



Veterans of Foreign Wars
Department of Idaho
Joint Opening Session Notes
January 17, 2026

Commander Troy Junier – VFW
Auxiliary President Jessica Ray
Emcee Sr. Vice President Tom Black

Parker Harold from Senator Mike Crapo's Office

Mr. Harold announced that he would be presenting the prestigious “SPIRIT OF FREEDOM” award which was established in 2002 for Outstanding Service to Idaho. Tammy Clement, Commander of Meridian Post 4000 was presented with a certificate and a flag that was flown over the U.S. Capitol. Mr. Harold gave a synopsis of Tammy’s military history, as well as the hours, events and miles she has devoted to VFW.

Senator James E. Risch

- Senator Risch said that all four Senators and Representatives are very close-knit and work cooperatively on issues impacting Idaho.
- He personally worked with the Commander-in-Chief on various issues
- He has attended many funerals of those killed in action and so has the Commander-in-Chief. He stressed that while the media doesn’t really show it, the President struggles with decisions that affect veterans and gets the input and options from all of those around him, then he makes his decisions.
- Senator Risch has 6 offices throughout Idaho and a special section of his office is strictly focused on making sure veterans receive the benefits they deserve, and helping veterans transition out of military service.
- He helped work on the issue of funding to rebuild the Veterans Home in Idaho and getting the waiver that was holding up construction in Boise.
- In terms of legislation, he is working on the Major Richard Star Act and getting a second National Cemetery in Northern Idaho.

Representative Russ Fulcher

- Politics is the biggest enemy we face today – it is the enemy within, good vs. evil, we fight in our country now

- Tory Shocking in his office focuses on veterans. They process about 1,000 cases a year and have gotten over \$3 Million in benefits for veterans.

Mayor Bill Jacobs – Garden City

Welcomed us to Garden City, thanked us for holding our conference there. His family has an extensive military background and his assistant, Suzanne, is a Marine Veterans that keeps him organized.

Brigadier General James Packwood, National Guard

- Thanked all for their service. He service 2 tours in Iraq, and served in various other locations such as Bosnia and Kosovo.
- He mentioned the 250th Anniversary of the Army – but the Guard is the oldest part of the Army and is 390 years old.
- He mentioned that the 116th Combat Engineers is transitioning to a Mobile Brigade Combat Team – one of the first in the National Guard. They will be the 116th Combat Regiment of the future. Watch for information about special ceremonies which will be held in March as the unit transitions.
- A-10's are being retired and they will transition to all F-16's by 2027 in the Air Guard
- There are no planned deployments at this time
- The 124th Fighter Wing return about 300 airmen
- They are working with many Native American tribes including the Nez Perce and Shoshone tribes on construction needs and readiness.

Idaho Division of Veterans Services, Bill Heyob

- Bill talked about the Boise Veterans Home. It will be 4 stories, ½ built now and ½ built later
- Hope to start construction at Lewiston home by end March
- Pocatello home may start construction in 2027
- Post Falls is the model home for all the Veterans Homes
- BURIAL & CEMETERIES
 - Veterans may be buried free in the Veterans cemeteries, except upper level in Boise costs \$700. Spouses may be buried with them or next to them for \$1002 (plus \$700 for upper level) – this is internment only – not funeral cost
 - If buried elsewhere, they may still have a Memorial Plaque at cemetery
- SPOUSE BENEFITS (Check always with Idaho Division of Veterans Services for your amount – this is general information only!)
 - Spousal benefit if veteran dies of SERVICE RELATED condition \$1699/month max.
 - If veteran was disabled 8+ years and married 10 years, spouse may receive an additional \$360/month
 - If the surviving spouse cannot do 2 or more activities of daily living, may receive another \$410/month

- Even if the veteran NEVER filed for benefits, spouse should check with Idaho Division of Veterans Services if they died of service-related condition as they may be eligible for the \$1699/month benefit on a PRESUMPTIVE basis.
- PACT ACT – Thailand and Samoa service now included due to Agent Orange exposure

ROBERT FELICIANO, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Veteran Coordinator, Janie Rivera is the Director. Their focus is Transition Challenges for veterans leaving military service. They have 8 different offices in cities and rural areas.

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION REGIONAL DIRECTOR – MEREDITH PAGE (Interim Roshetta Smith)

They are expediting Claims Processing and automating claims administration. They have had a 60% reduction in their backlog of claims.

OTHER SPEAKERS

1. **DAV COMMANDER CARL HERTZ** – Gave background on DAV and what they do. They can provide Emergency Grants to veterans
2. **AMERICAN LEGION COMMANDER DEE SASSY** – Emphasized that all veterans organizations need to work together as we are on the same team
3. **40 & 8 NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER RALPH BINION** – They help support Nurses Training, Youth Sports and help with family emergencies during disasters
4. **USS IDAHO NUCLEAR SUBMARINE** – Update on progress so far. They are hoping for an April Commissioning in Groton, Connecticut. The crew is now undergoing training and testing the submarine
5. **GALE BESTLAND – NATIONAL DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBER 14 FOR AUXILIARY** – Emphasized Mental Health, PTS issues
6. **GLEN UMBERGER – NATIONAL JR. VICE COMMANDER VFW** – They are focusing on the Major Richard Star Act. They have been working on this for over 5 years now. He stressed that he needs everyone to go online and sign up for VFW ACTION CORPS and take Action when it is requested. You can put in your zipcode and there are letters automatically generated for your particular legislative representatives that will be emailed immediately. You can resend these letters every 24 hours. This will greatly help to get the Star Act passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Brossard

Susan Brossard, Department Secretary
Idaho VFW Auxiliary

