



AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter



National Medal of Honor Day on March 25th recognizes all Medal of Honor recipients. The Medal of Honor is the highest military award for valor in the United States and was created in 1861. There are three versions of the Medal of Honor; one for the Army, one for the Navy, and one for the Air Force; Personnel of the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard receive the Navy version. Each branch of the U.S. military awards the Medal of Honor to those who have distinguished themselves “conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity” above and beyond the call of duty, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs official site.

The Medal of Honor is awarded only to US military personnel by the President of the United States in the name of Congress for personal acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty. It is also known as the Congressional Medal of Honor. National Medal of Honor Day is a time to remember the sacrifices of men and women in uniform who have earned this highest of military honors.

According to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, the 65 living Medal of Honor Recipients, they are grateful for the nation honoring the 3,516 Recipients who have received the Medal since the Civil War. Yet they are most appreciative of the opportunity it offers to reinforce what this day means to them and their comrades in arms.

To its Recipients, the Medal of Honor represents more than recognition of combat actions. Instead, it symbolizes the sacrifices of those we served alongside and those who came before us. Each year on this day, Medal of Honor Recipients lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. The “unknowns” buried here are each Medal of Honor Recipients.



We commemorate those who fought in the Vietnam War on National Vietnam War Veterans Day, March 29. There's no doubt that the Vietnam War was one of the most brutal. In fact, there were over three million Vietnam War casualties during the years of battle. It was known as the Second Indochina War to Americans, and considering its long fighting time and brutality, National Vietnam War Veterans Day was created to honor all the Vietnam veterans who fought during its time.

The Vietnam War has a long history. It was one of the longest wars involving America. Starting in 1955, the war went on until 1975, making it the second-longest war, aside from the Iraq-Afghanistan War. Over 2.7 million Americans served during this war. In 1973, all combat and support units withdrew from Vietnam following the war, but it continued to have an impact on many of the families and people affected by the war.

National Vietnam War Veterans Day is acknowledged on March 29 every year, honoring anyone who served during its 20-year time. Since respect and combat support wasn't immediately given to those who served after the war ended because of the number of deaths, the day was founded in 2017 to finally offer that respect to everyone involved.

- WOMEN'S VETERANS MONTH

The Defense Department honors the contributions of women serving in the military and DOD civilian forces, celebrating the richness and diversity of their achievements in March and throughout the year.

March is Women's History Month. This month and throughout the year, VA celebrates the accomplishments of women Veterans and Service members. Through their courage and accomplishments, women continue to make an impact during and after their military service. Learn more about the impact of women Veterans and how the VA supports them, through the Center for Women Veterans.

- VA ANNOUNCES GOAL TO HOUSE 38,000+ VETERANS WITH HOMELESSNESS IN 2023

the Department of Veterans Affairs announced its 2023 goals for preventing and ending Veteran homelessness. Specifically, in 2023, VA will:

- Place at least 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.
- Ensure that at least 95% of the Veterans housed in 2023 do not return to homelessness during the year. And of those who return to homelessness, VA will ensure that at least 90% are rehoused or on a path to rehousing by the end of 2023.
- Engage with at least 28,000 unsheltered Veterans to help them obtain housing and other wraparound services. This goal represents a more than 10% increase in the number of unsheltered Veterans reached during 2022.

Ending Veteran homelessness is a top priority of VA and the entire Biden administration. The number of Veterans experiencing homelessness has fallen by 11% since early 2020 and by more than 55% since 2010. Additionally, during 2022, VA placed more than 40,000 homeless Veterans into permanent housing — exceeding VA’s 2022 goal by more than 6%.

VA’s efforts to combat Veteran homelessness are grounded in reaching out to homeless Veterans, understanding their unique needs, and addressing them. These efforts are built upon the evidence-based “Housing First” approach, which prioritizes getting a Veteran into housing, then provides the Veteran with the wraparound support they need to stay housed — including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more.

This initiative is part of the Biden-Harris administration’s broader efforts to reduce homelessness for all Americans by 25% by 2025. President Biden also released his Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Proposal earlier this month, which invests \$3.1 billion in providing homeless Veterans — and Veterans at-risk of homelessness — with permanent housing, access to health care and other supportive services. *VA Office Of Public Affairs | VA.Gov*

- GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR GI BILL

For many, spring classes are in session. We encourage you to keep up the good work as you continue to pursue your educational goals. Don’t forget to celebrate all accomplishments, big or small. Whether it is finishing an assignment or polishing your resume, we applaud your effort to grow and learn!

Post-9/11 GI Bill students who receive monthly housing allowance and/or kicker payments can now verify their enrollment online at VA.gov, in addition to the text or email methods. This provides you with another convenient option to verify your enrollment each month. If you are opted into email or text and your enrollment verification link expires, you can utilize online verification instead of calling the Education Call Center to verify.

Thanks to Digital GI Bill, the Post-9/11 GI Bill application process is simpler than ever for Transfer of Entitlement (TOE) applicants. Family members and dependents may* now experience a more intuitive and user-friendly application process on VA.gov, including:

- Pre-filled personal and sponsor information
- Direct Deposit information (if applicable)
- A streamlined application with less questions

Before applying on VA.gov, TOE applicants will need to have their transferred benefits approved by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). Have questions about your benefits? Learn more here:

<https://www.va.gov/education/transfer-post-9-11-gi-bill>

Avoid delayed payments or debts. Have questions about enrollment? Read these FAQs to make sure you don't have any delayed payments or debts this term! They include:

- How can I be sure I'll be able to use my benefits?
- Can I attend school while waiting for VA to make the payment?
- How will my benefits be charged for my education or training?
- What happens if I need to change classes or training?
- What if I fail a class or training?
- What if I need to change schools or programs?
- What if I need a copy of my Certificate of Eligibility/award letter?

Learn more by visiting: <https://www.va.gov/resources/gi-bill-and-other-va-education-benefit-payments-faqs/>

- VETERANS TO FARMERS DETERMINED TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN VETS

Farming uses many of the same skills essential to the ethos of the U.S. military: hard work, attention to detail and service before self, to name a few.

In 2013, Veterans to Farmers launched to allow Veterans to re-utilize those skills while taking on the challenge of continuing to feed our growing nation and securing our food sovereignty. Its classes provide the hands-on training needed to learn about the many ways a Veteran may participate in agriculture. Although the word "agriculture" summons to mind rows of food and huge tractors, agriculture is really much, much more, with dozens of ways to contribute. Since 2013, Veterans to Farmers has trained 150 women veterans, preparing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to start a farm, work on a farm and grow their own food. It has not taken the organization by surprise that its classes have been predominantly male.

With that in mind, Veterans to Farmers is determined to expand agricultural opportunities to women Veterans. Currently, 17.3% of the active-duty U.S. military is comprised of women. Those women contribute to the readiness and well-being of the military community across the globe. Much like the military, women in agriculture are often underrepresented. Only 33% of women in the United States make up the agricultural labor force. And of that, only 14% of those women own their own farm, controlling a meager 7% of farmland in the United States.

Interested or you need more information visit: <https://www.veteranstofarmers.org/>

- NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH 2023

National Nutrition Month, celebrated in March, invites everyone to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits. This year, the theme is "Fuel for the Future," which highlights the importance of fueling our bodies at every age and eating with the environment in mind.

Eat Sustainably —Focus on the environment when meal planning. Purchase foods with minimal packaging or shop locally. Try your local farmer’s market!

Grow Your Own Food — A good way to focus on sustainability is by starting a garden to grow your own food at home. It can be starting a container garden or backyard garden. Southern Arizona’s climate has the ability to garden outdoors year-round with abundant sunshine. The morning sun is ideal for a vegetable garden or try an herb garden in your kitchen window.

Enjoy Plant-Based Foods — Eat with the environment in mind by getting creative with plant- based recipes and trying new foods! Start by aiming for 1 plant-based meal per week.

Save Money While Staying Nourished and Healthy — To help save money and reduce food waste, plan your meals and snacks, and make a grocery list before heading to the store. Start by planning around weekly sales and purchase fruits and vegetables in season. Remember to use your highly perishable items first like seafood, salad greens and berries. Revamp the leftover cooked meats and vegetables by adding to a soup or casserole.

Eat a Variety of Foods — Give your body the fuel it needs during every stage of life. Enjoy a variety of foods from all foods groups in various forms. The five food groups are Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Protein Foods, and Dairy and each provide essential nutrients. Also, many foods, like fruits and veggies can be purchased fresh, frozen, canned, or dried to be enjoyed any time.

Make Tasty Meals at Home — Preparing food at home can be good for you and the environment. Enjoy meals with friends and family and add variety by trying a new recipe or ingredient. Make enough dinner for an easy meal the next day!

VA Health Care System (VAHCS) has a team of Registered Dietitians ready to help you achieve your health goals. If you would like assistance setting goals and learning more about how to incorporate a variety of healthy foods into your diet, please contact your assigned Primary Care clinic to schedule an appointment with a Registered Dietitian.

- MILITARY TRANSITION CLASSES ARE ‘FALLING SHORT,’ LAWMAKERS WARN

Military leaders aren’t doing enough to ensure that troops are ready for civilian life after their service ends, according to a pair of key senators who are asking for service officials to come up with fixes to the transition process.

“The Armed Services do a superb job training Marines, sailors, [Coast Guardsmen], soldiers, airmen and guardians,” Sens. Angus King, I-Maine, and Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., wrote in a letter to the service chiefs on Tuesday. “Now we need to take that same focused approach and care to prepare our service members to return to the civilian world with the tools and support they need to thrive in their next endeavors.

The lawmakers — who sit on the Senate Armed Services and Veterans’ Affairs committees — said the military is “falling short” in its requirement to prepare service members for jobs and challenges after their time in the ranks, particularly when it comes to the Transition Assistance Program.

Those programs have come under criticism in recent years for being too superficial for most departing troops, when they should be providing them with in-depth looks at what assistance services are available after they leave the military.

In December, a Government Accountability Office report found that 70% of transitioning service members did not begin the TAP classes until they were within a year of leaving the military, despite requirements that all troops undergo pre-separation counseling a year before departure. “Service members who start TAP late face challenges with their transition to civilian life, such as being unable to take advantage of programs like SkillBridge or apply for disability benefits before leaving active service,” the lawmakers wrote. “We can and must do a better job to ensure our service members are supported in their transition back to the civilian life.”

Defense Department leaders have promised improvements in recent years. But Kramer and King — both of whom have promised to focus on the transition issue in legislative work throughout the year — are asking for specifics on TAP attendance, unit commander compliance with transition rules, and other program data to determine just how damaged the current system is.

About 200,000 troops leave U.S. military service annually. Past research has shown that veterans face their highest risk of mental health problems and suicide within the first year of separation.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/education-transition/2023/03/14/military-transition-classes-are-falling-short-lawmakers-warn/>

- INCREASED DISABILITY FOR TIME IN A HOSPITAL

Have you spent time in a VA medical center or a VA-approved hospital for a disability related to your military service? If so, you may be eligible to get added disability compensation or benefits with a temporary 100% disability rating for the time spent in the hospital. Find out if you qualify and how to file a special claim.

Need more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>

- GI BILL COVERS ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

Did you know your GI Bill benefits can be used to receive on-the-job training or apprenticeships? If you are a Veteran or currently serve in the Guard or Reserve, VA can help you pay for books, supplies, and housing while you are training for a new career. Find out if your training program is approved for VA education benefits. Need more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/service-member-benefits/>

- 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.)

- 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.