



Veterans Helping Veterans since 1896.

**Statement of
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
2018 Legislative Priorities
Before the Joint Senate and House
Veterans Affairs Committees**

March 14, 2018

Presented by

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National Commander, JWV

JWV NATIONAL COMMANDER PAUL D. WARNER, PH. D.

Paul Warner was elected National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV) in August 2017, at JWV's 122nd Annual National Convention in San Antonio, Texas.

A member of JWV Post 42 (now merged in Post 191) in New York for over fifty years, Paul Warner dedicated much of his life to volunteering in both the veterans and Jewish communities.

He entered the United States Coast Guard's officer candidate school in May 1952 and was commissioned in the Coast Guard Reserve as an Ensign four months later. He was assigned to the Coast Guard's training facility at Cape May, NJ, where he served for over twenty months. During that time, he was promoted to Lieutenant, and was involved in various Coast Guard Reserve administrative units, especially those involved in Judge Advocate matters. Unfortunately, extensive educational and business commitments prevented him from continuing in the Reserve, and he returned to civilian life in May 1954.

He received his Ph.D. in Accounting and Computer Applications and Information Systems (IT) and an M.B.A. in accounting from the Graduate School of Business Administration, New York University. He received J.D. and LL.M. degrees from the New York University School of Law. He is a CPA and a member of the New York and Federal Bars.

Paul had a varied and interesting professional career. He joined an accounting firm after completing his active duty with the Coast Guard. Ultimately, and as a result of mergers, he became a member of an international accounting firm and National Director of Audit Policy. He retired from the firm approximately 25 years ago. He then joined the faculty of Hofstra University where he spent the last twelve years as the Chair of the Accounting, Taxation and Legal Studies in Business department and where he is currently Professor Emeritus.

He authored numerous articles in his field, which have appeared in The CPA journal and Management Accounting. He also authored or co-authored many manuals and guides, including Chasin's Handbook for Auditors, the Kaplan Audit Manual, and the American Accounting Association's Cost Accounting manual.

Paul was a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants Auditing

Standards Board and Chair of the New York Society of Certified Public Accountants Auditing Oversight and Standards Committees. He was also a member of American Bar Association committees. He lectured extensively for the New York State Society of CPAs, the American Management Association and Management Center de Mexico.

He was Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Department of New York and obtained the passage of the law which increased the real estate tax exemption for New York state veterans by fifty percent.

He is currently a member of the Westchester County Veterans Advisory Committee where he guides its activities so that they will not interfere with the Jewish traditions. He is currently seeking an Honor Flight scheduled for observant members of the Jewish War Veterans. In addition to being active in JWV, Paul is also a member of the American Legion, DAV, MOAA, and the Korean Veterans Association.

Paul and his wife Norma have been married for 65 years. Norma is a retired elementary school teacher, and has experience teaching higher education. She is a member of Post 191 Ladies Auxiliary. They have three sons and one grandson.

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Isakson, Chairman Roe, and Members of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs, my fellow veterans and friends, I am Paul D. Warner, the National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV). JWV was established in 1896, and was congressionally chartered August 21, 1984.

JWV advocates for all veterans. We provide counseling and assistance to veterans encountering problems dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other organizations with which our members work.

JWV has been helping veterans and preserving the legacy of American Jewish military service for over 122 years. We represent veterans from all conflicts.

Volunteering at VA facilities, hosting educational programs, and supporting patriotic organizations like Boy Scouts of America, and advocating on behalf of all veterans lead the efforts our members make to serve the American veteran and our country.

The following veteran issues are the most relevant and concerning to our members. Last month, we brought these important issues to Capitol Hill, in member-led meetings with individual members of Congress and the Senate. However, that local representation is not enough. JWV urges the Senate and House Committees to address our concerns for all veterans. JWV strongly supports:

- Preserving veterans' healthcare
- Equal treatment and full range of healthcare services for our women veterans
- Preserving VA Healthcare system
- Appropriate benefits for veteran's exposure to environmental toxins, i.e., Blue Water Veterans, and burn pits.
- Authorizing the "Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers Act of 2017," also known as the Paws Act
- Authorization for caregivers for all veterans

On February 8 and 9, our National Executive Committee members were here in Washington to meet with their Senators and Representatives as part of JWV's Capitol Hill Action Days. Our members prepared diligently for these important meetings and

successfully presented our priorities to your colleagues, their members of Congress and congressional staff.

Mr. Chairman, on March 15, we at JWV will celebrate our 122nd birthday. For these 122 years, JWV has advocated for a strong national defense and fair recognition and compensation for veterans. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA represents a proud tradition of patriotism and military service to the United States.

NO GOVERNMENT FUNDING

For the record, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Inc., does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government. This is as it should be.

THE MILITARY COALITION (TMC)

JWV continues to be a proud member and active participant of The Military Coalition (TMC). Past National Commander Norman Rosenshein, JWV's National Chairman, serves on the Board of Directors.

JWV requests that the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs do everything possible to fulfill the legislative priorities of The Military Coalition.

PRESERVING OUR VA HEALTHCARE

According to the RAND Corporation's study¹, published in the Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2016, which compared VA and non-VA quality of care, the VA's healthcare system provides generally better or equal care for TBI, PTSD, and other traumatic and serious medical conditions. The VA has a special expertise in treating these types of illnesses and injuries because they see them regularly and VA physicians have specialized training in these critical areas which are not normally seen in other healthcare systems.

¹ *Comparing VA and Non-VA Quality of Care; A Systematic Review.* Published In: Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2016

Posted on RAND.org on September 14, 2016 https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP66619.html

Although there are many areas for performance improvement, 92% of its users acknowledge the service they receive to be good to excellent.

In addition to receiving better specialized care for critical illnesses and injuries, several studies support the cost benefits of the VA system vs a private system of veteran healthcare. In one study, by *Health Affairs*², it cites the ability of the VA to negotiate lower prices on prescription drugs, often at savings not available to most commercial and government payers. This study is often cited as a model for broader federal negotiation of drug prices--or as a benchmark for other purchasers to use in obtaining comparable pricing.

JWV is opposed to bill HR 4457, and any bill which would dismantle the VA healthcare system, charge veterans for service-connected healthcare, and/or to reduce the VA to an insurance program for veterans.

Jewish War Veterans of the USA reminds all that the reason the VA Medical Health Care exists is to serve American's veterans, rather than as a for-profit corporation with highly paid employees, shareholders, and profit and loss statements that must show sizable earnings to satisfy non-veterans at the annual stockholders meeting.

EQUAL TREATMENT AND FULL RANGE OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR OUR WOMEN VETERANS

There are unique medical needs for women veterans which continue to be inadequately met by the VA. For instance, according the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)³, 27 percent of VA medical facilities lacked an onsite gynecologist, while the number of women veterans utilizing the VA medical system has increased by some 80% over the course of the last decade.

In areas where the VA does not provide gender-specific services to women veterans, they must depend on Choice Act providers. While the number of obstetricians

² *Health Policy Brief Series 8, August 2017* <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20171008.000174/full/>

³ *Improved Monitoring Needed for Effective Oversight of Care for Women Veterans*
GAO-17-52: Published: Dec 2, 2016. Publicly Released: Dec 2, 2016.

and gynecologists under the Choice Act has increased, some areas still lack these providers, according to a Veterans Health Administration (VHA) analysis. Although the VHA monitors access-related Choice performance measures (such as timely appointment scheduling) for all veterans, it does not have such measures for women veterans' gender-specific care, such as mammography, maternity care, or gynecology.

All too often, women cannot obtain information and counseling through the VA on issues of reproductive health care, and an increasing number of women suffer from Military Sexual Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress while in service. There are situations wherein women veterans may be more open and candid speaking to a female medical and mental health provider.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Congress to provide adequate resources to the VA to:

- a. Provide women veterans with comprehensive health care in a timely and geographically accessible manner.
- b. Provide women veterans with reproductive information and counseling, as appropriate.
- c. Hire sufficient gynecologists to have services available to women veterans.
- d. Have available a sufficient number of female medical and mental health trained professionals so as to be able to meet the needs of women veterans who would prefer services provided by a female provider.
- e. Have every woman veteran screened to detect if the veteran suffered Military Sexual Trauma during the course of her service regardless of whether she reveals that assault or harassment and divert her to appropriate services and counseling.
- f. Create a long-term plan to address the future needs unique to women veterans in anticipation of a growing percent of women in the military and the increased deployment of women serving in the National Guard and Reserve components.
- g. Make available for women veterans, Women's Clinics at all VA facilities, regardless of size.

h. In situations where there are no appropriate services within 40 miles of the nearest VA facility, or an appointment cannot be made within 30 days, allow the veteran to utilize the medical services of a pre-authorized provider.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA **strongly supports the Deborah Sampson Act S 681** which would improve the benefits and services provided by the VA to women veterans.

PROVIDE BENEFITS TO BLUE WATER NAVY VETERANS

During the Vietnam War, approximately twenty million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed over the Republic of Vietnam, contaminating the lands, rivers, harbors, and territorial seas. Under the Agent Orange Act of 1991, Blue Water Navy Veterans were initially entitled to presumptive service-connected disability status, relieving them of the burdensome process of producing evidence that directly established service connection for a specific health condition. However, in 2002, the VA reinterpreted the language of the Agent Orange Act of 1991 to apply only to veterans who served in the inland waterways or set foot in the Republic of Vietnam.

A study⁴, conducted by the Institute of Medicine shows a plausible pathway for Agent Orange to have entered the South China Sea via dirt and debris from rivers and streams. Additionally, a study⁵ conducted by the University of Queensland found that Australian ships' distillation systems, which were identical to the systems used on U.S. Navy ships during the Vietnam War era, in fact, enriched the toxic dioxin in Agent Orange. This contaminated water was used for cooking, cleaning, showering, laundry, and drinking, exposing U.S. Navy personnel to high levels of the toxic chemical.

Jewish War Veterans of the USA strongly supports the passage of **HR 299**, to

⁴ Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange Exposure. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2011.

⁵ Jochen F. Müller, Caroline Gaus, Katie Bundred, Vincent Alberts, Michael R. Moore, and Keith Horsley. *Co-Distillation Of Agent Orange And Other Persistent Organic Pollutants In Evaporative Water Distillation* dynamicplace.com/Bordelon/contents/en-us/Australian%20Study.pdf

provide the same presumptive VA benefits to those personnel who served off the coast of Vietnam as are provided to those who had “boots on the ground” in Vietnam. It is quite clear that those who served in the waters off Vietnam are deserving of VA benefits. Thousands of older veterans who served in the territorial waters of Vietnam are now suffering from higher rates of disease, and other chronic health conditions, which can be attributed to exposure to Agent Orange.

When **HR 299** was to come up for a vote, some members of Congress decided that it should be paid for by reducing the veteran’s cost of living adjustments. They wanted to have veterans pay for those veterans who were injured by our government. Fortunately, this outrageous proposal was never voted on.

JWV POSITION ON BURN PITS

Burn pits are defined as open-air pits used to burn war chemicals, paint, medical and human waste, metal/aluminum cans, munitions and other unexploded ordnance, petroleum and lubricant products, plastics, rubber, wood, and discarded food. There were 197 burn pits operating in Afghanistan as of 2011 and 63 operating in Iraq as of November 2009, prior to new regulations being enacted for Iraq.

The Department of Defense estimates reveal that between 65,000 and 85,000 pounds of waste were disposed of each day at large bases (large being defined as over 1,000 military), and various peer review studies suggest an association between burn pit proximity and respiratory illness. The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs maintain that any ill effects from exposure to burn pits is temporary and will pass once the military member is removed from the area.

The American Public Health Association has developed a series of recommendations including:

1. Working with the Afghan troops to end the use of burn pits and remediate the area surrounding them;

2. Studying, at independent universities and non-governmental organizations, the long-range effects of exposure at burn pits;
3. Requiring the VA to make the current airborne hazard and burn pits registry fully functional;
4. Requiring those now working near burn pits to wear protective gear and enter into long-term medical surveillance;

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon both the Executive and Legislative branches to immediately implement the recommendation of the American Public Health Association.

ILLNESS CAUSED BY DEFOLIANTS, TOXINS AND OTHER HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

Members of the military were exposed to chemicals and defoliants such as Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. Servicemembers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and southwest Asia, were, continue to be exposed to a cocktail of poisons and other hazardous substances from “burn pits” and other sources.

The long-term effects of these poisons, toxins and other hazardous materials not only causes illness in the veterans but, also may cause birth defects in the offspring of the veterans spanning more than one generation. The true extent of the use and exposure to these toxic chemicals is still unknown as to how they were transported and sprayed in Korea, the Philippines and other locations, both stateside and overseas, sailors aboard the “Blue Water” Navy ships’ as well as numerous members of the Marines and Air Force flight crews were exposed by airborne and drinking water contaminants that the Department of Veterans Affairs denies occurred.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands that the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs acknowledge the true extent of the use of chemical and defoliants and calls upon Congress to provide adequate funding for further research into the effects of these toxins and other hazardous substances on the veterans and their families.

JWV SUPPORT FOR HR 3327-THE JACK ANDERSON TOXIC EXPOSURE DECLASSIFICATION ACT

The Jack Anderson Toxic Exposure Declassification Act, as a stand-alone bill, would require the Department of Defense to declassify documents related to any known incident where no less than 100 members of the Armed Forces were exposed to any toxic substance.

It has been over 50 years since members of the military were unwittingly and unwillingly exposed to secret chemical and biological warfare agents, and the Department of Defense continues to refuse to tell those exposed exactly what they had been exposed to. Among the tests under what was label as Project 112, was a test called the Shipboard Hazard and Decontamination Program that was conducted at various times between 1962 and 1970 and exposed service members to such chemical and biological agents as sarin, VX, and Q Fever. These former service members still cannot find out to what chemical and biological agents they were exposed to.

The Jewish War Veterans supports of the USA thanks Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA-5th) for offering this bill and to those members of the House who have signed on as co-sponsors. **We support bill HR 3327** in its current form and ask that a companion bill be passed by the Senate.

AUTHORIZING THE “PUPPIES ASSISTING WOUNDED SERVICEMEMBERS ACT OF 2017,” ALSO KNOWN AS THE PAWS ACT

Substance use disorders (SUDs), and mental health issues, including PTSD, depression, and other mood disorders, are a significant problem among our nation’s military veterans, and have been associated with increased risk of suicide.

Since 2001 the proportion of veterans with mental health or substance abuse disorders has significantly increased. According to Rajeev Ramchand, an epidemiologist who studies suicide for the RAND Corp, the suicide rate is higher for veterans than non-

veterans in every single state by at least 1.5 times, suggesting unique problems faced by veterans.

A pilot program and study of the pairing of service dogs with veterans suffering from mental health disorders has allowed the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine the efficacy of using service dogs as a nontraditional therapy to ensure the well-being of veterans.

H.R. 2327, directs the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out a five-year pilot program under which it provides grants to eligible nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder after completing other evidence-based treatment.

The VA shall develop metrics to measure the improvement in psychosocial function and therapeutic compliance and changes in dependence on prescription narcotics and psychotropic medication of veterans participating in the program.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Congress to **pass H.R. 2327**, the “Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers Act of 2017” also known as the “PAWS Act.”

BENEFITS TO CARE-GIVERS

Disabled veterans depend on the quality care that family caregivers provide. Whether the veteran was disabled recently or pre-9/11, the need for quality care is the same. Caregivers provide the best quality of life outcomes our veterans deserve. Additionally, care giver support for all veterans would provide better care outcomes at a lower cost than if those being cared for at home had to be housed and cared for in VA or private care facilities.

The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee has embraced a plan from Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) to expand eligibility for Post-9/11 caregiver benefits to older generations of veterans and caregivers, attaching her bill to a legislative package whose centerpiece – reform of the Choice program – is seen as critical for Congress to pass. (The Caring for Our Veterans Act S 2193)

Even if this strategy succeeds, caregivers of severely injured veterans from earlier wars face at least a year's wait and possibly longer before the first group of them gains eligibility for a monthly stipend, that first became available to the Post-9/11 generation of caregivers six years ago.

Under these bills, caregiver benefits couldn't be expanded to older generations until VA certifies it has modernized its information technology sufficiently to support a bigger program. The could take at least a year.

Benefits then would be extended first to caregivers of veterans severely injured in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975, which would include the Vietnam War and earlier conflicts. If that expansion runs well, two years later eligibility for the program would be opened to veterans with severe injuries incurred in the line of duty from May 8, 1975 through Sept. 10, 2001.

CBO estimated the average cost to VA per participant at \$30,000 a year. The House committee didn't hold a hearing last year on a companion caregiver bill all tough, it has 82 co-sponsors.

It is my opinion that this proposal is designed to reduce the number veterans who will be eligible, since the current budget short changes the VA and limits its ability to fund the modernization of its information technology systems.

Jewish War Veterans of the USA **supports Caring for Our Veterans Act S 2193**, and calls upon the Congress to expand the eligibility of Post 9/11 caregiver benefits to caregivers of veterans severely disabled before September 11, 2001.

POW/MIA

For many years JWV has consistently sought the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for the missing, and repatriation of all recoverable remains. At every National Executive meeting, JWV displays the POW/MIA flag in front of the dais to show our continued support.

As of February 20, 2018, the numbers still missing and otherwise unaccounted for from the Vietnam war is 1601.

In early December the government of Vietnam formally gave approval for a defense intelligence specialist to be permanently assigned to the US Embassy in Hanoi to provide support for locating and recovering remains.

JWV asks the Congress to provide the necessary personnel and funding to continue to make every effort to bring closure to the families of the missing.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Isakson and Chairman Roe, our great nation must care for its veterans. Our country must, therefore, pay the costs involved.

JWV believes that veterans' benefits are earned through service and sacrifices in defense of the nation and are not "entitlement" or "social welfare" programs. JWV opposes deficit-driven political decisions that would lump earned veterans' benefits with un-related civilian entitlement programs.

We thank you for the opportunity to present them to you today.

Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America

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