

LEGISLATIVE AMBASSADOR



DEANNA
"DEEDEE" GUYETTE

43 High Street
Carthage, NY 13619
315-783-5607
dgullquist@verizon.net

From the Beginning...

When our uniformed soldiers began fighting for our country hundreds of years ago, they did so without any guarantee of benefits when the fighting was over. It was simply their duty to serve and protect. But as the battle wounds mounted, someone needed to protect the soldiers and ensure that they received the necessary services and support upon their return home from war.

In the late 1800s, veterans trying to help each other began forming local organizations to secure medical and pension benefits. These organizations eventually merged and became the VFW of today, along with the VFW Auxiliary, which are founded on the principles of advocating for our veterans' rights and benefits within our government legislative system.

Importance of Today's Legislative Program

I consider the Legislative Program to be the root of all other VFW Auxiliary Programs and initiatives. After all, legislative rights are the reason the VFW and Auxiliary were formed. And the VFW Legislative Priority Goals, which are released annually, provide the framework for all VFW work on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (www.vfw.org/advocacy/national-legislative-service). All VFW Auxiliary Programs support and relate to the Priority Goals in one way or another. If we understand the *importance* of the Legislative Program, then our efforts to advocate for our veterans become that much more effective and our voices will be heard!

It All Starts Locally

While it is imperative that we continue to monitor pending legislation in Congress, we must not forget that local government and laws also impact the quality of life for our veterans. The two go together and support for veterans' rights begins locally. By establishing strong connections with our VFW and elected officials, we are demonstrating our commitment to the legislative process.

- **VFW Post:** It is very *important* to work with our home Post on supporting legislative initiatives. Often both organizations are doing similar projects that could be more effective if they collaborated together. We can share ideas and information about local programs and projects that support the VFW Priority Goals. We can collaborate on letter-writing to lawmakers, assist members with voting and distribute/post information on pending legislation, just to name a few.
- **Local Government:** It is very *important* to reach out to our elected officials and seek opportunities to advocate for our veterans. Knowledge is power. We are the teachers, and our local lawmakers are the students. The more they learn about the VFW Priority Goals and veterans' issues, the stronger our voices become. And by inviting them to VFW- and Auxiliary-sponsored events, it opens the doors to better communication and strengthens our advocacy efforts.

Advocates in Action

Now that we know the importance of the Legislative Program and educating our local lawmakers, we're ready to put our advocates into action! We need to be able to "speak the language" and navigate the legislative process effectively. Here are some things that will make us better advocates and improve our advocacy efforts:

- Become familiar with the VFW Priority Goals - then share this information with other VFW and Auxiliary members during meetings or in newsletters.
- Know where elected officials stand on veteran issues - then be prepared to draft letters for upcoming legislation.
- Sign up for the VFW Action Corps Weekly - then invite others to sign up.
- Respond to VFW Action Alerts - then spread the word for others to act.
- Get involved with town hall meetings - then encourage others to attend.
- Be sure to vote in all elections - then assist others with the voting process.
- Use the MALTA Member Resources, Legislative - then teach others what is available in MALTA Member Resources.
- DO NOT endorse any candidate on behalf of the VFW Auxiliary - we must remain neutral.
- DO NOT wear any VFW Auxiliary attire when campaigning for a candidate.

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

Be An Advocate • Be Informed • Be Engaged

One of the main objectives of the Legislative Program is to improve the lives of our veterans, service members and their families through advocacy. Your efforts, combined with nearly 1.5 million other VFW and Auxiliary members, can influence lawmakers whose decisions affect veterans and their families every day. Join the chorus of voices that will ring out in legislators' offices this year.

Study the issues laid out clearly in the VFW Priority Goals. A copy can be found in MALTA Member Resources.

The Priority Goals reflect the resolutions passed by the VFW to strengthen and ensure an adequate VA system for millions of current and future veterans.

They call for much-needed attention to crises such as veteran homelessness and suicide. They request fully funding research on traumatic brain injuries, reducing the claims backlog, fighting veteran unemployment and improving timely transition assistance for veterans after leaving military service. The goals are grouped under six areas of concern:

- Budget
- Health Care
- Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
- Education, Employment and Transition Assistance
- Military Quality of Life
- National Security, Foreign Affairs and POW/MIA

These goals are released in January of each year by the VFW. Be sure you check the VFW website or MALTA Member Resources for the current Priority Goals.

VFW Action Corps Weekly

It's free and it's full of news about what's happening on Capitol Hill, with veteran and service member issues and with our national security. Subscribe at the National website at vfwauxiliary.org by selecting "What We Do" then clicking on "Legislative."

Contact your legislators: find out who's who. To identify your congressional representatives, visit the VFW website at votervoice.net/VFW/register.

Step by Step—A Bill

To follow the progress of a bill through the stages of the legislative process, visit congress.gov, where you may find a specific bill by its number or by a key word or phrase.

VFW in D.C.

One of the most crucial responsibilities of the VFW Washington, D.C. office is to actively lobby Congress and the administration on behalf of veterans. The office monitors all legislation affecting veterans and alerts VFW and Auxiliary members about key legislation under consideration.

By testifying at committee hearings and interacting with congressional members, the VFW played an instrumental role in nearly every piece of veterans' legislation passed in the 20th Century, as well as bills developed in the 21st Century. (Find the VFW Legislative Fact Sheet in MALTA Member Resources, Legislative)

To contact the D.C. office:
Website: vfw.org/advocacy
Phone: 202-543-2239
Mail: 200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM AWARDS

Awards for Auxiliaries

1. Most outstanding activity and/or event collaborating with the VFW Post connecting members with local lawmakers.
 - Citation and \$25 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions with most outstanding activity and/or event that collaborated with the VFW Post connecting members with local lawmakers.

Entry form required and available in MALTA Member Resources. VFW Auxiliaries must send the required entry form to their Department Legislative Chairman by March 31, 2025 for judging. The Department Legislative Chairman must sign and send a copy of the completed Department-winning entry form to the National Legislative Ambassador by April 30, 2025 for judging.

Citations will be mailed directly to the winning VFW Auxiliaries from National Headquarters and money will be deposited into the winning VFW Auxiliary account after the 2025 VFW Auxiliary National Convention.

Awards for Departments and Department Chairmen

1. \$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Legislative Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best promotion of ensuring elected officials are educated on the importance of VFW legislative goals and veterans' rights.
2. The Outstanding Performance Award and Second-Place Outstanding Performance Award will be awarded in each of the 10 Program Divisions based on the criteria listed on Page 5 and for the promotion of the Program goals listed at the top of Page 35.

Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2025 VFW Auxiliary National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.