



Statement of
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
2019 Legislative Priorities
Before the Joint House and Senate
Veterans Affairs Committees

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Presented by
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National Commander Dr. Barry J. Schneider

Barry is a retired Air Force Major with 20 years of active military service. His assignments included: NORAD IG Team; Combat Crew Commander; Instructor Crew Commander and Standardization Evaluator for both Titan II and Minuteman Strategic Missile Weapon Systems; Commander of the 44th Strategic Missile Wing Headquarters Squadron and the Chief Administrative and Logistic Services at the Morocco US Liaison Office United States Embassy in Rabat, Morocco; Commander of the 57th Fighter Interceptor Headquarters Squadron in Keflavik, Iceland and Commander of the 7th Combat Support Group Headquarters Squadron in Texas. He graduated from the Squadron Officers School, Air Command & Staff College, Command Staff Officers course and Defense Institute for Security Assistance Management.



Barry worked for the Fort Worth Independent School District for 16 years serving as a Central Office Administrator in the Human Resources Department and became a Certified Records Manager. He completely revamped the procedure for maintaining and preserving employee records for the FWISD. He served as a board member of the Texas State Library Records and Archives Commission.

In 1994, Barry joined the Jewish War Veterans, Post 755 in Fort Worth, TX and became a Life Member. He is also a life member of National Museum of American Jewish Military History (NMAJMH). He served as Post Commander from 2005-2007 and received the Post Member of the Year Award in 2007. He served as Department Commander for Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas (TALO) from 2012-2014 and National Executive Committee member from 2014-2016. He developed and organized two JWV Posts in Oklahoma City, OK and Shreveport, LA in 2013 and a new Ladies Auxiliary in Fort Worth, TX in 2016.

Barry serves/d as Chairman of Vietnam Veterans Committee, Chairman of the Scouting Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Youth Achievement Committee, Convention Committee member, Personnel Committee member, Resolutions Committee member, Awards Committee member, NMAJMH Representative and the JWV Representative at the annual Jewish Warrior Weekend at Texas A&M 2017 and 2018. Barry has been a lifelong Boy Scout. As a youth, he earned the Eagle Scout award and the Ner Tamid Jewish religious emblem. As an adult, he served as Assistant District Commissioner for BSA Transatlantic Council in Turkey and Morocco. He was awarded the Silver Beaver award for sustained exemplary service and the Shofar Jewish religious award for service to Jewish Scouting.

Barry earned a BA in History from California State College in 1967, MEd in Guidance and Counseling from South Dakota State University in 1976, MA in Management from Webster University in 1986 and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University in 1996

Barry was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He was married to Dolores (Finkelstein) for 49 years. Dolores passed away in 2015. They have two children, daughter Myla and son Eric, and two grandchildren.

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Takano, Chairman Isakson, and distinguished Members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, my fellow veterans and friends, I am Dr. Barry J. Schneider, 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 over 123 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. Last month, we brought these important issues to Capitol Hill, in member-led meetings with individual members of Congress and the Senate. JWV urges the Senate and House Committees to address our concerns for all veterans. JWV strongly supports:

- No privatization of the VA
- VA availability for all veterans
- Suicide prevention
- End veteran homelessness

This past February 13 and 14, 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 123rd birthday. For these 123 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.

NO PRIVATIZATION OF THE VA

JWV is strongly opposed to the healthcare of veterans being privatized. Privatizing VA healthcare would mean worse healthcare for veterans.

The VA system is designed specifically to meet the needs of veterans. That means amputees, paralyzed veterans, blinded veterans, the traumatic brain injured, blinded veterans, and PTSD sufferers see medical personnel in the VA who specialize in these types of combat related injuries and who have the knowledge to 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.

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

AVAILABILITY OF VA ACCEPTANCE TO ALL VETERANS

About ten years ago, there was a VA policy that category 7 and category 8 veterans were not able to receive care in VA medical facilities.

JWV strongly opposes that concept. JWV strongly opposes any concept that closes the door of the VA to any veteran. VA Medical Centers should be available 24-7 to all veterans.

Every veteran should have access to VA medical care through the VA.

REORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

There currently exists within the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration. There are numerous agencies and administrations that sponsor, oversee and fund other programs designed to help and assist veterans scattered throughout the Federal bureaucracy.

These various agencies do not necessarily coordinate these programs in a cohesive manner. The Veterans' Education, Transition and Opportunity Prioritization Plan (VET OPP Act of 2018) would place under the VBA economic opportunity programs for veterans and their survivors and families. The VET OPP Act of 2018 would create a new Bureau within the Department of Veterans Affairs entitled the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, led by an Under Secretary appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

The new Administration would absorb several programs now within the VBA, including vocational rehabilitation and employment programs, educational assistance programs, housing and loan programs, and verification of small businesses owned by veterans. This organization would also capture the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program but would not disturb the employment assistance programs now within the Department of Labor. We join with several of our fellow veterans' organizations and associations in support of the VET OPP Act of 2018.

THEREFORE, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA joins with those who support the passage of the Veterans' Education, Transition and Opportunity Act of 2018 (VET OPP Act of 2018).

STAFFING OF VACANT VA POSITIONS

The VA has many staff vacancies in its healthcare facilities. Some estimates are as high as 40,000 medical personnel and staff. These vacancies result in patients not getting appointments in a timely manner, adversely impact on their quality of care, and affect staff morale in a negative way.

JWV asks each of you on this joint committee to provide the necessary funding to recruit and retain the right personnel to fill the medical staff shortages in VA medical facilities.

VA'S OUTDATED COMPUTER SYSTEMS

This past fall, thousands of veterans on the G.I. Bill watched their bank accounts dwindle because of the VA's technology failures.

The problem began this past summer when the VA's benefit processing system buckled under new formulas for G.I. Bill students. As a result, scores of veterans faced long delays in their G.I. Bill payments.

The VA's computer systems do not adequately support VA patients. There are those who say the cause is insufficient funding and those who believe the VA does not have the necessary IT talent.

JWV urgently requests the Veterans Affairs Committees to hold hearings to determine the true cause of the VA's IT failures.

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.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

The Department of Veterans' Affairs continues to report some 20 suicides per day. This is unacceptable.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA acknowledges the efforts taken to reduce and prevent this rate of suicide.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans' Affairs to increase their efforts in suicide prevention.

EQUAL TREATMENT AND FULL RANGE OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR FEMALE VETERANS

There are unique medical needs for women veterans which continue to be inadequately met by the VA. For instance, according to 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 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. There are situations wherein women veterans may be more open and candid speaking to a female medical and mental health provider.

There is now before the Senate, S.2402, which had been passed by the House of Representatives (H.R. 2147). This bill requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of peer-to-peer counselors providing counseling for female veterans. The bill directs the Secretary to seek counselors with expertise in female gender-specific issues and services and employment mentoring. The target population is female veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health conditions, who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, or are at risk of suicide.

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.

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.

g. Make available for women veterans, Women's Clinics at all VA facilities, regardless of size.

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.

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 study¹, 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 study² 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 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.

STUDENT VETERANS

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA request the support of each of you concerning protection of student veterans.

The post -9/11 G.I. Bill provides significant benefits. It provides a positive path for returning veterans to reenter society as productive citizens. We thank you for recognizing the importance of this Bill, and for ensuring that it continues to be funded.

However, since the Post-9/11 GI Bill became law, many predatory for-profit colleges have sprung up, and they view our veterans as nothing more than dollar signs.

¹ Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange Exposure. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2011.

² 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

There are many reports of aggressive and deceptive targeting of service members, veterans, and their families by these colleges. Predatory for-profit colleges recruit veterans without providing adequate financial counseling and academic support. Predatory for-profit colleges encourage service members and veterans to take out costly loans rather than encouraging them to apply for Federal student loans first; they engage in misleading recruiting practices on military installations; and fail to disclose meaningful information to enable potential students to determine if the college has a good record of graduating and positioning students for success in the workforce.

Recently, forty-nine state attorneys general sued one of these predatory for-profit colleges, Career Education Corporation, for deceiving prospective students about costs, transferability of credits and potential employment. They were fined \$500 million.

Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Congress to enact creditable standards for schools accepting federal funds for veteran students, including a designated point of contact for academic and financial advisement (including access to disability counseling), to assist service member and veteran students and their families with the successful completion of their studies and with their job searches, and further to have readily available a list of acceptable, accredited institutions.

POW/MIA

The number of still missing and otherwise unaccounted for servicemembers from the Vietnam War is 1,592. The total accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is 991.

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 is pleased with the recent return of Americans still unaccounted for from the Korean War. However, as of December 2018, over 7000 military personnel who fought in the Korean War are still not accounted for.

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 Takano and Chairman Isakson, 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 unrelated civilian entitlement programs.

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

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