

Veterans Legislative Symposia Report
Hosted by the Nevada Department of Veterans Services
May 12, 2016

Background: The Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) partnered with Nevada's United Veterans Legislative Council (UVLC) to host Veterans Legislative Symposia on March 26, 2016 in Reno and on April 16, 2016 in Las Vegas. The biannual event serves as an opportunity to bring together various perspectives from the veteran community and to develop legislative recommendations for the upcoming legislative session.

The initiative, which started over a decade ago, provides an opportunity for all veterans across Nevada to develop their agenda and prioritize their goals ahead of the upcoming session. While the Symposium is held in the even years between sessions, a Veterans Legislative Summit is held immediately before the Session to update the veteran community on progress. Finally, NDVS partners with the Nevada National Guard to hold Veterans and Military Day at the Legislature during the Legislative Session to bring awareness to the issues that affect the veteran community most.

The aim of this Symposium was to bring together the veteran community and highlight the ideas and issues for the upcoming 79th Legislative Session in 2016. It also provided an opportunity to engage directly with veterans on issues, encourage them to work with legislators, and otherwise become or remain involved in the legislative process. Over the years, these events have been crucial to encouraging members of the veteran community to collaborate and make their voices heard to the State Legislature.

This year, for the first time, two symposia were held; one in Las Vegas and one in Reno. Additionally, travel grants were issued to several rural veterans representing veterans organizations in Elko to ensure issues identified were reflective of the rural areas. There were over a hundred veterans present in Reno and over eighty in Las Vegas. As in past years, the perspectives ranged from World War II up through veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 2016 symposium began with the opening ceremonies, followed by remarks from NDVS Director Kat Miller and from the UVLC Chair, Mr. Kevin Burns and the UVLC Vice-Chair, Mr. Tony Yarborough. Next, members of Nevada's Legislature briefed attendees about how Nevada's legislative process works. These legislative members provided invaluable insight as to how the veterans who attended the symposium could contribute and be most effective during the upcoming Session. Presenting in Reno were Assemblywoman Dickman, Assemblyman O'Neil, and Assemblyman Sprinkle and presenting in Las Vegas were Senators Hardy, Senator Manendo, and Assemblywoman Irene Bustamante-Adams and Assemblywoman Neal. Additionally, Congresswoman Titus presented information to the Las Vegas Symposium regarding citizen participation in the federal process along with an update of veteran's issues currently being considered by the United States Congress.

Following the opening ceremonies and presentations, the floor was opened to veterans to address the symposia with their individual or organizational priorities for the 79th Legislative Session. After all participants who wished to raise an item had been given the opportunity to speak, each participant was given the opportunity to vote for the legislative items they would like to see addressed. The votes allowed NDVS to develop a prioritized list of policy changes and recommendations from the veteran community. Also developed was a list of 27 items suggested for Congressional consideration; these issues were not prioritized and were sent to Nevada's congressional delegation for their information. The Las Vegas Symposium resulted in 20 issues, while the Reno Symposium resulted in 17 issues.

Several issues received the same number of votes as shown in the ranking below. There were three common themes that ran through recommendations made at both symposia. These themes were:

- **Take action to prevent veteran suicide**
- **Take care of family survivors (especially children) and caregivers of veterans**
- **Improve the state's ability to connect veterans to benefits, focusing on rural, student, Native American, women and elder veterans.**

While generally specific items differed in each region, these themes clearly illustrated shared concerns among Nevada veterans and their families. It is also worth noting that while most items were region-specific, there were five items that were common to both symposia. They were:

STATE-WIDE PRIORITY 1:

Mandate suicide prevention/awareness training for those who most commonly might come in contact with at-risk veterans (medical professionals, first responders, veteran service officers, etc.).

STATE-WIDE PRIORITY 2:

Create a Veterans Service Organization Registry to help veterans connect to helpful veterans support organizations providing benefits and services.

STATE-WIDE PRIORITY 3:

Extend the eligibility period for the Fry Scholarship to ensure all children of those killed in combat are able to use these benefits.

STATE-WIDE PRIORITY 4:

Increase the number of Veterans Service Officers in rural Nevada.

STATE-WIDE PRIORITY 5:

Increase presence and support of Nevada Veterans Courts

Finally, some of the lower priority items did not have broad support by the event participants, but they might be representative of issues or concerns of veterans not present. Attached to this report are the individual symposia reports and the list of federal issues that will be forwarded to Nevada's Congressional Delegation.

**RENO VETERANS LEGISLATIVE SYMPOSIUM
MARCH 26, 2016**

PRIORITY 1. Support/Training for Spouses of Veterans affected by PTSD

During public discussion, the wife of a veteran who committed suicide made a passionate plea for training to help family members better understand PTSD in order to intervene and support their loved ones. Her plea struck a chord with the symposium participants who strongly agreed that we need to do more to help provide training and support for families living with a veteran suffering from PTSD and other mental health disorders.

PRIORITY 2. Mandate Suicide Prevention Training for Medical Personnel

The UVLC and many other participants felt that legislation unsuccessfully proposed under AB 294 during the 78th Legislative Session that would require certain providers of health care to receive training relating to suicide assessment should be reconsidered. Proposers commented that veteran suicide has become a national epidemic, with 22 veterans a day committing suicide. In Nevada, according to the Nevada Office of Suicide Prevention, one veteran kills him or herself every 2.75 days. The original AB 294 language read:

“Each person licensed, certified or registered pursuant to chapter 630, 630A, 633, 640A, 641, 641A, 641B or 641C of NRS shall complete a course of instruction, within 2 years after initial licensure, certification or registration, as applicable, relating to suicide assessment, screening and referral. The course must provide at least 3 hours of instruction relating to suicide assessment, screening and referral and be approved by the appropriate health care licensing board.”

The 2015 Legislature did pass a bill that included suicide prevention training requirements for the mental health community (AB 93), the concern was that veterans in distress are more likely to see a medical health provider than a mental health provider; 64% of people who attempt suicide visit a doctor in the month before their attempt, and 38% in the week before.

PRIORITY 3. Hire State Veterans Service Officers for Native American Communities

As a people, Native Americans are the smallest ethnic group of the American population, and yet on a per capita basis they provide more members to the Armed Forces than any other population sector. Native American veterans however, utilize their veteran benefits the least of any population sector. Nevada's tribal members live throughout the state, some in urban and other in rural areas.

According to the National Native American Veterans Association, the primary reason Native American veterans do not use their VA benefits is that they are not aware of the benefits they have earned through military service. Secondly, for the Native American veteran, it is much easier to obtain benefits from their individual Tribe or Nation rather than having to navigate the Veterans Administration.

Unfortunately, few Tribal and Nation representatives are familiar with the complex and confusing veterans benefits system. The Nevada Department of Veterans Services is planning a 2017 state-wide training conference to create Nevada Veterans Advocates (NVAs) who are members of tribal communities, but while these NVAs provide invaluable support directing veterans to existing services, they are not accredited with the US Department of Veterans Affairs and cannot file compensation, pension, education, loan, insurance and other veteran's claims.

PRIORITY 4. Funding for Student Veteran Centers at the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE)

While both universities within the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) have established Student Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs), the Community Colleges have not. These centers not only assist veterans access education and other VA benefits, they provide the support necessary to ensure successful matriculation and later job placement. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Labor issued a TAACCCT grant to the State of Nevada with funding for establishing Veterans Resource Centers at the Community Colleges. That funding runs out on September 30, 2017. The proposed solution was for NSHE to fund staff to operate the centers after the grant expires.

PRIORITY 5. “Individual Unemployability” Considered the Same as 100% Disability for State Purposes

Nevada offers a property tax exemption to combat veterans. Further, it offers increased exemptions for veterans with a service-connected disability of 60% or more. The amount of exemptions that are or will be available to disabled veterans varies from \$6,250 to \$20,000 of assessed valuation, depending on the percentage of disability and the year filed. To qualify, the veteran must have an honorable separation from the service and be a resident of Nevada. The widow or widower of a disabled veteran who was eligible for this exemption at the time of his or her death may also be eligible to receive this exemption, which can either be applied to a veteran's vehicle tax or personal property tax.

“Individual Unemployability” is a part of Federal VA’s disability compensation program that allows VA to pay certain veterans compensation at the 100% rate, even though VA has not rated their service-connected disabilities at the total level. A veteran must be unable to maintain gainful employment as a result of his or her service-connected disabilities. Additionally, a veteran must have one service-connected disability ratable at 60% or more, or two or more service-connected disabilities, at least one disability ratable at 40% or more with a combined rating of greater than 70%.

This proposed legislation aims to apply the same tax exemptions for those who fall under the Individual Unemployability program as those who are 100% disabled. This recommendation is based on the argument that those designated through the Individual Unemployability program are recognized as 100% disabled by the Federal Government and should therefore be recognized as 100% disabled by the State of Nevada. This legislative change would have an impact on Nevada counties, where the revenues are collected.

PRIORITY 6. Hire State Veterans Service Officers to Support Veterans Living in Rural Nevada

This recommendation, raised by members from rural counties and supported by participants at large, would increase the number of VSOs available to support rural veterans. Of Nevada’s 28 VSOs (11 state VSOs and 17 from veterans service organizations such as the VFW and DAV), only two live in rural areas. While NDVS has expanded outreach to rural veterans by the use of video teleconferencing and traveling VSO support, there are still insufficient VSO to serve the over 20,000 veterans who call rural and frontier Nevada home.

PRIORITY 7. Support for Caregivers

Caring for veterans with medical or physical disabilities can be a stressful and all-consuming mission. Many caregivers neglect their own health and well-being and the burden of care giving can put them at increased risk for significant health problems. Some caregivers of seriously injured post-9/11 veterans are eligible for assistance (monthly stipend, travel, counseling, etc) under the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 but most veterans caregivers are not eligible for these programs.

Participants felt that this inequity should be addressed by Congress, and that Nevada needs to develop programs to address the needs of those who care for our seriously disabled veterans.

PRIORITY 8. Create a Veteran Support Organization Registry

There are many federal, state, local, and nonprofit veterans service and support organizations working with the goal of empowering our veterans and their families that lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. Unfortunately, there are also individuals and organizations who have taken advantage of veterans and those who would support veterans. Because of this, there is a common request for assistance from veterans and their families to validate the purpose and legitimacy of veterans service organizations that they are either turning to for assistance or being asked to support financially with donations. A state-led registry and certification could benefit both veterans (and other members of the public) seeking information regarding the identity and legitimacy of veterans service organizations, and it will benefit veterans service organizations who seek to establish their legitimacy.

PRIORITY 9. Improve State of Nevada Veterans Education Benefits

This recommendation was a multi-part proposal that included charging in-state (versus out-of-state) tuition rates for all veterans and for active duty service member's dependents and extending the eligibility period for the FRY Scholarship.

- In-state (versus out-of-state) tuition rates for all veterans (up to 15 years)

Last Session, AB 76 changed NSHE policy regarding out of state tuition charges for veterans. The new NRS states that any veteran who has separated within five years of date of application will not be charged out-of-state tuition rates. The proposal is to expand in-state tuition rates to 15 years which is the time frame in which a veteran can generally claim this federal benefit.

- In-state (versus out-of-state) tuition rates for all dependents of active duty service members serving in Nevada

Dependents of active duty service members have little to say about where they are stationed while their spouse is serving in the military. Some of these dependents (spouses and adult students are paying out of state college tuition. Participants supported a change to the NSHE rates to allow dependents of active duty members to pay in-state tuition rates.

- In-state (versus out-of-state) tuition rates for all Fry Scholarship Beneficiaries

The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship is a federal scholarship that provides Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to the children and surviving spouses of service members who died in the line of duty while on active duty after September 10, 2001. Children are eligible as of their 18th birthday (unless they have already graduated high school). A child may be married or over 23 and still be eligible, although their eligibility ends on their 33rd birthday. A spouse will lose eligibility to this benefit upon remarriage. A spouse has 15 years from the date of death of the service member to use the benefit. Eligible beneficiaries attending school may receive up to 36 months of benefits, to include full tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance, and a book / supply stipend.

NSHE grants in-state tuition to any individual using benefits under the Fry Scholarship and is enrolling within three years of the service member's death in the line of duty following a period of active-duty service of 90 days or more. Dependents can be very young when the benefit is bequeathed to them and often are not within three years of college age when their parent is killed; therefore they cannot use the benefit. Participants felt strongly that we should not disadvantage children who are already facing the

loss of a parent and that parent's income. The recommendation is that this benefit be extended for the life of the student.

PRIORITY 10. All Fees for Veterans License Plates Should Go to the Veterans License Plate Gift Fund

Currently, only about half of the fees paid by veterans for license plates go to the Veterans License Plate Gift fund. (The Nevada Veterans License Plate Gift Fund is used to pay for veterans services and programs.) For example, the first-time fee for veterans license plates (non-personalized version) is \$61.50 with an annual renewal fee of \$30.00. Twenty-five dollars of the first-time fee and twenty dollars of the renewal fee are for the support of programs and services for veterans and their families. Participants recommended that all proceeds from sales be used for veterans programs and services.

PRIORITY 11(1). Veterans Courts in Every County

The veterans court model is based on drug treatment and/or mental health treatment courts. Substance abuse or mental health treatment is offered as an alternative to incarceration. Typically, veteran mentors assist with the programs. Currently, the state of Nevada has Veterans Courts in Clark County and Washoe County. The veteran's community believes the success of these courts necessitates expansion of the program throughout the state. A two-year study of the Minnesota Judicial branch's Fourth District revealed that most Veterans Court participants are charged with fewer offenses post-entry compared to pre-entry. When looking at charged cases within twenty-four months of entering Veterans Court compared to the twenty-four months just prior to entering, nearly three-fourths (72%) are charged with fewer cases after entering, while 14% are charged with the same number of offenses and 14% are charged with more offenses. It was also suggested that a "traveling" Veterans Court could be considered for rural counties.

PRIORITY 11(2). Programs to Connect Survivors to Benefits

This recommendation was within the same general theme of other recommendations that supported improving outreach to veterans and their families but focused specifically on the needs of survivors who may not be aware of the benefits of which they are entitled.

PRIORITY 12. All Nevada Hospitals Must Maintain/Staff Mental Health Wards

This recommendation grew from a participant concern that hospitals are not all capable of responding to a mental health / potential suicide crisis. A general discussion ensued regarding the need for medical services in areas not supported by VA hospitals and clinics.

PRIORITY 13. Renewable Energy for NDVS Facilities

It was recommended that State of Nevada veterans facilities consider the use of renewable energy sources, where possible, to save costs and to demonstrate good stewardship of the environment.

PRIORITY 14. Increase Veteran Owned Business and Disabled Veteran Owned Business Contracting and Purchasing Preferences to 10%

Currently, a business owned and operated by a veteran with a service-connected disability can apply for a 5% preference for a bid or proposal for a contract for which the estimated cost is \$100,000 or less. In addition, a business owned and operated by a veteran with a 50% or greater service-connected disability can apply for a 5% preference for a bid or proposal for a contract for which the estimated cost is more than \$100,000 but less than \$250,000. This proposal would move both thresholds up to 10%.

PRIORITY 15. Certification for Veteran Owned Businesses

This proposal would create a certification system for veteran owned businesses that would create awareness and help inform prospective clients who wished to support these businesses.

PRIORITY 16. Expand NRS 412.606 to Define Discrimination; allow Attorney Fees & Attorney General Enforcement

NRS 412.606, Discrimination against members of National Guard; penalty, states that:

- No person, firm, association, corporation or state or local governmental entity may, by any constitution, rule, bylaw, resolution, vote, regulation, order, or other action, discriminate against any member of the Nevada National Guard because of his or her membership therein.

- Any person who willfully aids in enforcing any such constitution, rule, bylaw, resolution, vote, regulation, order or other action against any member of the Nevada National Guard is guilty of a misdemeanor.

The participants suggested that the word discriminate needs further definition to ensure compliance. Further, if a Guardsman feels he or she is discriminated against, the costs of fighting that discrimination should be borne by the State of Nevada and the Attorney General's Office should be the primary point of contact for the Guardsman to ensure state level oversight.

**LAS VEGAS VETERANS LEGISLATIVE SYMPOSIUM
APRIL 16, 2016**

PRIORITY 1. Mandate Suicide Prevention Training for Medical Personnel, Veterans Service Officers, and Other Service Providers Who May Come in Contact with Veterans At-Risk of Suicide

The UVLC and many other participants felt that health care providers and service officers who routinely come in contact with veterans should receive training relating to suicide assessment. They recommended that legislation unsuccessfully proposed under AB 294 during the 78th Legislative Session requiring certain providers of health care to receive training should be reconsidered and expanded to include veterans service officers and other service providers. Proposers commented that veteran suicide has become a national epidemic, with 22 veterans a day committing suicide. In Nevada, according to the Nevada Office of Suicide Prevention one veteran kills him or herself every 2.75 days. The original AB 294 language read:

The UVLC and many other participants felt that legislation unsuccessfully proposed under AB 294 during the 78th Legislative Session that would require certain providers of health care to receive training relating to suicide assessment should be reconsidered. Proposers commented that veteran suicide has become a national epidemic, with 22 veterans a day committing suicide. In Nevada, according to the Nevada Office of Suicide Prevention one veteran kills him or herself every 2.75 days. The original AB 294 language read:

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The 2015 Legislature did pass a bill that included suicide prevention training requirements for the mental health community (AB 93), the concern was that veterans in distress are more likely to see a medical health provider than a mental health provider; 64% of people who attempt suicide visit a doctor in the month before their attempt, and 38% in the week before.

PRIORITY 2. Veteran Organization Registry

There are many federal, state, local, and nonprofit veterans service and support organizations working with the goal of empowering our veterans and their families that lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. Unfortunately, there are also individuals and organizations who have taken advantage of veterans and those who would support veterans. Because of this, there is a common request for assistance from veterans and their families to validate the purpose and legitimacy of veterans service organizations that they are either turning to for assistance or being asked to support financially with donations. A state-led registry and certification could benefit both veterans (and other members of the public) seeking information regarding the identity and legitimacy of veterans service organizations, and it will benefit veterans service organizations who seek to establish their legitimacy.

PRIORITY 3. In-State (Versus Out-of-State) Tuition Rates for All Fry Scholarship Beneficiaries

The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship is a federal scholarship that provides Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to the children and surviving spouses of service members who died in the line of

duty while on active duty after September 10, 2001. Children are eligible as of their 18th birthday (unless they have already graduated high school). A child may be married or over 23 and still be eligible, although their eligibility ends on their 33rd birthday. A spouse will lose eligibility to this benefit upon remarriage. A spouse has 15 years from the date of death of the service member to use the benefit. Eligible beneficiaries attending school may receive up to 36 months of benefits, to include full tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance, and a book / supply stipend.

NSHE grants in-state tuition to any individual using benefits under the Fry Scholarship and is enrolling within three years of the service member's death in the line of duty following a period of active-duty service of 90 days or more. Dependents can be very young when the benefit is bequeathed to them and often are not within three years of college age when their parent is killed; therefore they cannot use the benefit. Participants felt strongly that we should not disadvantage children who are already facing the loss of a parent and that parent's income. The recommendation is that this benefit be extended for the life of the student.

PRIORITY 4. Lower or Delete Car Registration Fees for Active Duty Members

The person making this proposal was serving on active duty at Nellis Air Force Base. Mentioned was that many other states waive these registration fees and that Nevada, one of the Nation's most military and veteran friendly states, should adopt this practice. Active duty and veterans alike strongly supported this recommendation.

PRIORITY 5(1). Make Nevada an Open Primary State

This issue was not raised as a veteran-specific issue but as an issue of perceived fairness in representation during elections.

PRIORITY 5(2). Access to Free Public Transportation (Especially Bus Transportation) for Veterans

The participants did not propose free transportation for all veterans, but those veterans who needed financial support that were experiencing challenges travelling to job interviews and places of employment, essential medical appointments, and other social services.

PRIORITY 6. Mandate Veteran Suicide Prevention Training for Law Enforcement

This recommendation was similar to Priority 1, "Mandate Suicide Prevention Training for Medical Personnel, Veterans Service Officers, and Other Service Providers Who May Come in Contact with Veterans At-Risk of Suicide." Participants believed that some veterans react differently to stressful situations where they perceive themselves to be under threat, and that there are veterans who might actively seek to commit suicide by engaging with police in a confrontational way. While it was believed that all law enforcement needed this training, discussed in detail was the need for Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and Mobile Outreach Safety Teams (MOST) to be trained. Participants believed that these teams should have suicide awareness training in the event that a distraught veteran becomes involved in a hostage/crisis situation in order to preclude the death of the veteran who sees no way out of the situation.

PRIORITY 7. Ensure Younger Veterans are Aware of Benefits they are Eligible for and Encourage Their Participation in Veterans Service Organizations

Younger veterans often do not join veterans service organizations or participate in events sponsored by these organizations. These younger veterans are usually still working and raising families and it was suggested that the "business of life" keeps them from connecting with organizations that can help them

access services and benefits that will improve their lives. Participants felt that more should be done to help connect these younger veterans with support organizations.

PRIORITY 8. Hire State Veterans Service Officers to Support Veterans Living in Rural Nevada

This recommendation, raised by members from rural counties and supported by participants at large, would increase the number of VSO available to support rural veterans. Of Nevada's 28 VSO (11 state VSO and 17 from veterans service organizations such as the VFW and DAV), only two live in rural areas. While NDVS has expanded outreach to rural veterans by the use of video teleconferencing and traveling VSO support, there are still insufficient VSO to serve the over 20,000 veterans who call rural and frontier Nevada home.

PRIORITY 9. Legislation to Prevent Dishonor to the American Flag

Participants recommended that Nevada create Legislation to prevent dishonor of and to the American Flag. Research after the symposium revealed that NRS 201.290 addresses this issue. It states:

"Any person who, in any manner, for exhibition or display, puts or causes to be placed any inscription, design, device, symbol, portrait, name, advertisement, words, character, marks or notice, or sets or places any goods, wares and merchandise whatever upon any flag or ensign of the United States, or state flag of this State, or ensign, evidently purporting to be either of the flags or ensign, or who in any manner appends, annexes, or affixes to any such flag or ensign any inscription, design, device, symbol, portrait, name, advertisement, words, marks, notice or token whatever, or who displays or exhibits or causes to be displayed or exhibited any flag or ensign, evidently purporting to be either of the flags, upon which shall in any manner be put, attached, annexed or affixed any inscription, design, device, symbol, portrait, name, advertisement, words, marks, notice or token whatever, or who publicly or willfully mutilates, tramples upon, or who tears down or willfully and maliciously removes while owned by others, or defames, slanders, or speaks evilly or in a contemptuous manner of or otherwise defaces or defiles any of the flags, or ensign, which are public or private property, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor."

According to the UVLC however, the challenge has been that the United States Supreme Court found in 1990 (US v. Eichman) that the prosecution of an individual for burning a flag in violation of the act was inconsistent with the First Amendment. The Court held that, despite the absence of the explicit restriction of particular messages found in Johnson, the government's declared interest in protecting the "physical integrity" of the flag "rests upon a perceived need to preserve the flag's status as a symbol of our Nation and certain national ideals."

PRIORITY 10. Increase Nevada Veterans Court Programs

The veterans court model is based on drug treatment and/or mental health treatment courts. Substance abuse or mental health treatment is offered as an alternative to incarceration. Typically, veteran mentors assist with the programs. Currently, the state of Nevada has Veterans Courts in Clark County and Washoe County. The veterans community believes the success of these courts necessitates expansion of the program throughout the state. A two year study of the Minnesota Judicial branch's Fourth District revealed that most veterans court participants are charged with fewer offenses post-entry compared to pre-entry. When looking at charged cases within twenty-four months of entering veterans court compared to the twenty-four months just prior to entering, nearly three-fourths (72%) are charged with fewer cases after entering, while 14% are charged with the same number of offenses

and 14% are charged with more offenses. It was also suggested that a “traveling” Veterans Court could be considered for rural counties.

PRIORITY 11. Create Veterans Centers in Rural Areas

Veterans and their families find it challenging identifying and accessing veterans benefits that they may be eligible for. This becomes even more challenging when the veteran lives in rural Nevada. This recommendation suggests that veterans centers be established throughout rural Nevada. While many participants agreed that this would be a great initiative, the challenge was finding services in rural areas that might be consolidated into a center; that the shortage of services was as much a part of the challenge as the consolidation of such services.

PRIORITY 12. Incentives for Hiring Older Veterans

Many of Southern Nevada’s at-risk veterans over 55 years of age want to work but find it difficult to gain employment. There are currently no programs that specifically target the employment needs of older veterans and there was a desire by participants to capitalize on the experience of these veterans and to help them regain their sense of self through meaningful employment.

PRIORITY 13. Make Nevada a Purple Heart State

Many State Legislatures have passed concurrent resolutions declaring their state to be a “Purple Heart State.” Other states have become a “Purple Heart State” through executive order. While largely symbolic, being a Purple Heart State acknowledges the efforts made across the State (Purple Heart license plates, named facilities and roads, and Governor’s proclamations) to honor and acknowledge the sacrifices of our veterans who were wounded or killed in action.

PRIORITY 14. Change Forms from “Are You A Veteran?” to “Have You Ever Served in the Military?”

Several studies and reports have pointed out that not all veterans identify with the word “veterans.” For example, some veterans believe the term refers only to those who served in combat and many women from earlier era conflicts also do not self identify as a veteran. Participants recommended that State of Nevada agencies who collect veteran data add the data collection question, "Have you ever served in the United States Military?" to their forms/applications (during the next programmed update) in place of the question "Are you a veteran?" Asking if people have served in the military will help ensure that their status as a veteran is identified.

PRIORITY 15. Create a State System to Train and Certify Veterans Service Officers (VSOs)

There are currently 28 VSO in Nevada who are accredited with the VA and are actively working. VA Accreditation permits the VSO to represent a veteran in the federal claims process under a power of attorney. Twelve of these VSO are state employees and the other sixteen work for nonprofit organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars. While most VSO are dedicated, caring veteran supporters, not all are trained to the same standard and many lack formal training or internal certification and oversight systems. Requiring the State of Nevada expand their training and certification program to all VSO will ensure consistency in training standards and may improve claims outcomes.

PRIORITY 16(1). Increase State funding for Veteran Outreach

This recommendation was more general than, but within the same general theme of, other recommendations that supported improving outreach to ensure that veterans and their families

understand and have access to benefits that will help our veterans and their families lead high-quality lives.

PRIORITY 16(2). Allow State Employers to Select Veterans without Competition for Jobs

Presently, the State of Nevada provides veterans hiring preferences by adding five points to state hiring examinations for all veterans and ten points for veterans with disabilities. This recommendation would allow state employers to select a veteran for a job without requiring that they compete for the position under current state policies.

PRIORITY 17. Program to Help Prevent Veteran Homelessness

While Nevada has made significant strides in ending veteran homelessness, there are still veterans who are homeless or living in substandard housing. Also noted, there were fewer resources to address the issue of homelessness in rural Nevada. The recommendation was made that efforts were put into place to end homelessness, with a focus on single males who may have fewer resources.

PRIORITY 18. Extend the Expiration on Marijuana Medical Cards from One to Four Years

This recommendation came from a participant who stated that the short renewal period causes extra, unneeded administration and may prevent people who would benefit from medical marijuana from seeking this treatment.

ITEMS FOR CONGRESSIONAL CONSIDERATION

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS WERE IDENTIFIED for Congressional consideration; these issues were not prioritized and will be sent to Nevada's congressional delegation for their information.

Reno:

1. Increase suicide prevention training
2. Offer automatic citizenship for those who complete military service with an honorable discharge
3. Extend the TAACCCT Grant (TAACCCT-4 currently ends August, 30 2017). TAACCCT funds programs helping economically dislocated workers who are changing careers (includes veterans)
4. Funding support for VSO to support Native American veterans
5. Improve Choice Act referral and billing systems
6. Improve Native American healthcare options
7. Offer VA caregiver support (at hospitals and off-campus sites)
8. VA – review hiring process to improve number and quality of medical care providers in rural areas
9. Keep Post 9/11 GI Bill housing stipend at same level (HR 3016 proposes to reduce it by 50%)
10. Offer fertility treatment for wounded veterans

Las Vegas:

1. VA retirees should receive Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP). Currently, only retirees with a VA disability rating of 50 percent or greater receive concurrent pay
2. Make MST a specific rating category on the VBA Compensation and Pension Medical Examination
3. Change "Are you a veteran?" to "Have you ever served in the military?" on all federal forms
4. VA should authorize the use of medical marijuana where appropriate
5. Expand Veterans Service Officer participation in DoD transition programs (TAP, etc)
6. Create and fund rural veterans centers
7. Create a resource center at the Southern Nevada VA Hospital for veterans; copying/print/phone access to veterans
8. Expand treatment and compensation for issues associated with environmental exposure
9. Pursue more federal grants for housing and accessibility for disabled veterans
10. Offer onsite child care for those accessing services in VA facilities
11. Prevent veteran homelessness
12. Congress needs to appropriate the federal match for the Northern NV Veterans Home
13. Create legislation to prevent dishonor to the American flag
14. Expand the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 ("Choice Act") to include all medical services (including dental services)
15. Expand programs that help educate veterans and their families about benefits they are eligible for
16. DoD should create a unified military medical command to reduce cost and increase effectiveness of America's Armed Forces