



Department of Ohio
35 E. Chestnut St., Room 503
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2590
tel (614) 221-3582
fax (614) 221-4822
dav.org

DAV Department of Ohio Newsletter

October/November 2020

Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Selects Eight DAV Members

Eight (8) DAV members were selected for induction to the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame in September of 2020. These new Hall of Fame honorees were: **Paul Butler** (Chapter #59 Warren County); **Timothy Espich** (Chapter #13 Clark County); **Kimberly Frisco** (Chapter #9 Dayton); **William Graybill** (Chapter #63 Clermont County); **Kenneth Jakubec** (Chapter #2 Youngstown); **James Kaster** (Chapter #72 Willie Marcum); **Daniel Kirkpatrick** (Chapter #9 Dayton); and **David Ridenour** (Chapter 77 Putnam County).

A total of twenty (20) inductees were selected for the Class of 2020. The selection of these inductees was made by the 13 members of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Executive Committee. Past Department Commander James Bailey is the DAV representative on the Executive Committee.

Over 350 applications were initially submitted for consideration and after screening, 136 packets were forwarded to the Executive Committee for grading. Ohio Department Veterans Services Director Deborah Ashenurst, commended the recipients by honoring their achievements by stating, “You are amongst Ohio’s Finest Citizens in this distinction.”

The Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame is not strictly a military hall of fame. These twenty (20) inductees are veterans who have honorably served their country and they still continue to serve and inspire their communities with their noble deeds and accomplishments throughout their lifetime.

Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there will not be a formal Banquet honoring the Class of 2020, nor an Induction Ceremony. The DAV Department of Ohio has always participated in both the Banquet and the Induction Ceremony in the past.

“On behalf of the DAV Department of Ohio, I would like to formally commend all eight recipients for their achieving this truly outstanding honor,” said Department

Commander John Plahovinsak. “To have 40% of the Class of 2020 honorees to be DAV members reflects greatly on the impact that the DAV has made in the State of Ohio. However, these members, through their actions, are certainly worthy to be selected for this significant honor.”

The Clarion’s Call Sounded: “Second Call to Duty”

On September 15, 2020, the DAV Department Commander joined with Ohio’s Secretary of State Frank LaRose, Veterans of Foreign Wars’ State Commander Fred Lavery and American Legion Commander Roger Friend to launch the “*Second Call to Duty*” Program in the State of Ohio.

This Program is a concerted effort to have veterans vote and to recruit additional poll workers throughout the State of Ohio to work on November 3rd, Election Day. Veterans made a commitment when they took their oath of enlistment to defend the Constitution of the United States.

One of the privileges, and responsibilities, contained in the Constitution is our voting rights. Elections provide for a peaceful transition of power, and that is the basis for our free society.

Veterans do make a significant difference in voting. In the 2016 General Election, 78% of our prior military service members voted, compared to 49% of non-veteran voters. As veterans, we understand that important responsibility and we have voted. However, in order to have a “fair and just” election in our democracy, we must have dedicated poll workers for that one day.

We understand that our physical limitations preclude many of our members from participating in the “*Second Call to Duty*” Program. However, if you believe that you can serve as a poll worker, I would strongly recommend that you “enlist” just one more time to serve your country at: VoteOhio.gov/DefendDemocracy

Any endeavor, in order to be successful, must require active participation by the leaders. At the September 15, 2020 Conference, the DAV Department Commander stated he would answer the Clarion’s Call to “enlist” in the “*Second Call to Duty*.” He urges our DAV members (if physically possible) to join with our fellow veterans from the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars to defend democracy by actively participating as poll workers in the “*Second Call to Duty*” Program.

Department Fall Conference Cancelled

On September 18, 2020, a majority of the Department's Executive Committee voted to cancel the Fall Conference. Our Constitution requires the Department to conduct a Fall Conference during the months of September, October or November. However, with the Governor of Ohio's restriction on the number of individuals that could attend an indoor event (because of COVID-19), guidance was requested from the DAV National Inspector General on the unique situation.

Prior to receiving the IG's guidance, the Department Commander consulted with sixteen (16) Past Department Commanders (PDCs) and the DAVA Commander. All recommended that the Fall Conference be cancelled because of health factors.

The IG's guidance was for the Commander to make a motion/recommendation to the Executive Committee and then have a vote. The Commander recommended to cancel the Conference and the Executive Committee approved the motion.

The Department is currently working (with the DAV National) on an alternate method to transfer the information (that was to be transmitted to the attendees at the Fall Conference.) When all the details have been finalized, we will notify the chapters immediately. This will be a new innovation for the Department, but the necessity was caused by the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Suicide Prevention Legislation passes House and Senate

On September 25, 2020, the House of Representatives passed H.R. Bill #4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. There were 150 co-sponsors of this bill including nine (9) Ohio representatives. Previously, the Senate passed a similar companion bill, S.B. 2661 unanimously. The bill is awaiting the President's action.

The legislation, when signed, will create a three-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crisis. Ohio Congressman Brad Wenstrup spoke in Washington about a fellow Iraq war veteran, confined to his wheelchair in a one-room apartment in forced coronavirus isolation, who ended his life on April 23, 2020.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has increased the suicide rates to their highest levels since World War II. Statistics have indicated that veterans' suicide rates are higher than non-veterans. Hopefully the implementation of this legislation will aid the reduction of veteran suicides.

October 1, 2020 Heralds the Start of Caregivers' Expansion

Phase One of the Caregivers Expansion Program officially started October 1, 2020. The DAV had made this critical legislative issue a priority for the last five years. Finally, eligible veterans who were injured, or aggravated a serious injury, in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service on or before May 7, 1975, are now eligible to receive enhanced clinical support for their caregivers.

All eligible veterans for the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) now include all World War II, Korean War and Vietnam veterans. Previously the eligibility criteria for enrollment in the PCAFC was only for veterans that were injured on or after September 11, 2001.

Phase Two, scheduled in the future, would encompass veterans who were injured between May 8, 1975 to September 10, 2001. During Phase Two, sometime in 2021, the PCAFC will include offering legal and financial services for designated Primary Family Caregivers of eligible veterans. The veteran's need for a caregiver need not arise from the veteran's service-connected disabilities.

The key requirement for the PCAFC is that the veteran must have a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 70% or more and is in need of in-person personal care services for a minimum of six continuous months. The in-person personal care services are based upon an inability to perform an activity of daily living (ADL) each time the activity is performed.

Veterans or caregivers may apply for the PCAFC by visiting www.caregiver.va.gov and downloading VA Form 10-10CG **or** in person through a local VAMC Caregiver Support Coordinator.

Analysis of Possible Department Face Mask Project

From September 12th to 16th of 2020, the Department Finance Committee and four other PDCs were surveyed concerning the feasibility of the Department having face masks made (2-ply) with a centered 3' DAV logo. Cost would be \$4.42 (each) per 250 ordered (shipping included.) A majority of the Finance Committee and the other surveyed PDCs indicated we should **not** proceed with this project. We have heeded the judgment of our PDCs. The rationale provided was it would appear (perception) that the Department was attempting to financially gain from a pandemic.

In the meantime, the DAV National Store has created and is now offering a DAV 100th Year Centennial (5" full panel) face mask for \$9.00. The Department should support the DAV Store in their face mask endeavor.

VA Community Care Program Not Meeting Expectations

According to a recent report released by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administration of the Veterans Community Care (VCC) Program is not being fully implemented, in terms of “wait times.” This VCC Program was created under the VA MISSION Act of 2018 and replaced the ineffective VA Choice Program.

The GAO reported that the VA never established a maximum amount of time veterans should have to wait to see private-sector doctors through the Program. Without having a “wait time” standard, veterans were waiting an indefinite amount of time to receive their medical care from the private sector.

The intent of the old VA Choice Program was to lessen veterans’ waiting times for health care by sending them to private-sector doctors when they live far from a VA facility. The GAO recommended that the VA to establish a “wait time” standard in 2013 for the VA Choice Program in 2013 and later in 2018 for the VA MISSION Act. Although seven years have passed, the VA has not established a “wait time” standard.

On September 22, 2020, the GAO called on Congress to develop the “wait time” for the VA. The GAO also found that there were too few schedulers in the community care offices and few physicians were using the VA software system.

Senator Jon Tester introduced the Accountability in VA Scheduling and Consult Management Act, which would require the VA to send regular reports on how long it takes for veterans to receive care from private-sector physicians.

New VA Scheduling System for Central Ohio Veterans

Starting on August 22, 2020, veterans in the Central Ohio area can now use a new online tool for scheduling, which incorporates a new VA Centralized Scheduling Solution (CSS) with the existing My VA Health. The system is an all-in-one system that provides veterans with capabilities to make and manage their appointments.

With the VA’s previous system, health care providers would be required to log into multiple applications to coordinate appointment timing and personnel. The launch of the CSS marks a major milestone in VA’s Electronic Health Record (HER) System. For the time being, Central Ohio veterans will still have the option for scheduling their visits by calling (614) 257-5200.

“Ground Work” Laid for Progress on Toxic Open Burn Pits

The 117th Congressional Session, which will start in January of 2021, may be the “breakthrough session” for obtaining legislation concerning Exposure to Airborne Hazards and Toxic Open Burn Pits. The “ground work” for this legislation perhaps could be a Joint House-Senate Bill, which was introduced on September 15, 2020.

The Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act, was jointly introduced by Senator Kristen Gillibrand and Representative Raul Ruiz. (*Rep. Ruiz currently serves as the co-chair of the Congressional Burn Pit Caucus.*) It would remove a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requirement that veterans must prove a definite link between a specific dozen diseases and exposure to open burn pits and other hazardous toxins.

Once the bill is enacted into law, former service members would only have to provide documentation to the VA that they served at least 15 days in one of 33 countries listed within the legislation. This legislation could impact over 3 million veterans who have served since August 2, 1990, in one of the listed 33 countries and have one or more of the listed illness.

The illnesses listed in the legislation include: asthma (diagnosed after deployment); any type of cancer; chronic bronchitis; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; constrictive bronchiolitis; emphysema; granulomatous disease; interstitial lung disease; lymphoma; pleuritis; pulmonary fibrosis; and sarcoidosis.

Although the bill has a slim chance of passing both the House and Senate before the end of the 116th Congressional Session, it will provide the necessary “ground work” for re-introduction at the 117th Congressional Session. Veterans are encouraged to include their information in the Airborne Hazards and Open Pits Registry.

Participation in the Registry is very important because it will allow the VA to track open burn pit exposure and draw inferences regarding associated adverse health effects. More than 212,000 veterans have already enrolled in this Registry. Recently, the VA had stated that veterans with underlying respiratory conditions may be at greater risk for developing complications related to COVID-19.

The legislative fight for those veterans impacted by Exposure to Airborne Hazards and Toxic Open Burn Pits will go on and the DAV will be spearheading the effort!

John Plahovinsak
DAV Department of Ohio
Department Commander

Michael Stith
DAV Department of Ohio
Department Adjutant