



AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter



- FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

We are a nation of change makers, a nation of those who stand for equality and freedom. And each February during Black History Month, we honor the black Americans who came before us and still serve now, standing for their dreams and rights, and making a difference for us all.

Originally founded as "Negro History Week" in 1926 by black American historian and author Carter G. Woodson, it recognized the contributions of African Americans to the country and fostered a better understanding of the black American experience.

In 1976, President Gerald Ford issued the first African-American History Month proclamation, calling upon the American people to celebrate the event each February.

Since 1986 "National Black (Afro-American) History Month" has lived as a time set aside by law to recognize the contributions of African-Americans to our nation.

~ VALENTINES DAY IS AT HAND ~ DON'T FORGET TO CELEBRATE WITH YOUR LOVED ONE ~

- LESSONS IN LOVE FROM MILITARY COUPLES

Deployments. Frequent moves. Job training separations. Military couples face situations not typically experienced by their civilian counterparts. Yet, despite these difficult circumstances many military couples are able to thrive. This February, we're asking – what is it that all couples can learn from military couples to strengthen their relationship?

Five relationships strategies derived from our work with military couples that any couple can employ.

1. Communicate Your Needs: Speak about your emotions, identify the problem and propose some solutions
2. Listen to Understand: Sometimes all your partner wants is for you to listen and support them; not solve all of their problems
3. Make Your Love Obvious: Never run on the assumption that your partner knows how much you appreciate and love them. Make it obvious and show them – celebrate them and do something special for them
4. Get in the Team Spirit: Your relationship is not the same as your military hierarchy. Treat your partner as your equal rather than a subordinate. Work together collaboratively and align as a team.
5. Ask: Are We Stuck?: Relationships can get stuck in patterns that aren't working and it can be hard to break out of them. Make some changes now, don't wait until it's too late

Some sage advice from Doctor Jim: share in the everyday things; schedule some together time; small things matter the most; do adventures together; remember the happy times and learn from the tough times; cultivate and continue to grow your love; make time to talk; take your significant other on a date; cut your partner some slack; and never stop having fun!

- CONGRESSIONAL VETS: 117TH CONGRESS BY THE NUMBERS

When our elected officials gathered on Capitol Hill to formally convene the 117th Congress, they did so with 91 veterans among their ranks, the lowest total since at least World War II. The number of veterans in Congress has declined almost steadily since the mid-1970s, as the military shifted from an end strength of largely drafted individuals to an all-volunteer force. In 1973, nearly three in every four members of Congress had some type of military service. In 2021, it'll be about one in every six members who have military experience. That's the lowest since at least the start of World War II. Information on congressional members with veteran experience before then is incomplete, making comparisons difficult.

However, the number could grow in coming years. Of the 79 lawmakers elected to the 117th Congress who are aged 45 or younger, 21 (about 27 percent) served in the military. But for now, the shrinking cohort of veterans elected to the House and Senate this session will be charged with sharing their knowledge of Defense Department operations and Veterans Affairs procedures with colleagues who lack direct personal experience on the topics. Here's a look at the group, by the numbers:

- 91 total veterans in the 117th Congress.
- 17 will serve in the Senate, 74 will serve in the House.
- 28 are Democrats, 63 are Republicans.
- 13 served in the military in the 1960s or earlier.
- 50 served in the military after 2000.
- More than half (49) had overseas combat deployments.
- 15 are first-time lawmakers.
- 6 are women, a decrease of 1 from last Congress
- 44 served in the Army, Army Reserve or Army National Guard.
- 15 served in the Air Force, Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard.
- 15 served in the Marine Corps or Marine Corps Reserve.
- 17 served in the Navy or Naval Reserve.
- None served in the Coast Guard.

- Texas has the most veterans in their state delegation, with nine.
- 12 states have no veterans in their state delegations (Idaho, Missouri, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming)

- YOUR NEW VA WELCOME KIT

Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors can use the newly updated VA Welcome Kit to learn about VA benefits and services. The VA Welcome Kit is organized around major life milestones, such as separating from military service, retirement, or seeking care while aging. The 14 ‘quick-start guides’ included in the VA Welcome Kit provide additional information, such as:

- Applying for VA health care
- Getting started with mental health services
- Getting started with health services for women Veterans
- Understanding community care
- Accessing urgent care
- Applying for disability compensation
- Understanding the modernized decision review process
- Applying for education benefits
- Applying for burial in a VA national cemetery and for memorial products
- Getting started with services for Veterans aged 65+
- Getting started with Veteran state benefits and services
- Getting started with Vet Center services
- Getting started with caregiver benefits
- Applying for survivor benefits

Whether you are just separating from service or have been a civilian for years, the VA Welcome Kit is your guide to helping you get started at VA – and sustaining you throughout your VA journey. It offers information on how VA can help you at major life milestones, including planning for retirement and care into your golden years.

VA's [Welcome Kit](#) breaks down available benefits and services in easy-to-follow guides so you don't miss out on any VA resources for which you or your loved ones may be eligible.

- TRANSITIONAL WORK PROGRAM HELPS VETERAN FIND STABILITY

VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Services' Transitional Work (TW) Program provides services for veterans, whose lives have been disrupted by mental illness or physical disabilities. Many veterans benefit from a supportive, stable and structured approach to vocational and employment related goals through community-based or medical facility therapeutic work assignments.

14 weeks of vocational development -- In addition to a hands-on therapeutic work assignment, each veteran also receives 14 weeks of vocational development, provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist at the Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center in Huntington, WV.

In the program, veterans learn how to develop a good resume for different types of employment, including for jobs in the community versus the federal government, and they even learn proper interview techniques, boosting his confidence. For more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/>

- VA COMMUNITY CARE CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE

The VHA's Office of Community Care has a new guide to assist eligible Veterans that are referred to a community provider for services. The Community Care Customer Service guide helps Veterans navigate and understand the process of receiving care through local, in-network providers out of side of VA medical facilities. Check out this useful guide to learn about the VA's community care process.

To learn more about the VA's Community Care program visit www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE

HOUSING HELP FOR VETERANS

VA offers three grant programs to help Veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities buy, build, or modify a home to meet their needs and live more independently. Find out if you're [eligible for a disability housing grant and how to apply](#).

GIVE BLOOD TO RED CROSS, GET AMAZON GIFT CARD

Blood donors who come to give this February at American Red Cross locations will receive a \$5 Amazon gift card via email. People can make an appointment to give blood, platelets or plasma with the Red Cross by downloading the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting www.RedCrossBlood.org, calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or enabling the Blood Donor Skill on any Alexa Echo device.

- FEBRUARY NATIONAL SNACK FOOD MONTH

When many of us think of snacks, we think of chips and dip, cookies, cheese and crackers, and ice cream. They all taste good and are high in fat and calories. The fat and calories can add up quickly. The good news is, we don't have to stop snacking, we just need to snack more mindfully.

Healthy snacks may sound boring, but there are some healthy and very tasty options out there. Such as:

- Chocolate Hummus and fruit
- Low fat cheese and whole grain crackers
- Veggies and Greek Yogurt Ranch Dip
- Apples/bananas with peanut butter
- Spicy Edamame (recipe below)
- Mixed Nuts (watch portion size)
- Homemade potato chips (in air fryer)
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Cherry tomatoes with mozzarella cheese and basil
- Cottage cheese and fruit

If you decide that you want some traditional snacks, use the serving size information on the package, pre-portion out your snacks, and put them in a bowl instead of eating out of the box or bag. That way you can keep better track of how much you're really eating.

- AFSA PROFESSIONAL AIRMEN'S CONFERENCE & INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Get ready for Orlando -- in July? Mark your calendars now... as we'd really love to see you in person! We are certainly hopeful that we are going to be able to gather and meet in person this coming July. The dates are 24-29 July 2021! Please start making your plans now to attend and we'll see you there!



- IRS FREE FILE AVAILABLE; CLAIM RECOVERY REBATE CREDIT AND OTHER TAX CREDITS

IRS Free File online products are available to any taxpayer or family who earned \$72,000 or less in 2020. MilTax online software is also now available and the free products support mobile

- AFSA MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

AFSA MEMBERSHIP is open to all: UNIFORMED SERVICES: Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, Retired and Veteran Military Members (Joint Services Enlisted and Commissioned Officers), Public Health Services (PHS), and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) personnel; FAMILY MEMBERS of Uniformed Service Members, and ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: DoD Civilians, Civil Air Patrol, JROTC, Mission Partners/Sponsors and all Military Supporters. Visit: WWW.HQAFSA.org for more information and to join.

- ARE YOU A VETERAN IN CRISIS OR CONCERNED ABOUT ONE?

Did you know that VA offers same day services in Primary Care and Mental Health at 172 VA Medical Centers across the country? Contact the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255.)