


**Statement of
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
2024 Legislative Priorities
Before the Joint House and Senate
Veterans Affairs Committees
March 13, 2024**



Presented by
**Colonel Barry Lischinsky USA, Ret.
National Commander 2023-2024**



Chairman Tester and Chairman Bost, Ranking Members Moran and Takano, Members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, fellow veterans, and friends, I am Colonel Barry Lischinsky, USA, Retired and the 92nd National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV).

My service started as an enlisted combat medic and I achieved the rank of a Colonel, responsible for the command and control of a combat service support brigade size element. I retired from the military having completed fourteen years as a traditional Guardsman and an additional twenty years of active federal service. My military service spans more than thirty-four years of continuous service, supporting operations and conflicts from the Vietnam War, Gulf War through Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terrorism.


Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV) was founded in 1896 and was Congressionally chartered August 21, 1984. JWV advocates for all veterans regardless of their religion, heritage or period of service.

JWV is the longest serving Veterans Service Organization (VSO) in the country and will celebrate its 128th anniversary in two days on March 15, 2024. JWV supports the military and veterans by participating in Veterans Day and Memorial Day events and by volunteering at Department of Defense military bases and Department of Veterans Affairs locations (medical facilities, regional offices, and cemeteries) across the country. We mentor the next generation of military leaders through Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and Scouting programs, grants and scholarships, Jewish Warrior Weekend, the Kiddush Cup, and Mitzvah projects. JWV's mission message is strong and clear: fighting for military and veterans benefits and services; advocating on their behalf with Congressional officials, Executive Branch departments and the White House; and continuing to combat antisemitism, bigotry and hate wherever and whenever it appears.

Special Focus on Hatred, Bigotry, and Antisemitism


As the only Jewish VSO, JWV opposes all forms of hatred, discrimination and bigotry but is especially outspoken on antisemitism. JWV officials participate in roundtables and express JWV's strong position against antisemitism by calling out University officials and Amazon officials on events and merchandise. JWV is also proud of our advocacy for William Shemin and Tibor Rubin to receive the Medal of Honor after they originally faced antisemitism and were denied nominations.

The world changed on the morning of October 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists attacked Israel and its citizens by launching a heinous, unprovoked, and vicious surprise attack on Israel, killing over 1,200 innocent civilians, and wounding many more Israeli civilian men, women, and children. In my statement published after sundown October 7, 2023, "JWV condemns the assault against Israel and emphasizes that terrorist actions anywhere are never justified. JWV supports Israel, offers condolences to all who lost loved ones, offers prayers for the wounded and all who have been kidnapped by Hamas."



JWV stands with Israel, its military, and its citizens and calls on our members and all Americans to join us in condemning this terrorist attack. The remaining hostages must be immediately released and reconstituted with their families.

JWV urges Senators and U.S. Representatives to stand with Israel and in support of humanitarian and military funding. JWV is leading this effort to demonstrate solidarity and unity from the larger veteran and military community in the United States. We are proud to have led the effort of securing the signatures of 26 veterans service organizations and military service organizations representing millions of current and former uniformed service members, veterans, and their families to stand against terrorism and with our brothers and sisters in the Israeli Defense Forces. The November 3, 2023, letter is included as part of our official written statement ([Attachment A](#)).

As instances of antisemitism continue to rise across the country, JWV asks all Americans to be vigilant, learn, and educate our fellow citizens. JWV is doing its part by coalition building with organizations like Foundation to Combat Antisemitism (#) and Combating Antisemitism Movement across the Nation. We are partnering with StandWithUs to address antisemitism at colleges and universities.

JWV also supports the National Strategy for Countering Antisemitism and its four pillars: 1) Increasing awareness and understanding of antisemitism, including the threat to America, and broaden appreciation of Jewish American Heritage; 2) Improving safety and security for Jewish communities; 3) Reversing the normalization of antisemitism and counter antisemitic discrimination; and 4) Building cross-community solidarity and collective action to counter hate.

We commend House Veteran Affairs Committee Members Representatives Mariannette Miller-Meeks and Juan Ciscomani for their work in addressing hate and bigotry. In December 2023, the bipartisan *Commission to Study Acts of Antisemitism in the United States Act* was introduced to address the rise in antisemitic violence and attacks on our Jewish communities. JWV urges you to cosponsor this important bipartisan legislation.

Descriptions of JWV actions are highlighted in the two-page summary of our efforts and are included in our official written statement ([Attachment B](#)). JWV asks all Americans, including Senators and Representatives to be vigilant, learn, and educate our fellow citizens.

JWV asks House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) members to join with us in combating hatred, bigotry, and antisemitism targeted at veterans and military service members. JWV stands ready to be a resource for you and your staffs in helping to educate Americans. We feel that education is the key to reducing antisemitic actions and incidents in America and around the world.

JWV Priorities for the Second Session of the 118th Congress

Supporting America's Veterans, Service Members, Their Families, Caregivers, and Survivors

JWV works to support veterans and service members, and believes that obligation extends to their families, including caregivers and survivors. JWV is and continues to be at the forefront as a voice for not only those of the Jewish faith but for all veterans. On August 10, 2022, the landmark PACT Act was signed into law leading to the largest expansion of benefits to address toxic exposures. JWV worked with Congress to connect veterans and their families to much-needed resources for education, housing, and health care. As we look to the second session 118th Congress, JWV honors all those who are wearing or have worn the uniform of the United States.

Before I address our priorities, I want to thank Chairmen Tester and Bost, Ranking Members, Moran and Takano, and all committee members for working on the bipartisan "Veterans Package." The legislation includes provisions of the *Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act*, the *Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone (HOME) Act 2023*, *Electronic Health Records Reset Act*, and provides for full funding of VET-TEC programs, making improvements to the GI Bill and modernizing USERRA. JWV recognizes and appreciates the efforts of all committee staff members in negotiating and bringing the package to the House and Senate floor soon. JWV will urge our members to contact their respective representatives and senators to support its passage.

JWV continues to support our veteran and military community by advocating for the following list of priorities.

Delivering Timely, High-quality Benefits and Services

JWV is pleased the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is delivering more benefits and health care, faster to more veterans than ever before. In 2023, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) processed a record of 1.98 million veteran claims. JWV will continue to hold VA accountable and urge them to continue to be innovative and provide timely service to all veterans.

JWV will continue engaging with VA in the implementation of the *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-55)* to improve the claims and appeals process. JWV urges Congress to: 1) have VA support investment in software and hardware upgrades for claims management; 2) have VA continue to hire and train officials to meet the expected surge in claims due to the PACT Act; 3) have VA assure that the processing of non-PACT Act claims are not delayed; and 4) assure that VA must prevent non-accredited and unlicensed individuals from taking fees for representing veterans' claims.

Addressing Toxic Exposures and Burn Pits

JWV, like many VSOs, made toxic exposure, burn pits and the PACT Act a top priority. While the legislation was life-changing for so many veterans, more needs to be done. JWV commends VA for screening more than 5 million veterans for toxic exposure and completing claims in approximately 160 days. Congress must continue to provide the resources, including hiring individuals to adjudicate claims and funding upgrades to VBA Information Technology (IT) systems, and ensure Veterans Health Administration (VHA) officials have the clinical resources, equipment, and space to treat all veterans. JWV remains committed to holding VA accountable in implementing the PACT Act. JWV supports that Congress and VA adequately fund and manage the Toxic Exposure Fund (TEF) as outlined in Section 103.

JWV applauds VA for expanding toxic exposure benefits to additional veterans on March 5 to include veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States will also be eligible to enroll. JWV urges all veterans to enroll now based on this new eligibility.


Suicide Prevention and Mental Health -- Reducing Veteran Suicide

Mental health and suicide prevention remain a top priority for JWV as the suicide rate among veterans is nearly double when compared to civilians with women vets more than double that of female civilians. In addition, the suicide rate for active duty service members is at an all-time high, with the U.S. Marine Corps having the highest rate of all branches in 2022. Veterans and service members must have increased access to mental health services as well as availability to alternative and community-based treatments. JWV urges Congress to fully fund VA's suicide prevention and mental health budget, including extending free emergency health care for all in crisis or in risk of crisis. The transition from active military to civilian is difficult and the time when individuals are often at higher risk. Education and awareness is paramount and must be integral to any prevention action plan.

Actions are needed to expand research into core causes, risk factors, and protective factors for service members, veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. JWV urges Congress to: 1) expand government and non-government funding around service members, veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors suicide rates, their possible causes, and the most significant risk and protective factors for each of these populations; 2) ensure that both VA and Department of Defense (DoD) release the underlying raw data from their annual suicide reports (properly redacted to protect individual privacy); 3) ensure DoD resumes reporting veteran combat deployment data to VA and to resume reporting on combat deployment data for suicides; and 4) explore the expansion of alternative therapies including complimentary treatment modalities such as highly trained service animals, outdoor and sports-related programs, and other innovative treatments.

In addition, JWV supports the *Veterans' Informed Consent Act* that improves veterans' understanding of the risks associated with certain pharmaceuticals to address persistent high rates of veteran suicides. Specifically, this bill requires that veterans provide written informed

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consent for Black Box medications included in the VA formulary. Black Box medications are required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to carry special warnings for medications that have a high potential for serious safety risks. Often, these warnings communicate potentially rare but dangerous side effects, or they may be used to indicate important instructions for the safe use of the drug.

Many of the Black Box medications are prescribed to veterans, and suicidal ideation is commonly one of their primary side effects. VHA Handbook states: “Veterans must be informed of the side effects of and the treatment options for medications and treatments they are prescribed.” The *Veterans’ Informed Consent Act* improves the education that veterans receive about certain risks associated with Black Box medications by requiring that all veterans provide written informed consent that they understand the risks associated with these drugs.

JWV continues to promote the 988 Veterans Crisis Line since it went live in July 2022 to provide veterans and their loved ones an easy number to remember for veterans in crisis. VA and DoD must continue to educate veterans, service members and their families on suicide prevention. More must be done, as even one suicide is one too many.

Expanding Services for Veterans and Caregivers

More than 5.5 million caregivers provide support to our nation’s wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers and veterans, many of whom require close care and supervision. Ensuring caregivers receive the support, training, and compensation they deserve is a critical priority for JWV. JWV will continue to work with Congress and VA to ensure that all veterans and their caregivers are fairly evaluated to enter the program and that those in the program receive the proper periodic clinical review.

VA implemented its final expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) to eligible veterans of all eras on October 1, 2022. VA also announced it was extending the time that legacy participants and their family caregivers within the PCAFC would remain eligible for the program. This included all services, supports and benefits for another three full years, until September 30, 2025. VA and Congress must resolve eligibility and system issues immediately and acknowledge that the current rules on eligibility make it far too difficult for caregivers to enter and remain in the program.

JWV urges VA and Congress to: 1) Provide accredited VSOs, representing veterans, access to complete records of veterans seeking assistance so that they can be properly represented; 2) Address the long-standing systemic problems related to eligibility as well as administer eligibility, reassessment and appeals in a consistent, transparent and equitable manner across the enterprise; 3) remove the annual reassessment requirement of a veteran’s qualifying activities of daily living (ADL) if the disability is unlikely to improve; 4) identify and implement program improvements either through policy, regulatory, or legislative means; and 5) remove the regulatory requirement for a 70% disability rating to be eligible for this program. JWV looks forward to working with VA and Congress to implement these important changes.

Major Richard Star Act

Thank you, Chairman Jon Tester and Senator Larry Crapo and Representatives Gus Bilirakis and Raul Ruiz, for your leadership in the House and Senate on concurrent receipt. JWV supports legislation for the immediate payment of concurrent receipt of full military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for disabled retirees. Specifically, JWV is seeking the enactment of the *Major Richard Star Act* (H.R. 1282/S. 344) that authorizes concurrent receipt of retired pay and VA disability compensation, to include Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) beneficiaries who are medically retired with less than 20 years of service (Chapter 61). This legislation has strong support, with 327 cosponsors in the House and 72 cosponsors in the Senate. Reduced retirement pay for all injured in combat and forced to medically retire communicates an awful message to our service members and their families in our all-volunteer force.

JWV urges all Senators and Representatives to please include *Star Act* language in the FY2025 NDAA base text. Now is the time to end the unfair pay offset faced by almost 45,000 combat-injured veterans to receive full DoD retirement pay and VA disability pay.

Supporting Women Veterans

According to VA, women are the fastest growing group of veterans who use VA services. JWV is committed to addressing the specialized health care needs of our women veterans including increasing cancer screenings, improving mental health care and access, addressing infertility, and reducing intimate partner violence. JWV supports the provisions of the Deborah Sampson Act and remains committed to improving maternal health, and ensuring that all women feel welcome and receive equitable treatment and care.


Women veterans transitioning out of uniform face unique challenges because of their experiences in service or other barriers. VA expects women health care enrollees to grow from the current 10% to as high as 19% by 2025. While VA has recognized weakness in its data, VA has not implemented corrective actions to address them. VA must expand its efforts to remove barriers to ensure all veterans receive the same care, services, and benefits they earned through their service.

JWV urges Congress to: 1) provide gender specific care at all VA facilities and increase the number of providers with expertise in women's health; 2) recognize the unique mental health needs of women veterans and work to reduce the suicide rate and substance dependency; and 3) eliminate harassment and inappropriate comments from male veterans so that women veterans feel welcome, safe, and do not delay getting needed care.

Protecting Service Member and Veteran Education Benefits

For too long, service members and veterans have been targeted by predatory marketing practices from for-profit educational institutions. In October, the Department of Education (ED) closed the 90/10 loophole in the *Higher Education Act* that allowed for-profit colleges to aggressively recruit veterans and service members. JWV has long advocated for this important change and will continue to hold the ED accountable in implementing the law.

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Veterans who attend fraudulent or low-quality schools rightly wonder why VA would approve schools known for producing poor outcomes or that are under a law enforcement cloud. VA should implement stronger standards for what schools are allowed access to the GI Bill to protect students and taxpayers alike.

- Require minimum standards for GI Bill programs including adequate administrative capability to administer veterans' benefits, screening of a school's financial stability, and ensure that programs are not overcharging VA and that VA tuition funds are spent on veterans' education.
- Restore veterans' education benefits in cases of fraud, authorizing VA to restore GI Bill eligibility comparable to traditional students using ED funds, and seek to recoup funds from schools in cases of fraud.
- Improve the GI Bill comparison tool with updated metrics, a "Risk Index," comprehensive displays of government actions against schools, all VA-received student complaints, closure satisfaction markers; and avoid "Yelp"-style reviews due to FTC concerns.
- JWV urges Congress to conduct rigorous oversight of VA, ensuring the Department seeks the maximum enforcement of civil and criminal penalties, in coordination with the Department of Justice, for institutions that defraud veterans.

Ending Veteran Homelessness

More Veterans needed homeless assistance resources than the existing capacity could help. JWV commends VA for housing more than 40,000 veterans and exceeding their goal of 38,000 in the last year. These veterans were provided safe and stable environments they deserve. Despite these efforts, Veteran homelessness still increased by 7.4%. As a member of the National Coalition on Homeless Veterans, JWV continues to support efforts to permanently reduce homelessness by housing veterans. We urge VA and Congress to remain committed to reducing homelessness among veterans. JWV is pleased that the "Veterans Package" includes the HOME Act.

Fixing VA's Electronic Health Record System

JWV remains concerned that VA continues to experience issues with deploying its electronic health record system. The combination of cost overruns and lack of proper training for clinicians and staff jeopardizes patients' safety. Patients' safety must be paramount, and VA must improve training for its staff and hold the current vendor, Oracle, accountable for the system's failures. JWV insists VA learn from and take corrective actions to prevent system failures as deployments are set to resume shortly.

The upcoming deployments in Columbus, Ohio, and the James Lovell complex in Chicago, Illinois, will be closely monitored. JWV urges Congress to hold VA accountable and ensure patient safety is maintained during any future deployments.

Arlington National Cemetery Pending Eligibility Changes

JWV continues to advocate for a long-term legislative solution to preserve burial with full military honors for countless elderly and women veterans who could lose that earned benefit.

JWV's National Executive Director, Ken Greenberg Co-Chairs the Retired Affairs Committee of The Military Coalition (TMC). TMC representing 5.5 million members strongly supports H.R. 1413, *The Expanding America's National Cemetery Act*. The Act seeks to transform an existing national cemetery and sustain equivalent military honors provided at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) as it reaches capacity. A summary statement is below.

Expanding America's National Cemetery Act H.R.1413: A proposal for eligibility reduction at ANC is approaching the final steps of the federal rule making process. Congressional action is required to protect the burial benefit with full military honors. The FY 2019 *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)* required the DoD to develop a plan for ANC to continue operations "well into the future." This resulted in the DoD proposal for a reduction in eligibility to extend ANC operations 150 years. The proposed reduction would render countless veterans, retirees, and nearly all female veteran's ineligible.

The bipartisan *Expanding America's National Cemetery Act* would authorize the transformation of an existing VA-run national cemetery into the "next ANC" that can afford equivalent honors as ANC reaches capacity. ANC will not run out of room for another 42 years, affording time to develop a longer-term solution. A gradual transition to the "next ANC" over the next 40 years will allow our nation to continue to honor families for lifetimes of service and sacrifice.


Despite its Southern Expansion, and eligibility restrictions designed to extend the life of the cemetery, ANC eventually will run out of room. Changing the rules is a cost-cutting measure that comes on the backs of military retirees and others whose final plans included burial at a national cemetery. It's also shortsighted, because a long-term solution involving the transformation of an existing VA national cemetery is cost-sensitive and establishes efficiencies by relying on existing VA expertise.

Survivor Benefits Love Lives On Act

JWV joins with others in the military survivor community, to thank Senators Rafael Warnock and Jerry Moran for their leadership on the *Love Lives On Act*. The proposed legislation is the first comprehensive approach to allowing eligible military surviving spouses to retain survivor benefits upon remarriage prior to age 55.

The *Love Lives On Act* will ensure surviving military spouses retain eligibility for survivor benefits from the DoD and the VA, if they remarry before age 55. It also removes archaic and punitive language regarding 'holding oneself out to be married.' This is an unjust situation that must be rectified. This restriction is imposed on military surviving families but not on the surviving families of first responders. For example, most U.S. surviving spouses of fallen firefighters and law enforcement officers are allowed to remarry before age 55 and maintain survivor pensions and benefits. Our nation's fallen military heroes deserve no less.

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JWV fully supports the *Love Lives On Act* to honor and strengthen our Nation's Gold Star Families. We look forward to working with Senators Warnock and Moran to pass this important legislation.

Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2023

The U.S. Coast Guard carries out vital national security missions and are funded by appropriations from the Department of Homeland Security. As a result, Coast Guard personnel are more likely to experience pay interruptions during a government shutdown. The threat of a shutdown brings unnecessary hardship on these men, women, and their families.

JWV urges Congress to pass H.R. 2693, *Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act*, legislation that would guarantee Coast Guard personnel are paid during a government shutdown.

VA Final Rule Cuts Emergency Medical Air Transportation Reimbursement Rates Putting Veterans at Risk


JWV has led the fight in the VSO community on VA's proposed rule (RIN 2900-AP89, Change in Rates VA Pays for Special Modes of Transportation) that cuts the VA reimbursement rate for emergency air medical services to below the costs of the services themselves. As published, it would put more than 2.7 million rural veterans in our country who are enrolled in the VHA, and 4.8 million rural veterans overall, at risk of losing life-saving emergency air transportation.

When VA published the final rule on February 16, 2023, they made no changes but did delay the effective date to February 16, 2024. The final rule would cause emergency air medical bases around the country to shut their doors, halting services to veterans. In November 2023 VA announced a further delay in the effective date to February 16, 2025 due to tremendous pressure from Congress and the VSO community. We appreciate this delay but remain concerned about the continued misunderstanding by the VA of how many Veterans receive emergency air medical care to and from non-VA facilities.

JWV is pleased that the FY24 MILCON/VA Appropriations Act included language confirming; *the Departments actions to postpone the final effective date for reimbursement rates for ground and air ambulance services. Before modifying these rates in accordance with the new timeline, the Department is directed to communicate directly with service providers to fully understand the impact of the proposed rule change on veterans. Further, the Department should identify staff dedicated to facilitating contracting with providers of these services at fair and appropriate reimbursement rates, to include providing technical assistance on the contracting process, and to provide support for entities who are beginning the contracting process for the first time. The agreement directs the Department to report back to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress no later than 90 days after enactment of this Act on the feedback received from industry stakeholders and its plan for ensuring zero harm to veterans.*

JWV also strongly supports S. 1803 and H.R. 5530, *the Veterans Emergency Transportation Access Act*. This legislation is a commonsense bi-partisan approach that, if

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passed, would require the VA to conduct a rigorous review process and consult with stakeholders in a meaningful way before proceeding with any reimbursement changes. We encourage Congress to pass this legislation to ensure Veterans have access to lifesaving air and ground ambulance transport.

JWV applauds HVAC and SVAC leadership for their support in getting this included in the appropriations act. JWV looks forward to working together to hold VA accountable and seek alternative workable solutions before the final rule becomes effective on February 16, 2025.

Policy – National Standards of Practice for Eye Care Health Care Professionals

One reason JWV is so concerned about the future of veterans' surgical eye care is that in September 2022, VA modified its Community Care "Standardized Episode of Care (SEOC): Eye Care Comprehensive" guideline by removing language that has provided that "only ophthalmologists can perform invasive procedures, including injections, lasers, and eye surgery." By removing this sentence, VA is implicitly authorizing optometrists to perform ophthalmic surgery on veterans they refer under the Community Care program in the few states where permitted by state licensure laws.

JWV understands that VA removed this language without any opportunity for the public or veteran community to comment. We are extremely concerned that this important patient safeguard was removed and poses an increased risk to veterans requiring surgical eye care. Veterans have benefitted from established, consistent, high-quality surgical eye care for decades because VA maintained a long-standing policy that restricts the performance of therapeutic laser eye surgery to ophthalmologists, medical or osteopathic doctors who specialize in eye and vision care, in VA medical facilities.

This policy is consistent with the standard of medical care in most states. It also ensures that there is a system-wide quality standard for surgical eye care and that all veterans have access to the eye care provider with the appropriate education, training and professional experience needed to perform their eye surgery.

JWV remains concerned that VA wants to adopt a national standard of practice that could allow optometrists to perform surgery on the eyes of veterans, even though optometrists do not have the necessary level of medical education or surgical training to be a surgeon. While JWV acknowledges that optometrists play a very critical role in delivering quality eye health care for our nation's veterans, we strongly believe that optometrists should not be allowed to perform eye surgery on veterans because they do not possess the requisite training or medical degree.

JWV urges VA to immediately reinstate the language back into the SEOC: "only ophthalmologists can perform invasive procedures, including injections, lasers, and eye surgery." JWV remains ready to work with VA as well as HVAC and SVAC officials as VA seeks to establish national standards of practice roles for optometry and ophthalmology within the VA health system.



National Museum of American Jewish Military History (NMAJMH)

Do you know about our museum located in our Headquarters' Building? JWV's leadership recognized the need to bring the stories of Jewish servicemen and women to the public because if Jews do not tell our stories, nor share our message, who will?

To that end, the National Museum of American Jewish Military History (located near Dupont Circle) was chartered in 1958. The museum is dedicated to recognizing, preserving, and commemorating the service, heroism, and sacrifices of Jewish men and women who have fought in war and contributed to the peace and freedom of America. The Hall of Heroes, which highlights the 18 Jewish Medal of Honor Recipients, is an exhibit that should not be missed.

We urge you to tour our museum. I am sure you will be surprised to learn about the long and extensive U.S. military history of members of the Jewish faith.

Conclusion

JWV has a long history in advocating for a strong national defense and fair recognition and compensation for veterans, service members, and their families. We are proud to share and work with Members of Congress and our colleagues at other VSOs. There is strength in numbers and working together we can continue to assure that all veterans, service members and their family members receive the benefits earned and deserved.

We thank you for the opportunity to present our legislative and policy priorities to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees today. JWV also appreciates the ability to have open dialogue with all of the members of both committees as well as the support of the hard-working committee staff on both sides of the aisle.

God Bless the United States of America and God Bless all the brave men and women in uniform who have served and continue to serve this great nation.

No Government Funding

For the record, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

JWV 2024 National Commander's Testimony

National Commander Barry Lischinsky (2023 – 2024)




Colonel Barry Lischinsky began his military career in December 1969, as an enlisted combat field medic. Upon graduation from Massachusetts Military Academy in June 1974, he was appointed as Second Lieutenant in the Massachusetts Army National Guard, holding both federal and state commissions. In September 1999, Colonel Lischinsky was appointed to the position of Director of Personnel responsible for coordinating, administering, and advising on all personnel policies, plans and programs affecting the more than 8,000 soldiers. In May 2002, he assumed the responsibilities of Commander, 79th Troop Command. Responsible for command and control for over 2,000 soldiers assigned to six combat service support career fields. Organizations under his command consisted of Aviation, Finance, Maintenance, Medical, Quartermaster, and Transportation. In support of the Global War on Terrorism, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi

Freedom, Colonel Lischinsky was responsible for the readiness posture and deployment of over 850 soldiers within his command. Deployments included several U.S. military bases, as well as various geographical locations situated in the Middle East. The colonel relinquished command in July 2004. In November 2004, Colonel Lischinsky retired from the military having completed fourteen years as a traditional Guardsmen and an additional twenty years of active federal service. Colonel Lischinsky's military service spans over a total of thirty-four years of continuous military service.

In September 2007, Colonel Lischinsky served as a Senior Army Instructor, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) in Boston, Massachusetts. Here he would instill in high school students the core values of citizenship, leadership, service to the community, personal responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment. In February 2015, he assumed the duty position of Deputy Superintendent at the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea, Massachusetts. The Soldiers' Home in Chelsea provided long term care and independent living with programs and services for over 350 Veterans. On February 1, 2016, Barry was appointed Acting Superintendent of the Chelsea Home. Barry retired from state service in March 2017.

Since his retirement from both federal and state service, Barry continues to be committed to our military veterans. He has held numerous command and staff positions at all levels within the Jewish War Veterans to include Commander, North Shore Post 220 (2009-2013) and Commander, Department of Massachusetts (2013-2015). Barry served as the National Chairman for Membership (2017-2022). He was appointed National Chief of Staff of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (2019-2020). He was appointed to the Board of Directors for the National Museum of American Jewish Military History (2020). Barry was elected to the position of National Vice Commander (2022-2023). During the 128th Annual National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida Barry was elected to the position of National Commander for the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (2023-2024). Colonel

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(Retired) Barry Lischinsky is a life member of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, the National Museum of American Jewish Military History, and the Disabled American Veterans.

Education

Barry's civilian education includes: Bachelor of Science and Management Degree from Northeastern University. Master of Science in Management Degree from Lesley College. Certificate of Special Studies in Administration and Management from Harvard University. His military education includes: Command and General Staff College. Defense Strategy Course, United States Army War College. National Security Course, National Defense University. Brigade Pre Command Course, Fort Leavenworth.

Awards and Decorations

Colonel Lischinsky's military awards and decorations include: the Legion of Merit. Meritorious Service Medal. Army Commendation Medal. National Defense Service Medal. Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. Numerous other federal and state awards.



Jewish War Veterans

of the United States of America

Founded in 1896

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JWV is A Jewish Voice for Veterans and
a Veteran's Voice for Jews

VSOs and MSOs URGE SOLIDARITY AND UNITY FOR ISRAEL

November 3, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Republican Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Democratic Leader Jeffries:

The undersigned Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs) representing more than six million current and former uniformed service members, veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors urge you to stand with Israel and in support of humanitarian and military funding. The Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV) is leading this effort to demonstrate solidarity and unity from the larger veteran and military community in the United States. Now more than ever, we must stand against terrorism and the atrocities committed by Hamas and with our brothers and sisters in the Israeli Defense Forces.

The October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks by Hamas, an Iranian proxy, were unprovoked and vicious, killing and maiming many Israeli civilian men, women, and children. Reports from the Middle East share barbaric atrocities including innocents being beheaded, whole families randomly being executed, women being raped, and people being kidnapped and held hostage for future trade-offs. Hamas, like ISIS, is a terrorist organization and terrorist activities are never justified. The United States must continue to fight for democracy and stand against terrorism wherever and whenever it occurs.

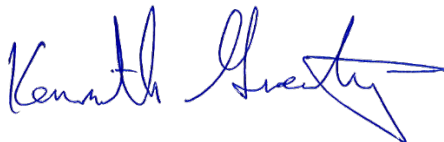
We believe that a strong national defense against terrorism is necessary to protect democracy. As such, the undersigned VSOs and MSOs urge you to stand with Israel and move swiftly to pass proposed emergency aid to Israel.

Thank you for all you do for service members and veterans, as leaders in Congress. We also commend your support for Israel at this critical time.

Sincerely,



COL Barry Lischinsky, USA, Ret.
National Commander
Jewish War Veterans of the USA



Kenneth Greenberg
National Executive Director
Jewish War Veterans of the USA

List of signing organizations

American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society
American G.I. Forum
American Retirees Association
American's Warriors Partnership
Association of the United States Navy
Blinded Veterans Association
Blue Star Families
Fleet Reserve Association
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Korean War Veterans Association
Marine Corps League
Marine Corps Reserve Association
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Military Order of the World Wars
Military-Veterans Advocacy
National Defense Committee
Non Commissioned Officers Association
Operation First Response
Sea Service Family, Foundation
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
USCG Chief Petty Officers Association
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vets4Vet Leadership
Wounded Paw Project

SPECIAL FOCUS ON ANTISEMITISM

By Ken Greenberg, National Executive Director

JWV is in a unique position to have a special focus on antisemitism. JWV opposes all forms of discrimination and bigotry but is especially outspoken on antisemitism. During 2023, JWV leadership participated in numerous roundtables and called out individuals for hate speech and antisemitism. JWV will continue to be a strong voice to combat antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

As the only Jewish VSO, we issued statements condemning antisemitic events and speeches at the University of Pennsylvania "Palestine Writes Literature Festival," the City University of New York law school graduation, the Goyim Defense League hate flyers on Long Island and remarks by a Member of Congress in Chicago. As instances of antisemitism across the country increase, JWV asks all Americans to be vigilant, learn, and educate our fellow citizens. JWV's full statements are provided in this article.

JWV Calls on University of Pennsylvania Leadership to Prevent Hate Speech on Campus September 20th, 2023

The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV) remains deeply concerned that the Palestine Writes Literature Festival will be held on campus September 22-24, 2023. The festival coincides with the Jewish High Holiday of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and takes place next to the location that Jewish students will be holding high holiday worship services. JWV National Commander retired US Army Colonel Barry Lischinsky stated, "University leadership should be sensitive to the needs of Jewish students and faculty and not provide a venue or platform for hate speech of any kind on campus." Lischinsky made clear, "The University must be responsive to its students and increase security around Jewish activities and move the festival to a different location, preferably off campus grounds."

JWV urges alumni and others to write University President M. Elizabeth Magill to disapprove of the "Palestine Writes Literature Festival" and to prevent the University from providing space to those that promote hate speech, bigotry, and antisemitic remarks and events on campus. Lischinsky reiterated that "JWV will continue to stand against hatred, bigotry, and combating antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs."

Background

Most "Palestine Writes Literature Festival" speakers have little to do with celebrating Palestinian literature or promoting the culture of Palestinian writers and artists. Guest speakers have published antisemitic statements in the past which conflict with the University of Pennsylvania's antisemitism policy. Speakers have previously given anti-Jewish speeches which are clearly "hate speech" and are again in violation of the university policy and the U.S. Constitution related to freedom of speech.

Members and patrons of the Jewish War Veterans and others have fought, and many have given the ultimate sacrifice, to preserve the rights covered by the U.S. Constitution. While there is nothing illegal about the University of Pennsylvania event itself, the event speakers' anti-Jewish hate remarks should not be allowed on campus.

Antisemitism Curricula in California Schools

JWV signs and stands in support of the coalition letter the AMCHA Initiative wrote to the California Legislative Jewish Caucus asking for their help in preventing the implementation of widespread antisemitic curricula in California high schools.

JWV Denounces Antisemitic Remarks by Representative Jayapal

July 17th, 2023

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV) expressed outrage at the remarks of U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal (WA) given on Saturday in Chicago stating that Israel is a "racist state."

JWV National Commander Colonel Nelson L. Mellitz, USAF (Retired) denounced the comments of Congresswoman Jayapal (WA) as "insensitive, hurtful, and just wrong." As antisemitism is on the rise, remarks like hers only fuel the fires of hate and bigotry. "JWV continues to stand in support of Israel as we have since its rebirth as well as vehemently oppose antisemitism, wherever and whenever it occurs, as we have since our founding in 1896," said Mellitz.

JWV Calls on New York Law Enforcement to fully Prosecute Individuals Responsible for Goyim Defense League Hate Flyers

June 19th, 2023

"Flyers recently distributed by the Goyim Defense League in Nassau County, New York are extremely antisemitic and filled with hate. They are despicable and threats to any Americans must be dealt with swiftly," said Colonel Nelson L. Mellitz, USAF, retired, National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV).

The flyer singles out current and former Jewish Members of Congress and contains a weapon in the upper left corner with a Star of David placed on the foreheads of elected officials from several states. Mellitz "implores New York law enforcement officials to fully prosecute the individuals responsible for the flyers." Law enforcement confirmed the flyer was found at a Jewish house of worship and at several residences in the Plainview, NY area.

JWV Condemns CUNY Law School Speaker's Comments and Calls on CUNY Leadership to Denounce Antisemitic Remarks

June 4th, 2023

Jewish War Veterans National Commander Colonel Nelson L. Mellitz, USAF, Retired, expressed outrage at the hate filled graduation speech delivered at the City University of New York (CUNY) Law School graduation by Fatima Mohammed.

Jewish men and women have served in the U.S. military in greater numbers than their percentage of the total population, since the founding of our great republic to preserve the right of free speech. The Fatima Mohammed anti-Jewish hateful graduation speech is a direct attack against what we have fought so hard to preserve for almost 250 years. "Her comments are extreme, inflammatory, filled with anger and have no place in any setting in the United States," said Mellitz.

JWV calls on CUNY and the law school leadership to take immediate action to denounce her antisemitic remarks and assure that students are not provided a forum to promote hatred and antisemitism in the future.

Coalition Building

JWV is strengthening our efforts by partnering with organizations like Combating Antisemitism Movement (CAM), the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism (FCAS). They are more commonly known as Stand Up to Jewish

STAND UP TO JEWISH HATE

standuptojewishhate.org/

Hate or #BlueSquare. We have carried our message to Congress and asked Members to join us in combating antisemitism targeted at veterans and military servicemembers. We partnered with CAM and six Jewish Community Organizations for a forum with ten Members of Congress on Capitol Hill. We are working with FCAS to expand outreach to include Jewish Federations and JCCs across the county. We connected with StandWithUs, to take our efforts to combat antisemitism on college campuses. JWV is a resource in helping to educate Americans. Education is the key to reducing antisemitic actions and incidents in America and around the world.

National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism

In a High Holidays call with American Jewish leaders before Rosh Hashanah, President Joe Biden reaffirmed his commitment to "condemn and combat antisemitism at every turn" and said his administration had "started aggressively implementing" the National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism it unveiled in May of this year. VA's representative is Under Secretary for Benefits Joshua Jacobs and he continues to consult with JWV leadership for issues related to the veteran and military community.

At our Convention in Jacksonville, Karen Barall Associate VP of the Jewish Federation of North America briefed JWV on the National Strategy. She highlighted four pillars of the document that focused on:

1. Increase awareness and understanding of antisemitism, including its threat to America, and broaden appreciation of Jewish American heritage.
2. Improve safety and security for Jewish communities.
3. Reverse the normalization of antisemitism and counter antisemitic discrimination.
4. Build cross-community solidarity and collective action to counter hate.

Chet Edwards Speaks Out on Jacksonville Shooting

"JWV is uniquely powerful and an important voice in the fight against antisemitism in our country. Thank you for being that voice. America is a better country today because of your voice and we will be a better country tomorrow. As we are here in Jacksonville, I would be remiss not to say what we all know. What happened here three days ago was an unspeakable, unconscionable, tragic assault, not just on African Americans in Jacksonville. It was an assault upon our country, the very soul of our country, very heart of our country. I think it's also important for all Americans to understand that that young terrorist, that the killer had etched Nazi swastikas on his A-15. I think that is a message that needs to go out across this country. Let me also add that as a lifelong Methodist and the son-in-law of a Baptist minister, I feel a responsibility to be a partner with you in the fight against bigotry and antisemitism. All Americans of all faiths and backgrounds must join in the fight against antisemitism because antisemitism diminishes our country and what you were willing to give your life for. So, when I leave this convention today, I will double my effort to be a voice with you against antisemitism." *August 29th, 2023*

SPECIAL FOCUS ON ANTISEMITISM

Updated December 2023

By Ken Greenberg, National Executive Director

JWV is in a unique position to have a special focus on antisemitism. JWV opposes all forms of discrimination and bigotry but is especially outspoken on antisemitism. During 2023, JWV leadership participated in numerous roundtables and called out individuals for hate speech and antisemitism. JWV will continue to be a strong voice to combat antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

As the only Jewish VSO, we've previously issued statements condemning antisemitic events and speeches. As instances of antisemitism across the country increase, especially following the terrorist attacks of October 7, JWV has continued to remain dedicated to the cause issuing a statement to Amazon regarding antisemitic product sales. JWV continues to remain active in the fight against antisemitism, monitoring and reporting on instances of antisemitism across the nation. These instances and JWV updates regarding them can be found in the information below. JWV direct action is marked blue and awareness is marked yellow.

JWV asks all Americans to be vigilant, learn, and educate our fellow citizens.

House Congressional Hearing on Campus Antisemitism

On December 5, 2023, the House Committee on Education & the Workforce heard from three university presidents regarding the rise in antisemitism on college campuses. JWV has continued to monitor the widespread instances of antisemitism on college campuses. Details related to actions of University of Pennsylvania, Harvard and MIT are below.

University of Pennsylvania's President and Chair Resign

In September 2023, JWV wrote to University of Pennsylvania's President Elizabeth Magill and Chair Scott Bok regarding Palestine Writes Literature Festival. Following the Congressional Hearing, University of Pennsylvania's President, Elizabeth Magill, and Chair, Scott Bok, submitted their resignation on Saturday, December 9, 2023. Julie Platt, the chair of the Jewish Federations of North America, was named the interim chair of the board of trustees of the University of Pennsylvania.

Harvard President Retains Support Following the Congressional Hearing

More than 500 Harvard faculty members supported University President Claudine Gay in a letter to the school's board Sunday, following intense blowback from a congressional hearing about the rise in antisemitism on campus, where Gay failed to clearly state whether calls for the genocide of Jews violated the Ivy League school's rules.

New York Governor Releases Letter Condemning Antisemitism

JWV commends Governor Kathleen Hochul of New York on her strong statement on antisemitism. JWV urges it members to contact their Governors and ask them to make similar statements against antisemitism in their states and educational institutions.

JWV, Auxiliary, and Museum Leaders Call on Amazon to Remove Items Expressing Hatred November 6th, 2023

Dear Mr. Jassy:

The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, (JWV), National Ladies Auxiliary (JWVA) and the National Museum of American Jewish Military History (NMAJMH) write to express concern on the critical issue of terrorism, hatred, bigotry, and antisemitism. Now more than ever, Americans must demonstrate solidarity and unity in standing against all kinds of expression of hatred. Officials from government, corporations, universities, nonprofits, and individual citizens are leading the effort.

We call on Amazon and its leadership to recognize a product that is offensive to many in your customer base and in the world. JWV, JWVA, and NMAJMH urge Amazon to stop selling and distributing offensive merchandise, including apparel, stickers and items on your website and commercial platform. The merchandise contains the phrase "From the River to the Sea Palestine Will be Free" and its meaning calls for the destruction of Israel and annihilation and elimination of the Jewish people. The attached is a sample from your website.

While we recognize the First Amendment provides for freedom of speech, terrorism and hatred are never justified. The slogan appeals to hatred, incites violence and bigotry and is deeply offensive across the global community. This is especially true since the terrorist attacks by Hamas on October 7, showing atrocities of innocents being beheaded, whole families randomly being executed, women being raped, and people being kidnapped and held hostage. All entities and individuals have a responsibility to prevent and not facilitate hatred and violence.

JWV, JWVA and NMAJMH have a long and extensive history of combatting antisemitism, hatred, and bigotry, advocating for America's veterans, service members, their families, caregivers, and survivors since 1896 and supporting Israel. We urge Amazon to join us in combatting hatred and bigotry, advocating for veterans and service members, and supporting Israel, the lone democracy in the region.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. We look forward to working and partnering with you in the future.

Questions should be directed to our National Executive Director, Mr. Ken Greenberg by email at (kgreenberg@jwv.org) or 202 265 6280, extension 406.

Sincerely,

COL Barry Lischinsky, USA, Ret.
JWV National Commander (2023-2024)
Shirley Zak

JWVA National President
Elaine Bernstein
NMAJMH President

Attached image
of sample product
shirt



Veterans Affairs Lawyer Under Fire for Mocking Israelis November 2023

JWV was alerted of behavior of a VA employee in the Office of General Counsel that was posted on Instagram and have been circulated in the Jewish press.

Shakeba Morrad, the employee in question, serves as an appellate attorney at Office of General Counsel for U.S. On November 12, 2023, Morrad posted a video on Instagram where she can be seen mocking Israelis pleading for the return of their citizens being held hostage by Hamas. The video was later deleted.

A Veterans Affairs spokesman confirmed to the *Free Beacon* that the agency is investigating the incident and that it does not tolerate antisemitism.

"We are aware of this incident, are investigating the matter, and will take any appropriate action," said Terrence Hayes, the department's press secretary. "There is no place at VA for antisemitism or any expression of bigotry or hatred."

JWV Suspends Use of X (Formerly Twitter) Following Antisemitic Remarks November 2023

JWV recently suspended use of the social media platform, X, formerly known as *Twitter*. This comes after X's owner, Elon Musk, gained notoriety for public antisemitic comments.

On November 15, 2023, Musk agreed with a tweet that said, "Jewish communities have been pushing the exact kind of dialectical hatred against whites that they claim to want people to stop using against them" stating that the user was telling the "actual truth." His response to this antisemitic tweet continues his ongoing support for the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, as well as providing implicit support for Nazism.

Coalition Building

JWV is strengthening our efforts by partnering with organizations like the Jewish National Fund, Anti-Defamation League, Hadassah, Hillel, as well local JCCs and Synagogues by reaching out and expanding our message of combating antisemitism, sharing the legacy of Jews in military service, and telling the stories of 18 Jewish Medal of Honor recipients.

We also partner with VA and DOD officials on Holocaust Remembrance Day and Jewish American Heritage Month programs to educate their employees and constituencies and conduct programs at our Museum highlighting the service of Jewish veterans and service members.

JWV is a resource in helping to educate Americans. Education is the key to reducing antisemitic actions and incidents in America and around the world and in preserving the legacy of Jews in the military.