

VFW Auxiliary

JANUARY 2026

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY MAGAZINE

**NEWEST FOREIGN-BASED
AUXILIARY
PARIS, FRANCE**

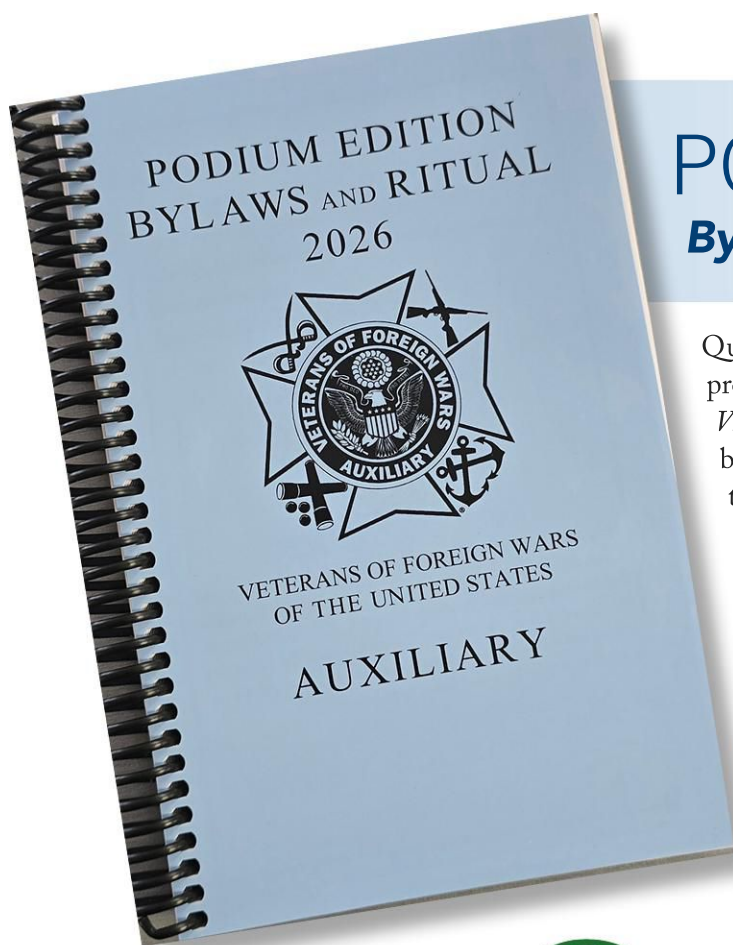
**FOLLOW YOUR
CHAIN OF
COMMAND**

**NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S
SPECIAL PROJECT UPDATE**

**LEGISLATIVE
VICTORIES**

**ILLUSTRATING AMERICA WINNER
SHARES CONTEST WITH
HER STUDENTS**





PODIUM EDITION: *Bylaws and Ritual 2026*

Quickly reference the VFW Auxiliary's rules and procedures with the most current edition of the *2026 VFW Auxiliary Podium Edition* – available digitally behind [MALTA Member Resources](#), or in print from the VFW Store, vfwstore.org and 1-833-VFW-VETS.

Published annually, this must have, go-to reference book contains the organization's most up-to-date rules and regulations. In it you will find the answers to all of your questions, from how to run a meeting to guidelines for Auxiliaries, Districts and Departments. Don't go to a meeting without it!

DATES & DEADLINES

January

- | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| JANUARY 1 | New Year's Day |
| JANUARY 15 | Annual Joint Reviews (AJRs) with Chiefs of Voluntary Services for VAVS representatives due at National Headquarters |
| JANUARY 19 | Martin Luther King Jr. Day |

February

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FEBRUARY 9-13 | National Mid-Year Conference |
| FEBRUARY 14 | Valentine's Day |
| FEBRUARY 15 | Continuing Education Scholarship applications due at National Headquarters |
| FEBRUARY 16 | Presidents Day |
| FEBRUARY 28 | Celebrating America's Freedom Event |

For information on awards, see the [2025-2026 National Program Book](#).

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FOR UNCOMMON HEROES®



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About the Cover

Auxiliary 605 members lay wreaths at the Suresnes American Cemetery for Veterans Day and Armistice Day in November. The ceremonies in Paris, France are in French and English to evoke Franco-American solidarity. **FROM LEFT:** Post 605 member Aaron K. Smith, Auxiliary 605 Guard Eva Kerourio, USA Cub Scout Overseas Maxime Eurieult, Auxiliary 605 member Hong Brassert and USA Girl Scout Overseas Solène McGeedy. The U.S. Flag was at half-mast for the passing of former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney.



2026 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Be sure you are accessing the latest National membership application and form available to order from Headquarters or [print off from the National website](#). Also find it in [MALTA](#). This is the only application that the organization will accept.

The revision, dated January 2026, is quite different from the previous versions. It is redesigned for better readability, reflects changes adopted at the 2025 National Convention (as did the interim online application) and most notably, features a new, more efficient and safer way of processing credit card payments.

This new application removes any concerns about credit card information getting stolen. The credit card check box is still there; however, applicants will not provide any credit card information on the application. Department Treasurers will input the membership and then an email and/or text message will be sent to the applicant with a secure payment link. This new process will be easier and quicker, with fewer back and forth questions.

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*I have to tell
you that every
Department I
have visited has
absolutely put
their best foot
forward.*

Dear members —

Happy New Year and welcome to 2026! As I have made my way across our amazing country (and beyond), I have to tell you that every Department I have visited has absolutely put their best foot forward. I've been so inspired by all of the good Auxiliaries are doing in their communities. If I've already made my Official Visit to your Department the following question will sound familiar: What is the best thing you're doing as Auxiliary members?

For those I haven't visited yet, I can't wait to hear your answers and ideas.

One new place I visited in late 2025 (and paid for the trip to get there myself) is Panama, for their 20th anniversary, which was stunning and heartwarming. I was greeted with warm *bienvenidos* and got to attend their anniversary gala, at which I was able to meet everyone and even give a congratulatory speech partially in Spanish. I think my grandfather, who was from Mexico but was so proud of becoming a U.S. citizen, would have been pleased.

In Panama, something the VFW and Auxiliary support is a donation and delivery of much-needed school supplies to a remote one-room schoolhouse in their area. The items have to be taken there by four-wheeler so students and the teacher can have the environment they need to learn.

As you know from my special project, I think education is so important, which is why I chose Continuing Education. It is our goal this Program Year to be able to offer increased scholarship awards in each of the four Conferences with the help of members' generosity.

We have two National events next month – the Mid-Year Conference cruise where we will hold our National Council of Administration meeting and our Celebrating America's Freedom Event in Washington, D.C. at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The cruise is about fellowship, learning and laid-back relaxation. We also have some fun surprises planned.

I'm so excited for CAFE not only because my husband and father served in Vietnam, but also because our event is right before the VFW's Washington Conference. I hope to see many of us attend. The VFW wants us there and I'd like for us to remember that through the legislative process, we have the opportunity to change lives.

LOIS CALLAHAN

National President



Deadlines are approaching. It's time to get prepared for our scholarship contests and remember, there is still time to promote these opportunities.

Dear members —

Hello, 2026! While it's an all-new calendar year full of promise and possibility, it is hard to believe we are nearly at the halfway point of the Program Year.

We look forward to TWO National [events](#) next month: Mid-Year Conference and the 13th Celebrating America's Freedom Event. Join VFW Auxiliary National President Lois Callahan aboard the Celebrity Reflection for Mid-Year February 9-13. We'll travel roundtrip from Fort Lauderdale with stops in Key West and Bimini. After that, we will gather at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial at our nation's capital for CAFE on February 28.

Deadlines are approaching. It's time to get prepared for our scholarship contests and remember, there is still time to promote these opportunities to your family members and out in your communities.

In February, submissions are due to National Headquarters for Continuing Education and in March for our Patriotic Art Contests; Young American Creative Patriotic Art (2-D) and the 3-Dimensional Patriotic Art Contest.

We also have a deadline in March for our art contest for younger students – Illustrating America.

Do make sure you have the most current information, as important updates (like rules) can change.

Find the latest scholarship and contest information on the National website or in [MALTA Member Resources](#) under Scholarships and Youth Activities.

We also want to share about who members should call, or email, when you need something, whether that thing is information or a document or advice. Did you know the best way for members to get what they need as quickly as possible starts at the local Auxiliary level? Ninety-nine percent of the time it is best NOT to contact the National President or the National Secretary-Treasurer or even National Headquarters first. Learn more about chain of command and why this is important in an article on page 15.

As always, we hope you enjoy our additional feature stories. This time they include a piece on an enchanting way to involve youth and invite new members into our organization, an exciting new way for veterans to connect, an article about our newest foreign-based Auxiliary in beautiful Paris, France and we catch up with our first-ever Illustrating America Art Contest winner. Spoiler alert: she has now embarked on a career of her own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda'.

AMANDA COOK
Editor-In-Chief

VOLUME 90 NUMBER 3

Editor-In-Chief
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READER'S VOICE



This is the space for comments regarding your *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*. Mail your submissions to National Headquarters or email them to info@vfwauxiliary.org, marked "Letter to the Editor." We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. The opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor should not be interpreted as the opinion of the National Organization.

Thank you for such a beautiful article in (November 2025) *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*. It covered the beautiful story of Renee and our mission to keep sending cards to veterans to brighten their day when in the hospital, visiting a clinic and anywhere where veterans need a special reminder we do care. The magazine is full of information and love this month's cover of our National President.

BETTY A. BAILEY
AUXILIARY 7721
Naples, Fla.

Thank you so very much for such a wonderful article in *VFW Auxiliary Magazine*. We are thrilled to be recognized for such a wonderful purpose. I am sure my daughter Renee is very happy her Project Christmas Cards for Veterans continued. Our veterans love their cards. They truly know they are not forgotten. Sincerely thankful.

MIMI TREADWAY
AUXILIARY 7721
Naples, Fla.

THE FOLLOWING ARE NOTES OF THANKS SENT TO NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:

In 2022 and 2023, I had spent my Thanksgiving and Christmas in the VA La Jolla (in San Diego, California).

I will say this; because it was lonely, I pushed my family away because I didn't want to ruin their holiday season. You guys turned my heart that was growing cold into a new heart filled with joy. I received the gift bags and stockings. The blessing of the gift bags and stockings is that I don't eat chocolate, but that gift you gave me allowed me to give gifts to the nurses taking care of me. You guys mean the world to us. One thing, as a Christian, I have learned (is) the greatest gift a person can receive is the joy of giving. I pray you find this joy when you are doing work. I smile as I read the items you share. I still have my blanket, socks and cards from the kids. God bless.

SCOTT BROWN

I wanted to personally thank y'all for the help y'all gave me. Not long ago, I contacted the Disabled American Veterans for help getting to and from my cancer treatments at Scott & White in Temple (Baylor Scott & White Health in Texas). They told me (the VFW Auxiliary) came up with \$250 of the \$500 they sent me. I just wanted to say thank you and that if it wasn't for you, I'd be sleeping in my car at the hospital.

SCOTT ARNOLD



AUXILIARY

SPOTLIGHT

COLLIERVILLE, TENNESSEE



FROM POST HOME TO BALLROOM Tennessee Auxiliary Hosts Princess Tea Party

Last February, 28 little girls in beautiful gowns danced their way into VFW Post 5066 in Collierville, Tennessee, and into the hearts of Auxiliary members who were hosting and working the first-annual Princess Tea Party event. They were joined by the “real” Cinderella (played by Elizabeth Patton, professional character artist) for an event coordinated by the Auxiliary’s very own fairy godmother, Kathy Curry.

Most of the little princesses ranged in age from 3 to 7 and arrived with their mothers, grandmothers or aunts, though one brought her father. This was an event entirely for the community, which proved to be so popular members nearly had more attendees than they could host in the modest space; they had to cut off RSVPs more quickly than expected. The cost to attend was kept low and Auxiliary members decorated to the nines.

Curry came up with the idea, which served multiple purposes, including introducing the community to the Post and Auxiliary, inviting the young attendees to sign 100 Valentine’s Day cards for local residents of the Memphis VA hospital and enjoying a fun day of dress up and fancy foods with little girls eager to play princess for a day. Recruitment is always a consideration and the event also provided local teens a chance to gain the volunteer hours they need for school service projects. Most of those who attended were not previously associated with the Post or Auxiliary, which meant many were visiting the space for the first time.

Curry, who is 82, has been involved with the VFW Auxiliary for 20 years. Her son, a West Point graduate, served in Iraq. When he returned, she wanted to throw him a party, so she contacted her local VFW Post in Missouri (where she used to live). She and her husband, a Marine who served in Korea, entered the Post seeking an event space to rent and left with Life Memberships to the VFW and Auxiliary. Her son’s wife also served in Iraq and they are the parents of her youngest grandchildren, so when they asked Curry to relocate to Tennessee in 2020, she did so and transferred her membership to 5066 the following year; she has been an active member there ever since, helping find recipients and organizing presentations for Quilts of Valor and serving as both Treasurer and Assistant Secretary.

During the party, says Curry, the girls and their guests “enjoyed fancy tea-sized sandwiches such as chicken salad, cucumber sandwiches, fancy miniature pastries, lemonade, and tea, of course.” Activities included a special princess storytime, but “the best part was the dancing, led by young professional dancers in training – tweens and teens dressed in their finest ballerina costumes!” She adds, “The sparkle and smiles were a beautiful sight to see!”

Also in attendance were dancers from Collierville Arts Academy, a local dance academy, including Curry’s 11-year-old granddaughter. They guided the girls onto the dance floor and helped to entertain the girls and

their guests, and Tom and Julie Knowles of the Arts Academy also donated DJ services and a sound system.

"The little girls, they just had a ball," says Curry. "They thought it was the ultimate, especially to dress up in their dresses and their crowns, and they just had a ball with the ballerinas."

"It was beautiful to see the teen volunteers interact with the little girls and get them out on the dance floor!" writes kitchen volunteer Teresa Johnson, who is also the Department Senior Vice-President. She, like the other kitchen volunteers, wore black pants and a white shirt as if working in a fine dining restaurant. "Such sweet smiles and giggles as they played games, twirled in their dresses, and danced in awe with the big girls!"

Many local businesses and artisans donated their products and services, including Lillia Osadzinski of O Photography. Each little girl was presented a special picture frame to bring home to put their professional photo in after the event, in addition to special prizes. Nothing Bundt Cakes donated many

delicious individual cakes and there were also door prizes to be won, including one haircut for a man, which went to the gentleman who attended with his daughter, though he wasn't the only man there – Auxiliary President James Marek was also in attendance, alongside his wife.

"People are already asking us if we are going to do it again and yes, we are," says Curry. Planning began in the fall. "Tickets sold out within days last time and Auxiliary 5066 has already started organizing the next one!"

One thing they'll likely do differently? Slightly less fancy food. While the parents enjoyed the tea sandwiches, the girls mostly filled up on desserts, so they're working on new ideas for this year that keep to the theme but also appeal to preschoolers through second graders. But the fancy atmosphere, beautiful dresses and community involvement will remain the same, and Curry is

looking forward to it – she's already purchased special pompoms to gift each girl at the door and as of November, at least one teen volunteer had already signed up to help. "Teenagers who aren't even affiliated with the Auxiliary gain exposure (through volunteerism) and that's one way of recruiting people."

Once they see the Auxiliary in Action, they want to get involved, and in some ways that's the best part of such a project.

That, and the dazzling smiles of 28 twirling princesses. ✨ NP

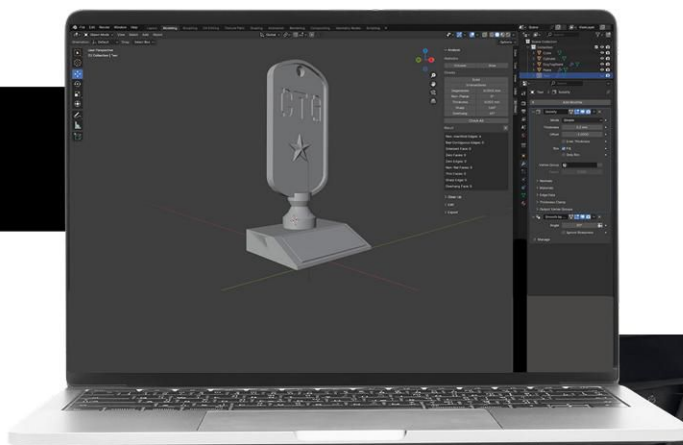


ABOVE: Ballerinas from Collierville Arts Academy volunteered to help with the event, entertaining the younger girls and encouraging them to twirl on the dance floor.

LEFT: Princesses and ballerinas joined Cinderella on the dance floor for a group photo during Auxiliary 5066's tea party last February.



VFW FAMILIES COME TOGETHER ON DISCORD



ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY NOW AVAILABLE TO AUXILIARY MEMBERS

Enemy fire whizzed past as Beth Caudill looked out over the battlefield. She spied her target. Beth climbed the rocky terrain. Thankfully, no obstacles blocked her path. She had her chance; she could take out her enemy with one shot. That's when a familiar voice rang in her ears. It was her husband, Robert.

"You can't be here anymore," he said. Just like that, her game was over.

The game was the first-person shooter "Call of Duty," and Beth, Auxiliary 5352 in Kernersville, North Carolina Life Member, was playing on the VFW's Combat Tested Gaming (CTG) Discord server. This online gaming server was only open to players who were military veterans. Though Beth and Robert are avid gamers and play together all time, Beth understood why she had to leave.

"It made sense," she laughed. "I thought it was very cool for him to be able to play with other veterans."

"I didn't enjoy kicking her off, but as a moderator of the site, I had to follow orders," Robert said. However, this was not an isolated event.

"I kept hearing from veterans that they didn't want to join if their spouse couldn't," Robert said. "It was becoming a real problem as we tried to grow the community."

In stepped Lynn W. Rolf III, VFW Programs Director, who oversees the VFW's activity on Discord. After some discussion, the decision was made. If VFW members can join the CTG server, why couldn't VFW Auxiliary members as well?

"This is a community, where people can come together, talk and feel safe," Rolf said. He believes the point is to use the app to help with people's mental health, so the easiest solution became the best. "People want to do that with their families, so we listened. The first line of defense for your mental health is your family."

Rolf and the VFW are excited to announce that the CTG Discord server is now open to VFW Auxiliary members. There is now a place where gaming veterans and their spouses can go and explore, build together (or shoot at one another), as much as they want. With the expansion, Discord offers a welcoming space for the extended VFW family. While the veteran-only channel will remain private, added features include Auxiliary joint channels for easy onboarding and Auxiliary-specific channels for tailored conversations and community-building.

Go to discord.com or download the app to register. The VFW/Auxiliary channels are listed once you are entered.

CREATING CONCORD WITH DISCORD

Though the word discord means an argument or lack of harmony, the app can mean the exact opposite. The VFW has found Discord the app to be beneficial in providing peer-to-peer mental health support, social connections and camaraderie, as well as a way to access resources and information about VA benefits. Though this free communication platform allows people to come together around a vast range of topics, gaming is especially popular. An increasing number of veterans were using online games to deal with issues, or just as a release, and the CTG server on Discord became an effective way to bring them together.

Video games may not always be taken seriously by their detractors, but the community around these games has produced some real success stories.

"I personally know of seven veterans that have been saved by this app," Rolf said.

”

The first line of defense for your
mental health is your family.

– Lynn W. Rolf III
VFW PROGRAMS DIRECTOR

"As a disabled veteran, I appreciate this is somewhere I can go every day and connect with others who may be feeling the same way I am," Robert said. "There is a huge need for this."

Beth is happy she can now play games on Discord with Robert without fear of breaking any rules. She is encouraging other veterans' spouses to join.

"Just do it," she said. "Especially if you play games. It's a way to meet friends and be a part of a community."

POWERFUL CONNECTIONS

VFW member and veteran Josh Poole has been involved with Discord since 2015, and along with Robert is another moderator for the CTG server. Use of the site begins after a registration process.

"Everyone is vetted and the moderators ensure that everyone stays respectful. It's a very secure place," Josh said. "You can come in, chat with like-minded people, and get some stuff off your chest. Some people are on screen, some type their comments, and some just hang back and listen. There is no wrong way to use it, and there are so many features that help you connect with people from all over the world."

Josh's wife Hillary has been involved with creating animations and videos to promote CTG. She recently designed a 3-D printed trophy for tournament play. She knows there are still untapped uses for the platform.

"Discord is the most powerful tool out there to share info," Hillary said.

The shared information can have far reaching effects. Discord is being used to coordinate virtual visits in Washington, D.C. for hospitalized veterans who cannot travel. In addition, the Veterans Relief Fund is using the app as a means to gather donations.

"We are very excited to use Discord to help out with the charities and fundraising," Hillary said. "With this kind of communication, we can help a big group of people do a whole lot of wonderful things." ★ KB

PREVIOUS PAGE: A 3-D gaming trophy for winners in video game tournaments in CTG. Discord hosts several of these tournaments for veterans and their spouses.



BONJOUR AND BIENVENUE

TO THE VFW AUXILIARY'S NEWEST FOREIGN-BASED AUXILIARY

Tucked among the charming buildings of Paris' 15th arrondissement in the city of light and love is the organization's newest foreign-based Auxiliary - 605.

Its hometown is a world center of art and architecture, fine food and fashion, culture and diplomacy. Its home country is both ally and friend of the United States. France played a pivotal role in the success of the American Revolution. For decades, our members traveled to New York City each year to celebrate the birthday of the Statue of Liberty, an enduring symbol of freedom and democracy that was a gift from the people of France. VFW Auxiliary National President Belle Myers described the monument in 1953 as "an idea immortalized in copper."

In 2025, a group of Parisians (some born in France, others who now call France home) united in their purpose of supporting veterans and a broader veteran community by becoming Benjamin Franklin Auxiliary 605 after they were instituted via Zoom. Facing one screen, Officers presided over the institution from the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan and on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean was Europe's only current Auxiliary.



The team that is Auxiliary 605 is family, both traditional and forged, and includes multiple generations, spouses of Post 605 Officers, U.S. veterans, a retired diplomat whose father was a decorated Navy veteran and an Auxiliary President who found her way to Paris to study film and television at the Sorbonne...and stayed.

"We were thrilled and honored to join the VFW Auxiliary family and bring their Programs to Paris," said Auxiliary 605 President Jennifer Pinard. "We have long supported Post 605 locally, and now we are strengthened by formally becoming VFW Auxiliary members. This was a major step forward for us that will reverberate across the U.S. community in France and throughout Europe.

Pinard's daughter played an integral part in the story of how Auxiliary 605 came to be.

"I met some local VFW members at an event with my daughter Eva (Kerourio), a Paris USA Girl Scout," Pinard said. "When my father, a veteran of the Korean War, visited us to celebrate his 90th birthday in Paris, the three of us attended the VFW Post 605 Annual Banquet and were given such a warm welcome, we felt like family! Dad immediately joined the local Post, became an active member and now visits us several times a year. We started talking with other veteran families about how to best serve this wonderful community, and with them, the project of creating Auxiliary Post 605 was born. There was no VFW Auxiliary in Europe, so it was an exciting project for all. In the process, I found out Americans living overseas who come from veteran families are more common than you would think. Creating an Auxiliary here was a way to open the door to them, too."

Among the projects this new Auxiliary support are Post activities that facilitate coordination between veterans and expat communities, local not-for profit organizations and

youth programs such as US Girl Scouts Overseas and Scouting America. They also, Pinard said, take pride in supporting "Buddy"® Poppy drives and ceremonies of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).

"Our VFW Post works closely with them to amplify their work and connection in the community. Being in France makes longstanding ties with our French veteran friends especially precious, and we are honored to pay our respects alongside them at historical and commemorative events. In the future, we plan to expand community outreach through social events and encourage dialogue about issues important to veterans and their families."

The Paris Auxiliary and Post, named after France's first U.S. Ambassador, shares a floor with the French Veterans Association in a neighborhood called Issy-les-Moulineaux along the left bank of the river Seine on the edge of the city. "Issy" is also the location of several war memorials that pay tribute to those who served and sacrificed; these are sites of national and military holiday ceremonies in the area.

Two such holidays Auxiliary 605 supported were Armistice Day and Veterans Day. Members laid wreaths at events at the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Monument in Marnes-la-Coquette and at the Suresnes American Cemetery.

Veterans Day was originally Armistice Day, the day we celebrated the end of World War I: November 11, 1918. In 1954, nearly a decade after World War II ended and a year after the Korean War ceasefire, President Eisenhower signed a bill to change the name to Veterans Day in honor of American veterans of all wars/conflicts. The date was moved around a few times in the decades to follow, but in 1979, President Gerald Ford signed a law returning the celebration to its original date, Armistice Day, under the name Veterans Day.



November 11 remains Armistice Day in France, where VFW Auxiliary 605 is located, so in addition to wishing a happy Veterans Day to our military who reside there, we extended Armistice Day greetings to our French VFW and Auxiliary members and allies in the Nov. 13 edition of the National E-Newsletter.

Auxiliary 605 Junior Vice-President Jessica Lovejoy, herself a U.S. Army veteran who became an attorney after she served, initially moved to France with her spouse, current Post 605 Commander Timothy Povich, because of his work with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

She said as they get their Auxiliary up and running, “We are focused on how to support Post 605 and the local veteran community more broadly. Our time and talent are currently our greatest assets, so we are assisting Post 605 with their events, including their annual Thanksgiving Dinner and Veterans Day and Memorial Day commemorative events. I look forward to exploring the various ways we can contribute to the broader global veterans community. I understand the importance of supporting U.S. veterans abroad and creating community where veterans can thrive.”

The Auxiliary’s Senior Vice-President, Marie-Dominique Tounissou Steiner, is married to retired U.S. Air Force Officer and Post 605 Quartermaster Charles J. Steiner.

“I was excited to join the new Paris Auxiliary, which I have seen evolve over the years. I am happy and proud to be involved in the Auxiliary. I understand the issues that non-American spouses of U.S. military and veterans can encounter living overseas and I look forward to learning more about VFW Auxiliary Programs in order to provide the support that such an awesome organization can offer.”

In addition to its contingent of active members, Pinard credits other key individuals instrumental in launching Auxiliary 605: Secretary Jennifer Harlay, who joined on the eligibility of her World War II veteran father and whose professional career is as head of marketing communications for a life sciences/biotech company; Post Adujutant Mark Primmer “for his tireless commitment and endless generosity,” and acting Auxiliary Treasurer William Jordan, who got acquainted with the VFW following his career in the U.S. Foreign Service.

“I grew up in a military family and understood well the sacrifices veterans and their families made in the service of their country,” he said. His father was an officer in the U.S. Navy for 30 years and his maternal grandfather served in combat in World War I. “I learned about the Auxiliary when asking Post 605 how I could help honor veterans but was dismayed to learn that there was no local chapter to join. It took quite a while for everything to line up to create one, but, thanks to the persistence and dedication of Post 605 leadership as well as others who felt as I did, it finally happened.”

“I hope that the Auxiliary and Post can collaborate to identify projects that not only reinforce our common mission to support veterans, but will also contribute to making this Auxiliary chapter durable and relevant to the larger American community in France and Europe. We are fortunate to be operating in a country that values the close historical ties that date back to the American Revolution and acknowledges the sacrifices American service members made here for the sake of shared values of liberty.” ★ AC



PAGE 11: Benjamin Franklin Auxiliary 605 Guard Eva Kerourio and her Auxiliary President mother Jennifer Pinard lay a wreath at the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Monument in honor of Veterans Day and Armistice Day. Paris Auxiliary members and friends attend Veterans Day and Armistice Day events at the Suresnes American Cemetery. Pictured are Anna Marie Mattson, Hong Brassert, William Jordan, Auxiliary Senior Vice-President Marie-Dominique Tounissou Steiner, Auxiliary Junior Vice-President Jessica Lovejoy, Kerourio and Pinard. **PAGE 12, FROM LEFT:** New Auxiliary 605 members are instituted via Zoom. Auxiliary and Post 605 members attend ceremonies at a French memorial monument in Issy-les-Moulineaux. Pictured are Andrew Hoffman of the Post; Mark Primmer, Adujutant (former Commander) of the Department of Europe; Natalie Martin; Post Junior Vice-Commander Ronnie Martin and Joanna Hoffman. **THIS PAGE:** On another day, their group distributed Poppies at the American Cathedral of Paris. Pictured are Pinard, Post Quartermaster Charles J. Steiner, Officer of the Day Alexander Brassert, Kerourio and Tounissou Steiner.

HQ MEMO

DUES REMINDER

PLEASE NOTE, IF YOU HAVE NOT PAID YOUR AUXILIARY DUES:

- An annual continuous member **MUST** have his or her 2026 dues received at VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters by June 30, 2026 to maintain their continuous years of membership within the organization. There is not a “reinstate” category for membership.
- If an annual continuous member’s 2026 dues are not received at National Headquarters by June 30, 2026, their continuous membership will end and they will then have to:

**REJOIN
THE
ORGANIZATION**

**PROVE
ELIGIBILITY
AGAIN**

**BE
READMITTED
BY VOTING
MEMBERS INTO
THE LOCAL
AUXILIARY AND**

**START
CONTINUOUS
YEARS OVER.**

- Again, if an annual continuous member misses even a single year of paying dues on time, continuous years of membership start over at one (1).
- This change will also affect an annual continuous member’s eligibility for a Cancer Grant. If a member does not maintain their continuous membership, they will have to wait one full year before they are eligible for another grant. There remains a limit of two grants per lifetime.



Know Your **CHAIN OF COMMAND**

AUXILIARY, DISTRICT, DEPARTMENT, NATIONAL

*Ten active members standing in a line,
One disliked another, and then there were nine.
Nine ambitious members offered to work late,
One felt unheard, and then there were eight...*

This poem, slightly modified from one called What's the Value of One Member (author unknown) is based on an old nursery rhyme nursery rhyme perhaps best remembered as the inspiration of the Agatha Christie novel and play "And Then There Were None." It counts down from 10 Auxiliary members as one-by-one, each becomes burned out, discouraged or mired in disagreements with the others, until there are only two left – but "One joined a bridge club and then there was one."

Most of the time, when members contact VFW Auxiliary National Headquarters with issues negatively impacting their Auxiliary, the reason is related to interpersonal conflicts either between members or growing animosity between the VFW Auxiliary and their VFW Post. Other times Headquarters hears from members, it's with questions or clarification relating to the *Bylaws*, *National Program Book* or eligibility and sometimes, these are time-sensitive. There are a number of reasons not to take these issues to a National level (which go beyond the simple believe that one "shouldn't put their business in the streets") and these include quicker response times, consideration for local customs, and, hopefully, for deescalation of potential interpersonal conflicts that can be resolved without necessitating formal disciplinary action or National involvement.

WHY KEEP IT LOCAL?

On an Auxiliary level, there are anywhere from 20 to 2,000 members, give or take, with good odds that an Officer or Past Auxiliary President will know the answer to one's question or have the skills to problem-solve otherwise, but on a National level, we have 475,000 members and a small staff, most of whom would not work directly with members on the sorts of issues or questions that typically arise. Simply put, we only have about one

staff member per hundred thousand members who could help you with these issues, which means your inquiries would potentially take a longer amount of time to reach the top of our "to do" piles.

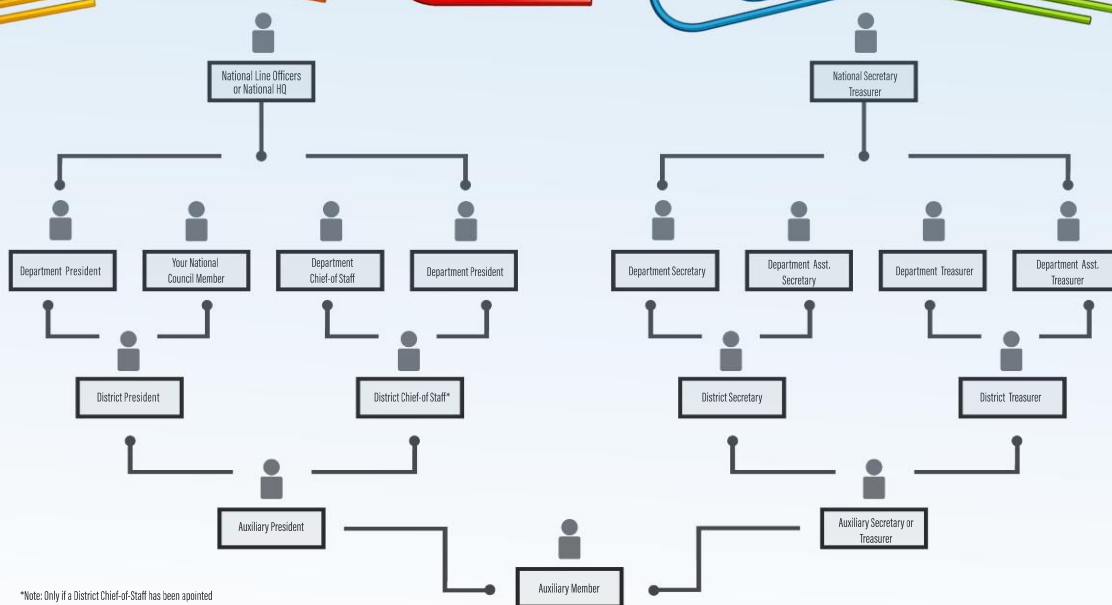
Additionally, we at National do not know the ins and outs of every Auxiliary. Some Auxiliaries prefer casual attire and round table meetings. Others prefer to dress in uniform and focus on floor work. At some, members may consider themselves family, while at others, they may be more like professional acquaintances than close friends. Your Auxiliary or District Officers are more likely to be familiar with the dynamics of your Auxiliary and be able to guide you in a more personalized way.

Lastly, many of the issues that reach National Headquarters concern interpersonal conflicts, but we find many of these could be handled at the ground level before escalation has occurred. As a diverse group with members from all different generations, cultures, political affiliations, religions, mindsets and regions, we know that we will not all agree on all things all the time - who does? But we are united in our mission to help veterans, service members, their families and our communities, even if we aren't always on the same page in regards to how. At a local level, Officers and mentors can spend the time needed to truly listen to each side of an issue and help those in disagreement come to a consensus that serves both parties and the organization as a whole. Unfortunately, once such an issue has made it all the way to the National level, it has typically become much harder to do so.

SO WHAT IS THE CHAIN OF COMMAND?

The chain of command starts with your own Auxiliary. Depending upon your question or issue, the best person to whom to address it may be the President, Secretary, Treasurer, Chief of Staff, a Program Chairman or even a member you personally consider a mentor, perhaps a Past President who has been around for a long time.

If your Auxiliary President, Secretary, Treasurer, Chief of Staff, etc. is unable to help, seek out the person in the



relevant position on a District level (if your Department has Districts). If they are unable to help or cannot be reached, the next level is Department, again starting with those in the aforementioned positions.

Only after the Department Officers have done their due diligence and concluded that an issue cannot be solved or a question cannot be answered should it be sent along to the National level. For many issues or questions there are potential other people to contact before reaching out to National Headquarters directly, such as your National District Council Member and/or or National Ambassadors (Program questions only).

If you have exhausted all of these options or if the question is not appropriate to ask of those in the aforementioned positions, sending an email to National Headquarters is the next step. If you contact us at info@vfwauxiliary.org and describe the question or issue, we will be able to forward it to the person best suited to help you, while sending a direct message to us on social media will only be read by our social media team, who may be able to assist if the issue is social media-related or if the answer is a simple one (for example, a link to the Patriotism Through Literacy list of recommended reads, or the date the next HQ Roundtable is scheduled), but in most cases, the social media team member will ask you to send us the inquiry as an email. Just remember, the chain of command is much like the chain of judging for National contests: local Auxiliary, District, Department, National.

HOW DO I REACH MY OFFICERS?

For members familiar with [MALTA](#), our online system (also available as a mobile app), it is easier than ever to find

contact information for those aforementioned. When looking at your Member Profile, scroll down below Dashboard and Membership/Auxiliary Information to the Officers section. Officers for your Auxiliary, District and Department will be in blue, as each is a clickable link. Once selected, a pop-up will show their position, full name, email address and phone number.

Many Auxiliaries have texting systems and frequently monitored social media pages – check with your President and Secretary at your next meeting to find out whether yours does! For those who have opted out of text message alerts and lack access to MALTA, they can also reach someone quickly by sending a message through the Post and Auxiliary's joint Facebook page. Additionally, some Auxiliaries and most Departments have their own web pages with Officer contacts, lists of upcoming events and Program information, much like the VFW Auxiliary's National website.

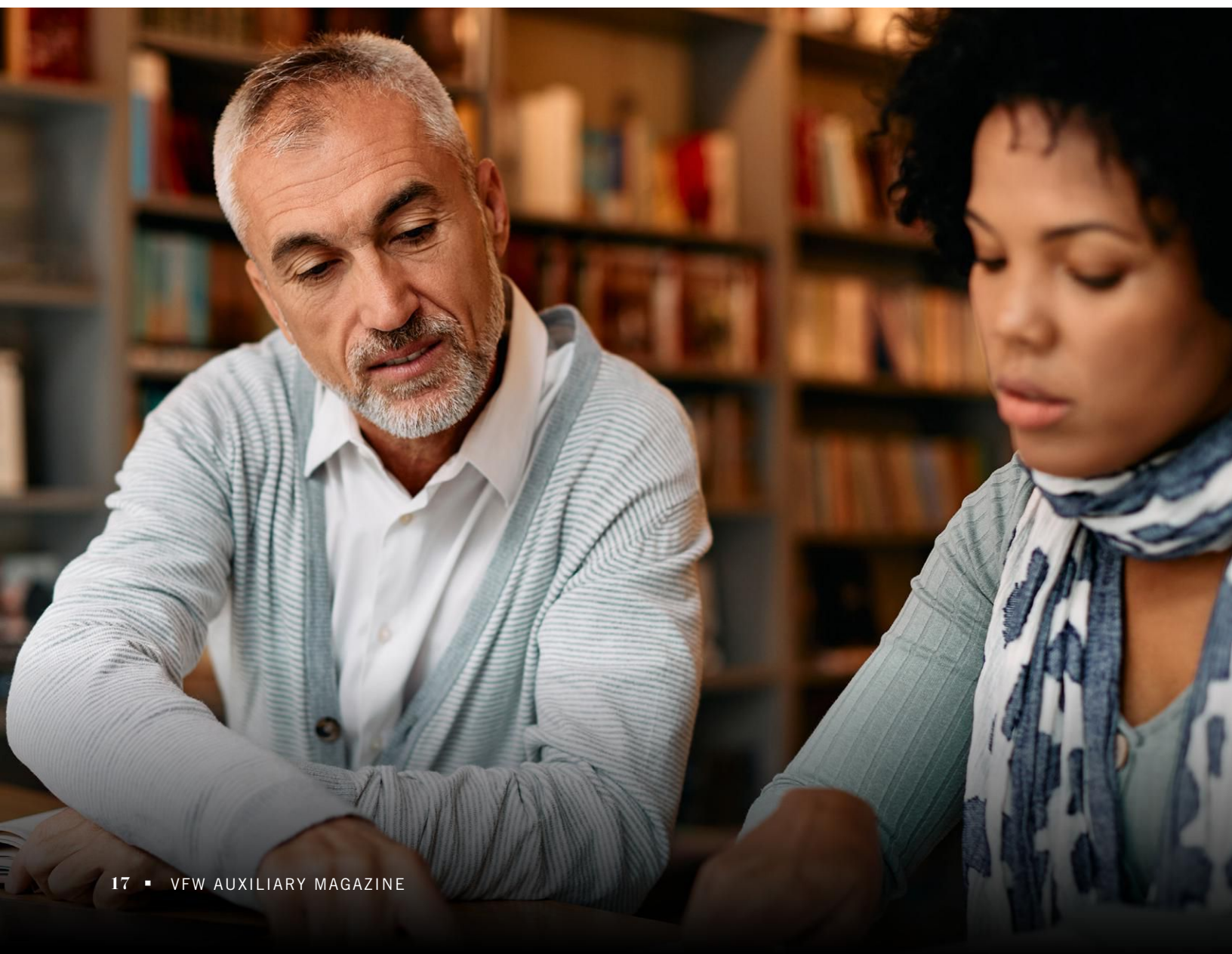
And then, of course, there are directories. Most Departments publish and distribute directories each Program Year just as the National organization does. These typically list the names and contact information for Auxiliary Presidents, District Presidents (if applicable), Conference Presidents, Program Chairmen, the National District Council Members, Officers and more.

National Headquarters thanks you for following this chain of command and we look forward to helping you in any way we can should your inquiry reach us in the future! 🌟 NP

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S

■ SPECIAL PROJECT ■

UPDATE



CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

Before National President Lois Callahan chose the VFW Auxiliary's Continuing Education Scholarship as her special project, this opportunity was a little mysterious.

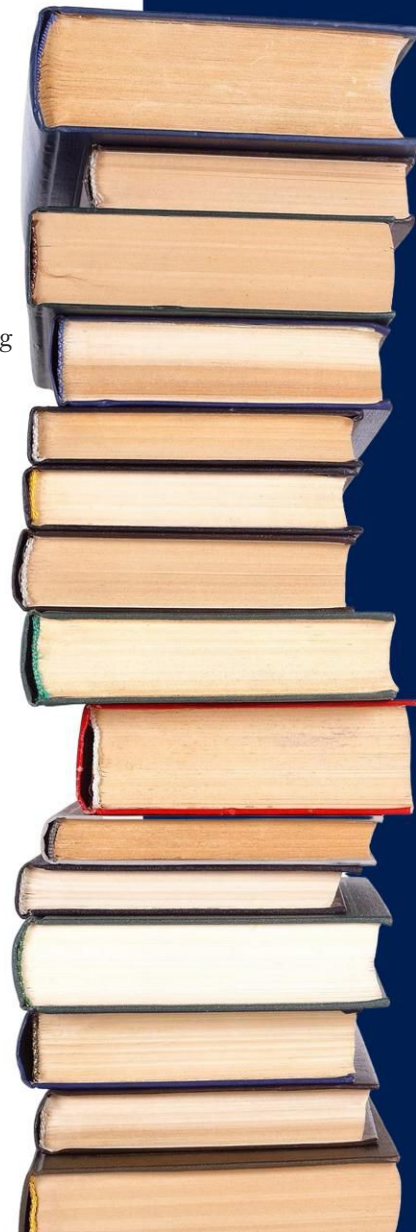
The awards, four total/one per Conference, go to members, their spouse or immediate family member to fund post-high school education for adults 21 and older wishing to advance their careers, complete training or finish their degree. But Continuing Education hasn't garnered enough attention.

That's where Madam President, herself a nontraditional student before she went on to a successful 26-year career as a pediatric occupational therapist, saw a great prospect. By choosing this Auxiliary scholarship as her special project, we could shine the spotlight on it, grow its escrow fund and award its escrow fund and award more money to students per Conference per year.

"VFW Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore's theme is: For Veterans, By Veterans," Callahan said. "We work so hard to support Poppy distributions, volunteer in VA hospitals and help with the VFW's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen. I began to wonder, what can we do for ourselves? And then it came to me. My hope is that we will be able jump on board with both feet and our whole hearts to assist many students with continuing their education through increased funding of this scholarship."

By using the scholarship for tuition, many past winners have therefore been free to spend other funds on related expenses like additional materials, transportation, housing and/or child care during classes. In 2024, one member used it to help in her journey to become a physician, while in 2023 the widow of a combat veteran used the money to return to school after raising children. In 2022, three of the four winners were Life Members of the Auxiliary, and in 2021, three of the four winners were completing their education in nursing.

Let's continue our momentum of supporting this project as we set sail into the second half of the Program Year. And let's get the word out to our fellow members and their loved ones who could benefit from this scholarship. We've got another six months to go! Learn more about it [here](#).



VFW Advocacy **in** Action

LEGISLATION IN THE SPOTLIGHT

During the first session of the 119th Congress, the VFW National Legislative Service spotlighted four main areas of concern: community care reform, alternative treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), transition from the military, and concurrent receipt of retirement and disability benefits. Additional and ongoing areas of concern included unaddressed toxic exposures, improving education benefits, and cracking down on Claim Sharks.

Legislation has been introduced that pertains to each of these issues, and congressional hearings were held during which the VFW testified or wrote statements for the record on behalf of the organization. The VFW will continue to focus its advocacy on this crucial legislation during the second congressional session.

By combining our efforts with those of nearly 1.3 million other VFW and Auxiliary members, we can influence lawmakers whose decisions affect the lives of veterans and their families.

2025 LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

S.141, Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, became law on Jan. 2, 2025. This legislative package focused on improving resources for veteran caregivers and included many improvements to a variety of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. It also included important provisions of the VFW-championed S.928/H.R.4157, Not Just a Number Act, to require VA to provide more benefits usage data in its annual suicide prevention reporting.

H.R.1815, VA Home Loan Program Reform

Act, became law on July 30, 2025. It created a partial claim program at VA as a loss mitigation tool for certain veterans with VA home loans who are facing foreclosure.

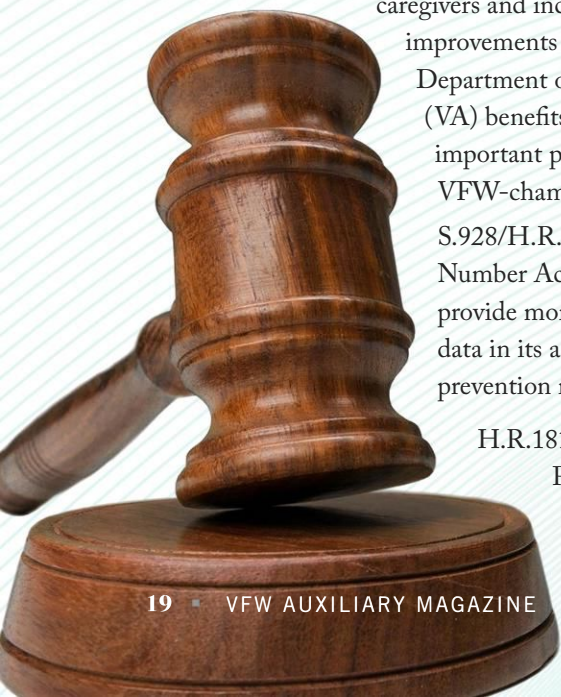
S.201, ACES Act of 2025, became law on Aug. 14, 2025. It requires VA to partner with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to study and report on the prevalence and mortality of cancers among veterans who served as aircrew members and regularly flew in fixed-wing aircraft.

2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Community Care Reform

While community care is essential to VA health care, administrative barriers hinder veterans from receiving timely, quality services. Improvements from the VA MISSION Act of 2018 have not resolved issues like confusing eligibility criteria, delayed referrals, billing disputes, and inconsistent communications that especially impact rural veterans who rely heavily on community providers. Increasingly, women veterans depend on community care for specialties like mammograms, fertility treatments and maternity care. Veterans in mental health crises may need urgent inpatient services outside VA facilities. The VFW urges Congress to pass H.R.740 / S.275, Veterans' ACCESS Act of 2025, to ensure veterans receive clear information and timely health care by improving the efficiency, oversight, and coordination of VA's community care program.

Overseas veterans face additional barriers through the Foreign Medical Program (FMP), which limits eligibility to those with service-connected disabilities, and requires them to find providers and seek reimbursement. FMP needs to be modernized by expanding eligibility, removing disability restrictions, updating payment processes, and exploring international provider networks. These changes aim to improve coordination, reduce delays, prevent care gaps, and ensure timely access to local services for veterans overseas. The VFW urges Congress to pass H.R.467,



Foreign Medical Program Modernization Act of 2025, to expand access to health care for veterans living abroad by modernizing reimbursement systems and strengthening global care options.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR PTSD

According to VA, over 40 percent of veterans in its system have a service-connected mental health disability. The VFW recognizes the growing need for alternative treatments for PTSD and other mental health conditions. Currently, most veterans are prescribed selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), along with evidence-based therapies. Veterans have shared concerns that VA may overprescribe these medications, which can cause side effects and withdrawal challenges. The VFW urges Congress to pass H.R.4837, Written Informed Consent Act, to expand informed consent requirements to include five additional medication categories so veterans are fully aware of the risks and benefits of these medications.

With nearly 2.5 million veterans receiving VA mental health care, the system is uniquely positioned to lead in developing innovative treatments. The VFW calls on VA to research and expand access to alternative treatments such as stellate ganglion block, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, ketamine infusion, MDMA-assisted therapy, medical cannabis, and other plant-based options. We urge Congress to pass H.R.2623, Innovative Therapies Centers of Excellence Act of 2025, to designate five VA medical centers as specialized hubs focusing on cutting-edge PTSD treatments for veterans.

TRANSITION FROM THE MILITARY

Leaving service is often complicated by service-related ailments, family needs, loss of identity and support networks, and the required training to enter a new career field. Sadly, the initial year following discharge also comes with increased suicide risk among new veterans, heightening the need to ensure all transitioning service members are connected to post-service benefits and resources as quickly as possible.

One of the best resources that service members have during this period is access to accredited representatives who can help file VA Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) claims. Unfortunately, not all service members going through the Department of Defense (DOD) Transition Assistance

Program (TAP) have access to accredited representatives, resulting in lost opportunities to receive timely care and benefits upon discharge. The VFW believes there is immense value in incorporating these accredited representatives into the TAP curriculum itself, a practice which VA has begun, but which the VFW would like to see made permanent at every military installation. The VFW urges Congress to pass H.R.1845, TAP Promotion Act, to require accredited representatives from national, state and local organizations to be included in TAP classes.

CONCURRENT RECEIPT

For over two decades, Congress has failed to correct the injustice of withholding military retirement pay from disabled veterans. DOD retirement pay and VA disability compensation are distinct benefits earned for different reasons, yet Congress still treats their concurrent receipt as “double-dipping.” The VFW believes this policy is unfair and must end.

More than 50,000 Chapter 61 retirees, including combat-injured veterans, face offsets that reduce their earned retirement and disability pay. Congress must end these offsets and fulfill its moral obligation to disabled veterans. The VFW urges the passage of S.1032/H.R.2102, Major Richard Star Act, to ensure that those medically retired for combat injuries receive both DOD retirement pay and VA disability compensation in full.



ILLUSTRATING AMERICA COMES FULL CIRCLE: FORMER WINNER, NOW TEACHER, SHARES CONTEST WITH CLASS



In 2016-2017, Auxiliary 1523 in Putnam, Connecticut held the first-ever Illustrating America contest. It was created to encourage artists in grades K-8 to show their view of America while also promoting the Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest, which students

would be able to enter upon reaching high school. Illustrating America would go on to be a Department of Connecticut contest and, as of 2019-2020, a National contest, which it has remained since.

That first year, there were more than 100 student entries between Putnam Elementary and Putnam Middle schools. The first-place winner for grades 6-8 was Mackenzie Peloquin, an eighth grader whose watercolor painting of silhouetted people against a twilight sky depicted an America of peaceful protest. In her own words: "The intention of my piece was to spread a message of peace and unity in America." Mackenzie went on to graduate both middle and high school as salutatorian (her identical twin sister, Brooke, was valedictorian) and to study elementary education at Endicott College in Massachusetts.

Now she is back at Putnam Elementary School – this time, as a fourth grade teacher. And she is preparing her

own students to enter the Illustrating America contest. In October, Peloquin sat for an interview in her brightly-decorated classroom during the tail end of Spirit Week, ahead of Halloween, during which she talked about her childhood experience with the contest, her first year commanding her own classroom and those who have inspired her along the way.

"My third grade teacher was Ms. Simanski; I actually went back and did an internship with her in college," says Peloquin. "She made her classroom very safe and welcoming, I made a lot of friends that year and she did a lot of hands-on, really engaging projects that made me excited about learning at the time."

Peloquin hopes to inspire her students the same way, giving them room to be creative while also stressing that perfection isn't required, including when working on their Illustrating America entries.

"I encourage them not to worry about making mistakes. If they're putting in an effort, it doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be their best. Start and see what happens; you usually end up with something good by the end!"

In middle school, Peloquin dealt with insecurity in her after-school art club, as art was a challenge that did not come naturally to her. This made winning Illustrating America all the more exciting.

"I remember comparing myself to the other kids in art club and thinking my (work) was not as good as theirs. I would get frustrated and start over a million times. It was a good self-esteem boost to win the competition...I remember working really hard on it in art club!" When asked about her win for an E-Newsletter "Where Are They Now?" article in 2022, Peloquin noted, "Placing in the competition was one of the first times I had placed in any contest... I was so excited to tell my friends and family that I won because it felt good to be recognized for



the hard work I put into the project. Winning gave me a sense of confidence and made me feel like I can accomplish the things I set my mind to.”

She hopes participating in Illustrating America this year will bring the same sense of accomplishment and confidence to her students, some of whom are dealing with difficult home lives or academic struggles, and many of whom came to her not reading at grade level. “I think it’s important for students to be able to express themselves and have an outlet for all the many things that are going on in their lives in a healthy way,” Peloquin explains. “Just to have something they can take ownership of and be proud of, to feel like they can accomplish anything.”

While Peloquin has danced from an early age and tried her hand at ceramics in college, she doesn’t consider herself an artist today, but she is still creative and has therefore incorporated her art skills in the decorating of her classroom. When teachers are starting out, their classrooms are bare. Peloquin wanted hers to be inviting, interesting and engaging, to inspire students to do their best in a clean, creative, comfortable space.

“She’s obsessive-compulsive with detail,” says her mother, Kris Allard, also a Putnam Elementary School teacher.

Working alongside her mother has been wonderful, says Peloquin, who watched her mom carefully when growing and playing school in the basement, which involved “bossing Brooke around.” (Brooke Peloquin, who now works in the robotics field, placed twice in the VFW’s Patriot’s Pen competition and won second place in the VFW’s Voice of Democracy competition.)

Peloquin’s students are currently doing a lesson on maps (geography and reading maps) and they will do a unit on

the states later in the year. She will assign each student a state to cover, which they will research, do a project on and present to their peers. “They become an expert on their own state and then they share with each other.” The inspiration for this

came, in part, from her own elementary education, especially “the student-led part.” When she was about their age, one of her favorite projects was on the Oregon Trail – “We made little journals like we were going west!” – and for a grade five presentation, everyone was assigned a different historical figure to research and bring to life. “I dressed up as Martha Washington,” says Peloquin, who notes that her students say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning.

Peloquin looks forward to seeing what her students come up with for their Illustrating America entries, which will be collected by Auxiliary 1523 Secretary-Treasurer Lisa Salisbury. Will one of her students follow in her footsteps and win this year? Time will tell!

Get ready, student entries are due to a participating/sponsoring Auxiliary VFW Auxiliary by March 31. Learn more about this contest here. 🌟 NP/Illustrating America Contest creator when she served as National Youth Activities Ambassador in 2019-2020



PREVIOUS PAGE: Mackenzie Peloquin poses by her desk at the start of the school year; this is her first year teaching fourth grade. **TOP:** Mackenzie Peloquin (left) won the VFW Auxiliary’s Illustrating America contest in middle school, while twin sister Brooke (right) placed twice in the VFW Patriot’s Pen competition. **ABOVE:** Peloquin’s winning artwork.

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