

# AMVETS Hawaii Legislative & VA Affairs Update

July 2026 / Vol 2



## Commander's Message



Donovan A. Lazarus (US Army, Retired)

Aloha AMVETS Family,

As we celebrate Independence Day and the 250th Birthday of the United States of America, we pause to reflect on the enduring ideals of liberty, democracy, and service that have defined our Republic since July 4, 1776.

This historic milestone is more than a celebration of our nation's founding—it is a tribute to the generations of Americans who have defended our freedoms. We extend our deepest gratitude to the brave men and women who have served in every generation, from the patriots who secured our independence to the members of our Armed Forces who continue to stand watch around the world today. Their courage, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment have preserved the freedoms we cherish.

As AMVETS members, we remain steadfast in our mission to advocate for

veterans, active-duty service members, National Guard and Reserve personnel, and their families. This month's legislative update highlights important actions in Congress affecting veterans' benefits, memorial affairs, and policies that honor those who have worn our nation's uniform. Staying informed and engaged ensures that the voices of veterans continue to be heard at every level of government.

On behalf of the AMVETS Department of Hawaii, thank you for your continued service to our communities, your commitment to our fellow veterans, and your dedication to preserving the legacy of those who came before us.

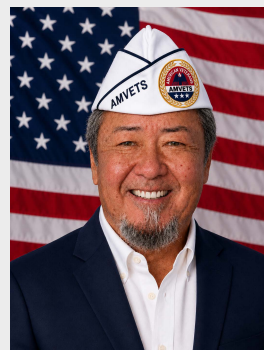
May you and your families enjoy a safe, meaningful, and patriotic Independence Day as we proudly celebrate 250 years of the United States of America.

Serving with Pride,

Donovan Andrew Lazarus

State Commander, AMVETS Department of Hawaii

## Chaplain's Message



Each month in the year holds something special. It marks time moving forward, regrets left behind, and memories of the sacrifices each of us has made serving our country.

July is especially profound in that the hallmark of this month is Independence Day. We celebrate independence from tyranny, going back 250 years. However, to remain independent, free to

live in harmony with nature, out God, and with each other, requires us to live interdependently.

1 Corinthians 12, teaches that each one of us is important; that we each bring something that others need. This cannot be something that we minimize, but something we hold dear to our hearts.

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# Legislative Update

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs – Subcommittee on Disability Assistance & Memorial Affairs

June 30, 2026

## Veterans Cemeteries Oversight Hearing

The Subcommittee examined the future of America's veterans cemeteries, focusing on long-term burial capacity, access for rural veterans, workforce needs, and stronger partnerships with veterans service organizations.

### Key Takeaways

- National cemeteries continue to maintain exceptional standards of care and service.
- Lawmakers discussed improving the VA's 75-mile burial access standard by considering actual travel times for rural communities.
- Witnesses emphasized better end-of-life planning, including earlier education on burial benefits and survivor services.
- Strong bipartisan support was expressed for continued funding of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program to expand and improve state and tribal veterans cemeteries.
- Veterans cemeteries were recognized as places of remembrance, education, and preserving the legacy of military service for future generations.

### Legislative Markup

The Subcommittee unanimously advanced three bipartisan bills to the full House Veterans' Affairs Committee:

- H.R. 8552 – Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2026  
Provides the annual COLA increase for VA disability compensation and survivors' benefits.

- H.R. 9006 – Locating Our Unclaimed Veterans Act  
Improves identification and dignified burial of unclaimed veterans.

- H.R. 6588 – PROVIDE Act  
Expedites VA disability assistance for veterans impacted by federally declared natural disasters.

### Why It Matters

These bipartisan efforts reinforce Congress' commitment to honoring veterans through dignified burial, improving access to memorial benefits, supporting surviving families, and protecting earned disability benefits.

AMVETS Hawaii will continue advocating for legislation that honors the service and sacrifice of America's veterans and strengthens the benefits they have earned

SERVICE ★ PATRIOTISM ★ FELLOWSHIP ★ COMMUNITY

As veterans, we have stood shoulder to shoulder alongside each other facing the uncertainties of war and conflict, as a member in good standing of this "Brotherhood of Warriors." In peacetime, we often forget the importance of depending on each other. War brings together soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines in a common cause, but peacetime can leave each of us out in the cold, without anyone covering our 6.

As we celebrate Independence Day, and for the rest of the month of July, as well as throughout the year, let's remember that we have fought the good fight, we have won our independence, but we still need each other. Don't let a day go by without calling another veteran to encourage them, and to pray for them. Our wars may be over, but there is still a battle for our hearts and lives.

Dr. James Kimo Walz, Sr. (US Navy, Retired)  
Chaplain, AMVETS Department of Hawaii



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**OUR PROMISE**  
To honor, empower, and serve veterans and their families through advocacy, fellowship, wellness, and community.



**VETERANS HELPING VETERANS**



**SERVICE HONOR INTEGRITY**



**COMMITMENT COMMUNITY COUNTRY**

#### CONNECT WITH US



[www.amvetshawaii.org](http://www.amvetshawaii.org)

@amvetshawaii

#VeteransHelpingVeterans



### 1. MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT COMMANDER

It is an honor to serve as your Department Commander. This reporting period has been one of growth, service, and impact across Hawaii, American Samoa, and the Pacific. Together, we delivered more than 600 programs and events that touched the lives of veterans, families, youth, and communities.

We expanded our Adaptive Sports & Fitness Program, strengthened partnerships with the VA and community organizations, and advanced programs that promote wellness, education, and opportunity. Our members and volunteers continue to embody the spirit of "Veterans Helping Veterans" every single day.

Looking ahead to 2027, we will expand statewide programs, increase membership, strengthen America250 initiatives, and build new partnerships that ensure no veteran is left behind.

*"Together, we honor our past, serve today, and build hope for tomorrow."*



### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The AMVETS Department of Hawaii continued to expand its mission of "Veterans Helping Veterans" through innovative programming, strategic partnerships, adaptive sports, youth development, patriotic remembrance, legislative advocacy, and community engagement across Hawaii, American Samoa, and the Pacific.

### 3. DEPARTMENT IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- 600+ programs and events
- 800+ veterans and active-duty servicemembers served
- 100+ events at the West Oahu Veterans Center
- 62 ROTC/JROTC cadets recognized
- Two-week Summer Camp for youth
- Five-day American Samoa Flag Day participation
- Three-day Heal the Healers Workshop
- America250 Hawaii Commission participation

### 4. ABOUT AMVETS DEPARTMENT OF HAWAII

Our mission is to improve the quality of life for veterans and their families through advocacy, assistance, wellness, and community service. We proudly serve Hawaii, American Samoa, and the Pacific through our posts, programs, and partnerships.

### 5. MEMBERSHIP

Membership continues to grow through outreach, engagement, and retention initiatives. Our members are the heart of AMVETS—leading programs, mentoring youth, and serving communities.

### 6. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

We partner with the VA, VAPAHCS, DoD, DPAA, UH, WWP, U.S.VETS, Hawaii Foodbank, America250 Hawaii Commission, and community organizations to multiply our impact.

### 7. ADAPTIVE SPORTS & FITNESS PROGRAM

Through the VA Adaptive Sports Grant, we provided more than 800 opportunities for veterans and active-duty servicemembers to discover strength, confidence, and camaraderie through adaptive sports.

### 8. SUICIDE PREVENTION & WELLNESS

We promote whole-health wellness and suicide and community resources—ensuring help is available and hope is restored.

### 9. HEAL THE HEALERS INITIATIVE

Our three-day workshop supports clinicians and helping professionals with tools, training, and resources to prevent burnout and care for

### 10. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

We inspire the next generation through Summer Camp, sports, Scouts, Young Marines, character, confidence, and citizenship.

### 11. WARRIORS 'OHANA GARDENS

Therapeutic gardening provides veterans and families connection, and access to fresh, healthy food while promoting wellness and sustainability.

### 12. HAWAII VETERANS BEEKEEPING PROGRAM

Veterans learn beekeeping, agriculture, and sustainability while supporting wellness, education, and pollinator health across our communities.

### 13. STEM & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Through partnerships with UH and industry, we provide students and veterans with STEM education, certifications, and pathways to meaningful careers.

### 14. AMERICAN SAMOA OUTREACH

We strengthened connections through Flag Day activities, outreach events, and adaptive fitness programs that uplift veterans and families in American Samoa.

### 15. MILITARY & PATRIOTIC PROGRAMS

We honor service and sacrifice through Memorial Day, Battle of Midway, West Loch, Korean War, Pearl Harbor, Ewa Battlefield, and other patriotic observances.

**ANNUAL EWA BATTLEFIELD, PEARL HARBOR COMMEMORATION CEREMONY**

We lead the planning and execution of this annual ceremony to honor the Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, and Airmen who defended Hawaii during the attack on Pearl Harbor and to educate future generations about the historic significance of MCAS Ewa and the Ewa Battlefield.

**EWA BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC SITE**

**ANNUAL BATTLE OF MIDWAY COMMEMORATION CEREMONY**

We honor the heroes of the Battle of Midway—the turning point of the Pacific War—through our annual ceremony that preserves their legacy and inspires future generations.

**16. AWARDS & RECOGNITION**

We are honored to receive recognition for our service and impact.

- BRAVE Hawaii 2025 Award
- VA Pacific Islands Recreation Award
- VA Pacific Island Health Care System Certificate of Appreciation
- 2025-2026 Distinguished Citizenship Award presented March 31, 2026 to Donovan Andrew Learman for Outstanding and Meritorious Service

**17. LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY**

We advocate for veterans on critical issues including the Major Richard Star Act, PACT Act, toxic exposure, women veterans, healthcare, housing, and mental health—ensuring the needs of our community are heard at every level.

**18. FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS (PLACEHOLDER)**

Financial data will be finalized and updated in our next report.

- REVENUE
- GRANTS
- DONATIONS
- EXPENSES

**19. COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

We share our mission and impact through our website, social media, newsletters, and engaging our community—connecting.

**20. LOOKING AHEAD TO 2027**

- ✓ Expand Adaptive Sports statewide
- ✓ Increase membership growth
- ✓ Strengthen America250 initiatives
- ✓ Expand youth and wellness programs
- ✓ Develop new federal and community partnerships

**21. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Mahalo to our members, volunteers, partners, donors, and supporters. Your dedication and generosity make our mission possible. Most of all, mahalo to our veterans—for your service, sacrifice, and trust. We promise to remain committed to you and your families.

*Mahalo!*

## 2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

### HONORING SERVICE • STRENGTHENING AMERICA

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #1: MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

Issue: Combat-disabled veterans medically retired with less than 20 years of service continue to face an unfair offset between military retired pay and VA disability compensation.

AMVETS Position: Support passage of the Major Richard Star Act to allow these veterans to receive both their earned military retirement pay and VA disability compensation.

Impact: Restores earned benefits, Corrects a long-standing inequity, Supports wounded warriors and their families

AMVETS ACTION: Contact Congress and support passage of the Major Richard Star Act.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #2: TOXIC EXPOSURE & PACT ACT IMPLEMENTATION

Issue: Many veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, radiation, and other toxic substances continue to face barriers to care and benefits.

AMVETS Position: Ensure full implementation, oversight, and funding of the PACT Act.

Impact: Expanded healthcare access, Faster disability claims processing, Improved long-term health outcomes

AMVETS ACTION: Protect and strengthen toxic exposure benefits.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #3: VETERAN MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION

Issue: Veteran suicide remains a national crisis.

AMVETS Position: Increase funding and access to mental health services, peer support programs, crisis intervention, and community-based resources.

Impact: Saves lives, Expands treatment options, Supports veterans and families

AMVETS ACTION: Invest in prevention, treatment, and recovery programs.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #4: HOMELESS VETERANS & HOUSING SECURITY

Issue: Thousands of veterans continue to face housing instability and homelessness.

AMVETS Position: Expand affordable housing initiatives, supportive housing programs, and housing assistance grants.

Impact: Reduces veteran homelessness, Improves quality of life, Supports family stability

AMVETS ACTION: Increase housing resources for veterans nationwide.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #5: MILITARY RETIREMENT & TAX RELIEF

Issue: Many military retirees continue to face unnecessary tax burdens.

AMVETS Position: Support federal and state legislation that provides tax relief for military retirees and surviving spouses.

Impact: Keeps more income in veterans' households, Supports economic security, Honors military service

AMVETS ACTION: Expand tax exemptions and retirement protections.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #6: VETERAN EDUCATION & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Issue: Veterans need continued access to education, workforce development, licensing, and certification opportunities.

AMVETS Position: Protect and expand GI Bill benefits, apprenticeship programs, and workforce training initiatives.

Impact: Increased employment opportunities, Higher earning potential, Stronger transition outcomes  
AMVETS ACTION: Invest in veteran education and career success.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #7: CAREGIVER & SURVIVOR SUPPORT

Issue: Family caregivers and survivors often face financial and administrative challenges.

AMVETS Position: Expand eligibility and support for VA caregiver programs, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and survivor benefits.

Impact: Supports military families, Strengthens caregiver networks, Improves survivor assistance

AMVETS ACTION: Protect those who continue serving after service.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #8: ADAPTIVE SPORTS & RECREATION

Issue: Adaptive sports and recreation programs improve physical and mental wellness for disabled veterans. AMVETS Position: Increase federal support for adaptive sports, recreation therapy, and community-based wellness programs.

Impact: Improved health outcomes, Enhanced quality of life, Greater community engagement

AMVETS ACTION: Expand access to adaptive sports opportunities.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #9: VA HEALTHCARE ACCESS & MODERNIZATION

Issue: Veterans continue to face challenges accessing timely healthcare services.

AMVETS Position: Strengthen VA healthcare staffing, infrastructure, telehealth, and specialty care programs. Impact: Reduced wait times, Improved healthcare outcomes, Increased access in rural and island communities

AMVETS ACTION: Ensure world-class healthcare for every veteran.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #10: VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS & CLAIMS ASSISTANCE

Issue: Veterans often require expert assistance navigating benefits and claims systems.

AMVETS Position: Increase funding, training, accreditation, and support for Veteran Service Officers (VSOs). Impact: Faster claims processing, Improved claim accuracy, Increased access to earned benefits

AMVETS ACTION: Strengthen veteran advocacy services nationwide.

#### Physical Address:

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Membership Visit [www.amvets.org](http://www.amvets.org)  
Website: <https://amvetshawaii.org>