

Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America

► Key Legislative Priorities for 2019

► SUICIDE PREVENTION

Current research puts veterans suicides at 20 deaths per day. This is unacceptable. Even one veteran suicide a day is too many. The Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV) strongly urges the members of Congress to place this important issue high on their priority list.

Data released this past summer show that veterans are twice as likely to die by suicide than non-veterans. It also shows that the rate is highest among post 9/11 veterans ages 18-24. Female veterans are least likely to reach out for help, and veterans over age 55 and those who served during a peacetime experience had the highest rates overall.

• *JWV urgently asks Congress to fund research which will help eradicate veteran suicide. Additionally, the VA needs new ways of reaching out to veterans in need of mental healthcare. The VA must have enough healthcare providers to ensure quick access for veterans in need.*

► VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Veteran homelessness continues to plague us. In spite of heroic efforts by many, there are still thousands of homeless veterans out there. Housing and Urban Development officials estimate that there are approximately 38,000 veterans across the country who do not have stable housing.

In 2009 the VA announced a department goal of bringing an end to veterans homelessness in five years. Indeed, the number of homeless veterans fell by more than 35,000 individuals by 2016. That almost halved the number of homeless veterans at the start of this VA effort.

However, in 2017, the number actually increased, largely due to a sharp increase in homelessness in a few western states, most notably California. Thankfully, this year is showing a decrease, including California.

• *JWV implores Congress to do much more for our homeless veterans. We need legislation which would substantially reduce veteran homelessness and get the many thousands more of our veterans off the streets.*

► BURN PITS ACCOUNTABILITY

Burn pits are the new Agent Orange. This issue is of primary interest to the Jewish War Veterans and our members who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Burn pits have been used as a way for service members to dispose of waste at forward operating bases. Service members had to stand over metal drums and stir the burning waste. Although not as visible as other job-related risks, exposure to toxic chemical fumes is perilous.

• *JWV strongly urges legislation to provide adequate benefits to these veterans who have been exposed.*

► BLUE WATER NAVY VETERANS

JWV has been a strong supporter of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which would extend Agent Orange disability benefits and health care to between 70,000 and 90,000 veterans who served aboard ships in territorial waters off Vietnam during the war. The bill passed the House last year, but it seems that it is likely to fail in the Senate before this Congress's term is over. It will be likely that the new Congress installed next year will have to tackle this important issue.

JWV salutes the House of Representatives for unanimously passing a Blue Water Navy bill (H.R. 299) this past June.

The sailors and Marines who served in the waters off of Vietnam, but did not come ashore or operate in "brown water" near sprayed foliage or runoff from dioxin-laced herbicides, are denied Agent Orange related benefits. This must be corrected!

• *JWV asks each member of Congress to vote to insure passage of legislation, which will provide appropriate benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans.*

► GI BILL ACCOUNTABILITY

Earlier this year, a report came out stating that more than 10,000 student veterans have gone more than 30 days—and 1,000 more than 60 days—without receiving their GI Bill stipends. Some had their housing and food supply interrupted due to the issue in distributing these stipends. To make matters worse, the VA initially stated that they were unable to retroactively pay these veterans.

After much intervention by different VSOs and the Military Coalition (which JWV is a proud member), the VA reversed its course, and it will now retroactively pay these veterans their much earned benefits.

The reason behind the missed payments and the delay were due to a 50-YEAR-OLD computer system. Congress must ensure that the VA updates it's system as soon as possible. Relying on 50-year-old technology is not only substandard, it is actually *harming our veterans*.

• *JWV urges Congress to pass legislation modernizing all of the VA's computer systems as well as ensuring that veterans receive their much-earned GI Bill benefits.*

► SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

The Jewish War Veterans urges Congress to support \$3.3 billion in security assistance to Israel and \$500 million in joint U.S.-Israel missile defense funding in fiscal year 2020, as called for in the 2016 U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on security assistance. A robust foreign aid budget is an essential element of America's national security strategy.

• *JWV urges Congress to support full security assistance to Israel and a robust overall foreign aid budget.*

► POW/MIA

JWV continues to strongly advocate for the return of all those still missing in action. The JWV displays the POW/MIA flag in the lobby of our national headquarters and in front of the dais at every meeting of our National Executive Committee meeting. We must never forget.

JWV is pleased to see the reparation of those missing in Vietnam, as well as those from the Korean War and even from WWII. It's important that as many families as possible have closure.

• *JWV asks Congress to provide adequate funding to support the fullest possible accounting of our missing service members and the repatriation of all recoverable remains.*

