



**American Legion Auxiliary
Department of California
Storm the Capitol Report
March 2024**



We started our session learning that over eight hundred thousand people die by suicide each year globally. National Commander Daniel Seehafer presented “Be the One”. The main goal for the Legion is to have more people trained on how to stop Suicide than any other organization. The steps to get there is by changing culture through destigmatization, training our members on suicide prevention, research how suicide effects family members especially spouses, holding public awareness events, and using social media to get the word out. The Legion is currently working with Columbia University, who was vital when the Legion was fighting for veterans with effects from Agent Orange in the 70s and 80s. More promotional items will be coming out, so keep an eye on www.betheone.org. The Legion hosted two Be the One training on Sunday before I arrived. They are planning on additional training both in person, virtually, and at National Convention.

National President Lisa Williamson then shared with us that the National Security Chairman were brought in this year because of the need to get the word out about Coast Guard pay. The Coast Guard is under a Department of Homeland Security instead of the DOD, so when Congress can't pass a budget our Coast Guard don't get paid. She also mentioned that we need more VA Representatives and Deputies. There is not one state in the nation that has Representatives in all their hospitals. Lisa also mentioned that we need to do better reporting our volunteer hours. Did you know that you can claim 10 hours a week if you live and care give for a Veteran in your home? You can claim 5 hours if you take care of a veteran family member outside of your home.

Next I got to attend the Veteran's Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission meeting. Our Commissioner was the one and only Autrey James. In 2024 the Legion is focused on Mental Threats and Suicide Prevention, Electronic Health Record Rollout, and Increasing funding for PTSD and brain tremors.

Next we heard from Mathew Rowley who works for the VHA Innovation Ecosystem. He spoke about what the VA is doing to push forward Health Care for Veterans, Mission Daybreak, increasing social connections for Veterans, pharmecogenomics, the Million Veteran project, and the Office of Advance Manufacturing. This office is using 3D printing to provide person specific solutions. They are using CT scans and 3D printing to create 3D models of anatomy so the surgeon can view it and know exactly what they need to do before going into surgery. These 3D models help in multiple ways including the patient needing less time under since the surgeon knows what to expect, it allows the surgeon to more easily explain the procedure to the patient, and allows the patient to understand and explain it to their family.

Next we heard from Eugene Luskin, the CEO of Digital Medical Record Service for Veteran's Health Management. Eugene shared an app they have created called Sync MD. It allows our veterans to obtain medical records from all their doctors and store them in the app. It also allows them to send all records or partial records to new doctors as needed. They are

currently working with the DOD to integrate their service history and eligibility information for easy access.

We then had a Leadership Panel answer questions from members throughout the nation. We got answers from the panelists about VA Benefit Claims handling, safeguarding Veteran Benefits, processing time of the legacy appeals, suicide being the #1 priority, and using AI in the claims process at the VA.

Tuesday started with the Commander's call. Commander Seehafer shared the importance of family. Many times the last words on the battlefield is to tell my family that I love them. We currently have military installations in 170 countries. Lisa Williamson shared that 70% of veterans will die by suicide within one hour of thinking about it. 20% will die by suicide within 20 minutes of thinking about it. She also gave us the acronym ALR- Ask, Listen, React. Sons Commander Donald Hall asked us to share our Why. A bigger American Legion is a stronger American Legion.

Next we heard from Senator John Tester from Montana. He spoke on the Pact Act and its benefits to our veterans. He knew a veteran who had been given six months to live. When the Pact Act passed he no longer had to stress about his family. Without the pact act his family would have been in poverty. Senators are working on a bill to fix the problems with stolen benefits. They need to find a way to stop the crooks. They are also working on bills to help support mental health care of our veterans.

Before heading to the hill each Commission Chairman spoke on the most important topics to speak with our senators and representatives with. Autrey James, the head of the VA&R Commission spoke on the Suicide Prevention & Mental Health (HR3722 and HR1639), VA Healthcare Modernization (EHRM- Electronic Health Record Transparency), and Safeguard Veteran Benefits (HR1530)

John J Bowen is head of the Commission on Veteran's Employment and Education. He asked us to focus on Veteran Homelessness, Mental Health Issues, Veteran Suicide, Task Force Movement Group, and Improving the Military Tap (HR3722)

Matthew Shuman is head of the National Security Commission. He shared information on Military Quality of Life, Pay the Coast Guard, and Access to healthcare for Overseas military and families.

On Tuesday, I met up with Legionnaire Chris Yates. We headed to the Rayburn building and we headed to California Representative's offices to leave the Legislative Issues brochure. During this time we visited and chatted with the staff members of: David Valadao 22nd District, Ted Lieu 36th District, Jared Huffman 2nd District, and Julia Brownley 26th District. At this point we met up with Autrey James, Marquis Palmer, and Manny Vega and started focusing on the Veteran's Service Committee members. We spoke with staffers in the following offices: Nance Mace of South Carolina and Morgan Luttrell of Texas. We had our first appointment with Mike Levin from the 49th District. During this meeting we met with one of his staffers and spoke on the Military Quality of Life, the Pact Act, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, TAP, Coast Guard Pay, and the GI Bill. Next we headed to the offices of Raul Ruiz 25th District Ben Cline of Virginia, Veronica Escobar of Texas and dropped off Legislative Brochures. We stopped in to drop off a Legislative Brochure with Salud Carbajal of the 24th District and got the chance to speak with his staff members. We shared the same topics from above. Finally we met with a staff member of my Congressperson Barbara Lee. We joined her staffer in the cafeteria and shared the same above topics.

Please ask Liz Doidge if you'd like to see the extended version of this report.