

AMVETS Hawaii Legislative & VA Affairs Update

September 2026 / Vol 1



Commander's Message



Donovan A. Lazarus (US Army, Retired)

Aloha AMVETS Family,

As we enter September, we do so with remembrance, renewed purpose, and tremendous pride in what our AMVETS family continues to accomplish here in Hawaii and across our nation.

On September 11, we pause to remember the nearly 3,000 lives lost during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We honor the innocent victims, the first responders who ran toward danger, the military members who answered our nation's call in the years that followed, and the families who continue to carry the weight of that day. For many of our post-9/11 veterans, September 11 is not simply a moment in history—it represents the beginning of deployments, combat operations, sacrifice, and the loss of brothers and sisters in arms.

As veterans, we have a responsibility to ensure that future generations understand both the cost of that day and the extraordinary unity that followed it. We will never forget.

September is also National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, providing an important opportunity to remind ourselves that taking care of one another is one of our most important missions. Behind every statistic is a veteran, servicemember, family member, friend, or teammate.

Within AMVETS Hawaii, our responsibility extends beyond programs and events. It means knowing our members, checking on one another, recognizing when someone may be struggling, and having the courage to reach out. Sometimes the most important thing we can say is simply, "How are you doing?"—and then take the time to listen to the answer.

To anyone facing a difficult season: you remain part of our team, and asking for help is an act of strength. I encourage every member to continue looking out for the veterans and families around us and connecting those in need with appropriate resources and support.

From Hawaii to a National AMVETS Program

I also want to thank everyone who represented and supported the Department of Hawaii during the 80th AMVETS National Convention in Orlando, Florida, August 17–23. Our Hawaii delegation once again demonstrated that the size of a Department does not determine the size of its impact.

This year's convention was especially significant for Hawaii. I extend special recognition and congratulations to Program Director and Head Coach Alim Shabazz, our Big Tire Bootcamp Team, and the entire AMVETS Hawaii Adaptive Fitness & Sports Program. Through years of hard work, innovation, and dedication to veterans and servicemembers of all abilities, a program developed here in Ewa Beach has reached an extraordinary milestone.

Resolution 27-10 was adopted, establishing our adaptive fitness initiative as an AMVETS-endorsed national model.

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- Donovan Andrew Lazarus, State Commander

Legislative & VA Affairs Update

LEGISLATIVE SPOTLIGHT

VA Electronic Health Record Modernization Under Congressional Scrutiny

On September 2, 2026, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a full committee hearing titled "Beyond Go-Live: VA Electronic Health Record Modernization Status Update." The hearing examined the Department of Veterans Affairs' ongoing transition to its modernized Electronic Health Record (EHR) system.

VA officials reported meaningful improvement during the 2026 rollout, including smoother deployments, better training and support, improved system stability, and no critical patient-safety findings identified at the most recent go-live locations. Lawmakers from both parties nevertheless raised concerns about escalating costs, unresolved operational problems, employee training, referral management, workforce readiness, and whether VA has adequate information to project the program's total cost and completion schedule.

BY THE NUMBERS

VA officials discussed estimates of approximately \$37 billion through deployment, while GAO identified a broader estimate of approximately \$56.5 billion including longer-term operations and sustainment.

THE COST OF MODERNIZATION

GAO cautioned that even its cited figure may not represent the complete cost because certain Veterans Health Administration and Office of Information Technology expenses may not be fully included. Congress also questioned the increase in Oracle's contract ceiling and whether VA has developed a sufficiently reliable lifecycle cost estimate and integrated master schedule to determine whether the program can realistically be completed by 2031. For Veterans and taxpayers, transparency regarding these costs remains essential.

PATIENT CARE MUST REMAIN THE PRIORITY

While technology modernization is necessary, AMVETS Hawaii believes the measure of success must ultimately be the Veteran's experience.

- > Referral management and reports of referrals requiring manual
- > interventionEmployee and clinician training
- > Scheduling complexity and community-care interoperability
- > Pharmacy access and system usability
- > Workforce capacity and employee burnout
- > Continued operation and eventual retirement of the legacy VistA system
- > Patient safety throughout accelerated deployments

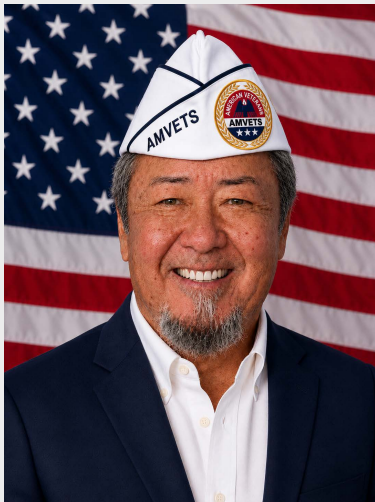
GAO reported that VA-created learning labs and expanded use of experienced "super users" have received positive feedback and appear to be improving the transition experience for frontline employees. These improvements should continue as VA moves toward additional deployments.

BIPARTISAN CONCERN OVER ACCOUNTABILITY

Although members differed on some aspects of the program, there was substantial bipartisan concern regarding cost, transparency, implementation, and accountability. Republican members acknowledged previous failures and cost overruns while noting improvements in recent 2026 deployments. Democratic members focused heavily on contract oversight, transparency,

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Chaplain's Message



September is a month that carries a lot of meaning for those of us who have served. September can bring back memories—places we served, people we served with, missions we were assigned, victories we celebrated, and losses we experienced. Some memories bring a smile. Others bring a lump in our throat. But September also gives us an opportunity to remember something important: **Your service did not become meaningless when you took off the uniform.** You may have retired, or separated from the military. Your rank may have changed. Your responsibilities may have changed. **But your value, your experience, and your ability to make a difference did not end.**

The military taught us that we weren't simply individuals doing our own thing. We were part of something bigger. We learned words like: Duty, Honor, Commitment, Sacrifice, Loyalty, and Responsibility. Those principles don't have to disappear when military service ends. In fact, many of the qualities developed during

military service can become powerful tools for serving God and serving others. You learned how to stand when things were difficult. You learned how to keep moving when you were tired and to look out for the person beside you. You learned that sometimes the mission is more important than personal comfort. Those lessons still have value.

One of the greatest challenges veterans can face after service is wondering: **"What am I supposed to do now?"** Maybe you once had a very clear mission. You knew where you were going, what your responsibilities were, and who was counting on you. Then suddenly, the uniform comes off. The structure changes. The mission changes. And sometimes we wonder, **"Where do I fit now?"** But God has never depended on a uniform to give someone purpose. Your assignment may have changed, but your purpose hasn't disappeared. **God doesn't retire people from usefulness.** Moses was eighty years old when God called him to confront Pharaoh. Caleb was eighty-five when he said, "Give me this mountain." Abraham was called to step into a new chapter late in life. Your age doesn't disqualify you. Your retirement doesn't disqualify you. Your past doesn't disqualify you. **God can still use you.**

Veterans possess something that cannot be taught in a classroom: **Experience.** You've been through things. You've faced pressure. You've experienced leadership. You've dealt with difficult people. You've experienced loss. You've learned resilience. You've learned what it means to depend upon others. And there are younger people who desperately need what you have learned. Maybe your greatest memory is sitting beside someone who is struggling and saying: **"I've been there. Let me walk with you."** Maybe it's mentoring a young person or encouraging another veteran, being there for a military family, or simply listening. Never underestimate the power of your presence.

Most of us carry memories that are difficult. There may be things you wish you could change, or decisions you still think about, people you remember, and experiences you wish you never had to endure. But hear this: **Your past may be part of your story, but it doesn't have to be the conclusion of your story.** God specializes in redemption. He takes broken things and gives them purpose. He takes experiences and turns them into wisdom. He takes our scars and uses them to help someone else. Psalm 147:3 says: "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." God doesn't ask you to pretend that difficult things never happened. He invites you to bring those things to Him. Fellow Veterans, I want you to remember something today: **You matter.** Your service mattered. Your sacrifice mattered.

We understand the word mission. So here's the **mission** for this season: **Be a light.** Be the person who encourages, who serves, who listens, who checks on someone who hasn't been heard from. Be the person who reaches out to another veteran or who helps the younger generation understand the value of commitment and sacrifice. And above all, be a person who points others toward God.

My Prayer for You:

Father, We thank you for the men and women who have served our nation. Thank you for their sacrifice, their courage, their commitment, and their willingness to serve something greater than themselves. For those carrying difficult memories, bring peace. For those who feel forgotten, remind them that they are valuable. For those wondering what comes next, give them direction. For those who are weary, give them strength. And help every veteran recognize that their experience, wisdom, and testimony can still be used to encourage and serve others. Remind them that their military assignment may have ended, but their purpose has not. Give them a new sense of mission. Let them finish this next chapter of life with faith, courage, and hope. In Jesus' name,
Amen!

- Dr. James Kimo Walz, Sr. (USN, Ret.), Chaplain, AMVETS Department of Hawaii

Commander's Message Continues:

The National Significance: The national significance of this accomplishment cannot be overstated. What began as a locally developed, veteran-run adaptive fitness program in Ewa Beach now creates a pathway for AMVETS Departments and Posts throughout the country to replicate Hawaii's approach in their own communities. Through standardized implementation and coach training, the model is designed to remove barriers and expand inclusive fitness opportunities for veterans and servicemembers of all abilities.

This is more than recognition of a successful Hawaii program. It demonstrates what can happen when veterans identify a need, develop a solution, prove that solution in their community, and then share it with veterans across America.

An idea built by veterans in Hawaii now has the potential to improve the lives of veterans nationwide.

I am tremendously proud of our coaches, athletes, volunteers, partners, and everyone who helped build this program. This achievement belongs to all of you.

As we move forward into the final months of 2026, let us carry that same spirit into everything we do—from our daily work at the AMVETS West Oahu Veterans Center and our veterans' programs to preparations for the 85th anniversary of Pearl Harbor and our Ewa Battlefield Commemoration Ceremony in December.

As we begin September with the Labor Day weekend, I wish each of you and your families a great, safe, and enjoyable holiday weekend. Whether you are spending time with family and friends, traveling, enjoying our beautiful islands, or simply taking a well-earned opportunity to rest, please celebrate responsibly and look out for one another. Let us also remember and honor the generations of American workers—including our veterans and military families—whose hard work, sacrifice, and service continue to strengthen our communities and our nation.

Remember those we lost. Check on those still with us. Honor those who served before us. And continue building something worthy of the veterans who will come after us.

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

We Remember. We Serve. We Lead.

Donovan Andrew Lazarus, State Commander
President & CEO, AMVETS Hawaii Service Foundation Corp

Legislative update Continues: workforce readiness, referrals, employee training, accessibility, and the absence of what GAO considers a complete lifecycle cost estimate and integrated master schedule.

The Committee also moved to compel testimony from senior Oracle leadership following the company's decision not to appear at the hearing. AMVETS Hawaii believes effective oversight of Veterans programs should transcend political affiliation. Our priority must remain ensuring that Veterans receive the benefits and care they earned.

MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

The hearing also brought renewed attention to the Major Richard Star Act. Members contrasted the substantial resources being committed to EHR modernization with the cost of legislation intended to provide concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability compensation to certain combat-disabled Veterans. AMVETS Hawaii continues to support efforts that ensure Veterans are not forced to sacrifice one earned benefit to receive another.

WHAT AMVETS HAWAII IS WATCHING

VA Health Care— EHR modernization, community care, access, staffing, mental health services, and quality of care.

Veterans Benefits— Disability compensation, concurrent receipt, survivor benefits, claims processing, and appeals.

Major Richard Star Act— Continued congressional action affecting combat-disabled military retirees.

PACT Act Implementation— Ensuring eligible Veterans receive appropriate toxic-exposure screenings, health care, and benefits.

Veteran Homelessness & Housing— Federal and Hawaii initiatives addressing housing instability and homelessness among Veterans.

Veteran Suicide Prevention— Continued investment in prevention, peer support, mental health care, community partnerships, and early intervention.

Women Veterans— Equitable access to health care, benefits, outreach, and specialized services.

Hawaii & Pacific Veterans— Policies responsive to geographic isolation, transportation requirements, and limited access to specialized services.

HAWAII & PACIFIC VETERANS

National policy must recognize that Veterans living in Hawaii and across the Pacific often face circumstances different from Veterans on the continental United States. Distance, inter-island travel, provider availability, transportation expenses, access to specialty care, and geographic isolation can significantly affect access to services.

AMVETS Hawaii will continue advocating for federal policies that recognize these realities and ensure Veterans throughout Hawaii and the Pacific receive equitable access to VA health care, benefits, adaptive sports, mental health resources, and other earned services.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Legislative advocacy begins with informed Veterans. We encourage AMVETS members to stay engaged with legislation affecting our community, communicate with elected representatives, participate in AMVETS legislative initiatives, and share accurate information with fellow Veterans. When Congress considers Veterans legislation, lawmakers need to hear directly from the men and women whose lives will be affected. Our collective voice matters.

AMVETS HAWAII LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- > Protect earned Veterans benefits.
- > Expand timely access to quality VA health care.
- > Support disabled and combat-injured Veterans.
- > Strengthen suicide-prevention and mental-health resources.
- > Support Veterans with disabilities through adaptive sports, fitness, and recreation.
- > Improve services for Veterans throughout Hawaii and the Pacific.
- > Support military families, caregivers, and survivors.
- > Demand accountability and responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources dedicated to Veterans.

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