

AMVETS Hawaii Legislative & VA Affairs Update

August 2026 / Vol 2



Commander's Message



Donovan A. Lazarus (US Army, Retired)

Aloha AMVETS Family,

As we welcome the month of August, I am reminded that service to our nation does not end when we remove the uniform—it simply takes on a new mission. Every day, AMVETS members across Hawaii and the Pacific continue to answer the call by serving veterans, military families, and our communities through compassion, leadership, and volunteerism.

This month also marks an important milestone as AMVETS members from across the nation gather in Orlando, Florida, for the 80th AMVETS National Convention (17–23 August 2026). Our Department of Hawaii delegation is honored to represent each of you as we participate in national business sessions, legislative discussions, training, and fellowship with our brothers and sisters in service. Together, we will continue advocating for policies and programs that strengthen veterans' health care,

benefits, memorial affairs, and opportunities for future generations.

As our delegation travels, I ask all members to keep them in your thoughts and prayers for safe journeys and successful representation of our Department.

This month, I also want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to our AMVETS Adaptive Fitness & Sports Program and the outstanding coaches and volunteers of Big Tire Bootcamp. Their unwavering commitment to improving the health, resilience, and quality of life of veterans continues to make a profound difference throughout Hawaii.

Recently, the team was presented a Letter of Appreciation by the Navy Munitions Command Pacific East Asia Division, Unit Pearl Harbor, recognizing two years of exceptional service in developing and leading an adaptive fitness and wellness program that significantly improved the physical readiness, morale, and overall well-being of Sailors assigned to the command. This recognition reflects not only the professionalism of our coaches but also the positive impact AMVETS continues to have across our military community.

Achievements like these remind us that partnerships, dedication, and servant leadership create lasting change.

As we move forward together, let us remain committed to our mission of supporting veterans of all generations, preserving the legacy of those who came before us, and ensuring no veteran is ever forgotten or left behind.

Thank you for your continued service, your leadership, and your unwavering commitment to the AMVETS family.

Together, we continue Serving Veterans. Serving Hawaii.
Serving America.

Serving with Pride,

Donovan Andrew Lazarus
State Commander, AMVETS Department of Hawaii

Legislative & VA Affairs Update

August 2026

Congress Returns to High-Stakes Decisions While VA Advances Veteran-Focused Initiatives:

As Congress enters the August work period, legislative activity remains active despite the House beginning its recess. The Senate continues debating major national security measures, veterans' priorities, and foreign policy legislation while the Department of Veterans Affairs expands initiatives honoring America's military heritage and Congress continues oversight of veteran healthcare, research, and military transparency.

Capitol Update:

Although the House has adjourned for the August recess, the Senate remains in session to address national security legislation, sanctions against Russia, and several veteran-related priorities. Congressional committees continue advancing legislation affecting veterans' healthcare, disability compensation, military readiness, and modernization of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans Affairs Update:

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced a nationwide initiative supporting America's 250th Anniversary by honoring Revolutionary War veterans buried in VA National Cemeteries. Congress also continued oversight of Department of Defense casualty reporting, emphasizing transparency and accountability to servicemembers, veterans, and military families.

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Highlights:

Senators from both parties reaffirmed strong bipartisan support for preserving VA medical research while discussing workforce challenges, funding priorities, and innovative treatments.

Key discussion areas included:

- Precision Oncology Program for Cancer of the Prostate (POPCaP)
- Suicide prevention and PTSD research
- Emerging psychedelic-assisted therapies
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Women Veterans' health research
- Artificial intelligence in healthcare
- Recruitment and retention of VA researchers and physicians

Technology & Benefits Modernization:

Lawmakers reviewed modernization of the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), with emphasis on improving system reliability, reducing claims processing delays, increasing interoperability, and improving services for Veteran Service Organizations and veterans.

National Affairs:

National leaders gathered in Washington for memorial services honoring former Senator Lindsey Graham while diplomatic discussions continued regarding Ukraine, Israel, Iran, and broader international security issues.

What This Means for Veterans:

Veterans should continue monitoring legislation involving VA healthcare, medical research, suicide prevention, TBI, women veterans, technology modernization, disability compensation, the Major Richard Star Act, and continued congressional oversight of veteran services.

AMVETS Hawaii Legislative Affairs:

AMVETS Hawaii remains committed to monitoring federal legislation, VA policy, and congressional action affecting veterans, servicemembers, military families, and survivors. We will continue providing timely updates and advocating for policies that strengthen healthcare, earned benefits, memorial affairs, and quality of life for all who have served.

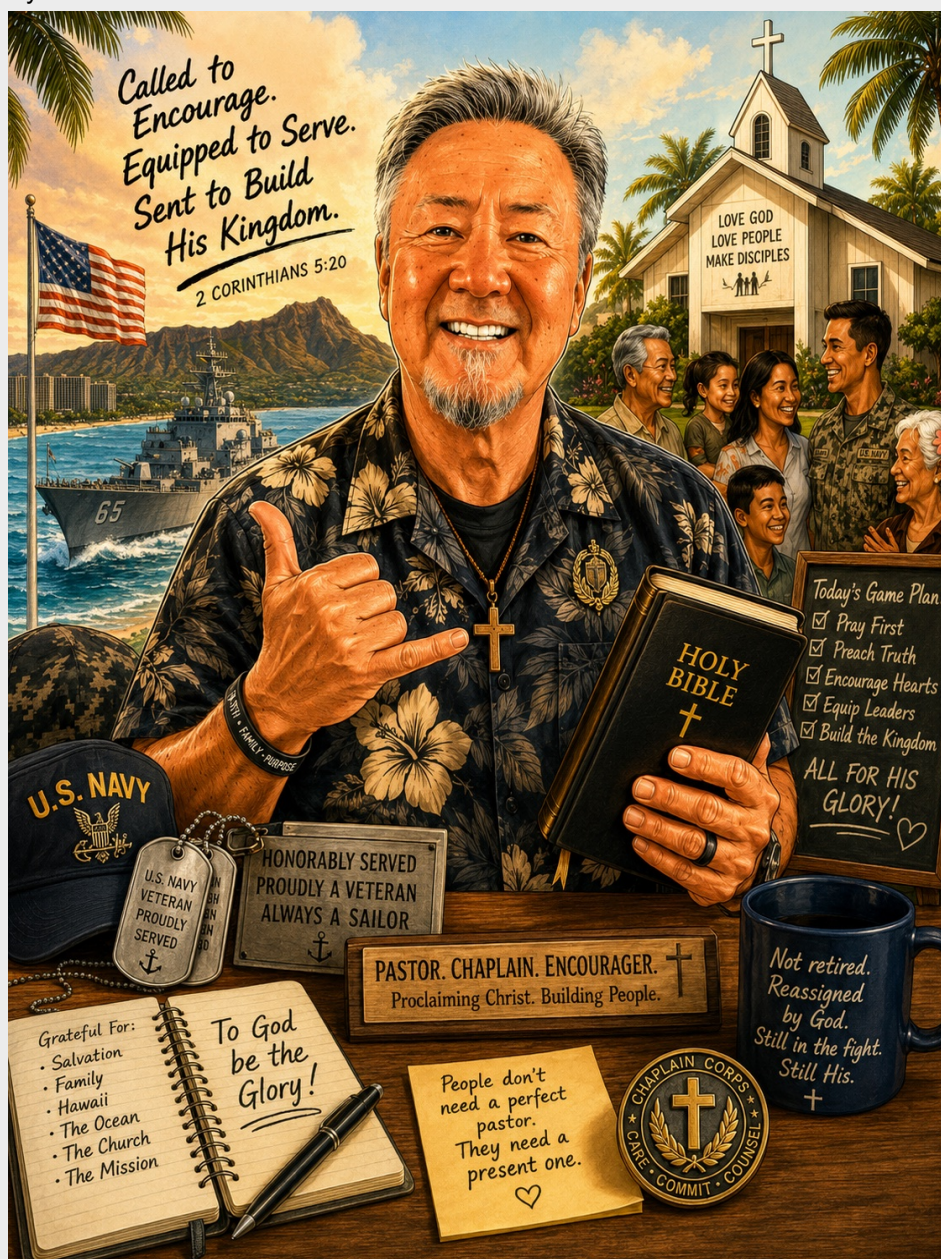
Chaplain's Message



"Lord, we sit safely here today because of the sacrifices of those who served in times past. It is our desire to lift up the young men and women who go to the far corners of the world to bring and maintain peace to a world torn apart by the enemy of our souls. Preserve them, watch over them, protect them, and bring them safely home again, just as you did for us. And for the family left behind, we ask for your peace that surpasses all understanding to rest upon them. Meet every need they have, physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Let them know that you care for each and every one of them. For those whose families can only remember the loss of a fallen warrior, we ask that you comfort and encourage them. Finally, we pray for safe travels for those who will be attending the AMVETS 80th National Convention in Orlando, Florida, August 17th – 23rd. Give our leadership and convention body wisdom as they continue to represent us veterans, past, present, and future to government agencies, political appointees, and elected officials. Amen!"

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

As we begin the month of August, I'm struck with the thought that summer is easing its way out, and fall is quickly taking its place ushering in new PCS assignments for our active duty members, and their spouses, along with new schools for their precious children. As for us veterans, the fall can bring mixed emotions remembering past deployments, military exercises, or the loss of a buddy and friend. Living in Hawaii and near the Marine Corps base in Kaneohe, I often encounter active duty Marines speaking fondly of Okinawa. I spent a couple of years there during the Vietnam War, and my memories are mixed at best. If you are a Vietnam Era Veteran, or a survivor of Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada (1983), Operation Just Cause in Panama (1989), Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf (1991), or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, your memories, like mine are often about our brothers and sisters who never made it home. Today, we have young warriors deploying to parts of the world that most Americans have never heard of. They go willingly to lay down their lives for our country, which, at this writing is struggling to remain the land of freedom that the rest of us fought and many have died for. Our days on the battle front may be behind us, but let us not forget that we laid the groundwork for those deploying to places like the Middle East, Europe, South Korea, Okinawa, Africa, and South America. We followed the prayers of those who went before us, and we have the responsibility to pray for those who come after us. Let us take this opportunity to pray:



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.

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