

DEPARTMENT OF IDAHO, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
General Business Session Minutes
Mid-Winter Convention, January 15-17, 2026
Riverside Hotel, Boise Idaho
Troy Junier, Commander

On Saturday, January 17, 2026, the General Business session of the Department of Idaho Veterans of Foreign Wars was opened according to the ritual by Commander Troy Junier at 11:05am MST at the Riverside Hotel, Boise Idaho.

Roll Call was taken and all Council of Administration members were present except for: Judge Advocate Gordon Petrie (excused-medical), Surgeon Frank Fabbi, District 2 Commander Jack Paulsen (represented by District 2 Sr Vice Commander Doug Welch)

Special Guests were introduced:

National Jr Vice Commander-in-Chief (NJVCIC) – Glenn R. Umberger Jr.

National Council Member (NCM)/Past State Commander (PSC) - Bobby Tettleton

National Surgeon Doug Welch

National Sergeant at Arms (NSA) - David Frei

National Legislative Payton Schooler-Polillo

Conference Housekeeping Rules were presented by Commander Junier.

Announcements:

- Judge Advocate Gordon Petrie – medical issues. Please sign card at Chaplain Ludlow's table.
- Comrade John Crotinger – medical issues. At home resting.

Commander Junier stated that Minutes of the June 2025 Convention were emailed out and copies were provided to the COA members. Commander Junier asked for corrections. The minutes were approved as published.

Committee Reports:

Audit Committee – Past State Commander (PSC) Kenneth J Babcock

- Based on internal reviews and audits performed, the Department Audit Committee is of the opinion that, in all material respects, income received, expenditures made, and disposition of assets belonging to the Department of Idaho VFW through 31 December 2025 of the 2025-2026 program year have been recorded or administered according to approved budgets, proper accounting practices, and organizational procedures.

Membership – Daniel Damigo

- Post 5423 attained 101% in membership this morning.
- Idaho VFW membership is now at 91.6%

- We need under 600 members to reach the Department membership goal of 101% by 6/31/2026,
- Districts 4 and 5, and possibly a District 5 and 6 will be holding inter-district events this year.
- Mtn Home Air Force Base will host an airshow in May 2026. Will be well attended. Need VFW volunteers to help (get our name out there). Contact Daniel Damigo if you can help. Working on a booth approval (VFW booth). Will be recruiting and giving out information.

Department Service Office Update – Bill Heyob

- See attached report for more details
- Summary:
 - Personnel: 7 at Boise VA Regional Office (VARO), 1 in Mtn Home, 2 in Caldwell, 2 in Twin Falls, 2 in Lewiston, and 2 in Post Falls. Administrative Assistant in Lewiston retired; process of hiring a replacement.
 - Fiscal Year 2025, \$16.2 Billion was recovered for Idaho veterans
 - Do not feed the claim sharks. Veteran Services Officers services are free!
 - Post Service Officers have changed their name title to Benefit Advisors
 - Boise Veterans Home broke ground on their rebuild on October 3, 2025. It will take several years to complete. Bed size will double approximately, when done.
 - It is expected that the Lewiston Veterans Home remodel grant will be approved this year.
 - The State will try to get approved for the Pocatello Home remodel next year.
 - Cost of Living Allowance for 2026 will be 2.8%. This will be for VA benefits and Social Security awards.
 - Non-service Connected Burial Allowance has increased to \$1,002; plot allowance rate \$1,002 for veterans buried in a private cemetery.
 - Service connected burial allowance remains at \$2000 and VA does not permit plot allowance rates to be paid if Service Connected Burial Allowance is paid.
 - Burials/inurnments at the State or National Cemeteries are no charge for veterans.
 - State Veteran Cemeteries charge the current plot rate for non-Veteran spouses interred there.
 - The Snake River National Cemetery in Buhl is considered a National Cemetery and does not charge for spouse internments.
 - There are currently 3,600 claims for Idaho veterans pending with an average of 86 days for claims to be completed. Contact Bill Heyob's office if you have any question.
 - Rashetta Smith continues to serve as Acting Boise VA Regional Office Director and serves as the Director of the VA Regional Office in Reno NV as well.
 - Boise VARO currently has 133 full-time claims processors working in the Service Center, and has 1,001 claims currently being worked.
 - Boise VARO remains instrumental in the development and testing for the VA's Automated claims processing.
 - President Executive Order 14184, reinstating service members discharged under the military's COVID-19 vaccination mandate. VA announced that potentially

thousands of military members may regain GI Bill education benefits. Following that, the Secretary of War directed the military departments to facilitate discharge upgrades for individuals involuntarily separated solely for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine and whose service was characterized as less than honorable. VA has sent letters to individuals who this affected, to inform them of their GI Bill education benefits. The letter also encouraged veterans to seek an upgraded status and apply for GI Bill benefits. Contact a veterans service officer if you need assistance.

- VA Dental Coverage – The VA will only provide dental treatment to Veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system that are rates 100% service connected, approved for Individual Unemployability or are service-connected for dental trauma related issues. For all other veterans who are enrolled in VA Healthcare and Dependents of 100% service-connected veterans (or surviving spouses approved for Dependency Indemnity Compensation) and on ChampVA, you are eligible for the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP). This is a monthly premium based dental insurance that is managed by Metlife and Delta Dental.
- VA Foreign Medical Program Update – Veterans who receive care under this program can now receive reimbursement payments through direct deposit instead of paper checks. This only applies to U.S. based bank accounts, but VA is working to add verified international bank accounts.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs will soon propose a rule extending eligibility for legacy veterans and caregivers in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) for three years, until September 30, 2028.
- Apportionments – on Friday January 9, 2026, VA posted a final rule in the Federal Register that discontinues the authority for VA to make need-based apportionment awards. This means that effective February 9, 2026, veterans and family members can no longer request new apportionments, unless the veteran or surviving spouse is incarcerated, or the veteran is incompetent without a fiduciary and institutionalized at government expense. VA will not process apportionments for other situations such as child or spousal support after February 8, 2026. Please note: VA will not discontinue any current apportionments because of this rulemaking.
- Gulf War illness – The 38 Code of Federal Regulations does not grant presumptive service connection for Gulf War Illness, but it does include 38 CFR 3.317 for Compensation for certain disabilities in Persian Gulf Veterans to include:
 - An undiagnosed illness (contact Service Officer for more details)
 - A medically unexplained chronic multisymptom illness that is defined by a cluster of signs or symptoms such as:
 - Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
 - Fibromyalgia
 - Functional Gastrointestinal Disorder
 - A veteran who served in qualifying locations are also covered under 38 CFR 3.320 claims based on exposure to fine particulate matter as well as the presumptive conditions under the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson

Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022-
Burn Pits.

- The VA considers all of the previously approved presumptive conditions to include:
 - Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)
 - Chronic conditions (within 1 year of leaving active duty)
 - Diseases specific to former prisoners of war
 - Diseases specific to radiation exposure
 - Diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents (Agent Orange) (Viet Nam-contact Service Officer for boundaries of this area)
 - Diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, NC from 1953 to December 31, 1987,

- Idaho Veterans Property Tax Reduction Program – Veterans who are an Idaho resident, homeowner, and have a 100% service-connected disability or receive 100% compensation due to individual employability may qualify for this reduction. This program could reduce property taxes on your home and up to one acre of land by as much as \$1,500. For veterans who do not qualify for this program, you may qualify for the Property Tax Reduction Program (Circuit Breaker). Please contact the Idaho State Tax Commission for forms to apply for either program. More information can be found at: <https://tax.idaho.gov/taxes/property/homeowners/veteran-benefit/>

Time & Place Committee

June 2026 Convention – Commander Troy Junier

- Dates: June 3-6, 2026
- Location: Hilton Garden Inn, Boise Idaho (near Edwards Theater, Cole Rd & Overland Rd)
- Hotel rates: \$169 Basic, \$179 Upgrade rooms
- Centrally located elevators
- Taller building – one building (closer to meeting rooms)
- ADA accessible
- In-house catering and onsite Chef & staff (good reviews online)
- Large ballroom (can be split by sound walls, and smaller meeting rooms (as needed)
- More information will be sent as HQ staff and Commander Junier meet with the Hotel staff.
- Working to have Breakfast at Black Bear restaurant and Lunch at Goodwood BBQ.
- Working with HQ staff to publish the Registration and Hotel information soon in the General Orders

Business Session Meeting recessed at 11:36am MST

Business Session Meeting reconvened at 1:16pm MST

Time and Place (continued)

2026 Legislative Conference – Washington DC - Payton Schooler-Polillo

- 28 Feb-5 March, 2026
- Washington DC
- Information available on VFW website
- Attend: Payton Schooler-Polillo, Troy Junier, Sharyl Junier
- Anyone else going: Let Payton know (for touring with our congressmen's offices)

2026 National Convention – Commander Troy Junier

- Dates: July 24-29, 2026
- Location: Reno NV
- Reminder – every Post needs to pay the National Delegate fees.
- Hotel Reservation link on VFW National web site should open approx. March 18, 2026.
- More information will be on the National VFW website (when available)

2026 Western Conference – SVC Tom Black

- Date: November 5-8, 2026
- Host State – Dept. of Arizona
- Location – Tempe AZ
- Hotel – TBD
- Check the website for Dept of AZ for more information (when available)

2027 Mid-Winter Conference – SVC Tom Black

- Dates: 6-9 January 2027
- Location: Riverside Hotel, Garden City ID
- Room rate: \$169.00 plus taxes
- Working on contract details with Dept QM

2027 State Convention – SVC Tom Black

- Dates: 9-12 June 2027
- Location: Riverside Hotel
- Room Rate: TDB
- Working on contract details with Dept QM

2027 National VFW Conference – SVC Tom Black

- 31 July-3 Aug 2027
- Location: Milwaukee WI
- Watch National web site for more information

2028 Mid-Winter Conference – JVC Lee Hartwig

- Dates: 6-8 January 2028
- Location: Riverside Hotel, Garden City ID
- Room rate: TBD
- Working on contract details with Dept QM

2028 June Conference – JVC Lee Hartwig

- Dates: 8-11 June 2028
- Location: Coeur D Alene Casino, Worley ID
- Room rate: TBD
- Working on contract details with Dept QM

Time and Place Committee moved to approve the reports (as presented). Motion carried.

Community Service – JVC Lee Hartwig

- Read General Orders article published January 2026
- Not all events and activities qualify as Community Service
- Be careful of the word verbiage you use
- Begin with “While representing the VFW, ……”
- Post and AUX members have access to input their Community Activities through the Idaho VFW website. Any web access question, contact Matt Biggs for login information. JVC Hartwig and Commander Junier can answer questions.

Special Presentation – Post 3296

- 2024-25 National Community Service Award presented to Post 3296 (Orofino) by Commander Junier and NJVCIC Glenn Umberger
- Post 3296 Commander Doug Boyer accepted the award

Awards Chairman: VOD,PP, TOY – Tom Black

- Voice of Democracy, Patriots Pen, and Teachers of the Year will be honored tonight at the Awards Banquet.
- Patriots Pen: 19 posts, 75 students participated
- Voice of Democracy: 19 posts, 402 students participated
- Teacher of the Year: 11 Posts, 19 teachers participated
- District Escorts please meet with Tom Black at the Head table immediately after this meeting (briefing)
- VOD, PP, and TOY Recipients briefing will be in the glass Quiet Meeting Room at 4:30pm today.
- Reminder: all Posts and Districts need to input their VOD, PP, TOY information into the Dashboard on the National VFW website no later than January 31, 2026. This deadline includes the Districts and Department review and approve the entries. Start getting it done 5 days before the deadline. Any assistance, contact Tom Black, Dan Ragland, District, and Post officers.

National Legislative Service Report – Payton Schooler-Polillo

- PowerPoint Presentation (handout attached)
- Advocacy in Action
- Why it Matters
- Where to Research
- VFW Priorities Brochure and Talking Points
- List of Congressional Bills (VFW endorsed)
- Congress.gov web site for more information
- Richard B. Starr Act
- Advocacy at Home
- Things You Can Do Today
- QR Code, Action Alert, Newsletter
- Show more information on social media platforms
- Ladder of Engagement Chart
- Take Action when you receive VFW Action Alert emails (one sent today)
- Challenge, fill out the 2-minute survey, share a short story how Richard B. Starr Act could benefit you (and share with other veterans). We need your stories.
- Roadblocks on the Richard B. Starr Act
 - Misperception on the cost of the Act
 - Needs a more realistic budget
 - Overcome the misconceptions concerning the impact and benefits to veterans

NJVCIC Umberger Comments:

- There is a lot of misconceptions out there
- VFW will be contacting the Congressmen who do not support this bill
- If the bill cannot be moved out of committee to the Senate floor for a vote, then the VFW and other veterans organizations will be requesting a Hearing to address concerns and misconceptions.
- It is currently stalled in the Armed Forces Services Committee
- The VFW wants to clear up the misperceptions
- Ask CBO to relook at the budget costs and come up with a more realistic budget cost
- Veterans organizations have been working for approximately 5 years to get this budget passed.
- Ask your congressmen to talk to members on the Armed Services Committee to get this moved to the Senate floor for a vote.
- This requires active communication to your congressmen and constituent involvement

National Legislative Service Report (continued) – Payton Schooler-Polillo

- Advocacy is the keystone in getting this Action done
- Attendees today – please use the QR code and take the survey, click submit
- There will be a drawing based on surveys done today (prize provided by Payton)

Recess at 1:46 pm MST

Reconvene at 1:56 pm MST

Inspections – PSC Rick Johnson

- Inspections need to be done by the end of February 2026.
- Best inspections to date are for District 8 Posts (kudos)
- Inspector Johnson also reminded Posts of the inventory requirements of rifles (on loan from DOD), static displays, and regular displays:
 - Rifles are regular displays (triennial inventory)
 - Howitzer in the front of the Post building is a static display (annual inventory)
 - If you have both, then an annual inventory is required to be done online to TACOM
 - If you don't want to turn in required inventories and track them, turn them in.

Bylaws – PSC Rick Johnson

- Submit your bylaw changes not later than April 15, 2026.
- Need to follow chain of command: Posts to Districts, Districts to Department Bylaws Committee.
- Proposed Bylaws changes need to be sent out to all Posts, Districts and COA members a minimum of 30 days before the Department June Convention for review.
- Any Bylaws changes will then be voted on by Delegates at the June Convention in Boise ID.

Safety Committee Report – Tammy Clements

- Report given
- Safety Awards announced (sent to National for certificates to be printed and back by June Convention (approximately)).
- Safety Awards winners announced:
 - EMT – Jenna Walton (Post 3296)
 - Fire Fighter – Wyatt Roy (Post 3296)
 - Law Enforcement – Matt Anderson (Post 10043)
 - Dispatcher – Sara Showers (Post 10043)
- Reminder from Commander Junier to get your entries input to National on the OMS dashboard by 1/31/2026.

Raffle Report – Russ Ludlow

- Reminder to get all your tickets sold and turned in by May 15, 2026
- There are still 1500 more tickets to check out and sell (contact Dept. QM Ragland)
- Early Bird drawing is tonight (Saturday January 17th) at the Awards Dinner
- Chairman Ludlow will have raffle tickets for sale tonight
- Next year raffle tickets will be available at June Convention to be checked out and picked up.

Raffle Ticket Challenge – PSC Rockey Davis

- Post 10043 has sold 2000 tickets to date
- Challenge any Post to meet or beat this

Special Actions Committee – Commander Junier

- One Special Action issue has been addressed and completed. A student's Patriot Pen Essay was delivered on time to a Post, but did not get judged. The Post presented a certificate and check to the student. However, the essay missed the District and Department judging. The parent of the student complained to Department and to National. Commander Junier sent a letter of apology and encouraged the student to apply again next year. The student's parent was unhappy.
 - Lessons learned:
 - Posts need to track their entries (VOD and PP)
 - Use your chain of command; Post Commander first, then District Commander, Dept. Awards Chairman, and Department Commander. Don't jump over these and go to National as the first line of inquiry.
 - Meet the scholarship judging deadlines. Results of a scholarship judging contest cannot be changed after the judging is done.
 - Public Relations – work to present a positive and encouraging attitude

2024-2025 All State Awards presented – Commander Junier, PSC Joe Riener, and JVCIC Umberger

- Quartermaster Ragland read the 2024-2025 All-State report
- Jackets presented: Lee Hartwig (District 2 Commander), Elizabeth Weaver (Post 6232), Brian Harris (Post 9036), Jim White (Post 142), Randy Eich (Post 7137), Tammy Clement (Post 4000)
- All-State Hat presented: Chris Marker
- Other All-State Hats will be mailed when received at Dept. HQ.
- To be mailed All-State Hats: Ralph Binion (District 5 Commander), Brian Plass (Post 1004), Davis Owsley (Post 3296), Don Tobias (Post 3465), Lester Reiss (Post 8893), Jeremy Watson (Post 10300)
- VFW Store Voucher: James Alter (Post 63), Ralph Binion (Post 5423)

75th Diamond Jubilee Award presentation – SVC Tom Black

- Presented to Post 3884 Bear Lake Post located in Montpelier, Idaho
- Presentation by Commander Junier and JVCIC Umberger
- Quartermaster Jacob Hirsbrunner accepted

Membership/Recruiter Awards – SVC Tom Black

- Commander Pins and Certificates presented by Commander Junier and JVCIC Umberger
- Districts attaining 101% or higher Certificates: none to date
- Posts attaining 101% or higher Certificates: Preston 107.69% (Post 10323), Soda Springs 103.77% (Post 9141), Montpelier 103.03% (Post 3884), Kuna 101.96% (Post 7019), Nampa 101.79% (Post 3465), Mtn Home 101% (Post 5423)
- Recruiters signing up 15 or more members (commander eagle pin and certificate): PSC Joe Riener
- Recruiters signing up 10 or more members (commander eagle pin and certificate): PSC Joe Riener

- Recruiters signing up 5 or more members (commander eagle pin and certificate): PSC Joe Riener, Commander Troy Junier, Stacy Whitmore, Daniel Damigo, Ralph Binion, David Morgensen, Chris Marker, David McFerrin, James Earl
- Recruiters signing up 3 or more members (commander eagle pin): PSC Joe Riener, Commander Troy Junier, Stacy Whitmore, Daniel Damigo, Ralph Binion, David Morgensen, Chris Marker, David McFerrin, James Earl, Robert Kimbell, James White
- Recruiters signing up 1 or more members (commander eagle pin): PSC Joe Riener, Commander Troy Junier, Stacy Whitmore, Daniel Damigo, Ralph Binion, David Morgensen, Chris Marker, David McFerrin, James Earl, Robert Kimbell, James White, Casey Gannon, Robert Rains, Dennis Neibaur, Russ Ludlow, Jacob Hirsbrunner, Scott Williams, Claton Ward, Terry Morgan, Mark Brown, Kenneth Hunt, Thomas Lindley, Tel Thompson, David Frei, Andy Feebeck, David Brown, Payton Schooler-Polillo, Lee Hartwig, PSC Rockey Davis, Albert Cole, Jordan McKie, Enid Brossard, Eric Larsen, Tom Jones, Tom Black, Don Mitchell, Don Tobias, Robert Huber, Jerry Somers, Kelly Garey, Tammy Clement, Darrell Welle, Eileen Kirkland, Kathryn Peterson, Eric Bolich, Joseph Gardner, Terry Emlet Jr., Steven Faulkner, Denny Croner, Michael O'Brien, PSC Kenneth Babcock, Brice Neal.

Old Business:

- None

New Business:

- Boise Veterans Day Parade:
 - PSC Kenneth Babcock suggested looking into a parade float entry for the Boise Veterans Day Parade. Past Department commanders could be invited to be on the float.
 - Commander Junier looked into a parade entry – costs more than last year
 - The location of the parade will be changing (conflict with another event in Boise) Possible the city charging for the parade to take place.
- Patriotic Freedom 250
 - See web page Freedom250.org
 - Celebrating the U.S. 250 anniversary this year
 - Events and activities in all 50 states
 - Sign up to be an ambassador
 - Gives contacts for all 50 states
 - Lists ideas for events to organize and participate in every community.
 - Began January 1st in Washington D.C.
 - What can your Post do in your communities?
 - National VFW is working on something. Check the VFW website for news.
- VFW Day of Service

GOOD OF THE ORDER:

Comments – JVCIC Glenn Umberger Jr.

- MAJ Richard Starr Act – get involved with your congressmen. Support this Act.

- Watch for upcoming community based health care legislation
- HR 740, S275, and HR467. VFW is focusing on getting these Acts passed.
- JVCIC Umberger has visited Europe twice this year.
- Medical services for veterans living overseas are very costly
- Active Armed Forces are reducing services overseas (that veterans can access). This is a concern.
- Alternate treatments for PTSD. There are a lot of options. VFW is asking the VA to start their own study into alternate PTSD treatment methods. Trying to get away from medications that have serious side effects.
- Talk to your Congressmen – to allow studies for alternative treatment methods. There are good prospects out there.
- Transition Assistance Program (TAP)
 - Goal to reduce the downward spiral, reduce veteran suicides
 - Get into treatment early and save lives
 - Keep veterans informed of local, statewide, and VA resources
 - Treat each other with kind words and kind gestures
 - Talking to each other (as veterans) makes a difference
 - JVCIC shared a story about a veteran thinking about suicide. One person talked to them, and asked if they need any help.
 - Do your buddy checks and duty calls
- JVCIC Emberger invited the Dept. Jr Vice Commander to contact him if you need to vent in a safe place. Also would like to hear good news too.
- JVCIC Umberger shared an artifacts exchange story (from Asia recovered remains). The last exchange, the VFW was the only veterans organization there for the exchange. The U.S. returned captured battle flags to Viet Nam. Our families need closure. Bring home the remains of KIA/MIA loved ones provides this closure.
- Accredited Veterans Service Officers are underrepresented and underappreciated. Thank your Service Officers and recognize them. Their jobs are challenging and rewarding when a veteran successfully receives their benefits and service ratings. Laws and regulations are changing every day. Keeping up is a challenge.
- JVCIC Umberger stated that it was a pleasure to be here in Idaho. He is looking forward to the Awards Dinner tonight – honoring the students and teachers.
- This year is the U.S. 250th anniversary. How will the VFW participate. You matter. Submit your ideas through your Commanders, Districts, and Department Commander and Council Members. Submit your ideas to the National VFW organization. The VFW Magazine or Press Releases will publish the best ideas.
- Thank you all for attending the Mid-Winter Conference of the Department of Idaho.

Commander Junier presented his commander's eagle pin to JVCIC Umberger.

Candidates for 2026-2027 Officers announced:

Commander – Tom Black

Sr Vice Commander – Lee Hartwig

Jr Vice Commander – Ralph Binion, Owen Spurling

Judge Advocate – Matt Biggs
Surgeon – Frank Fabbi
Chaplain – Russ Ludlow
Quartermaster – Dan Ragland
National Legislative Service Representative – Payton Schooler-Polillo

Officer comments:

Commander Junier – thanked everyone for attending the Mid-Winter Conference.
SVC Tom Black – none
JVC Lee Hartwig – none

Announcements:

- Briefing for Voice of Democracy, Patriot’s Pen, and Teachers of the Year will be held at 4:30pm in the Quiet Room. [Tom Black - Briefing, Melanie Palmer - vouchers/meal tickets]
- Banquet attendees please be seated by 6:15pm.
- The parade of students and teachers will start promptly at 6:30pm. District Commander/ President (or alternate) escorts, please meet with Chairman Tom Black right after the close of the Business Session (at head table).

Chaplain Ludlow closed the bible.

Business session was closed at 3:10pm MST by Commander Junier. Next meeting will be Thursday June 4, 2026 at the Garden Inn Hilton in Boise ID.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Palmer

Melanie Palmer
Executive Assistant
Department of Idaho
Veterans of Foreign Wars

Addendum - Awards presented at the Saturday Dinner:

Teachers of the Year:

High School - Chester Packer, W. Jefferson HS, Idaho Falls (District 8, Post 8893)
Middle School - Jennifer McConnell, Emmett Middle School, Emmett (District 4, Post 4900)
Elementary School - Sherri Ybarra, Stephensen Elementary, Mtn Home AFB (District 5, Post 5423)

Patriots Pen:

1st - Crosby Haver, Sweet ID (District 4, Post 4900)
2nd - Robert R. Burch IV, Moscow ID (District 2, Post 3913)
3rd - Pilar McGirr, Meridian ID (District 5, Post 63)

Voice of Democracy:

1st - Cassidy Burlile, New Plymouth ID (District 4, Post 9036)

2nd - Brodie Merrell, Glens Ferry ID (District 6, Post 3646)

3rd - Jaelyn Llamas, Terreton ID (District 8, Post 8893)

2024-2025 Lifetime Achievement Awards:

Douglas Welch (Post 10043)

Ronald Hart (Post 9036)

Joseph Wallace (Post 1675)

2026 VFW Mid-Winter Service Officer Report

Personnel- The State of Idaho has (18) VFW Accredited Veteran Service Officers- (7) at the Boise VARO, (1) in Mountain Home, (2) in Caldwell, (2) in Twin Falls, (2) in Pocatello, (2) in Lewiston and (2) in Post Falls. Anita Monroe (Administrative Assistant at the Lewiston Office just retired after 24 ½ years and we are in the process of hiring a replacement.

During Fiscal Year 2025, VFW accredited Veteran Service Officers assisted recovered more than **\$16.2 BILLION** in FY '25. Mike Figlioli, Director of the VFW's National Veteran Service stated that "This extraordinary milestone is a testament not only to the expertise of VFW Accredited Veteran Service Officers, but to the resilience in the face of constant challenges. Accredited representatives—especially within the VFW—have been scrutinized, criticized, and underestimated from all sides. Yet you have stood firm. You have risen above the noise, the doubt, and the misconceptions that claim you are untrained or “just volunteers.” Mike is referencing arguments from Lobbyists for Claim Shark businesses who say they are needed because there are not enough accredited representatives or that we are poorly trained. **Do Not Feed the Claim Sharks!**

No longer VFW Post Service Officers- Now called Benefit Advisors

This long awaited, much anticipated rebuild of the Idaho State Veterans Home in Boise is now underway with the Groundbreaking Ceremony being held this past October 3rd and will take years to complete. It is expected that the Lewiston State Veterans Home Grant will be approved this year and the State will try to get approved for the Pocatello Home remodel next year.

The **Cost of Living Allowance for 2026** has been released and it will be 2.8%. This will be for VA Benefits as well as Social Security Awards. Following the COLA increase, the **Non-Service Connected Burial Allowance** has increased to **\$1,002** as well as the **Plot Allowance rate (\$1,002)** if a Veteran is buried in a private cemetery. The **Service Connected Burial Allowance** remains at **\$2,000** and VA does not permit plot allowance rates to be paid if a Service Connected Burial Allowance is paid.

Burials/Inurnments at the State or National Veteran Cemeteries are no charge for Veterans, State Veteran Cemeteries charge the current plot allowance rate for non-Veteran spouses. The Snake River National Cemetery in Buhl is considered a National Cemetery and does not charge for spouse internments.

The new **Cost of Living Allowance Rate** equate to:

- 10% S/C- \$180.42
- 100% S/C (Single)- \$3,938.38, (Married)- \$4,158.17
- Non-Service Connected Pension at the A&A Rate (Single/Max)- \$2,424 (Married/Max)- \$2,874
- Dependency Indemnity Compensation-\$1,699.36, 8-year Enhanced Rate- \$360.85, A&A- \$421.00
- Survivor Pension A&A Rate (Max)- \$1558

* At no time does the VA allow surviving spouses to assume the Veterans VA Award. DIC can be awarded for a service connected disability rating as low as 0% as long as it is on the Death Certificate

** All VA Awards are Tax Exempt. VA will not send out 1099s or W-2s for VA Benefit Awards

Concurrent Receipt- **CRDP** (for 20+ years and Veteran is rated 50% disabled or higher **Automatic Benefit** and is taxable. **CRSC** (Combat Related Special Compensation)- Less than 20 years (Medical Retirement) for VA service connected disabilities that were incurred in combat, training for combat, instrument of war or simulated war- Must file to the Branch of Service and is Tax Exempt.

Here are some of the recent statistics and information from the Boise VA Regional Office-

- 579k claims pending Nationwide with claims backlog (claims over 125 days old) now below 100k claims. Average number of days for processing- 83.
- There are currently 3,600 claims for Idaho Veterans pending with an average of 86 days for claims to be completed
- Rashedta Smith continues to serve as the Acting Boise VA Regional Office Director and serves as the Director of the VA Regional Office in Reno as well.
- Boise VA Regional Office currently has 133 full-time claims processors working in the Service Center and has 1,001 claims currently being worked.
- Boise VARO remains instrumental in the development and testing for the VA's Automated claims processing.

On November 17, 2025, the VA announced that potentially thousands of Veterans who were discharged from service by the Biden Administration for refusing the COVID vaccine may regain eligibility for GI Bill education benefits. The President Trump issued Executive Order 14184, [Reinstating Service Members Discharged Under the Military's COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate](#). Following that, the Secretary of War directed the military departments to facilitate, among other things, discharge upgrades for individuals involuntarily separated solely for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine and whose service was characterized as less than fully honorable. In September, VA sent letters to Veterans who have already received upgraded discharges to inform them of their potential eligibility for GI Bill education benefits. VA encourages all Veterans who were discharged from service for refusing the COVID vaccine to seek an upgraded status and apply for GI Bill benefits.

What Veterans should know:

- Veterans who believe they were discharged inappropriately or believe their military personnel records still reflect an error or injustice (for example, separation under the COVID-19 mandate) may request review from a Discharge Review Board or Board for Correction of Military or Naval Records. For more information, visit the Military Department Review Boards website at <https://www.milreviewbds.mil/>.
- Once Veterans receive official notification that their discharge status has been upgraded to fully honorable, they can [submit a new education benefits claim](#) to VA.

VA Dental Coverage- The VA will only provide dental treatment to Veterans enrolled in the VA Healthcare system that are rated 100% service connected, approved for Individual Unemployability or are service connected for dental trauma-related issues. For all other Veteran who are enrolled in VA Healthcare and Dependents of 100% service connected Veterans (or Surviving Spouses approved for Dependency Indemnity Compensation) and on ChampVA, you are eligible for the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP). Again, this is a monthly premium-based dental insurance that is managed by MetLife and Delta Dental but it is very good dental insurance. More information can be found at: www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits/dental-care/dental-insurance/

VA Foreign Medical Program Update- VA has announced that veterans who receive care through the Foreign Medical Program (FMP) will now receive reimbursement payments through direct deposit instead of paper checks. This applies only to payments made to U.S. bank accounts, but VA is working to add international bank accounts. More information on the VA Foreign Medical Program can be found at www.va.gov/health-care/foreign-medical-program/

The Department of Veterans Affairs will soon propose a rule extending eligibility for legacy veterans and caregivers in the **Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)** for three years, until September 30, 2028. During this extension, legacy participants will keep their current status and benefits unless they request a new assessment. Legacy participants are those who were in PCAFC as of September 30, 2020, and those applicants who applied prior to October 01, 2020, and were accepted into the program October 01, 2020, or afterwards.

Apportionments- On Friday, January 9, 2026, VA posted a final rule in the Federal Register that discontinues the authority for VA to make need-based apportionment awards. **This means that effective February 9, 2026, veterans and family members can no longer request apportionments** unless the veteran or surviving spouse is incarcerated, or the veteran is incompetent without a fiduciary and institutionalized at government expense. VA will not process apportionments for other situations such as child or spousal support after February 8, 2026. **Please note:** VA will not discontinue any current apportionments because of this rulemaking.

Gulf War Illness: The latest news all on internet news outlets and Social Media pertains to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) acknowledging Gulf War Illness. The 38 Code of Federal Regulations does not grant presumptive service connection for Gulf War Illness but it does include 38 CFR 3.317 for **Compensation for certain disabilities occurring in Persian Gulf Veterans** to include:

- An Undiagnosed Illness
- A medically unexplained chronic multisymptom illness that is defined by a cluster of signs or symptoms, such as:
 - o Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
 - o Fibromyalgia
 - o Functional Gastrointestinal Disorder

*Signs or symptoms of undiagnosed illness and medically unexplained chronic multisymptom illness means a diagnosed illness without conclusive pathophysiology or etiology, that is characterized by overlapping symptoms and signs, have objective indications of chronic disability that have existed for 6 months or more. Conditions include, but not limited to: Fatigue, Signs or Symptoms involving skin, Headache, Muscle pain, Joint pain, Neurological signs or symptoms, Neuropsychological signs or symptoms, Signs or symptoms involving the respiratory system, Sleep disturbances, Gastrointestinal signs or symptoms, Cardiovascular signs or symptoms, abnormal weight loss or menstrual disorders.

Veteran who served in qualifying locations are also covered under 38 CFR 3.320 **Claims based on exposure to fine particulate matter** as well as the presumptive conditions under the **Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022- Burn Pits**

The VA also considers all of the previously approved presumptive conditions to include:

- Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)
- Chronic Conditions (within 1 year of leaving active duty)
- Diseases specific to former prisoners of war
- Diseases specific to radiation exposure
- Diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents (Agent Orange)

(Vietnam, within 12 nautical miles of the Vietnam Coastline, C-123 Air or Ground Crew until 1986, service in Thailand (until June 30, 1976, Guam or American Samoa from January 9, 1962 through July 31, 1980, Johnston Atoll from January 1, 1972 until September 20, 1977, Service on the DMZ in Korea from 1968 until 1971)

- Diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, NC from 1953-December 31, 1987

Veterans who are an Idaho resident, homeowner and have a 100% service-connected disability or receive 100% compensation due to individual employability may qualify for the **Idaho Veterans Property Tax Reduction Program**. This program could reduce property taxes on your home and up to one acre of land by as much as \$1,500. For Veterans who do not qualify for the 100%/\$1,500 you may qualify for the Property Tax Reduction program, also known as the Circuit Breaker program. Please see the attached Property Tax Reduction program Fact Sheet for eligibility requirements. Once granted to a qualifying Veteran, a surviving spouse can use this benefit. However, the benefit isn't transferable to a new property after the death of a Veteran. More information can be found at the State's Tax Commission at:<https://tax.idaho.gov/taxes/property/homeowners/veteran-benefit/>

Please contact myself or one of my Team Members if you have any questions.

Respectfully

Bill Heyob
SgtMajor USMC (Retired)
Department Service Officer
Department of Idaho
(208) 780-1380



In order to grow our organization,
we must recruit new members.

**Safeguard The
Mission:**

We rely on members
to continue our work

Membership decline
puts our core
programs and
benefits at risk.

**Sustaining
Community Impact:**

Members = power

More members
means more
volunteers, more
hands on the work

**Strengthening Post
Culture:**

New voices and new
viewpoints

Builds camaraderie
and belonging across
all generations of
veterans

What type of events work?

- Different focus = different approach
- Learn what works in your area



How do we find them?

- Online tools – Google is your friend!
- Use local resources
- Build relationships

What do we do once we're there?

- Active vs Passive vs Captive Recruiting
- Tailor your approach
- Know your material
- Follow up

VFW ID – As of Jan 2026

