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San Diego Navy/Marine Corps Dispatch

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SIXTY-SIXTH YEAR NO. 6

JULY 23, 2026

July 25: National Hire a Veteran Day (encourages employers to hire veterans)

July 27: National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day (marks the 1953 armistice ending the fighting in the Korean War)

July 28: National Buffalo Soldiers Day (honors the historic all-Black regiments formed in 1866)

July 29: Army Chaplain Corps Anniversary (marks the establishment of the corps in 1775)

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT WELCOMES NEWEST STUDENT NAVAL AVIATORS

by Austen McClain
Naval Education and
Training Command

The oldest living Medal of Honor recipient returned to the base where he earned his gold wings July 15, joining Naval Aviation Schools Command in congratulating 29 student naval aviators who completed their introductory flight evaluation training, the first milestone on the path to those same wings.

Navy Capt. (Ret.) E. Royce Williams, 101, enlisted during World War II and earned his wings at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., in August 1945, going on to fly combat missions in the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

He received the Medal of Honor Feb. 24, 2026, for a 1952 solo engagement against seven Soviet MiG-15 jets that remained classified for more than 50 years. He is the only living Medal of Honor recipient from the Korean War.

For the student naval aviators seated in front of him, the medal was not the point; the wings were. Williams earned his at the end of the same training pipeline these students have entered, and, 81 years later, he came back to tell them what carried him through it.

"He is the living, breathing standard, the embodiment of what it means to be a United States naval aviator," said Capt. Ron Rumfelt, NASC commanding officer. "This is the history and heritage you join today."

NASC, a subordinate command of Naval Education and Training Command, trains and develops future naval aviators, naval flight officers and aircrew for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The flight evaluation training is the entry point of that pipeline, combining aviation ground school and introductory flight instruction to screen and prepare students before they report to primary flight training.



Capt. (Ret.) E. Royce Williams

Rumfelt told the graduates that the connection between Williams' era and theirs is the training itself.

"We are the best-trained aviators in the world. We do it better than anybody," he said. "It starts with preparation. It ends with debriefs. We call that the relentless pursuit of perfection, because you do not know when that training is going to be called upon, when you will be challenged like Capt. Williams was challenged."

After the ceremony, Williams took questions from the graduates. When asked what advice he would give a student naval aviator to be successful, he pointed to the same standard.

"You have to want it. The word that comes to mind is push. Be diligent," Williams said. "Each one of you is different, but you are all trying to attain the same goal, [be] the best you can. I took every activity as a challenge."

That approach, he told the students, never changed across a career that spanned three wars and ended with his retirement as a captain in 1980.

"It was not a game. It was business," he said. "I applied myself, and the rewards were good."

The graduates now report to primary flight training, where they will fly the T-6B Texan II or enter the helicopter training track on the way to their own wings.



Medal of Honor recipient Navy Capt. (Ret.) E. Royce Williams poses with the 29 graduates of Naval Aviation Schools Command's introductory flight evaluation training at Naval Air Station Pensacola July 15, 2026. Williams, the oldest living Medal of Honor recipient, earned his gold wings at NAS Pensacola in 1945. U.S. Navy photo by Austen McClain

VICE ADM. MARC MIGUEZ ASSUMES COMMAND OF U.S. 3RD FLEET

by Senior Chief Petty Officer
Ryan Tabios

C3F

Vice Adm. Marc Miguez assumed command of U.S. 3rd Fleet (C3F) from Rear Adm. Richard Meyer during an assumption of command ceremony held at C3F headquarters in San Diego, July 20.

Adm. Steve Koehler, commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, presided over the ceremony. During his remarks, Koehler highlighted C3F's critical role in generating combat-ready naval forces, strengthening maritime security, and supporting operations and partnerships in the region. He recognized Meyer's steadfast leadership and welcomed Miguez to the helm of the fleet.

Meyer concluded his tenure leading C3F after assuming duties as acting commander following Vice Adm. John D. Wade's departure earlier this year. During his time as acting commander and his prior service as deputy commander, Meyer led fleet operations, exercises, and readiness initiatives supporting the fleet's mission.

Miguez (shown in photo)



assumes command after most recently serving as the Navy Chief of Legislative Affairs. A former enlisted Marine and

career Naval Flight Officer, he has accumulated more than 4,000 flight hours and over 1,000 carrier-arrested landings.

His previous command assignments include Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 213, Carrier Air Wing 3, and Carrier Strike Group 2 during the 2023–2024 deployment of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN 69).

C3F leads naval forces in the region and provides the realistic, relevant training necessary to execute our Navy's role across the full spectrum of military operations – from combat operations to humanitarian assistance and disaster response. C3F works together with allies and partners to advance freedom of navigation and overflight, the rule of law, and other principles that underpin security for the region.

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New York Guardsmen, Greenland airports partner to improve lodging facility

by Air Force Staff Sgt. Jocelyn Tuller
109th Airlift Wing

The New York Air National Guard, New York Army National Guard and Greenland airports are working together to improve living conditions for airmen by repairing a long-standing roof issue at a lodging facility in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland.

The project adds a new pitched roof over the building's existing flat roof to stop water from leaking into the facility. There have been two rotations of 46 Soldiers so far, and construction is expected to be completed in August, following three rotations of Soldiers assigned to the New York ANG's 1156th Engineer Company. The Soldiers are vertical engineers who specialize in building construction, maintenance and upgrades.

"We've known for years that there's problems with the roof," said Air Force Col. Eric Underhill, deputy commander of the 109th Airlift Wing.

The 109th Airlift Wing conducts mission-essential training

and provides remote resupply support across the Greenland ice sheet each year, beginning in April and running through August.

Underhill began working with Greenland airports two years ago to discuss facility improvements as part of a new operating agreement.

Greenland airports, which owns the building, initially sought a contractor to complete the work. After no contractors accepted the project, Underhill proposed a partnership that would allow New York Army National Guard engineers to complete the construction during annual training.

Under the agreement, Greenland airports designed the roof and purchased the construction materials, while the New York Army National Guard provided the labor.

"This would not have happened if we didn't trust each other and we didn't have a good working relationship," Underhill said.

Army Chief Warrant Officer



A National Guardsman constructs a new pitched roof at a lodging facility in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, June 15. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jocelyn Tuller

3 Reid Duncan, an engineering technician assigned to the 1156th, worked with Underhill during multiple site visits to evaluate the project before construction began.

The project builds on work completed by New York ANG engineers during annual training last year. Underhill said the project demonstrated that the Soldiers could successfully complete construction projects in Greenland's remote environment.

Construction in Greenland requires months of planning, and the remote location creates additional challenges throughout construction. Underhill said logistics and sustainment make building in the region difficult. "If something breaks, or you are short on material, it is a long turnaround to get a replacement," Duncan said.

Rather than removing the existing roof, the Soldiers are building a new pitched roof over the original flat roof. The new design will direct water away from the building instead of through the interior drainage system that contributed to years of leaks.

"Jobs like this really show them what real construction is like," Duncan said. "We're not just building a 10-by-10 shed; this is a big job." Underhill said the completed roof represents more than a construction project. The project gives Soldiers valuable experience completing a large-scale construction project while improving living conditions for the 109th Airlift Wing's Arctic missions.

Coast Guard monitors Chinese vessels in the Arctic

The Coast Guard recently monitored two Chinese research ships as they transited north through the U.S. exclusive economic zone and over the U.S. extended continental shelf in the Bering Sea.

The Chinese research ships Xue Long and Xue Long 2 transited the Arctic, marking the first time this year that Chinese vessels were tracked transiting this area. In response, the Coast Guard cutter *Munro* executed Operation Frontier Sentinel to actively monitor the vessels during their northbound transit.

The operation was designed to protect American sovereign rights, ensure consistency with international law and position the Coast Guard to rapidly respond to any detected malign activity.

While foreign vessels are permitted to operate within the

U.S. exclusive economic zone and over the U.S. extended continental shelf, the Coast Guard remains vigilant to ensure their activities comply with established international laws. In particular, conducting marine scientific research within this area would require advance permission from the United States and subsequent sharing of the information collected.

In recent years, the Coast Guard has observed heightened activity in the U.S. Arctic and anticipates a continued and increased presence in the region this summer.

"Alongside the Department of War, the Department of State, and our international partners, we are actively responding to competitor activities across an increasingly contested Arctic," said Rear Adm. Bob Little, U.S. Coast Guard Arctic District commander.



A crew member assigned to Coast Guard cutter *Munro* observes the oil tanker *Bella 1* in the North Atlantic Ocean, Jan. 6, 2026. *Munro*'s crew recently monitored Chinese vessels transiting through the U.S. exclusive economic zone and over the U.S. extended continental shelf in the Bering Sea. U.S. Coast Guard photo

man on the street

If you could compare yourself with an animal, what would it be and why?



"Domestic cats. I have two cats and we share the same things."
Alma Przybylko
NAS North Island

"Grizzly bears. I like to fish and so do they."

ET1 Gino Tolentino
LCS Training Facility Pacific



"Orangutans, because of my long limbs, dude."
Austin Arnce
Naval Base San Diego

"Robins. They are providers - they provide their young in the nest."

Mylene La Sala
NAB Coronado



"Raccoons, because of the amount of food I eat."
Genaro Bermudez
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Declassification of the DoW internal After-Action Review of the Covid disease 2019 vaccine mandate report

As part of the Department of War's continuous effort to rebuild trust with Service members discharged under the COVID-19 vaccine mandate, Secretary Pete Hegseth directed the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to conduct an After-Action Review (AAR) capturing lessons learned to improve future policy.

Additionally, due to President Trump's and Secretary Hegseth's commitment to accountability and transparency, the Department will publicly publish the review's findings.

To supplement NAPA, the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness will convene an internal panel of DoW military and civilian employees. The objective of this panel is to review the official decisions, coordination, planning, and execution of the COVID-19 vaccine mandate from January 2020 through January 2023.

"The Department is fully committed to restoring honor and rebuilding trust with the warfighters impacted by the COVID-19 vaccine mandate," said Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness Anthony J. Tata. Under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Hegseth, we continue to prioritize reinstatement, deliver remedies, and establish permanent safeguards against future mandates."

Tata added that, "the actions detailed in these memorandums reflect our ongoing dedication to transparency and accountability.

"By having members of the affected community lead the internal after-action review and further analyze how the COVID-19 vaccine mandate influenced decision-making and readiness—and making the findings public—we will ensure that the Department learns from the past and does not repeat these mistakes in the future."

The memorandum on the Review of the Department of War Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine Mandate is available at <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jul/15/2003961457-1/-1/1/REVIEW-OF-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-WAR-CORONAVIRUS-DISEASE-2019-VACCINE-MANDATE.PDF>.

The memorandum is available at <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jul/15/2003961446-1/-1/1/DECLASSIFICATION-OF-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-WAR-INTERNAL-AFTER-ACTION-REVIEW-OF-THE-CORONAVIRUS-DISEASE-2019-VACCINE-MANDATE-REPORT.PDF>.

DOW identifies Army casualties

The Department of War announced July 20 the death of two active-duty Soldiers who were supporting Operation Inherent Resolve.

1st Lt. Tyler James Feehan, 25, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii was killed in action on July 18, 2026, and Pvt. Isabella Gonzales, 19, of Carrollton, Texas, was killed in action on July 17, 2026, during an enemy attack on July 17, 2026, at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, Jordan. The incident is under investigation.

Feehan was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 55th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 32nd Army Air Missile Defense Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Gonzales was assigned to 1st Battalion, 57th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 52nd Air Defense Artillery Brigade, 10th Army Air Missile Defense Command, Ansbach, Germany.

Department of War invests \$7.1M to enhance space solar cell coverglass manufacturing

The Department of War announced July 17 an investment of \$7.1 million in Defense Production Act (DPA) Title III funds to Martin Materials Solutions LLC (Martin Materials Solutions).

The investment will establish and scale domestic supply of space solar cell coverglass manufacturing in Twinsburg, Ohio. Used on every satellite, solar cell coverglass protects sensitive solar cells by providing radiation shielding, selective wavelength filtering, and defense against micrometeorites, while ensuring structural stability.

This investment supports the administration's goal to increase key space industrial base capabilities as articulated in the December 18, 2025, Executive Order 14369 - Ensuring American Space Superiority.

"Space-qualified coverglass is a critical component for ensuring the longevity and efficiency of a satellite's power system," said Assistant Secretary of War for Industrial Base Policy, the Honorable Michael Cadenazzi. "A robust domestic manufacturing capability secures our national space assets and ensures the continuity of our orbital missions."

These DPA Title III funds will enable Martin Materials Solutions to scale and de-risk advanced manufacturing processes which are needed to ensure the U.S. domestic supply of critical space solar technology.

This project will enable Martin Materials Solutions to fully establish a sustainable manufacturing operation, expanding current capability in terms of modern manufacturing and test equipment, specialized personnel, additional raw material, and facilities for the design, development, and manufacture of coverglass.

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard delivers battle-ready Albany

by Hanna Lanoie

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) delivered USS Albany (SSN 753) to the Navy at Naval Submarine Base New London, returning the Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine before the Fourth of July holiday.

"Team Albany worked tirelessly to deliver a battle-ready asset back to the fleet and get the team home to celebrate the Nation's 250th anniversary," said Jeremy Squires, Albany project superintendent.

Aligned with the Chief of Naval Operations' "Foundry Fleet Fight" edict, PNSY's standard of excellence is an essential component of the Fleet's ability to sail forward, stay ready, and sustain combat power.

"The Albany project team tackled obstacles with absolute professional resolve and innovation, buying time back for their counterparts to perform their duties," said Capt. Jesse Nice, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard commander.

This is one of six DPA Title III investments totaling \$109.7 million made by the WIRE directorate since the beginning of Fiscal Year 2026. Recipient cost shares total \$1.1 million in FY 2026.

For more information on the WIRE directorate, visit <https://www.businessdefense.gov/ibr/wire.html>.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of War for Industrial Base Policy (OASW(IBP) works with domestic and international partners to forge and sustain a robust, secure, and resilient

industrial base enabling the Warfighter, now and in the future. OASW(IBP) also uses a new Defense Industrial Base Consortium Other Transaction Agreement (DIBC OTA) to solicit new ideas for research or prototype project solutions for critical supply chain resiliency focus areas.

This OTA underscores the Department's ongoing dedication to safeguarding the integrity of our crucial supply chain and promptly giving our Warfighters the materials and technologies they need to accomplish their missions.



The USS Midway Museum is currently recruiting for docents, air craft restoration, ship restoration and safety volunteers. These assignments are a regular commitment of at least 6 months.

Visit this page of our website to watch fun videos about our different teams and participants: <https://www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/>

Armed Forces Dispatch

published by Western States Weeklies, Inc.
2604 B-280 El Camino Real, Carlsbad, CA 92008
619-280-2985 • E-mail: editor@navydispatch.com
Editor.....Scott Sutherland

The Dispatch is published online weekly on Thursdays, and in print on the 1st & 16th of each month by Western States Weeklies, Inc., as a commercial, free-enterprise newspaper. The editorial objective of the Dispatch is to promote support for a strong military presence. Contents of the Armed Forces Dispatch are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps. The opinions and views of writers whose materials appear herein are those of the writers and not the publishers. Appearance of advertising does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or any other DOD component, this newspaper, or Western States Weeklies, Inc. Subscriptions mailed USPS First Class.

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Top 5

- Blasts reported in Iran as U.S. launches new wave of strikes
- Disputed veterans benefits bill gets pulled before House vote
- Blue Angels flight debrief complete: 'No problem' says acting SECNAV
- Political crisis and protests in Ukraine as Zelenskyy defends sacking defense minister
- Senators question whether military pharmacy program is the best deal for beneficiaries

Your Military

- Bad actors use bogus offers to go after payouts to families affected by first atomic bomb test

Army

- Army fields device that detects traumatic brain injuries in just 15 minutes
- Soldier, partner charged with starving deaths of their child, dog on Fort Benning
- Ex-soldier started a fire and fired a pellet gun outside a New York federal building, FBI says

Navy

- U.S. Navy fears ballistic missile subs can be hit by drones, anti-tank rockets

Marine Corps

- Marines working with DoD to build direct-hire path for civilian jobs
- Marine accused of sexual assault was 'out of his mind,' fellow Marine testifies
- Marine Corps issues new rules to prevent heat and cold injuries

Air Force

- Airman dies in equipment incident at California Space Force base

Space Force

- Space Force can't figure out what personnel it needs for its missions, GAO says

Veterans

- Veterans in VA care targeted by inmate in elaborate phone scam

Cyber, Space & Unmanned

- Space increasingly becoming a warfighting domain, says Space Force chief nominee
 - Space Force chief nominee: China going 'breathtakingly fast' with space weapons
 - Navy develops strategy to weaponize data, AI
 - Marines used anti-drone netting during recent logistics exercise
 - Army's heavy units face counter-drone capability gaps
- Defense Industry**
- 2 defense tech companies sue U.S. Navy after losing out on MUSV program
 - Saab to supply sensors and combat systems for new German warships after F126 scrapped
 - Franco-German defense cooperation under strain as Macron, Merz meet

Florida man admits to strangling military spouse on 2 occasions and lying to FBI

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

A Florida man pleaded guilty July 15 to charges related to two incidents where he strangled his wife, lying to the FBI about the events, and lying about a prior arrest for a domestic violence battery in 2020.

According to court documents, Antonio Jabar Floyd Jr., 38, strangled his active-duty military wife on two occasions, once in 2025 and once in 2026, while he was living with her overseas in Misawa, Japan.

In January 2025, while in the home of a mutual friend where children, including his own, were present, Floyd Jr. became enraged at his wife and began strangling her so hard that his hand shook, telling her “see how easy I can control you.” The friend attempted to intervene but was unable to pull Floyd Jr.’s hand from his wife’s neck.

On another occasion in April 2026, Floyd Jr. strangled his wife in the family home and in the presence of their minor children. He became enraged upon reading her personal e-mails, told her she was “lucky I didn’t kill you” and told her that he would

not leave her even if she served him with divorce papers.

In consensual meetings with investigating FBI agents, Floyd Jr. made several false statements including denying that he strangled his wife, that he had never engaged in physical violence against her, and that he had never been arrested for battery or assault.

Court records show that Floyd was arrested in Pensacola, Fla., on Oct. 22, 2020, for first degree

battery on his wife for reportedly grabbing her by the throat and slamming her into a hallway wall.

Floyd Jr. pleaded guilty to two counts of domestic violence (strangulation) and one count of making false statements to a federal agency. He will be sentenced on Oct. 15 and faces a statutory maximum penalty of five years in prison on each count and mandatory domestic violence counseling. A judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing

Guidelines and other statutory factors.

FBI Los Angeles investigated this case with support from Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Senior Trial Attorney Danielle Hickman of the Criminal Division’s Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney David Goldberg for the Northern District of Florida are prosecuting this case.

Air Force releases field grade officer promotions

JOINTBASE SANANTONIO-RANDOLPH, Texas (AFNS) - The Air Force selected 2,447 active-duty officers for promotion to major during the P0426A Central Selection Board (LAF A/N/I/C/F, Chaplain, and Judge Advocate General categories).

LAF-A: 1,211 selected out of 1,578 considered.

LAF-N: 62 selected out of 86 considered.

LAF-I: 412 selected out of 482 considered.

LAF-C: 428 selected out of 485 considered.

LAF-F: 222 selected out of 266 considered.



Chaplain: 37 selected out of 46 considered.

JAG: 75 selected out of 87 considered.

The complete list of Air-

men selected for promotion is available online by visiting AFPC’s Officer Promotion website, <https://www.afpc.af.mil/Promotion/Officer-Promotions/>.

NAVY AWARDS CONTRACT FOR MEDIUM LANDING SHIP ACQUISITION

WASHINGTON – The Navy awarded a \$2.2 billion contract to TOTE Services LLC for vessel construction management, or VCM, to oversee the acquisition of the new medium landing ships (LSM). This contract will maximize commercial practices to accelerate delivery, improve cost

discipline, and expand the U.S. shipbuilding industrial base. The first LSM is anticipated for delivery in fall of 2029.

For the initial production of up to eight LSMs, the Navy will direct the VCM to execute and manage subcontracts with Bollinger Shipyards for the

construction of one LSM and Fincantieri Marinette Marine for the construction of four LSMs. The VCM will have the flexibility to determine the best award strategy for up to three additional vessels.

“The VCM strategy is an innovative shift in Navy shipbuilding. We are changing the way we do business, and leveraging commercial best practices to improve cost, schedule, and performance,” said Will Mahan, performing the duties of assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition. “With a five-month duration between RFP release and contract award, we achieved

a nearly 50 percent reduction to traditional contracting timelines. This reflects the immediate impact our Portfolio Acquisition Executives are having to accelerate shipbuilding.”

The VCM will hold the prime contract with the Navy; therefore, it will hold direct contractual responsibility for issuing and managing shipbuilder subcontracts to construct and deliver LSM vessels. This prime contract places the VCM in direct contractual control of shipyard performance and leverages commercial practices and flexibilities that, together with a proven design, are expected to reduce cost and schedule risks.



Illustration of new medium landing ship. Courtesy of TOTE Services



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Air Force Chief of Staff letter to the force on standards

Secretary of the Air Force
Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. (AFNS) - Airmen, Every day, our nation depends on the United States Air Force to deter aggression and, if called upon, to fight and win. Meeting that responsibility starts long before we launch aircraft or execute missions. It begins with the high standards we uphold.

Standards are the foundation of discipline and readiness. Consistently holding ourselves accountable builds trust within our formations, reinforces confidence in our teammates, and ensures we are prepared to answer our Nation's call.

To strengthen our readiness, every Airman must focus on fitness and appearance standards. Start by familiarizing yourself with the updated physical fitness regulation and prepare to meet them. Fitness remains essential to every Airman's ability to execute the mission under challenging conditions.

The Waist-to-Height Ratio (WHtR) assessment is an important component of our overall fitness program

and provides commanders another tool to understand the readiness and health of the force. You must have a current WHtR assessment uploaded in myBodyComp. Unless medically exempt from the WHtR component, all Airmen must complete this action no later than July 31, 2026 (active duty) or Aug. 31, 2026 (ARC members).

Finally, continue to uphold our dress and appearance standards. A professional image reflects discipline, pride, and attention to detail. That same mindset drives excellence across every career field and should be evident in how we present ourselves.

Let's continue to hold ourselves to the highest standards that make us the world's most capable Air Force. Thank you for your professionalism and commitment to excellence. Fight's On!

Gen. Kenneth S. Wilsbac,
Air Force Chief of Staff

View CSAF Wilsbach's letter at https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/7/Mes-sage_to_the_Force_13Jul26.pdf?ver=VMfNGxeCNPYUEBSVlaY_WQ%3d%3d.

Secretary of War most recent flag officer announcements

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced July 17 that the president has made the following nominations:

Navy Rear Adm. (lower half) **Kevin J. Brown** for appointment to the grade of rear admiral. Brown is currently serving as commander, Naval Medical Forces Pacific, San Diego.

Navy Rear Adm. (lower half) **Donald W. Marks** for appointment to the grade of rear admiral. Marks is currently serving as commander, Carrier Strike Group NINE, San Diego.

Navy Rear Adm. **Michael S. Wosje** for appointment to the grade of vice admiral, with assignment as deputy chief of Naval Operations for Warfighting Requirements and Capabilities, N9, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Wosje is currently serving as director, Air Warfare Division, N98, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Pentagon.

Navy Rear Adm. (lower half) **Andrew T. Miller** for appointment to the grade of rear admiral. Miller is currently serving as director, Plans and Operations, U.S. Naval Forces Europe - SIXTH Fleet/ deputy commander, SIXTH Fleet/ commander, Submarine Group EIGHT, Naples, Italy.

Navy Rear Adm. (lower half) **Christopher A. Nash** for appointment to the grade of rear admiral. Nash is currently serving as commander, Submarine Group NINE, Silverdale, Wash.

Navy Rear Adm. (lower half) **Lincoln M. Reifsteck** for appointment to the grade of rear admiral. Reifsteck is currently serving as commander, Submarine Group SEVEN/ commander, Task Force SEVEN FOUR/ commander, Task Force FIVE FOUR, Yokosuka, Japan.

Navy Rear Adm. (lower half) **Michael T. Spencer** for appointment to the grade of rear admiral. Spencer is currently serving as commander, Carrier Strike Group FOUR, Norfolk, Va.

AI-powered chatbot helps streamline recruiting

by Kevin Dietz

To help Army recruiters get information fast, enabling them to do their jobs at speed and with more authoritative resources, the Army developed Staff Sgt. Star, an artificial intelligence-powered chatbot.

The tool provides policy and regulatory guidance and answers to recruiting-based questions, allowing recruiters to quickly find answers without having to sift through manuals or rely on a help desk.

Staff Sgt. Star is not necessarily a new concept. It was introduced in 2006 on GoArmy.com as a recruiting tool. Its aim was to engage potential Army recruits with information that would make the recruitment process easier to understand, and it served as a friendly first contact with the service.

Jeffrey Faulkner, deputy product lead for Accessions Information Environment, the service's recruiting information technology software system, said the chatbot lives within the system and is available to authorized users. The AIE office developed the tool in under three months, with the goal to find ways to reduce burdensome and repetitive tasks.

The development team was tasked with making the system into an innovative and leading-edge technology by incorporat-



Army Staff Sgt. Shaun Hollenkamp, New Jersey National Guard, leads recruits during a weekend drill at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, N.J., March 7. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Seth Cohen

ing AI as much as possible.

Faulkner said that Staff Sgt. Star "focuses on policies, procedures and regulations while optimizing" AIE office team members for other high-value, high-impact projects.

As recruiters began using the tool, they discovered the need for greater functionality. The development team quickly adapted the chatbot, and it now draws from a curated repository of recruiting regulations, policy documents and system references, allowing it to provide answers tailored specifically to the recruiting mission. For example, the chatbot can provide specific information on completing tasks or filling out specific waivers.

When creating and updating a

chatbot, developers upload reference toolsets, which can consist of documents, spreadsheets, PDFs or images. The chatbot's functionality scans for information and key words in seconds, providing an answer in a fraction of the time it would take someone to research it. If the information becomes outdated, a developer simply removes that reference tool from the backend.

Staff Sgt. Star currently serves approximately 12,000 authorized users and is expected to support as many as 28,000 by as early as November. Unlike publicly available AI tools, the chatbot is trained on authoritative recruiting resources and is continuously updated as policies, regulations and workflows evolve.

"We want to deliver updated features and capabilities every two weeks, or as the mission dictates," Faulkner said, adding the team's plan is to expand the chatbot's current role, making it into a tool that can perform tasks rather than simply answer questions.

"The intent is for recruiters to know that Staff Sgt. Star is their one-stop shop for authoritative information," he added.

Staff Sgt. Star embodies the AIE office's broader effort of leveraging AI to streamline operations, which reduces a recruiter's digital burden and helps them focus more time on their mission.

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New Navy policy limits medical shaving waivers to one year

Sailors who cannot shave due to medical reasons now have one year before they could face separation over their inability to go clean shaven, according to a Navy policy released July 7.

U.S. Naval Institute reported July 9 that under the most recent Navy administrative message, the sea service will offer shaving waivers for men who are unable to shave due to a medical condition. The waivers can be granted for 90 days, while commands have the option to offer additional 90-day waivers. The waivers cannot exceed one year total, according to the NAVADMIN.

Sailors will be evaluated for administrative separation if they are unable to meet grooming standards of a clean shaven face after one year of medical treatment. Sailors do have the option of maintaining a mustache, according to USNI.

The first separations for failure to adhere to grooming standards due to a medical condition will not happen until July 7, 2027, a year from the NAVADMIN's release.

Men who receive shaving waivers must keep their beards to a quarter inch from their face and be on a treatment plan, according to the policy. Only

commanding officers may issue the waivers.

The Navy will evaluate sailors for administrative separation if they have a permanent medical condition preventing them from meeting the grooming standard, under the separation guidelines. Sailors may also be referred to the Disability Evaluation System.

Approximately 6,400 Sailors are diagnosed with chronic skin conditions annually, which affect

their ability to meet grooming standards, according to an e-mail from Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle that was obtained by USNI News.

In early June, the Navy also released a policy requiring sailors to resubmit religious accommodation requests for facial hair. The sea service will reevaluate those requests under new standardized procedures, reads the policy.

There are 1,000 facial hair

religious accommodations in the Navy that the service must evaluate, according to Caudle's email. Religious accommodations allow for beards to be a quarter inch at sea and 2 inches ashore, according to the email.

"Don't make this personal with our sailors, but make it about the requirements for them to look professional as examples of Navy exceptionalism," reads Caudle's email.

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Navy chaplain uses AI-assisted music to support warfighter mental health care

by **Arsenio R. Cortez Jr.**
Naval Medical Forces Pacific

Military service comes with high stress. Warfighters often carry invisible burdens such as chronic stress, operational fatigue, grief and moral injury. These experiences can be difficult to talk about.

To support warfighter readiness and recovery, Naval Medical Forces Pacific is highlighting an innovative approach to mental health care: music-informed spiritual

care with AI-assisted music.

At Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command San Diego and Naval Medical Center San Diego, Lt. Cmdr. Abraham Jiregna, a clinical pastoral education resident chaplain, is blending traditional pastoral care with artificial intelligence to support mental health and spiritual readiness.

Jiregna draws from a lifelong passion for the arts and his experience from more than

5,000 counseling sessions. He uses AI-assisted music to create tailored therapeutic experiences for service members.

“Music often reaches places that ordinary conversation cannot,” Jiregna said. “What makes music-informed spiritual care unique is that the music is not merely entertainment or background ambiance; it becomes a therapeutic and spiritual bridge. Through carefully produced AI-assisted music experiences, service members and veterans

are able to reflect on themes such as loss, hope, moral injury, purpose, belonging, forgiveness, and recovery.

This work directly supports Naval Medical Forces Pacific’s (NMFP) mission to ensure medical forces are fully trained, properly manned, and capably equipped to be forward deployable and ready to execute operational medicine responsibilities in support of warfighter requirements. Capt. David Alexander, NMFP chaplain, recognizes

the impact of this approach for overall readiness.

“The value of this approach is not primarily the technology itself, but its potential to help some service members throughout the enterprise approach difficult experiences in a way that feels less exposing than conversation alone,” Alexander said. “Music can sometimes create the conditions for reflection, honesty, connection and new meaning-making around experiences that contribute to grief,

shame and isolation. Tools like these may help support chaplains and caregivers foster such conditions while preserving what remains central to spiritual care: the fundamental human work of relational accompaniment grounded in compassionate, discerning presence.”

Rather than replacing human connection, the AI-assisted music serves as a catalyst for it. Jiregna uses the music in group settings like Chaplains Corner or Play and Pray. He writes songs about common struggles so individuals can maintain their privacy but still relate to the message. Tracks like “Dopamine Motel” look at unhealthy coping mechanisms, while “Broken Compass Blues” reflects the emotional disorientation people feel after trauma or moral injury.

During a typical session, the group spends 15 minutes talking and building connection. Then, they listen to a song while reading printed lyrics, followed by guided discussion and reflection on ways to cope.

“The goal is not simply to make songs, but to create emotion,” Jiregna said. “The goal is to see **Music, page 7**



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Capt. (Ret.) Tony Holmes (left) and Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD) Commanding Officer Capt. Nicholas Hoffman, cut their change of command cake July 17, 2026, following a transfer of power at NSWC PHD on board Naval Base Ventura County. Holmes retired from a 38-year career in the Navy after Hoffman relieved him of duty. U.S. Navy photo by Jhon Parsons



MUSIC
continued from page 6

tionally resonant experiences that help service members feel seen, understood, and less alone in their struggles,” Jiregna said. “Music-informed spiritual care is designed not merely to reduce symptoms, but to strengthen resilience, restore meaning, improve emotional regulation, and encourage healthy coping strategies.”

He said that music lowers emotional defenses and gives people language for their experiences when ordinary conversation falls short.

“For some warfighters, music becomes a safer entry point into discussing difficult subjects such as trauma, grief, anger, shame, guilt, fear or hopelessness, topics that may otherwise remain suppressed,” said Jiregna. “What makes the approach adaptive is the ability to tailor the musical experience to the needs of the audience or individual. Some sessions may focus on resilience and motivation, while others emphasize grief processing, recovery, emotional awareness, hope, forgiveness or identity restoration. The music is intentionally paired with guided reflection, mindfulness practices, spiritual care conversations and practical coping strategies to create a more holistic therapeutic experience.”

The feedback from partici-

pants shows the approach helps build trust and self-awareness. The music helps individuals process trauma and build psychological safety. One participant said, “This is what I needed today. This put how I’ve been feeling into context and helped me better understand how to move forward.” Others regularly ask Jiregna to post the songs online so they can listen outside of group meetings. While Jiregna uses AI

tools to help compose music, he said that technology does not replace human care. AI helps

with creativity, but healing takes real human connection.

“AI is simply a tool that helps facilitate reflection, creativity, and therapeutic engagement,” Jiregna said. “The heart of spiritual care is still relational presence - sitting with someone in grief, helping them process trauma, and praying with them.”

Jiregna has made more than 300 original songs. “The musical styles span a wide range of genres - hip hop to country, R&B to bluegrass, and more, which helps increase accessibility and engagement among different generations, cultures and personalities within the military community,” he said.



Lt. Cmdr. Abraham Jiregna plays the piano at Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command San Diego, June 1, 2026. Courtesy photo)

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NBSD expands Grab-N-Go meal program

SAN DIEGO - Naval Base San Diego's Mercer Hall galley began serving "grab-and-go" lunches July 7.

The move expands the Grab-N-Go pilot program which began earlier this year with breakfast meals. The program is intended to provide greater convenience and flexibility for Mercer Hall patrons.

Grab and go meals are served daily for breakfast from 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m., and for lunch from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. The normal operating hours for Mercer Hall galley will remain unchanged, meaning the expanded program adds even more flexible dining options for Sailors.

"At NBSD, our operational tempo never stops, and neither should our Sailors' access to high-quality nutrition," said Navy Senior Chief Culinary Specialist Carlos Escobar, the acting food service officer for NBSD. "The introduction of these new Grab-N-Go lunches is a direct investment in our fleet's readiness. By breaking down the barriers of traditional dining hours, we are providing our Sailors with flexible, healthy, and high-quality meals they need to fuel the fight and sustain the mission."

Grab-and-go meals are pre-packaged, ready-to-eat meals that allow customers to quickly pickup their food and continue on with their day with little to no wait time. They are designed to provide fast, convenient, and portable dining options while maintaining food safety and nutritional standards.

"Taking care of Sailors is our top priority," said Capt. Brian C. Bungay, commanding officer of NBSD. "We know that working, maintaining a ship, and standing a watch doesn't always fit neatly into traditional galley hours. Improving our grab-and-go initiative with lunchtime meals is a direct response to feedback from the deckplates. We are

actively modernizing our base services to give our personnel the flexibility, convenience, and respect for their time that they deserve."

Mercer Hall galley serves more than 10,000 Sailors every week from commands across NBSD.

Established in 1922, NBSD is the largest naval installation on the West Coast and the principal homeport of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, supporting more than 60 surface combatants and auxiliary ships and more than 250 tenant commands.

Join the hosts at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar for three action-packed days of high-flying excitement, patriotism, and fun for the whole family. Open to the public Friday through Sunday, the Miramar Air Show is where friends and families come together to create unforgettable memories while honoring America's proud legacy and the future of flight.

ID Requirement: All attendees ages 18 and older must present a valid form of government-issued identification for entry to the Air Show. Entry will not be permitted without proper ID.

For non-U.S. citizens planning to attend, please ensure you possess valid documentation demonstrating your current legal status in the United States.

FRCSW opens new Osprey hangar

Story and photo
by Michael A Furlano

Fleet Readiness Center Southwest

Earlier this year, Fleet Readiness Center Southwest (FRCSW) marked a significant milestone in naval aviation sustainment with a ribbon cutting ceremony for its new V-22 Osprey maintenance hangar, a state-of-the-art facility designed to increase capacity, improve efficiency, and ensure the command remains ready to support the Navy and Marine Corps for decades to come.



80 percent Combat Surge Ready forces." At more than 64,000 square feet, the hangar provides FRCSW artisans, engineers, and support personnel with advanced infrastructure needed to meet increasing fleet demands. The facility includes 39,781 square feet of high bay hangar space and 24,556 square feet of dedicated back shops and administrative areas.

The new facility represents a multimillion-dollar investment completed in 25 months and delivers a modern, purpose-built environment dedicated to sustaining, repairing, and modernizing the Osprey fleet.

"This facility is more than a building, it is an investment in readiness, our workforce, and the sustainment of naval aviation," said Capt. Shannon Thompson, FRCSW commanding officer. "Increasing capabilities and exploiting our constraints at FRCSW aligns us in pursuit of the CNO's "North Star" goal of

The hangar features four full size V-22 aircraft maintenance bays, allowing multiple aircraft to be supported simultaneously while increasing aircraft throughput capacity for the command by approximately 25 percent. Integrated 400Hz aircraft power at each bay improves troubleshooting and testing efficiency, while two 5 ton bridge cranes provide artisans enhanced overhead lift capability throughout the entire maintenance space, a significant improvement over the command's previous facility.

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The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

“Let’s walk around my house, and you can tell me what you want to get after I die,” my Gran said to me during a visit to her small ranch house in Ocean City, New Jersey. She held a pad of sticky notes and a pen, which she would use to affix my name to the bottom of any bric-a-brac I wanted to inherit.

At the time, I felt completely awkward. Eyeing up Gran’s belongings so I could snatch them up after she croaked just seemed wrong. Not only was it a morbid exercise, it felt greedy, as if I was competing with the other heirs for dibs on china, crystal, silver and nicknacks.

But Gran insisted, so I walked slowly around her living room, past her Kimball Organ, her gilded lamps, her ornate decor, all of which went perfectly with her flamboyant style. Gran followed me slowly, wearing a colorful kaftan dress with heels — always heels — with her signature ostentatious jewelry and bright lipstick.

My eyes glanced to the dining room buffet as I searched for something that no one else in the family would care much about.

“Not that!” Gran piped up, mistakenly believing that I was eyeing her crystal punchbowl set. The huge spherical bowl

Who gets Grammy’s teacups?

had a lid with an obelisk-shaped spike at the top like a German Nazi’s helmet. It was surrounded by twelve cups on a huge round crystal tray. Each item was intricately hand cut from Austrian crystal with tiny facets that refracted light into rainbows. While I appreciated the craftsmanship, I knew the set would stick out like a sore thumb in my house filled with PCS-move-scratched furniture, hand-me-downs, and garage sale finds.

“That’s actually worth some money,” Gran added, using her body to block my view of the punchbowl, making it clear that my choices were limited to worthless tchotchkes only.

Finally, in the sunroom, I spied teacups. “Do you like those,” Gran smiled, approvingly. She stuck my name on the bottom of the set of six, and the painful exercise was finished.

More recently, after my mother-in-law passed, my husband, Francis, and his siblings had to endure an even more cringe-worthy experience called, “The Jewelry Grab.” Apparently, the lawyer advising the family on the proper distribution of assets to the heirs instructed the siblings to display my mother-in-law’s jewelry for the heirs to see, then allow each sibling to select an item, one-by-one, until the jewelry was gone.

As instructed, my brother-in-law laid the jewelry out in a bedroom during a celebration of life party at his house. Francis, who’d had too much to drink, laid on the bed babbling, “I don’t

really care.” One brother took only the items he’d given his mother as gifts. Another brother inspected the jewelry closely, rubbing a set of pearls on his teeth. The sister didn’t think her brothers’ wives should be in the room. After tip-toeing around the diamond ring, the siblings agreed they’d save it for the first grandchild to get engaged.

The Jewelry Grab may have been legal, but it ruined the vibe. It made us all feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, as if we were all sitting naked in a sauna together noticing the worst parts of each other.

“Mom, please, I beg of you ... before you die, make a list of your valuables and write down exactly who you want to inherit each item,” I told my mother the following week. “For the love of God, don’t make us do a Jewelry Grab after your funeral,” I pleaded, while Mom sat silent, confused by my sudden moroseness.

The death of a family member is never easy. To make ourselves feel better and honor the deceased, we gather with other family members to grieve and remember good times. Nothing ruins the moment quite like splitting up the dead person’s property between the heirs.

As awkward as it seemed at the time, Gran had it right. I now realize how thoughtful it was of her to put my name on those teacups before she kicked the bucket. I just hope she isn’t miffed that I ended up with the crystal punchbowl set because no one bought it during the estate sale.

AutoMatters™ & More



by Jan Wagner

Typically, I don’t recommend films that are essentially forgettable: movies that break little or no new ground, that I do not think about as I leave the theater, that I have no compelling desire to discuss with other people and for which I wonder why I just wasted my time watching them. Such is the case with Disney’s new, live-action remake of “Moana.”

“Moana” is a live-action remake of the beloved, animated Disney motion picture that premiered in U.S. theaters in 2016 and went on to become Oscar-nominated. In this remake, once again Moana (portrayed by Catherine Laga’aia) seeks to restore her people’s deteriorating ecosystem, which is being ruined by bad magic. Towards that worthy goal, she seeks the help of the magical, shape-shifting demigod Maui (portrayed by Dwayne Johnson).

This version of “Moana” was shot on location in Hawai’i. The ensemble cast for the live-action “Moana” is composed of over 200 actors from the Pacific, including principals Catherine Laga’aia (Moana), Dwayne Johnson (Maui), Rena Owen (Gramma Tala), John Tui (Moana’s father, Chief Tui), Franki Adams (Moana’s mother, Sina) and Jemaine Clement (the voice of the giant singing crab Tamatoa).

The press and promo preview for “Moana” that I attended got off to a bad start — an unfortunate omen. The colors of the movie, as projected on the screen in the theater, were way over-saturated to the extent that they were glowing. At first, I thought it was some sort of special effect, intended to make audiences think

Review of Disney’s live-action ‘Moana’

that the scenes that we were watching were flashbacks, visually representing events that had occurred in the past — sort of like early ‘black & white’ or sepia-toned scenes in a movie that was predominantly in color. Patiently, I endured this ugly color effect, waiting for it to go away.

Eventually it did go away — after a few seconds during which the screen was completely black, but at a point in the movie where such a dramatic transition made absolutely no creative sense. When the video of the movie resumed, the weird, overall color effect was completely gone, and it did not return.

What we had just endured a was, in retrospect, an extended technical malfunction that likely originated in the theater’s projection room. Usually when there is a serious technical malfunction, the screening of the movie is stopped long before this, the house lights come on dimly, someone from the theater walks into the auditorium and apologizes, and then the movie is restarted from the beginning, so that the audience can watch it the way that it was intended to be seen. However, this time no one told us anything, and the movie continued.

This retelling of “Moana,” while visually different from the original thanks to its blend of live-action and extensive use of high-tech digital effects, fails to deliver a story with surprises and unexpected plot twists. Instead, unlike the original animated movie (with emphasis on the word “original”), this remake of “Moana” is an uninspired, only mildly entertaining snoozer with familiar music and themes. Little kids will probably enjoy it.

For the most part, the performances of the actors lack depth, complexity and nuance. Thankfully, notable

exceptions are the performances by Catherine Laga’aia, who plays the 16-year-old Moana, in her first starring role in a feature film; and her interactions with Gramma Tala (warmly portrayed by Rema Owen).

Dwayne Johnson, on the other hand, should feel embarrassed by his silly, self-serving, arrogant and utterly unbelievable portrayal of Maui, with his animated tattoos; his shameful, contemptuous disregard for Moana and her people; and his ridiculous, over-the-top muscle suit.

In a style reminiscent of the movie musicals that were popular decades ago, the characters in “Moana” repeatedly broke out in awkward, distracting, uncomfortable singing while they went about the routines of their daily lives as coconut farmers and fishermen. Unfortunately, much like the plot of this new retelling of the story of “Moana,” the music consists mostly of new renditions of songs from the older, original, animated “Moana.” An exception is “Along The Way” — a new song, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

“Moana” is in theaters now. To see a trailer, visit the official Disney website at: <https://movies.disney.com/moana-2026>.

To explore a wide variety of content dating back to 2002, with the most photos and the latest text, visit “AutoMatters & More” at <https://automatters.net>. Search by title or topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page or click on the blue ‘years’ boxes and browse.

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Veterans News

VA announces \$1.2B in infrastructure improvements in third quarter of FY 2026

WASHINGTON (July 20, 2026) – The Department of Veterans Affairs approved \$1.2 billion in VA infrastructure improvements in the third quarter of fiscal year 2026, part of a record \$4.8 billion in non-recurring maintenance funds VA will deploy this year.

NRM budget is the largest in the department’s history.

The funds will be used by VA medical facilities for significant maintenance, replacements and upgrades needed to maintain and improve operational capability and healthcare delivery.

VA’s FY 2026 \$4.8 billion

“Under President Trump, VA

is making historic improvements in healthcare accessibility, customer service and convenience,” said VA Secretary Doug Collins. “These record-breaking investments will enable us to continue building on that progress.”

The list of third quarter projects can be found at <https://department.va.gov/vha/wp-content/uploads/sites/65/2026/07/VHA-NRM-Project-Awards-FY2026-Q3.pdf>.

Of the total \$4.8 billion committed for FY 2026, VA has now obligated \$2.3 billion through the third quarter. That obligation of funds in the third quarter will be used for:

- \$915M to repair and upgrade outdated infrastructure systems in medical facilities.
- \$229M for maintenance and modernization of facility infrastructure to support future electronic health record system updates.
- \$11M for major building upgrades like elevators, electrical systems, and boiler plants.

These investments are just one of many ways the Trump Administration is making VA work better for Vveterans. For example, VA has:

- Enrolled more than 200,000 new veterans in VA healthcare in 2026.
- Opened 38 new VA health care facilities since Jan. 20,

2025, expanding healthcare access for veterans around the country.

- Reduced the backlog of veterans waiting for VA benefits by 74 percent since Jan. 20, 2025, after it increased 24 percent during the Biden Administration.
- Completed 82,083,918 direct care appointments in FY 2025, up 4.1 percent from FY 2024.
- Completed 59,989,662 com-

munity care appointments, up 12 percent from FY2024.

- Offered Veterans more than 3 million appointments outside of normal operating hours, giving veterans more timely and convenient options for care.
- Permanently housed 51,936 homeless veterans across the country in FY 2025, the highest total in seven years.

Vote on Take Care of America’s Veterans Act stalls in the House

WASHINGTON - In a showdown July 16 over the Take Care of America’s Veterans Act, the massive bill was postponed just prior to a final vote on the House floor, according to a report in *Stars and Stripes*. The Republican-led bill has faced backlash from Democrats and divided veteran groups over a key funding mechanism that reduces disability compensation on future claims for tinnitus and sleep apnea — among the most common service-connected medical conditions, the report stated. A last-ditch attempt by Rep. Chris Deluzio, D.-Pa., an Iraq war veteran, to block a vote by sending the bill back to the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee failed by one vote. The Take Care of America’s Veterans Act was pulled after a vote of 211-210 against the measure was announced. No information was immediately available on when the bill might come up for a vote again.

<https://www.stripes.com/veterans/2026-07-16/sweeping-house-bill-veterans-stalls-22282911.html>

VA proposes to slash benefit paperwork

FLEET RESERVE ASSOCIATION - The Department of Veterans Affairs is advancing a proposal, now open for public comment, to cut the paperwork burden veterans and survivors face when claiming their earned benefits.

Published in the Federal Register, the plan would restructure the VA’s primary application forms, cutting total pages by roughly two thirds and reducing completion time by about a third. The VA projects the simpli-

fied forms will be available for use by December 2026.

The proposal targets two of the VA’s highest volume forms:

- VA Form 21-526EZ (Disability Compensation): shrinks from 15 pages to five, with completion time falling from an estimated 25 minutes to 15.
- VA Form 21-534EZ (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and Survivor Pensions): drops from 20 pages to seven, with completion time for grieving families falling from about

40 minutes to 25.

The FRA applauds this step toward simplification. For decades, FRA’s national service officers have watched overly complex forms act as a barrier, confusing disabled veterans and delaying benefits for grieving survivors. No veteran or surviving spouse should face unnecessary administrative gridlock when claiming the benefits they earned through sacrifice. The FRA will monitor the public comment period closely.

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SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Ask Rusty – I'm Still Working; Why Didn't I Get a Higher Social Security Benefit?

by AMAC Foundation Social Security Advisor Russell Gloor
Association of Mature American Citizens

Dear Rusty: I began collecting benefits at age 72 and am now 78. Since that time, I have continued to work and have contributed over \$40,000 to Social Security over the last six years. At the time of my retirement, I was informed that the Social Security Administration (SSA) would review my contributions annually and replace lower-earning years from my 35-year record with my current higher-earning years.

Despite my current annual income exceeding \$100,000, I have not seen an increase in my benefit amount over the past six years. I recently met with an SSA representative who confirmed that my benefits are being reviewed annually but did not provide specific details or evidence of these adjustments. Could you please advise me on how to formally verify that my benefits are being accurately reviewed and updated to reflect my continued contributions?

Signed: Collecting and Still Working

Dear Collecting: For information, your contributions (from FICA payroll taxes) to Social Security over the last 6 years are not what determines if you get an increase to your monthly SS benefit. Although you contributed to SS since you started receiving SS benefits, those contributions do not affect your monthly SS benefit. Your monthly SS benefit is based only the highest inflation-adjusted 35 years of earnings over your lifetime. And for your monthly benefit to change, your current earnings each year would need to replace at least one of those 35 historical, inflation-adjusted year earnings.

We regularly hear from those who do benefit from SSA's regular review of work earnings after they start receiving monthly SS benefits, and our Advisory staff includes two individuals with a combined 70 years of service with the Social Security Administration. Thus, we are comfortable saying that SSA does, in fact, review your earnings annually to see if your monthly SS payment should be higher. From a process standpoint, SSA receives your annual earnings information from the IRS (i.e., directly from your annual tax return) by mid-year annually, after which SSA evaluates your recent earnings to see if an increase in your monthly SS benefit is warranted. If so, that increase is automatically applied (usually around October each year), and you are paid the extra amount retroactively to the beginning of the year.

What you may not realize is that your lifetime earnings (your historical earnings) are adjusted for inflation. This is a good thing, because that means your current monthly SS benefit is calculated using today's dollar values for your past earnings, rather than the actual money amounts you originally earned and received. For example, \$50,000 of 1990 earnings would be worth about \$125,000 today. Which also means that those 1990 earnings would only yield a higher current Social Security benefit if your recent earnings were more than \$125,000. And this is true for all 35 years of lifetime earnings used to calculate your current monthly Social Security benefit.

The best way for you to ensure that you are getting the right monthly benefit amount is to first obtain your lifetime earnings history from Social Security. This is most easily obtained through your online "my Social Security" account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount. If you don't have an online account set up, you can also request an "Earnings Statement" by calling Social Security at 1.800.772.1213 (or call your local SS field office to request it). Next, I suggest you use Social Security's "Online Benefits Calculator" explained and available at this link: <https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/planner/AnypiaApplet.html>

If, after this, you believe you should be getting a higher monthly SS benefit because of your recent earnings, you can again contact SSA and tell them you believe they did not properly adjust your current SS benefit for your most recent earnings. Following that, you can submit a "Request for Reconsideration" (form SSA-561) which will result in a full separate review of your case by an independent SSA person, followed (some months later) by a formal written determination on your assertion. If you received a letter from SSA because of your previous meeting with them, include a copy of that letter with your "Request for Reconsideration."

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisior@amacfoundation.org.

About AMAC

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.

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The heat is on around the county: Here's how to stay safe

by Tom Christensen,
County of San Diego
Communications Office
Jul. 22, 2026 | 4:16pm | The
National Weather Service is pre-
dicting elevated and significant
risks of extreme heat in areas of
San Diego County this week.
Here are some tips to help people
and pets stay safe.

There is an Extreme Heat
Warning for the desert regions
of the County effective until
8 p.m. on Monday, July 27. A
Heat Advisory is in effect for the
valley and inland valleys, also
in effect until Monday, July 27.
A Heat Advisory for the coastal
areas goes into effect at 10 a.m.
Thursday, July 23 through 6 p.m.
Saturday, July 25.

Forecasts are predicting ex-
treme heat — up to 118 degrees
in the desert, while temps could
reach just over 100 in the moun-
tains and inland valleys, and
the upper 80s in and along the
coast. Officials suggest people
stay prepared by drinking plenty
of fluids, staying out of the sun
and remaining indoors where
it's air-conditioned during the
hottest days, and checking up
on friends and relatives.

Extreme Heat

Extreme heat can cause body
temperatures to soar. And that
can cause heatstroke, exhaus-
tion, dizziness, nausea, confu-
sion, headache and even death.
People who are particularly at
risk are children, older adults,
people with chronic medical
conditions, someone who is
pregnant, and outdoor workers.



Sailors attached to Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley (DDG 101) swim in the Atlantic Ocean May 19, 2026. Gridley was deployed with Nimitz Carrier Strike Group as part of Southern Seas 2026 which seeks to enhance capability, improve interoperability, and strengthen maritime partnerships with countries throughout the region through joint, multinational, and interagency exchanges and cooperation. U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Frankie M. Guage.

Here are some tips to help
you, your friends and loved ones
stay safe.

Cool Zones and Indoor
Relief — Places to Stay
Cool

The County's Cool Zones, in-
cluding the County's 33 branch
libraries, community centers
and other locations, offer people
safe, air-conditioned sanctuaries

from the heat. Here is a complete
list of County Cool Zone sites,
their hours and locations.

You can also use the County's
interactive link that lets you
search for Cool Zone sites by
location, ZIP code, organiza-
tion and by what animals are
allowed.

What to DO if Someone
Shows Signs of Heat-

stroke

- Call 9-1-1 immediately. Signs of heatstroke include diz-
ziness, nausea, confusion and
headache.
- Begin cooling the person
right away. Move them into the
shade; spray them with cool
water and fan them.
- If they are alert, place them
in a cool shower and monitor
their body temperatures.
- DO NOT give them fluids; a

person with heatstroke may not
be able to swallow safely.

What to DO if Someone
Shows Signs of Heat Ex-
haustion

- Signs include being faint
or dizzy, excessive sweating,
cool/pale/clammy skin, nausea/
vomiting, rapid/weak pulse and
muscle cramps.
- Get the person to a cooler,
air-conditioned place.
- Have the person drink water
if fully conscious.
- Place them in a cool shower
or use cold compresses.

Tips to Help People Avoid
Heat-Related Problems

- Stay in an air-conditioned
space during the hottest hours
of the day.
- Don't rely on electric fans
alone when temperatures exceed
90 degrees.
- Wear light, loose-fitting
clothing.
- Drink plenty of water
and avoid alcohol and sugary
drinks.
- Take cool showers.
- Never leave a child, elderly
person, or pet unattended in a car
— even briefly.
- Limit outdoor activity dur-
ing the hottest part of the day.
- Wear sunscreen and a wide-
brim hat if you must be in the
sun.
- Avoid using the oven to keep
indoor temps lower.

Tips to Keep Your pets
cool in hot weather

- Keep your pets indoors if it
is cooler inside.
- Exercise pets in early morn-
ing hours or early evening
only.
- Keep your pets' water supply
in a tip-proof container, always
topped off, and be sure it stays
cool (pets will not drink water
that is too hot).
- Consider a misting system to

keep the outdoor areas cooler.

- Be sure your pet has shade
ALL DAY, if they are outside.
Remember, the sun's position
changes during the day.
- Avoid car trips; vehicles heat
up dangerously fast. On an 85-
degree day, a car can reach 102
degrees in 10 minutes and soar
upward even with the windows
down an inch or two.
- Check pavement tempera-
tures; if it is too hot for your bare
feet, it's too hot for paws.
- Offer a shallow wading pool
or misting area.
- Watch for signs of heat
stress: heavy panting, drooling,
vomiting, lethargy, or stumbling.
Seek veterinary help immedi-
ately if you notice these.

Stay cool, check on vulnerable
neighbors and keep pets safe!

Tijuana River Valley Ef-
fects

Officials also said the high
temperatures could affect people
in the South Bay, especially
those living near the Tijuana
River Valley, by increasing the
hydrogen sulfide emissions
in the valley, which are often
recognized by a strong rotten
egg odor.

They said people can reduce
the impacts by limiting outdoor
activities when the odors are
present, keeping windows and
doors closed, and increasing air
circulation with fans or air con-
ditioning on recirculation and to
consider using air purifiers with
HEPA filters, activated charcoal,
or potassium permanganate
People sensitive to air pollu-
tion should keep rescue medica-
tions ready and seek medical
help if symptoms worsen.

People can get more infor-
mation at the County's Tijuana
River Valley Environmental
Dashboard.

Rabid bat startles patrons at Vista restaurant

by Cassie N. Saunders,
County of San Diego Com-
munications Office
Jul. 23, 2026 | 9:38am--County
public health officials looking
for anyone who may have come
into contact with a bat Sunday,
July 19 at the Yellow Deli Res-
taurant in Vista.

The bat landed on a table
while a family was eating at 1
p.m. Another diner used a towel
to collect the bat and bring it to
the Humane Society in Oceans-
ide. The bat was then delivered
to the County's Public Health
Lab where it tested positive for
rabies. No direct skin contact
with the bat by an individual has
been reported at this time.

If you or someone in your
family or group had direct con-
tact with this bat or you know
of someone who may have
touched the bat, County Public
Health Services urges you to
call your health care provider
as soon as possible. Only those
who have direct contact with
the bat, such as touching or
holding the animal, are at risk
for rabies.

Rabies post-exposure pro-
phylaxis is highly effective at
preventing rabies if received
before symptoms start. Once
rabies symptoms start there is
no treatment and rabies is almost
always fatal.

This is the 22nd bat to test
positive for rabies in San Diego
County this year. In 2025, 21
bats tested positive.

Public health officials remind
residents:

- Respect the space of wildlife,
do not touch or approach bats or
any wildlife.
- If you have direct contact
with a bat, wash the exposed
area with soap and seek medi-
cal advice.
- Rabies symptoms can take
weeks to months to appear,
and once symptoms begin, the
disease is almost always fatal.
Prompt treatment after an expo-
sure is highly effective.

Rabies remains rare in hu-
mans due to prevention efforts.
California's most recent human
rabies case occurred in 2024 in
a Fresno County resident who



was exposed to a bat in Merced
County.

Bats play an important role in
our local ecosystem. Many spe-
cies of bats live in San Diego
County, feeding on insects such
as mosquitos. Other bat species
feed on nectar from plants and
pollinate them in the process.
You may see bats occasionally
around sunset when they are
most active. It is important to

respect wildlife and give wild
animals space to play their role
in our natural environment.

Find more information about
rabies visit the rabies dashbo-
ard for additional information
about rabies view the County's
website. For more information
about rabies post-exposure pro-
phylaxis and prevention, you can
contact the Epidemiology unit
(619) 692-8499.

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