



## **Department of California**

### **National Security**

#### **Washington DC Report 2025**

Our first meeting of the day was led by Derck Blumke, the Grunt Style Foundation's Veteran Impact Fellow. His focus is on overprescribing of medications to veterans and harm reduction. He stated all medications have some kind of side effects including suicide. 70 percent are treated at the VA.

The suggested actions to end the Prescribed Suicide Crisis:

- Retrain all VA prescribers and mental health clinicians
- Signatory informed consent
- Reform VA de-prescribing guidelines – implement Maudsley De-Prescribing guidelines
- Establish Red Alert Pharmacy system
- Differential Diagnosis – Identify Cause
- Publicly release all VA collected data on Veteran Suicides and medications

The problem is the suicide rates continue to increase despite increased spending and access to VA and Non-VA mental health. There is a documentary called Medicating Normal. Everyone was encouraged to watch it.

Akathisia Acute Psychotropic Drug side effects of: Delirium – skin crawling to tingling, insomnia, new or worsening agitation or anxiety and suicidal thoughts or actions. Objective symptoms of Akathisia may include inability or difficulty staying still. The data that has been put together is not being shared by the VA.

Our next speaker was Ivan E. Denton of the Senior Executive Service within the Department of labor, Veterans' Employment & Training Service. He oversees the VETS Program office that administer five congressionally mandated programs that serve over 430,000 military members, Veterans, and employers.

Mr. Denton gave us information to the DOD Skillbridge Program. The program is an opportunity for service members to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of service. It connects transitioning service members with industry partners in real-world job experiences. Additional information can be found through the Office of Small Business Programs Department of Defense website.

There is also Off Base Transition Training available with workshops that you can sign up for. You select what you would like to view and what day and time. There are 14 states that have it. The latest trends are that 30 percent of Federal Employees are Veterans.

It is important for Veterans to know who their state USERRA is. USERRA is Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. Another site to visit is the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E).

Next on the schedule was Brigadier General David “Mac” MacEwen, U.S. Army, Retired. He is with the Veterans Justice Commission. There are 3 sections of work:

- Transition for Military Service
- Arrest through sentencing
- Corrections & Re-entry

We need to get back to allowing Veterans to get benefits they have earned. Arrest through Sentencing recommendation: Define and identify Veterans in the Criminal Justice System.

Housing – they saw a 7% decrease in Veterans homelessness. 96% remained housed. It is important to look for opportunities to find full-time jobs for older veterans.

Sarah Bierman was the next person to speak to us. She is the Deputy Director for Grants and Training in the Office of National Programs (ONP) with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Veteran’s Employment and Training Services (VETS). She is from South Dakota Army National Guard and served for 17 years that included 16 months of active duty in Kuwait/Iraq.

Bierman said programs work but the grants fund for specific things. What can we do in our communities? We need to reach out to providers and ask what they need.

There are various housing programs:

- Emergency – Shelter
- Transitional
- Permanent – has a lease
- In the meantime, could be living in an RV

Advocacy – affordable housing is a crisis, and we need more affordable housing. A suggestion would be to have HUD also have a percentage put aside for Veteran Housing.

Workforce Development – there are a lot of different opportunities out there. The person needs to be assessed and see where they get placed.

Next, we had Tammy Barlet, Vice President of Government Affairs, Student Veterans of America (SVA). She recommends these improvements be made:

- If a Veteran passes away and has dependents, their benefits be transferred to the dependents.
- G.I. Bill focus is on State School
- Support increase of book stipend
- The window for the G.I. Bill should be when you actually start school – look at elimination date.
- What is the Yellow Ribbon Program the extension of Chapter 33?

After lunch we heard from Service to Small Business Administration. The speakers were:

- Donnell E. Johns Sr., Command Sergeant Major U.S. Army Retired, Founder of Veterans Growing America.
- Hyacinth Tucker, Army Veteran, and owner of The Laundry Basket LLC
- Michael D. Thornton, Sr. Chief Operating Officer and co-owner of Visionary Consulting Partners, LLC

All three recommended the Small Business Association. Go to the people who know the programs out there to get started. They also recommended:

- Boots to Business Reboot
- Pathway to Business Military Spouse
- Find a community of entrepreneurs
- Make sure you get your credit right
- Have some thick skin, resilience
- Look at skills sets you already have
- Don't do it for the money – you must be passionate about it
- Network – don't try to do it alone.

After our workshops, we went in to the Commanders Call from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm. We heard from National Commander James A. LaCoursiere Jr.

I then went to meet with National Executive Committee Members Jere Romano, Harley Santos, Scott Wagenseller, and some of the other Legionnaires from California to map out our plan for our walk on the Hill on Tuesday. I am so grateful to the California Legionnaires for their expertise and their kindness to include me in their visits as well as going to my visit. I also had the privilege of having Past National Auxiliary President Nancy Brown-Park walk the hill with us.

I went to the Longworth House Building to meet with Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren from District 18 that is from Monterey County. She was not available, and I dropped off a pamphlet along with my business card. I have never received an email to let me know she received it.

We then went to the Rayburn Building and visited with the assistant to Dereck T. Tran, the assistant to Julia Brownley, and the assistant to J. Luis Correa.

This trip was an amazing experience, and I am so grateful for the opportunity. I knew our Legion Family was huge but didn't realize how large and powerful we are. This trip gave me a new respect for our Legionnaires. I learned how important it is to network with other Legion Family members.

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