



# AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## JANUARY 25, 2021

### News Driving the Week

- Officials from [the new administration of President Joe Biden](#) announced that Dat Tran, principal deputy assistant secretary for VA's Office of Enterprise Integration, will serve as acting secretary until McDonough's confirmation process concludes. McDonough is scheduled to testify before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on Jan. 27. Senate officials have not yet released a final schedule for votes on any of Biden's nominees. Two holdovers from Trump's administration who were asked to remain for now were Richard Stone, acting under secretary for health, and Carolyn Clancy, deputy under secretary for health. Stone, who has been the department's lead on coronavirus response, will remain in his current role. Clancy will act as the department's deputy secretary, overseeing a host of issues. Meg Kabat, who led transition efforts for Biden on veterans issues, will serve as a senior advisor on family support and caregiver issues. Kabat previously worked as the head of VA's Caregiver Support Program. Kayla Williams will serve as Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. She previously served as director of VA's Center for Women Veterans, and also was on Biden's transition team. Terrence Hayes, former spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, will serve as press secretary for the department. Ray Kelley, who had worked as majority staff director for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, will be the department's new Veteran Service Organization Liaison.

- President Joe Biden announced that he was asking the Department of Veterans Affairs once again to [delay collecting debts from veterans](#). According to the White House, an economic relief executive order signed Friday "will help approximately 2 million veterans maintain their financial footing by asking the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to consider pausing federal collections on overpayments and debts." Rep. Chris Pappas confirmed in a statement Friday that the debt collection delay had been extended. "Far too often veterans face unexpected debt collection from the VA, some due to overpayments that were through no fault of their own," he said. "However, this Executive Order will provide the relief so many need and ensure that our veterans can focus on their



physical and financial health during these trying times."

- [One More Day](#) works to connect struggling veterans and service members with the care they need and equip others with the skills and resources to do the same. In addition to connecting people with help and suicide prevention training, One More Day organizes motorcycle rides to raise awareness, fundraises to assist with the costs of seeing a counselor, and advocates for change in the military's current approach to suicide prevention. One More Day is currently raising awareness for a DoD-funded study by Florida State University's Dr. Thomas Joiner, a leading expert on suicide. Joiner hopes to use online tasks to learn how technology could change the way members of the military view seeking help when they encounter thoughts of suicide. The study will take a total of four hours spread out across six sessions in 11 weeks. For their participation in the research, service members will receive \$20 for each completed session. Interested active-duty service members should contact Joiner at [militarystudy@psy.fsu.edu](mailto:militarystudy@psy.fsu.edu) to learn more about participating.

- The [rates of suicide among those who've served](#) continues to be much higher than the national average - 27.5 per 100,000 in 2018 for veterans compared to 18.2 per 100,000 for non-veterans. That disparity has continued despite prevention campaigns, more focus on mental health, and an Air Force "stand down" to shine a spotlight on the issue. In recent months, Congress has taken some steps to grapple with veterans' mental health issues and bolster suicide prevention overall. A law passed last year bolsters and expands veterans mental health care, with a particular emphasis on rural veterans. It also extends grant money for community organizations helping veterans. Many of its provisions will take effect in 2021. "It's my hope that the bill will also serve as a signal to our veterans, service members, and their families that they are never, never alone," said Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas on the Senate floor. Rep. Mark Takano said that while these bills address known gaps in care and intervention, much more should be done to reduce veteran suicide. He said he's hopeful that the new Congress will take steps in that direction. Duane France, Director of Veteran Services for the Family Care Center in Colorado Springs and an Army veteran, agrees. "We need to be able to establish infrastructure both in personnel and in funds at the community level so we can address it where it's happening, rather than trying to establish this blanket overarching solution," France said. He pictures federal help as an inverted

pyramid. There are lot of resources and people concentrated at the top - on the federal and state level. But there's much less available at the local level. He said local treatment providers need more support and an easier way to deal with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

#### AMVETS in the News

##### [Some national veterans organizations vow to remove members charged in the Capitol riots](#)

Some national veterans organizations have vowed to remove members who were charged in the Capitol riots, taking a stand against the violent attack. AMVETS, which has 250,000 members, said it was "shocked, saddened and outraged" by the riots at the Capitol. The organization's constitution includes an oath taken by members to preserve the democracy and the freedom of the country, AMVETS wrote in a statement to CNN. "This mob intentionally used violence to interrupt and attempt to stop a function mandated by the U.S. Constitution," the statement read. "They killed a law enforcement officer (who was a veteran), injured many more, desecrated the halls of Congress and threatened to derail democracy."

#### Upcoming Events

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Business Meeting

Wednesday, January 27 3:00 PM

Dirksen 106

Watch [here](#)

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Hearing to Consider Pending Nomination

Wednesday, January 27 3:01 PM

Dirksen 106

Watch [here](#)

#### AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

Continued News

- [Opinion](#): To VA Secretary Nominee Denis McDonough: Here's How We Fix the Broken VA

