

# **Serving Those Who Served**

**The Official Newsletter of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs**



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## Commissioner's Corner



## Commissioner's Corner

Greetings teammates,

As we hit the halfway point of 2023 and close out our Fiscal Year, we have had many successes in the past few months. Our two women veterans events, the Veterans Experience Action Center event, the 2023 Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award and more. The full numbers for FY 2023 will be out for viewing in our Annual Report in August, but the main takeaway I want is for our veterans to know we're here for them and our different departments have been and will continue to support them across our great Commonwealth.

As we look ahead, we have our Commanders State Conference August 24-25 where leaders from various Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), federal VA leaders and state level officials will meet and discuss the needs of our veterans. We have plenty to look forward to in the second half of the year. I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable Fourth of July!

Very respectfully,  
**Commissioner Whitney P. Allen, Jr.**  
*Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs*

## Latest VA News

# VA launches national PACT Act Summer VetFest to encourage Veterans and survivors to apply for new health care and benefits

In July, VA will kick off PACT Act Summer VetFest to inform Veterans, their families, and survivors about the PACT Act and encourage them to apply for the health care and benefits they have earned. The PACT Act, which President Biden signed into law on Aug. 10, 2022, is the biggest expansion of Veteran health care and benefits in generations.

Throughout July, VA will host [50+ Summer VetFest events](#) across all 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico. The events will be casual summer gatherings featuring Veterans, their families, Veteran advocates, and the VA health care and benefits professionals who serve them. At the events, VA staff will be ready to help Veterans [apply](#) for PACT Act-related benefits (or submit an [intent to file](#)), enroll in VA health care, get screened for toxic exposures, and more.

VA encourages all [eligible](#) Veterans and survivors to [file a claim](#) — or [submit their intent to file a claim](#) — for PACT Act-related benefits now. Veterans who do so by Aug. 9 may have their benefits, if granted, backdated to Aug. 10, 2022, the day that President Biden signed the bill into law.

“There are millions of Veterans and survivors across America who are eligible for new health care and benefits, and we will not rest until every one of them gets what they’ve earned,” **said VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “That’s what this Summer VetFest is all about: educating Veterans, their families, and survivors — and encouraging them to apply today.”

Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law, VA has delivered more than \$1.4 billion in PACT Act benefits to Veterans. Additionally, more than 665,000 Veterans have applied for PACT Act-related benefits, more than 3.7 million Veterans have received the

new [toxic exposure screenings](#), and more than 287,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care (this is 40,000 more enrollments than during the same timeframe last year, and it includes 94,000 enrollees from the PACT Act target population).

The PACT Act Summer VetFest is just one component of VA's nationwide PACT Act Veteran outreach campaign, which is the largest coordinated outreach campaign in VA history. The campaign has one goal: ensuring that every eligible Veteran and survivor gets the PACT Act-related health care and benefits they have earned. Highlights of the campaign to date:

- Within one hour of the Senate passage of the PACT Act, VA launched [VA.gov/PACT](#) — a one-stop-shop for Veterans and survivors to learn about and apply for PACT Act-related care and benefits. Since then, the website has garnered more than 13.4 million page views from 10 million unique visitors.
- VA is executing an aggressive national and local earned media campaign, seeking to inform Veterans and survivors about the PACT Act and encourage them to apply. Between Aug. 10, 2022, and June 9, 2023, these efforts have helped generate 30,000+ news articles and 24,000+ broadcast items about the PACT Act. VA is executing a nationwide, targeted advertising campaign across streaming video (Hulu, Roku, YouTube); print (Military Times, Military.com, USA Today); radio (satellite, traditional); podcasts; signage (including [Times Square](#) ads, D.C. Metro ads, airports, billboards, and more); sponsorships (such as Military and Armed Forces Bowls); digital advertising, including Search (Google and Bing), Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Spotify, iHeartRadio, ESPN online, RallyPoint, and more.
- To date, VA has spent more than \$7.5 million on PACT Act advertising, driving millions of visitors to VA.gov/PACT, and generating hundreds of millions of impressions. Through Public Service Announcement distribution along with vendor negotiations, VA has also achieved \$7.9 million in added value between October 2022 and May 2023, more than doubling the media value of PACT Act efforts. By the Aug. 9 filing deadline, we anticipate that VA will spend more than \$11.4 million. This campaign is focused on reaching all eligible Veterans and survivors, especially those who have not previously come to VA for benefits or care. Since Aug. 10, 2022, VA has hosted hundreds of PACT Act-related events across all 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico with Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, and Veteran advocates.
- This includes a [PACT Act Week of Action in December](#), when VA hosted more than 120 events across the nation. At the events, Veterans applied for benefits, got screened for toxic exposures, enrolled in VA health care, and learned more about what the PACT Act could mean for them and their families. VA has developed a library of PACT Act flyers, videos, and fact sheets to help Veterans understand what this new law means for them.
- The [videos](#) have been viewed more than 4 million times across platforms, and the [resources](#) have been shared directly with Veterans, VA facilities, Veterans Service Organizations, and other partners nationwide. VA has also released [PACT](#)

[Act flyers and information](#) in more than 10 languages, including Arabic, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

VA has sent more than 300 million PACT Act-related e-mails to Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors, which were opened more than 94 million times. VA encourages all eligible Veterans and survivors to apply for their earned PACT Act-related health care and benefits now. Veterans and survivors can apply or learn more about the PACT Act by visiting [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT), by calling 1-800-MYVA411, or by attending one of July's events.

For more information about VA's implementation of the PACT Act, visit the [PACT Act Dashboard](#). VA is publishing this dashboard every other Friday to document the implementation of this law and showcase its impact on Veterans and survivors.

*(News Release from VA, June 27, 2023)*

## What's New at KDVA?

## 2023 KDVA Women Veterans State Conference







For the 2023 KDVA Women Veterans State Conference, we had several guest speakers and representatives from Federal and State government. Lt. Governor Jaqueline Coleman, Retired General Huntley, Heather French Henry, and more came out to give thanks to our Commonwealth's women vets and to give them up-to-date information on benefits available to them.

In the first image Lt. Gov Coleman poses with Kentucky's Influential Women Advocates and Leaders at the federal, state and local levels.

## **Tamara Stewart held Songwriting Sessions with Veterans at Carl M. Brashear Veteran Center**



On June 19, 2023, Tamara Stewart visited the Carl M. Brashear Veteran Center in Radcliff, KY. She held several songwriting sessions with veterans where she took input from the veterans in attendance to create a song. It was an engaging set of sessions as many veterans sang with Stewart as they built a song from scratch and Stewart even sang to the vets some old and current popular country songs.



To see more photos, visit our website under the gallery tab [here](#).

## Commissioner Allen at the Council of State Governments- Region South Leadership



Commissioner Allen visited Director Lindsey Grey and her team at the Council of State Governments Region South Headquarters in Atlanta, GA to discuss CSG-South and KDVA missions and how each can be a great resource and teammates for each other.

## Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC)







The VEAC event gave Kentucky veterans direct communication with people in person to learn about employment opportunities and VA benefits available to them. Veterans Benefits Representatives from KDVA from across the Commonwealth came to provide information and assistance to all veterans who attended and needed the assistance.

Beyond this event, KDVA's mission is to aid KY veterans in getting the benefits they've earned and are entitled to and the Benefits Reps team across the state are here for them.

## **Did you know...**

--The fourth of July is the only federal holiday (national holiday) in July. Independence Day is in celebration of the United States declaration of independence from Great Britain. America's birthday. The Declaration of Independence was signed by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and John Hancock.

--Neil Armstrong made history on July 29, 1969, by taking the first steps on the moon. His famous declaration "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind!"

--The name July was named after Roman general Julius Caesar.

--July is in the the summer season in the northern hemisphere and one of the warmest months. July in the southern hemisphere is one of the coldest.

--Early July historically is called the dog days of summer because it's the beginning of the hot summer days.

## U.S. Small Business Administration and Veterans



U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) offers support for veterans as they enter the world of business ownership. There are funding programs, training, and federal contracting opportunities

available. The office of Veterans Business Development (OVBD) is devoted exclusively to promoting veteran entrepreneurship. The OVBD facilitates the use of SBA programs for veterans, service members, National Guard and Reserve members, military spouses, and family members. The Veterans Business Outreach Center Program is an OVBD initiative that oversees [Veterans Business Outreach Centers \(VBOC\)](#) across the country. This small business program features a number of [success stories](#) and offers business plan workshops, concept assessments, mentorship, and training for eligible veterans.

[Find your nearest center.](#)

Find your local SBA District Office

[Kentucky | U.S. Small Business Administration \(sba.gov\)](#)

## Donations and Veterans Program Trust Fund

Interested in making donations that'll go towards helping veterans in Kentucky? Need a grant to aid veterans with your own programs or projects? Visit our website under the Veterans Trust Fund page [here](#).



Talk to the Veterans Crisis Line now >



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## Veterans Program Trust Fund

To submit your application,  
send to **KDVA.PIO@KY.GOV**

Applications for the June Trust Fund Meeting have been filled. The next meeting for applicants to submit for is in September, with a deadline of August for submissions.

### What is the VPTF?

The Kentucky General Assembly established the Veteran's Program Trust Fund (VPTF) as part of the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans' Bonus Act on December 23, 1988. The purpose of the VPTF is to direct funding to projects and programs that help Kentucky's veterans for which other funds are not available.

The VPTF is overseen by a Board of Directors whose members are appointed by the Governor.

The Trust Fund supports many veterans programs and projects throughout the Commonwealth, like the University of Louisville's [free behavioral health clinic for veterans](#).

The application deadline is thirty calendar days before the meeting date and must be received (not stamped by the post office, but received in our office) at the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs by US mail or by fax no later than thirty calendar days from the scheduled meeting.

### Links

[Application for Funding](#)  
[KAR: Title 201, Chapter 37, Regulation 010](#)  
[Donate to the Veterans Program Trust Fund](#)  
[Congratulations to Grant Recipients](#)  
[FY 2021 Trust Fund Annual Report](#)

### Meeting Minutes

[March 2023 Meeting Minutes](#)  
[December 2022 Meeting Minutes](#)

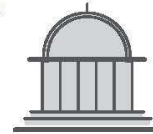
## Latest PACT Act News



## BE VIGILANT OF PACT ACT SCAMS

On August 10, President Biden signed the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act) into law. This law helps millions of Veterans and their survivors by:

- Extending VA health care eligibility for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 (Post-September 11, 2001) eras
- Expanding benefits eligibility for Veterans exposed to toxic substances and their survivors



### Tips to Avoid PACT Act Scams

Scammers are taking advantage of new opportunities to commit fraud. There's been an increase in PACT Act-related [phishing \(email\)](#), vishing (phone), and [social media scams](#) targeting Veterans to access their PACT Act benefits or submit claims on their behalf.

Veterans should be cautious of anyone who guarantees a lucrative financial benefit or service.

#### Do's

- ✓ You may submit your application securely [online](#) via VA.GOV or in person at any Regional Office. You may file your claim directly with VA and then, VA will assist in gathering evidence necessary to support it. There are no costs or hidden fees to apply.
- ✓ Be cautious of companies who advertise VA benefits can only be obtained with their help. These companies may not be recognized by VA and may be attempting to charge illegal fees.
- ✓ Be cautious of aggressive companies who may try to pressure you to sign their contract through frequent communications or by insisting "you must act now or lose your chance for benefits."
- ✓ Be cautious of companies who claim to be contacting you on behalf of VA or to have a special relationship with VA. Contact VA at 1-800-827-1000 if you are unsure about the authenticity of any message received.
- ✓ Validate: If you are interested in working with a Veteran Service Organization (VSO), agent, or attorney, use the Office of General Counsel [Accreditation tool](#) to confirm and validate their credentials.

#### Don'ts

- ✗ Do not sign a contract agreeing to pay an unauthorized company a percentage of your benefit payment in exchange for their assistance with your VA claim. If you need help filing a claim, there are representatives of VSOs, agents, and attorneys who have been [accredited by VA](#) to assist you.
- ✗ Do not sign a blank form for someone else to complete later. Always review the completed form before signing and keep a copy for yourself.
- ✗ Do not be fooled by companies who advertise they have special relationships with medical professionals and can guarantee your benefits award. If they are defrauding the Federal government, you could be held responsible for paying those benefits back.
- ✗ Do not provide your social security number, medical records, or other personally identifiable information to anyone offering claims assistance before confirming their credentials using the Office of General Counsel [Accreditation tool](#).
- ✗ Do not sign forms that are not [VA generated](#) or third-party authorization for someone to provide "behind-the-scenes" claims assistance.

### [www.VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) is the official source of PACT Act information.

We want Veterans and survivors to apply now for their PACT Act-related benefits.

To report suspected scams, please contact the VA Office of Inspector General ([OIG Hotline \(va.gov\)](#)). File a complaint with the [Federal Trade Commission](#). Visit the [Cybercrime Support Network](#) for additional [resources](#) to help Veterans, service members, and their families combat cybercrime.

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

Learn more and sign up at [VA.gov/PACT](#)  
Download the VA Health and Benefits App  
Call us at 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411)  
Find a VA at [VA.gov/find-locations/](#)

## Useful VA Links



- **VA Housing Assistance Page** - Information about home loans, eligibility, interest rates reductions and other related topics: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/>
- **National Center for PTSD** - Provides information and resources to veterans, care providers and organizations relating PTSD: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- **Covid-19 Vaccine Updates** - Latest updates on Covid-19 guidance and vaccinations: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>
- **VA Life Insurance (VALife)** - <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp>
- **Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E)** - job training, education, employment coaching, etc.: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp>

## Upcoming Veterans Dates and Events

- Independence Day (July 4)
- National Hire a Veteran Day (July 25)
- National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day (July 27)
- National Buffalo Soldiers Day (July 28)
- Army Chaplain Corps Anniversary (July 29)

## A Veteran's Perspective of Patriotism on this Independence Day

Op-Ed By Will Atkins, Military Times

*Editor's note: This is an op-ed and as such, the opinions expressed are those of the author. If you would like to respond, or have an editorial of your own you would like to submit, please contact Military Times managing editor Howard Altman, [haltman@militarytimes.com](mailto:haltman@militarytimes.com).*



National Guard Master Sgt. George Roachs holds up a pamphlet of the U.S. Constitution on Jan. 17, 2021, in Washington. (Brandon Bell/Getty Images)

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union ...”

These words were written more than 200 years ago as the opening words of the preamble to one of the greatest documents we have: the U.S. Constitution. Yet despite the Constitution being considered the highest law in the land, its preamble is not considered law. It cannot be used as the foundation for litigation in our courts, and it cannot be used to support or deny rights in this country. So, then, what purpose do these words serve?

These words serve a purpose higher than law. They are a goal and a promise set forth by our forefathers. The preamble is the guiding hand of the founders of this country, a reminder of where true patriotism lies, in the continued quest to find that “more perfect union.” If we look at these words upon which the Constitution rests — the very foundation of our great country — we can clearly see our forefathers’ vision of patriotism.

Sometimes, to understand a lofty ideal such as patriotism, it is easier to start with describing what it is not. Patriotism does not mean blind fealty or uncritical support for a party’s elected officials or even for the country itself. That is more appropriately called “nationalism” — a threat that the military has ranked as a national security risk on par with ISIS and al-Qaida. Veterans like me know the difference between true patriotism and hollow nationalism. That kind of blind and empty patriotism is exactly what George Washington warned us about when he cautioned against the “impostures of pretended patriotism.”

Instead, we need to understand and emphasize that American patriotism and love of country means that we affirm, and service members are prepared to defend, a commitment to a set of ideas best summarized in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. These ideals evoke a sense of freedom, equality, justice, and opportunity. Devotion to country is not about misleading slogans and empty gestures. Instead, it is about ideals, and the hope that this nation can serve as an example to the rest of the world. President Reagan got it right when he said that “My fondest hope for each one of you ... is that you will love your country, not for her power or wealth, but for her selflessness and her idealism.”

In defending our basic principles and institutions, true patriots support efforts to form a “more perfect union.” To that end, patriotism also means caring enough about our country to try to correct it when it goes astray. When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out against the Vietnam War, he explained simply, “I criticize America because I love her. I want her to stand as a moral example to the world.”

Flag-draped, sycophantic allegiance is not patriotism — it hurts our reputation, and is an affront to our institutions. This is not to say that we should deny unflattering truths about our country’s conduct. We should not whitewash history to paint ourselves in a better light. We should acknowledge our shortfalls, and continue striving to create “a more perfect union.” But it can be hard to acknowledge that our country has erred and committed hideous crimes. Admitting mistakes and attempting to atone for them, however, is a patriotic act. And we can acknowledge our shortfalls, while still adhering to the notion that the United States is an exceptional nation.

In the course of human history, on July 4, 1776, it was unprecedented to dedicate a nation to the ideals of equality, individual rights, and self-government instead of to blood or soil. American exceptionalism derives from different premises: a bedrock commitment to our freedom and liberty; the exceptionally high value we place on opportunity, even at the expense of stability; and our commitment to equality even when it disturbs long-held legal and cultural norms.

Speaking on the Fourth of July a few years before the Civil War, the great American patriot Frederick Douglass asked a difficult question: “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Though a free man, this African American hero was asked to speak at a Fourth of July parade in honor of freedom and justice. But these principles were not available to Black men, and he loved his country enough to take the opportunity to ask how the great principles embodied in that Declaration of Independence could be extended to all men. It should not be political to state that there are inequities in this country.

Our forefathers knew the union they were forming was not perfect, and left it up to us to continue to strive to make it “more perfect” with each passing year. We need to claim, without pretense or apology, an honorable place in the long tradition of those who demanded that American ideals apply to all people, and oppose the efforts of those who try to reserve them only for privileged groups and causes.

The foundation of this nation came directly from “we the people” — not the government, not political parties. It was a gift given — and a gift many have given their lives to defend. It is up to us to continue to protect this gift for our children and those who come after. We have a responsibility to future generations to continue to strive for that perfect union dreamed of so long ago.

Do not allow our celebrations today to be a sham. This Fourth of July, commit to standing with “we the people” to form that more perfect union our forefathers dreamed of. Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, I urge you to join me and commit to being loyal and true to what is just and fulfills the promise given to us by our first patriots. Commit with me, to that kind of Independence Day.

*Will Atkins, a U.S. Air Force veteran of 19 years, served six deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan as a political-military strategist. He currently teaches American government and national security courses at the U.S. Air Force Academy, and is a democracy advocate with [Common Defense](#).*

*Editor's note: This is an op-ed and as such, the opinions expressed are those of the author. If you would like to respond, or have an editorial of your own you would like to submit, please contact Military Times managing editor Howard Altman, [haltman@militarytimes.com](mailto:haltman@militarytimes.com).*

## Resources for Veterans



### Flood Relief

Have you been affected by flooding in Eastern Kentucky? The Governor's Office has prepared a list of resources designed to help you make it through this challenging time.

Click here for more information:  
<https://governor.ky.gov/disaster-response/flood-resources>

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