

**Statement of
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
2021 Legislative Priorities
Before the Joint House and Senate
Veterans Affairs Committees
March 4, 2021**



**Presented by
Jeffrey Sacks
National Commander**

JWV National Commander Jeffrey Sacks

Jeffrey Sacks was elected as National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV) during its 124th Annual, and first virtual, National Convention, held in August 2020. A member of JWV since 1996, Jeff has previously served as JWV's National Awards Committee Chairman, Resolutions Committee Vice Chairman, and National Executive Committeeman from Illinois. Jeff was Commander of JWV's Department of Illinois, and of JWV Post 153 of Chicago. He is a life member of JWV, VFW, American Legion, National Sojourners, and Military Order of the World Wars. Jeff also serves on the Board of the National Museum of American Jewish Military History.

Jeff is a veteran of Operation Desert Storm and was awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious service. His service during the Gulf War included Base Defense, Enemy Prisoner of War Operations, Convoy Escort, and Customs/Agriculture Pre-Screening of Troops returning to their home stations. As an Army Reserve Captain, he commanded the 822nd Military Police Company of the US Army Reserve in Southwest Asia in 1991. Under his command, the 822nd MP Company received a Meritorious Unit Commendation, among other decorations.

After the war, Jeff returned home and resumed his civilian occupation as a law enforcement officer and was a Supervisor with the Chicago Police Department, before retiring in December 2012. Jeff served in the Army Reserve until 1997, when he joined the Retired Reserve, retiring from the Army in October 2017, due to a disability.

Jeff suffers from a rare autoimmune disorder, Pemphigus Vulgaris, which was diagnosed within a year of his service in the Gulf War. Jeff has been denied VA disability because Pemphigus Vulgaris is not on the list of diseases currently considered service connected. Being VA Category 8C, he is not entitled to free medical treatment at the VA.

Jeff is active in the Jewish community. He is a member of Ezra Habonim the Niles Township Jewish Congregation and is Chairman of his Synagogue's Security Committee. He is an NRA Range Safety Officer and enjoys teaching safe handling and shooting of antique firearms in inclement weather at the Conservation Club of Kenosha County, Wisconsin. He is also an active Mason and Shriner.

Jeff was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from the University of Illinois in 1979. He also graduated from the US Army Military Police School (Officer basic and advanced courses), and the Chicago Police Academy. He has worked in law enforcement and security for over 40 years.

Jeff is married to Pye Squire and together they have five remaining children and ten grandchildren. Jeff's eldest son, an Army veteran who also was a Chicago police officer, committed suicide on January 1st, 2019. Two of their remaining children also serve on the Chicago Police Department, and one is on active duty with the US Armed Forces.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
NO GOVERNMENT FUNDING.....	1
THE MILITARY COALITION (TMC).....	1
NO PRIVATIZATION OF THE VA.....	2
HOMELESS VETERANS.....	2
MEANS TEST FOR WWII VETERANS.....	2
MAJ. RICHARD STAR ACT (H.R. 1282) (S. 344)	3
SERVICE MEMBER AND VETERAN SUICIDES	3
SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE VA.....	3
POW/MIA	4
CONCLUSION	4

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Takano and Chairman Tester, and distinguished Members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, my fellow veterans, and friends, I am Jeffrey Sacks, 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 regardless of their religion. We provide counseling and assistance to veterans encountering problems dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other entities with which our members work.

JWV has been helping veterans and preserving the legacy of American Jewish military service for almost 125 years. We represent veterans from all conflicts.

Volunteering at VA facilities, hosting educational programs, supporting patriotic organizations like 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. JWV urges the House and Senate Committees to address our concerns for all veterans. JWV strongly supports:

- Elimination of the means test for all veterans, especially WWII veterans
- No privatization of the VA
- Suicide prevention

Mr. Chairman, on March 15, we at JWV will celebrate our 125th birthday. Throughout our existence JWV has advocated for a strong national defense and fair recognition and compensation for veterans. Like all of us sitting here before you today, 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.

NO PRIVATIZATION OF THE VA

JWV is strongly opposed to veterans' healthcare being privatized. Privatizing VA healthcare would be a giant step backwards.

The VA system is designed specifically to meet the needs of veterans. That means amputees, paralyzed veterans, blinded veterans, the traumatic brain injured, and PTSD sufferers see medical personnel in the VA who specialize in these types of combat related injuries and know how to best deal with them. Privatizing the VA, i.e., changing the VA and giving every veteran a healthcare card, would result in the loss of access to these invaluable specialists.

The traumatized veteran needs medical personnel who are experienced working with these specific types of problems.

Also, those who work in VA healthcare have a special affinity for veterans and seem to give an extra effort on their behalf. Moreover, veterans who are patients tend to wear caps to indicate their military service, and tend to bond with each other, which helps make the VA health facility a friendlier place.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA strongly urges the members of this joint committee to firmly resist any, and all efforts of those who want to privatize the VA.

HOMELESS VETERANS

There continues to be a serious problem with too many veterans being homeless throughout the country. One homeless veteran is ONE TOO MANY!

In order for homeless veterans to receive the funding necessary to address some of their difficulties they need to be considered as a "Special Needs Population".

As a Special Needs Population, the homeless veterans will receive a larger portion of the funding allocation.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA supports having our homeless veterans deemed as a Special Needs Population.

MEANS TEST FOR WWII VETERANS

In 1996, Congress passed the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Act which established a means test for eligibility for some veterans to be able to make use of the VA healthcare system.

The Legislation exempted veterans of the Spanish-American and World War I.

The Legislation exempted veterans who, at the time of its passage were in their late 80s to 90s.

Today our surviving World War II veterans are in this same age bracket and deserve the same courtesy.

Thus, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA strongly urges Congress to eliminate the means test for all World War II veterans and their spouses.

MAJ. RICHARD STAR ACT (H.R. 1282) (S. 344)

Maj. Richard Star is a combat engineer in Afghanistan and Iraq. Maj. Star had to retire with less than 20 years of service due to service-connected terminal lung cancer.

The proposed legislation would authorize full concurrent receipt of military retirement and disability compensation.

Under the system now in existence, there is a dollar-for-dollar offset so that the average disabled veteran suffers an offset of \$494.11 per month or almost \$6,000 per year.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA supports the efforts to enact the Maj. Richard Star Act to end this unfair burden on combat-related ill and injured service members.

SERVICE MEMBER AND VETERAN SUICIDES

In 2013, there were 18.5 suicides per 100,000 active-duty troops but in 2018 there were 24.8 suicides per 100,000 active-duty troops.

Male veterans were about 30 percent more likely to commit suicide than their civilian counterparts, and women veterans are committing suicide at a rate of almost double their civilian counterparts. This is a crisis!

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has long called upon Congress and the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to redouble their efforts and financial support to halt this trend toward more suicides.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA strongly urges that Congress and the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs increase the funding and psychological testing of all members of the military and all veterans to ensure that they are not at risk for suicide.

A system whereby appropriate authorities can be notified that a member of the military or a veteran might be in danger to him/herself without any negative repercussions to the endangered individual or the person making such a report should be introduced.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE VA

A Government Accounting Office study found that 26% of female employees within the Department of Veterans Affairs felt that they had been victims of sexual harassment on the job site. The GAO study found conflicting and incomplete policies concerning sexual harassment as well as a lack of data about allegations.

The Department of Veterans Affairs told Congress that it could take up to four years to implement the recommendations within the GAO report.

The Congressional Committee overseeing the Department of Veterans Affairs has directed that the four-year timeframe was completely unacceptable.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA strongly urges the Department of Veterans Affairs to immediately implement to GAO recommendations as a staff fearing sexual harassment may not pay as much attention to caring for veterans they serve as they do trying to avoid being sexual harassed. There is no place for sexual harassment in the VA or in any government organization!

POW/MIA

For many years JWV has consistently sought the return of all POW's, 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.

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. The number of still missing and otherwise unaccounted for servicemembers from the Vietnam War is 1,585.

The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America urges Congress to provide adequate funding to support the greatest possible accounting of missing service members and the repatriation of all recoverable remains. JWV remains a strong advocate for the return of all those missing in action and prisoners of war. It's important that as many families as possible have closure.

CONCLUSION

Our members serve in war, as volunteers in their communities jointly with other veterans' organizations, as patriotic citizens, and as advocates for veterans. JWV strongly urges each of you to remember the needs of those who have served.

We thank you for the opportunity to present our priorities to you today.

God Bless the United States of America.

Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America

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Veterans Helping Veterans