the number of children a woman has, or the gender of the children; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges to VA to ensure that women who are homeless or who at risk of becoming homeless are provided adequate mental health and employment counseling services.

SOURCE: Women Veterans Committee, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 11

STRENGTHENING RESERVE & NATIONAL GUARD EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

WHEREAS, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), forbids employers from discriminating or taking adverse action against an employee due to military service; and

WHEREAS, employers must give returning Reservists and National Guard personnel their old jobs back, or offer better jobs to them, and provide compensation at the level they would have received if they had been continuously employed there; and

WHEREAS, the enforcement provisions of the current USERRA legislation do not deter employers from willful violations of employment rights: Now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that it be made unenforceable any agreement that employers may arrange with employees to require arbitration of disputes arising under USERRA; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the award of attorney fees and actions to enforce USERRA be required, rather than merely authorized as under current law; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS support federal legislation that will strengthen USERRA and lower incidents of discrimination by employers against Reservists and National Guard personnel.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 10

SUPPORT VETERANS' PREFERENCE IN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

WHEREAS, AMVETS is committed to seeking full access to employment opportunities for our nation's veterans; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS has strongly supported federal, state, and local veterans' preference laws; and

WHEREAS, it is important that programs and policies at all levels of government continue to help veterans establish private businesses by providing them with technical, financial, and procurement assistance; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS support the strongest veterans' preference laws possible at all levels of government and oppose any attempt to weaken such laws.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

HEALTH CARE

RESOLUTION 18 – 13

EXPAND ELIGIBILITY FOR VA FAMILY CAREGIVER PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program provides a monthly stipend, respite care, mental and physical health care, and necessary training and certifications for caregivers of veterans who were severely injured or disabled on or after September 11, 2001; and

WHEREAS, the fact that severely injured or disabled veterans from other eras are ineligible to participate in the Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program is inequitable; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS believes that severely disabled veterans of all eras have made tremendous sacrifices and the family members who care for them are equally deserving of recognition, assistance and support; and

WHEREAS, DoD's Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living (SCAADL) program provides support to family caregivers of members of the military who are catastrophically disabled whether through injury or illness, the VA's Family Caregiver Program excludes veterans who require home care services as a result of serious illness; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges Congress to expand eligibility for the VA Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program to include veterans of all eras; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges Congress to fully align the VA and DoD assistance programs by including in its eligibility criteria veterans who require caregiver services as a result of a serious illness incurred in the line of duty.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 19 – 9

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

WHEREAS, family caregivers selflessly support wounded, injured, and sick veterans allowing for a greatly improved quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the utilization of family caregivers also plays a critical role in controlling and reducing health care costs by minimizing both inpatient and outpatient hospitalizations; and institutionalization; and

WHEREAS, family caregivers have been the primary source of support for severely injured or sick veterans; and

WHEREAS, studies have shown that improving family caregivers' well-being and minimizing the burden they carry, is critical to their being able to continue assisting their loved ones; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS should ensure that Congress continues the strictest oversight of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in-home and community based services for supporting family caregivers, while providing sufficient funding for the caregiver program, to include the newly passed MISSION Act which will allow caregivers of conflicts prior to September 11, 2001 to be part of the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 19 – 13

SUPPORT FOR VETERAN ACCESS TO MEDICINAL CANNABIS

WHEREAS, medicinal cannabis is currently legal in 30 states and the District of Columbia and a number of states have decriminalized the possession of small amounts of marijuana; and

WHEREAS, in 2016 the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) formally approved the first-ever randomized controlled trial to study the effectiveness of whole-plant cannabis as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in military veterans; and

WHEREAS, about seven or eight out of every 100 people will have PTSD at some point in their lives; approximately 8 million adults have PTSD during a given year; and about 10 of every 100 women develop PTSD sometime in their lives compared with about four of every 100 men; and

WHEREAS, there is evidence that medicinal cannabis has the ability to effectively treat chronic pain while allowing veterans to function with fewer debilitating side-effects, such as the mental foggiess that often accompany opiate-based painkillers; and

WHEREAS, the in 2017 the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) issued Directive 1315: *Access to VHA Clinical Programs for Veterans Participating in State-Approved Marijuana Programs*, which includes major changes that include adding policy to support the veteran-provider relationship when discussing the use of marijuana and its impact on health including veteran-specific treatment plans; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages the VA to allow veterans access to medicinal cannabis through their VA doctors.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 14

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

WHEREAS, the continued prevalence of military sexual assault continues to grow and has been the subject of numerous military reports, Congressional hearings, documentaries and media stories. Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is a heinous crime which is a disgrace to all of those who have worn the uniform of the Armed Services; and

WHEREAS, DoD and VA have made progress towards developing and implementing a policy that creates a tangible, visible deterrent to perpetrators through consistent prosecutions or other severely negative consequences to one's military careers, both departments must commit to improving their Integrated Mental Health Strategy; and

WHEREAS, the effects of untreated MST can be devastating to the overall health of veterans and in the successful transitioning back into their families and communities; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS calls on DoD to continue to enhance its MST awareness programs, and calls on VA to continually improve its MST treatment programs and to disseminate evidence-based clinical practice guidelines to clinicians who care for veterans who have suffered from MST; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS calls upon Congress to continue its oversight and hearings related to military sexual trauma care and benefits with the goal of improving VA and DoD collaboration and improving policies and practices for military sexual trauma care and disability compensation.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 15

PROSTHETICS & SENSORY AIDS

WHEREAS, the number of veterans needing the services of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service (PSAS) has grown exponentially over the past decade; and

WHEREAS, the number of veterans needing PSAS care and services is projected to continue to rise due to our aging veteran population and the injuries veterans are returning with from current and recent conflicts; and

WHEREAS, the prosthetics program continues to lack consistent administration of prosthetics services throughout the VHA; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS ensures that Congress and VA maintain the proper growth in appropriated funds for PSAS in order to keep pace with the number of veterans requiring their services and care; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS reminds Congress that centralized budgeting, adequate funding and appropriate staffing for PSAS will continue to be of the utmost importance in properly caring and providing for our wounded warriors, and, be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages VHA to require all Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) to adopt consistent operational standards in accordance with national prosthetics policies.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 19 – 10

RURAL & REMOTE VETERANS HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, there are an estimated 4.7 million rural and highly rural veterans who face a unique combination of factors that create disparities in health care not found in urban areas, such as inadequate access to care, limited availability of skilled care providers and additional stigma in seeking mental health care; and

WHEREAS, about 60 percent - or 2.8 million - of these veterans are enrolled in VA Health Care which is significantly higher than the 37 percent enrollment rate of urban veterans, and 56 percent of enrolled veterans are over the age of 65; and

WHEREAS, rural residents account for 17 percent of the entire U.S. population, yet more than 44 percent of recruits come from rural areas and more than 460,000 are veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, compared to urban areas, rural communities tend to have higher poverty rates, more elderly residents, residents with poorer health, and fewer physician practices, hospitals and other health delivery resources

WHEREAS, currently VA operates 143 medical centers, of which 25 are considered by VA to be located in rural or highly rural areas, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, AMVETS advocates for rural veterans and supports legislation that addresses the gaps in care of rural and highly rural veterans and advocates for additional mobile Vet Centers; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS expresses in the strongest terms the need for appropriate levels of funding to care for the physical and mental health care of rural and highly rural veterans.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 16

TOXIC EXPOSURES

WHEREAS, military bases have historically used and disposed of chemical degreasers and other toxic substances that were later determined to contaminate drinking water and pose multiple health risks including cancers; reproductive disorders; birth defects; and numerous other serious difficulties, and;

WHEREAS, countless combat deployed military personnel or those stationed on any of the 141 toxic bases within CONUS have been exposed to a wide variety of contaminants, through drinking water, general water usage, exposure through vapor seepage, soil contact, as well as exposure to toxic smoke from oil field fires or burn pits, and

WHEREAS, Vietnam veterans have been granted presumptive service-connection for conditions related to Agent Orange exposure; many other veterans, including Ft. McClellan; Blue Water Navy; Korean DMZ; C-123 air crews; Gulf War; and Iraq & Afghanistan are still arbitrarily and unfairly denied recognition of their exposures and therefore access to healthcare and compensation benefits; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS aggressively urge Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs to invest adequate resources to fully research, diagnose and treat conditions associated with toxic exposures. And that any significant developments stemming from the previously mentioned activities be shared with veterans as it becomes available; and it be further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS continues to seek system-wide changes related to military environmental hazards and toxic wounds, including:

- seeking improvements to the pre- and post-deployment health monitoring and assessment program to address all currently recognized and emergent environmental hazard and toxic wound health issues;
- seeking improvements to the DoD-VA health research systems so that they aggressively focus on treatments, diagnostic biomarkers and mapping out bio- pathology and symptoms for the full range of environmental hazard and toxic wound health issues;
- seeking the implementation of a seamless DoD-VA environmental health evaluation/ treatment system to ensure medical evaluation, evidence-based treatment, and ongoing medical surveillance for current and former servicemembers suffering from toxic wounds; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages the Department of Veterans Affairs to extend presumptive service-connection to all veterans suffering from conditions associated with toxic exposures while serving in the military.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 17

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)

WHEREAS, servicemembers continue to be deployed to areas where they are at risk for experiencing blast exposures from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombs, land mines, mortar rounds, rocket-propelled grenades and similar weapons systems; and

WHEREAS, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), the signature injury of modern combat, is a complex injury to the physical structure of the brain, and effects about 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, the overarching issue faced by the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is identifying symptoms resulting from TBI which are often difficult to definitively diagnose and document and which may not be immediately evident; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages VA and DoD to coordinate their efforts to better address the consequences of mild-to-severe TBI and other concussive injuries, including improvements in: screening and treatment protocols; coordination of care; and support services for injured servicemembers; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS convey to Congress that it is of the utmost importance for VA to have all of the necessary policies, procedures and personnel in place to provide the care for all service members having sustained blast related brain injuries and the corresponding effects that will either immediately, or over time, accompany them.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 19 – 11

VA & DOD MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING & PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, AMVETS acknowledges the benefits accrued to veterans through implementation of VA's National Mental Health Strategic Plan to improve Access to Mental Health Services for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families; and

WHEREAS, the VA provided specialized mental health services in FY2015 to more than 1.6 million veterans; and of the nearly 2 million veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan eligible for VA care, 62 percent accessed health care services with over 58 percent receiving mental health diagnoses; and

WHEREAS, despite progress in hiring additional mental health staff, AMVETS remains concerned about how VA plans to resolve its mental health staffing issues to meet demand and provide timely access for these critical services; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS strongly encourages both the VA and DoD to ensure that veterans and service members receive adequate screening for their mental health needs; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS strongly encourages VA to work to address mental health staffing shortages, and to ensure that all professional staff are provided specialized training and orientation to the current roles and experiences of the men and women in the military, taking care to acknowledge the unique post-deployment mental health challenges faced by women; and be it further

RESOLVED, AMVETS strongly recommends Congress appropriate more dedicated funding for mental health care and related programs and services during the next five fiscal year budgets and to annually review the effectiveness of said services in order to effectively treat servicemembers and veterans suffering from psychological trauma.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 22

VA DRUG PRICING INITIATIVES

WHEREAS, the VA is the primary source of medication for those veterans who are eligible for and receive services from the VA based upon their military service to our country; and

WHEREAS, recently there are efforts in various states, such as Washington and Maine, to requires state governments to not pay more for their drug purchases for state employees and other state medical recipients than those paid by the VA; and

WHEREAS, most recently this issue was on the November 2016 California ballot as Proposition 61 where it was opposed by over 30 veterans' organizations; and

WHEREAS, California voters listened to the veterans' service organizations and overwhelmingly defeated Proposition 61 by a margin of 53.79 percent to 45.39 percent; and

WHEREAS, there is currently a ballot measure similar to Proposition 61 on the November 2017 ballot in Ohio; and

WHEREAS, the proponents of these ballot and legislative measures will continue in their efforts to require state agencies to pay no more for drugs than what is paid by the VA by going state by state; and

WHEREAS, these VA price controls were previously tried by Congress in the 1990s and after they proved to be unworkable, they were cancelled by Congress; and

WHEREAS, the VA stated that if Proposition 61 had passed it would have cost the VA an additional \$3.8 billion per year in increased drug prices and administrative costs; and

WHEREAS, if any of these ballot or legislative measures pass, it will undoubtedly require the VA and Department of Defense to raise medication co-payments and/or reduce services based upon their current budgetary constraints; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS shall oppose any effort to require any governmental agency, in any state, to align its drug pricing structure with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

SOURCE: Department of CA

RESOLUTION 19-2

VETERAN MENTAL HEALTH

WHEREAS, AMVETS has committed to taking an active lead role in confronting substance abuse, barriers to accessing quality mental healthcare, and suicide among veterans; and

WHEREAS, veteran suicide is often a consequence of prolonged social isolation, stressful life events, a sense of burdensomeness, elevated pain tolerance, untreated or undiagnosed mental conditions, and substance abuse; and

WHEREAS, predictors of and contributors to suicide are often detectable to persons who are trained to screen for indicators and refer for professional intervention; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS has established the HEAL Program in order to give the organization the in-house professional competency to address mental health concerns for underserved veterans; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that reducing barriers to quality mental health care, ensuring quality treatment for veterans with mild to severe traumatic brain injury, and expanding suicide awareness needs to be front and center at our community, state, and federal level; be it further

RESOLVED, that each AMVETS department's designated suicide liaison from either AMVETS, AMVETS Ladies Auxiliary, AMVETS Sons, or the AMVETS Riders will have access to training programs provided by the HEAL Team that are designed to provide information and tools for detecting indicators of potential suicide; and be it further

RESOLVED that each AMVETS department have, or have access to, a suicide awareness plan for outreach and to help promote awareness of the HEAL Program.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 12

EXPAND VETERAN TREATMENT COURTS

WHEREAS, 2017 marks the sixteenth straight year of America at war, and there are now more than 21 million U.S. veterans including nearly two million from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, the United States military instills a sense of honor, duty, leadership, commitment and respect, evident in the millions of veterans who have returned home to their communities as productive citizens, strengthened by their military experience; and

WHEREAS, an estimated twenty percent of veterans has symptoms of a mental disorder or cognitive impairment, and about 1 in 10 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan seen in the VA healthcare system have a substance use disorder and there is a well-established link between substance abuse and combat-related mental illness and an unprecedented number of veterans nationwide are appearing in the courts to face charges stemming directly from these issues; and

WHEREAS, Drug Courts evolved out of the necessity for a solution-based approach to an influx of drug abusing offenders before the courts; and the Drug Court model and the Mental Health Court model are the nation's most successful, cost effective, and scientifically validated tool to deal with substance abuse and mental health issues in the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, Veterans Treatment Courts are hybrid Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts and have evolved out of the growing need for a treatment court model designed specifically for justice-involved veterans to maximize efficiency and economize resources while making use of the distinct military culture consistent among veterans; and

WHEREAS, Veterans Treatment Courts build upon this camaraderie by allowing participants to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS advocates for the continued use and expansion of Veteran Treatment Courts across the country.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 18

WOMEN VETERANS' HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, women are a rapidly growing and important component of the U.S. military services, yet their contributions have often been under-recognized. Women currently comprise 20 percent of new recruits, 14.5 percent of active duty forces and 18 percent of the reserve components. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline by 2020, the opposite is true of women veterans; and

WHEREAS, women veterans have been shown to have unique and complex health needs with a higher rate of co-morbid physical and mental health conditions than their male counterparts; and

WHEREAS, the availability and quality of health care for women veterans varies widely across the VA healthcare system causing an inequity in both quality and services. Less than 30 percent of VA facilities can provide women veterans onsite gender specific healthcare; and

WHEREAS, most male veterans can receive the full spectrum of primary and preventative care services in one visit, most female veterans must schedule multiple visits to receive the same gender-specific care; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges DoD and VA to enhance their programs to ensure that women veterans receive high-quality, comprehensive primary and mental healthcare services in a safe and sensitive environment at every VA health-care facility; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges DoD and VA to redesign and implement an appropriate health-care delivery model for women veterans and establish an integrated system of healthcare delivery that provides a comprehensive continuum of care; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the DoD and VA need to ensure that every woman servicemember and/or veteran gains and keeps access to a qualified primary care physician who can provide gender-specific care for all basic physical and mental healthcare conditions prevalent in women.

SOURCE: Women Veterans Committee, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, AZ, DC, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RECOGNITION & SUPPORT

RESOLUTION 19 – 12

DEPORTED U.S. MILITARY VETERANS

WHEREAS, lawful permanent residents or green card holders have the legal right to reside, work, study, and own property in the United States, and they may also serve in the U.S. military and apply to become U.S. citizens once they meet eligibility requirements; and

WHEREAS, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) allows people born in other countries to gain U.S. citizenship through military service – in some cases without going through the usual preliminary step of getting a U.S. green card since the exact legal requirements depend on whether you served during peace or wartime; and

WHEREAS, foreign nationals can take steps toward citizenship by serving in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, or in a National Guard unit while the unit was federally recognized as a reserve component of the U.S. Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, during peacetime, foreign nationals must have at least one year of honorable service in the U.S. military and then must get a green card – after which they can apply for U.S. citizenship one year after receiving their green card; and

WHEREAS, foreign nationals who enlist in the U.S. armed forces during wartime can apply for U.S. citizenship after as early as their first day of service; and

WHEREAS, deported veterans are banned for life and can only return to the U.S. after they are dead. Honorably discharged veterans, even deportees, are entitled to burial in a National Cemetery with an engraved headstone and their casket draped with an American flag. The VA will pay \$300 toward the cost of bringing an eligible deportee's remains to the United States; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS recommends that honorably discharged foreign nationals who served in the United States military who commit a crime after returning to civilian life should be treated the same as U.S. citizens—punished for any crimes they commit, but not deported.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 19-14

RECOGNITION OF THE LAO/HMONG COMBAT ROLE IN VIETNAM

WHEREAS, Lao/Hmong Soldiers, were recruited by, trained by, equipped by, paid by, and fought as United States Special Forces SGU (Secret Gorilla Units), commanded by Officers of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, Colonel James W. Leer Commanding from 1961 to 1975 and beyond; and

WHEREAS, Lao/Hmong Soldiers, performed covert missions as ordered and planned by Officers of the United States Military and Central Intelligence Agency within Laos and Vietnam to help deter the movement of North Vietnamese Troops, supplies and weapons on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and other areas as assigned and rescued many downed pilots and recovered the bodies of many members of the United States Armed Forces at great risk and losses to their own ranks. Many of their ranks were captured and tortured in prison camps for many years after the United States engagement ended in Vietnam after which finding they had lost their country for fighting in the United States SGU Forces; and

WHEREAS, Lao/Hmong Soldiers, were issued U.S. Air Force Pilot wings on successfully completing pilot training and U.S. Parachute Badges for completing parachute school along with being awarded the Congressionally Awarded Vietnam Veteran National Medal on or about May 1997, were Honored by the State of Connecticut and issued the State of Connecticut Military War Time Medal by former Governor Jody Rell; and

WHEREAS, many Lao/Hmong Soldiers escaped and immigrated to the United States of America where they became citizens, went to work, raised their families, educated their children, became voters and were not given housing, education or other amenities as are many immigrants of present days and are still asking for the basic items of recognition listed below forty years after the end of the war; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS honors the sacrifices and contributions made by members of the Lao / Hmong Secret Gorilla Forces, who operated under the orders and control of the United States CIA in Laos and Cambodia where by agreement our United States troops were not to be deployed; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages the Congress of the United States to pass into law a bill which provides for the recognition of the Lao / Hmong Soldiers, who fought under the direct control of the CIA Agency of the U.S. Government or any other authorized Agency of the United States Government. This recognition is to include burial with military honors in military cemeteries within the United States of America and basic health care within the Veterans Administration Health Care System.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 19 – 12

SUPPORT FOR DEFENSE POW/MIA ACCOUNTING AGENCY (DPAA)

WHEREAS, the Defense POW/Missing in Action (DPAA) provides policy oversight for the continuing mission to recover captured, missing or isolated men and women placed in harm's way while serving their country; and

WHEREAS, the efforts to recover fallen and missing service members from past and present conflicts serve the common interest of all Americans; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS remains fully committed to pursuing the critical issue of POWs and MIAs to our fullest capabilities until every single man or woman lost in battle is accounted for, including the crew of the U.S.S. Intrepid; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS will stand behind our service men and women and tirelessly work to account for those who have not returned; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS petition Congress to provide adequate DPAA funding to ensure the release or rescue of our missing or captured men and women in uniform; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS continues to work with DPAA to ensure full accounting and recovery of the missing from all conflicts and military operations worldwide.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 19 – 7

SUPPORT FOR THE REPUBLIC OF TAIWAN

WHEREAS, the Republic of China on Taiwan is a long-time friend, ally, and an important trading partner of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan is a strategically located island and is extremely important to the peace, prosperity, and stability of the Pacific Rim; and

WHEREAS, the Republic of China maintains a strong and well-trained military force, has extensive air and naval facilities and, therefore, is a vital link in the Pacific defense chain; and

WHEREAS, the People's Republic of China has never renounced the use of force to integrate the Republic of China into its communist system and government and this threat remains substantial; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS supports and encourages the democratic process in Taiwan, and encourages the President of the United States to promote peaceful dialogue and avoid any actions which could lead to military conflict; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS supports the continued promotion of educational and cultural relationships and exchanges between the United States and the Republic of China; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS calls upon Congress and the Administration to support the admission of the Republic of China on Taiwan into the United Nations and to afford the President of Taiwan the same respect and privileges as other visiting Heads of State.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 18 – 20

SUPPORT FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL

WHEREAS, on 14 May 1948, the people of Israel proclaimed the establishment of the sovereign and independent State of Israel, and the United States government established full diplomatic relations with Israel, and

WHEREAS, for nearly 70 years, the United States and Israel have maintained a special relationship based on mutually shared democratic values, common strategic interests, mutually beneficial trading alliances, strong bonds of friendship, as well as mutual trust and respect; and

WHEREAS, the State of Israel maintains a strong and well-trained military force, has extensive air and naval facilities and, therefore, is a vital ally and link in the Middle East defense chain; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS supports and encourages a just and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, by promoting peaceful dialogue amongst the stakeholders in the region and avoid any actions which could lead to military conflict; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AMVETS urges Congress and the Administration to continue to support the State of Israel through the sale of state-of-the-art military equipment and technology to help them maintain an adequate defense of their borders and independence.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, MD, TX, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 18 – 19

U.S. FLAG PROTECTION

WHEREAS, the flag of the United States of America is a symbol of our country and of freedom around the world; and

WHEREAS, in 1989, the United States Supreme Court ruled that flag desecration is protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS has strongly supported reversing this ruling since 1989; and

WHEREAS, a flag protection amendment is supported by over 80 percent of the American people; and

WHEREAS, all fifty State legislatures have passed resolutions asking Congress to submit a flag protection amendment for ratification; and

WHEREAS, Congress should be permitted to protect the American flag from desecration; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS petition Congress to allow United States citizens to consider approval for a flag protection amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

SOURCE: HQ, Departments of WA, IL, AK, NC, VA, MN, OR, MD, TX, MI, CA, KY, OH, FL, NM, WI, TN, PA

RESOLUTION 19 – 4

CONGRESSIONAL RECOGNITION OF VIETNAM-ERA DUST OFF CREWS

WHEREAS, while it would be impossible to accurately calculate the value of the selfless service provided by our heroic ‘Dust Off’ crews during Vietnam, there is no doubt that they saved countless lives and permanently changed the face of war; and

WHEREAS, thinking about these fearless helicopter crews going out on mission after mission, hour after hour, day after day, in weather of every description while essentially unarmed and taking withering enemy fire in one LZ after another, it’s amazing that any of them actually survived; and

WHEREAS, there is no honor high enough to adequately acknowledge the gallant and noble service these crews provided both to their fellow soldiers and to this country; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS encourages every member of Congress to show some long-overdue recognition for these courageous and daring individuals who put the lives of their fellow soldiers before their own.

SOURCE: HQ

VA STAFF & ACCOUNTABILITY

RESOLUTION 19 – 6

PUTTING VETERANS FIRST – INFORMED CONSENT

WHEREAS, AMVETS believes that veterans need to be better informed by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) doctors about the side effects and available alternative therapies prior to prescribing any high-risk medications; and

WHEREAS, AMVETS believes that an informed patient is much more likely to fully comply with their doctor's instructions and much less likely to complain or be dissatisfied with their treatment, and that having the veteran's buy-in and clear understanding of any proposed risky medications will not only provide much needed peace of mind for the veteran and their family, but will be instrumental in the veteran's overall healing process; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans Health Administration's Handbook already mandates that side effects and alternative treatments be explained to a veteran prior to deciding on a treatment plan for certain procedures; and

WHEREAS, this type of information is especially critical for veterans who may have additional physical and/or mental health concerns and may already be taking, or require, a number of dangerous medications; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS works to ensure that veterans receive adequate information regarding the risks and alternative treatments of any medications prescribed by VA physicians.

SOURCE: HQ

RESOLUTION 19 – 5

IMPROVED VA ACCOUNTABILITY

WHEREAS, considering the ongoing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care and budget issues, it is more important than ever that we ensure that Congress provides the strongest oversight of all VA operations; and

WHEREAS, it is essential that all stakeholders think creatively and work collaboratively, and keep veterans and their needs at the forefront of every discussion, consideration and decision; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative that Congress, the VA, and all Americans remember that the VA exists to serve the needs of veterans; and

WHEREAS, the VA Secretary needs to have the power, when appropriate, to remove or demote VA employees based on performance or misconduct; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that AMVETS ensures that Congress remains mindful that the health care obligations imposed by the sacrifices of our veterans continue to be met in a timely, professional, and compassionate manner.

SOURCE: HQ



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