

## NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date: 1 June 2021**

**Location: Virtual ZOOM**

### **OFFICERS and VOTING MEMBERS in attendance ( ✓ ):**

Paul Lloyd - Chair  
Diane Domenicis - Vice Chair  
Denise DeBlois - Secretary  
Armand Soucy - Chaplain  
Kelly Dobens - Treasurer  
David Kenney - Chair Emeritus

#### **Air Force Association**

✓ Kevin Grady (prim)                      Gavin MacAloon

#### **Air Force Sergeants Association**

Bob Heichlinger (prim)                      Ray Hayes (alt)

#### **American Legion**

✓ Mike Lopez (prim)                      Robert Blais (alt)                      Ollie Brooks (alt)

#### **AUSA Col. Cross Chapter**

✓ Greg d'Arbonne (prim)                      ✓ Ed Harrington (alt)

#### **Camp Resilience**

✓ Kurt Webber (prim)                      ✓ Ed Harrington (alt)

#### **Catholic War Veterans**

✓ Denise DeBlois (prim)                      Robert Guldner (alt)                      ✓ Armand Soucy (alt)

#### **Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association**

✓ Nate Smith (prim)                      Larry Ward (alt)

#### **Disabled American Veterans**

✓ Andrew Patterson (prim).                      Robert Guldner (alt).                      Paul Boore (alt)

**Korean War Veterans**

√ Mike Lopez (prim) Conrad Perreault (alt)

**Marine Corps League**

√ Shawn Carboni (prim) Mark Lindsley (alt) √ Chris Peirce (alt)

**Military Officers Association (MOAA)**

√ Peter Burdett (prim) Joseph DiChiaro (alt) Warren Coulter (alt)

**Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)**

Tony Fowler

**National Guard Association of NH**

√ Peter Duffy (prim) √ Roy Hunter (alt) Mike Horne (alt)

**NH Army Retiree Council**

√ Frank Musmanno (prim) √ Mike Rice (alt)

**NH National Guard Enlisted Association**

√ Mike Lestage (prim) √ Mike Rice (alt) Jack Howley (alt)

**NH Veterans Association**

√ Kelly Dobens (prim) Mike Young (alt) Doug Crooker( alt)

**Patriot Resilient Leader Institute (Camp Resilience)**

√ Kurt Webber √ Ed Harrington

**Reserve Officers Association of NH**

√ David Kenney (prim) Mike Horne (alt) BG John Pappas (alt)

**Rolling Thunder.**

√ Bruce Garry (prim) Keith Hurrell (alt) √ Diane Domenicus (alt)

**Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)**

√ Darwin Beeman (prim) Russ Norris (alt) √ Paul Lloyd (alt)

**Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41)**

√ Ray Goulet (prim) Alan Grant (alt)

**Legislative Members (Voting):**

√ Al Baldasaro  
√ Regina Birdsell

Bob Guida  
Patricia Klee

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS: (non-voting):**

**Governor's Office** - Jane Graham  
**Senator Maggie Hassan** - Justin Troiano  
**Senator Jeanne Shaheen** - Chris Scott  
**Congressman Chris Pappas** - Patrick Carroll  
**Congresswoman Annie Kuster** - Tom Giancola

**COMMITTEE ADVISORS/AGENCIES:**

Kevin Forrest, Director, VAMC Manchester, NH  
Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, VAMC White River Junction, VT  
BG David J. Mikolaities - Adjutant General NHNG  
Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General- NHNG  
Shawn Buck, NH State Veterans Cemetery  
Margaret LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home  
William Gaudreau, Director, Office of Veteran Services  
Michael Hartt, American Legion Veterans Service Officer  
Amy Cook, DHHS  
John Reed, Martin's Point  
Dan Marcek, VETFLIX  
Barry Conway, Sage Emeritus  
Jorge Dreusicke, American Legion  
JP Marzullo, Liberty House

**GUESTS:**

Dr. Becky Rhoads for Dr. Brett Rusch (VAMC White River Junction, VT)  
Major Shannon Van Splunder, Pease Airshow Director  
Philip Taub - Swim With A Mission

**OPEN MEETING/CALL TO ORDER:** Paul Loyd, Chairman, convened meeting at 1700.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman

**Invocation:** Armand Soucy

**Moment of Silence:**

**Welcome - Remarks of the Chair:** Paul welcomed everyone. He reminded he members and guests that this is an apolitical group. We are here for the veterans.

**Introduction of New Members/Guests:**

Guest Speaker: Pease Airshow Director, Major Shannon Van Splunder

Guest Speaker: Swim With A Mission, Philip Taub

Patrick Carroll from Rep. Chris Pappas's office introduced Jake Friedman.

**Secretary's Report:** Meeting has a quorum.

**Message from the Secretary:** If you are attending the meeting by mobile phone or iPad, please let me know who you are in the chat so I can record your attendance. You can also send me an email: [dmdeblois65@gmail.com](mailto:dmdeblois65@gmail.com)

A motion to accept the minutes of May 4, 2021 was made by Ray Goulet, 2nd Andy Patterson. Unanimous. Motion carries.

**Treasurer's Report:** Kelly Dobens is excused. Chairman Paul Lloyd reported a balance of \$1002.67.

**Comments from Chair Emeritus:** Dave Kenney

Hundreds of people showed up for the Memorial Day service at the NH State Veterans Cemetery. Thank you for your support.

**Guest Speaker:** Major Shannon Van Splunder.

The Airshow at Pease is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, September 11-12, 2021.

We are 101 days away to the Air Show. Friday, September 10th will be a family day. Planes are flying in on Wednesday and Thursday. Saturday will begin with a 9/11 ceremony. There will be a dedication of a statue. Then the static displays will open up. The static display is going to be very involved. We got a C-5 recently and we are still working on a C-17. There is also going to be a STEM event. This will really line up with what the goal of this event. - an open house with the goal of recruiting from the Air National Guard and Army National Guard standpoints. We want to make sure we are looking at the next generation of soldiers and airmen and getting them introduced to our love of aviation and of all things military. The STEM event itself will be back in the quad area. We will be looking at hosting industry leaders and making sure that our recruiters are talking to them and how certain age ranges are a little bit more recruitable than others. We will also be looking at the individual interests of the kids in attendance.

The Airshow will be all day Saturday and Sunday. The aerial acts will start around noon and go on until around 4:00 PM. Then we will do the same thing again on Sunday. The Thunderbirds will close at the airshow.

On Sunday morning, we will have the KC-46 naming ceremony. We will have a community outreach event that will recognize the parts that many people played in order to attract this airplane to the New England region. We were going to do this event last year and then COVID put us off. So it really aligned us with the air show. We are expecting around 100,000 people over two days, not including the family day. Any questions?

Question from the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army in the State of New Hampshire. You were talking about recruiting? I am a Navy pilot. Do you have any positions for me?

Response: Yes, there is a rated Board in October and you are welcome to apply.

Question by Barry Conway: Could you confirm the date? Will the Thunderbirds be there?

Response: September 11th and 12th. It is 101 days from now (June 1, 2021). Yes, it has been all over the papers for the last three weeks now. The Thunderbirds will be flying in the show and will close us out.

There was a question on funding. The Guard will be running this show. The last time the Guard ran the show was in 2007. We had three airshows in a row in 2010, 2011 and 2012. According to the reports, a lot of people were very upset that they were not Guard hosted. The cost to get a family in the door, park and get some bottles of water was around \$150. This Guard hosted airshow will be a lot more accessible for more people. In 2012, a lot of the funding dried up from an Air Force perspective for

airshows. In general, you will see that they dipped a lot across the country. The Blue Angels and Thunderbirds kept flying so a lot of the airshows were primarily focused on being civilian airshows. We are bringing them back on the Guard ramp. This is the first time since 2007. That means our budget is small. We are doing whatever we can to cut corners as well as keep air eye on COVID protocols and security. The ramp has been shrunk down. Our own defenders will walk and secure the ramp.

Question by Andy Patterson: Are you affiliated with the civilian agency who is doing stuff for the vendors?

Response: We are affiliated in that in order for a Guard airshow to be a completely legal entity. Airshows are a non standard event. The civilian agencies can control the sponsorships. We (the Guard) cannot.

Comment by Warren Perry: Thank you for coming tonight. I appreciate that you are doing this. Tomorrow, I may hook you up with Jane Graham in case there are any questions from the Governor's office.

## **SUPPORTING AGENCY REPORTS:**

### **Manchester VA Update:** Corey Beem

Slides were sent out. He initially had technical difficulties and presented after the NHVH Update.

Items of Interest:

VHA Chief of Staff visit is expected on the Seacoast. Director Kevin Forrest and other leaders throughout New England and the Division are together in Portsmouth at a leadership forum or summit. It is really nice to be able to see the leadership get back together.

Manchester's Memorial Day Message: [Manchester VA Memorial Day Celebration 2021 - You Tube.](#)

Toxic Exposures Announcement: Veterans who served in the Vietnam War and in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War and after September 11, 2001.

The first decision concerns the addition of bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism to the list of those conditions presumptively associated with exposure to Agent Orange. This implements provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (P.L. 116-283), and VA will apply the provisions of court orders related to *Nehmer v. Us Department of Veterans Affairs*, which may result in an earlier date for entitlement to benefits for Veterans who served

in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam era. Vietnam era Veterans and their survivors, who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions, will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim and will receive a letter from VA on the status of their claim.

The second decision involved Veterans who served in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War and after September 11, 2001. After a thorough review of the scientific evidence around toxic exposures, including the report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, I am directing initiation of rule making to consider creating presumptions of service connection for chronic respiratory conditions associated with exposure to airborne hazards during military service in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the covered periods of conflict, which may include asthma, sinusitis and rhinitis. Our approach to this process will be holistic, and we will base our decision on science, in fulfilling our responsibility to Veterans who may have suffered disability due to their service.

#### Personnel Updates:

Erin Paquin was selected as the Chief of Sensory and Rehabilitation Service.

We thank Dr. Glen Gechlik for his time serving as the as the Acting Chief of Staff and welcome Dr. Robert Zwolak and Dr. James Hamilton will be sharing acting roles as of June 12 while the Chief of Staff recruitment continues.

#### Manchester VA Construction Updates:

Clinical Services Building: New Urgent Care and Mental Health spaces; estimated opening - Fall 2021.

Mountain Entrance: Upgraded entrance with an elevator; estimated opening - Fall 2021.

Women's Health Clinic: New spaces for compliant women's healthcare; currently under design; construction projected for 2022.

Loop Road Project: Upgraded utilities to the building and new road loop around the campus; currently under design.

Specialty Care Building: Upgraded spaces for Ophthalmology, Optometry, and Audiology; currently under design; construction projected for 2022.

Sterile Processing Water Upgrades: Water treatment completed.

New Loading Dock: Completed mid May.

Nurse Call Replacement, B15 (CLC): New compliant system; construction projected start 2021.

COVID Vaccination Data:

10,530 patients vaccinated.

714 employees vaccinated.

309 caregivers, spouses and other agency vaccinations.

We are still operating COVID Clinics as well as supporting point of care vaccination when that is appropriate.

**White River Junction VA Update:**

Slides were sent in advance.

Dr. Brett Rusch and Dr. Becky Rhoads were not available to give a briefing.

**DMAVS Update:** Shawn Buck

NH Office of Veterans Services - Bill Gaudreau: No report.

Department of Military Affairs & Veterans Services - Amy Cook

Applications are currently being accepted by DMAVS and NH Employment Security for the 2021 New Hampshire Veteran Friendly Business Program. You can find a brochure on the DMAVS website. You can go right to the agency - Department of Military Affairs and Veteran Services. The deadline for applications is August 30th. So we have all summer. Applications can be submitted anytime but we are not going to start reviewing until the July/August timeframe.

We will also be hosting virtual information with Question & Answer sessions about the program and the applications in June and July. You will find those dates and the virtual link on the DMAVS website where the application is available.

Amy Cook is also available to speak to businesses or any group association or network meeting in order to promote the program. Please promote this program within your personal and professional network as it serves to benefit not only the military and veteran community, but also the New Hampshire business communities. Contact Amy Cook with questions or an invitation to speak about and promote the program.

Amy Cook's contact information: [amy.Cook@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:amy.Cook@dhhs.nh.gov)

Tel. 603-271-9394.

Link to the 2021 NH Veteran Friendly Business application: <https://www.dmavs.nh.gov/veteran-friendly-businesses-0/apply>

NH State Veterans Cemetery - Shawn Buck

Thank you to all who helped out at the NHSVC on Memorial Day. Despite the rain and and everything else, it went relatively well. I appreciate everybody coming.

### **NHVH Update:** Peggy LeBrecque

We have 100 veterans currently at the Veterans Home - 93 men and 7 women. The average age is about 83. Our youngest veteran is 62 and the oldest is 99.

We had a wonderful virtual ceremony that we ran today in our town hall. About 20 of our veterans came over to watch that. I want to thank everybody who participated by sending in virtual remarks to our veterans. They truly did appreciate it.

The other thing our veterans and their families are very excited about is that we have started with social excursions. So our veterans are able to get out into the community or just go for a drive with their loved ones. And I will tell you that we have very excited and happy faces over the last couple of weeks with that. So we look forward to the day when we are moving away from masks and moving back into a regular visitation and the CDC guidelines to make sure that our veterans are safe, protected, but have the right to visit and do things that they want to do. So that wraps that up.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

None.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### #1. Nominations for Vice Chair

Chairman Paul Lloyd opened up nominations for Vice Chair. Are there any other nominations for Vice Chair? He asked 3 times and then closed nominations. We will move forward with the election. A motion was made and seconded for the election of Andy Patterson as the Vice Chair for the next term of two years. Unanimous vote. Motion passed.

## #2. Nominations for Treasurer

Chairman Paul Lloyd opened up nominations for Treasurer. Last month Kelly Dobens was nominated for Treasurer. Are there any other nominations for Treasurer? He asked 3 times and then closed nominations. We will move forward with the election. A motion was made and decoded for the the election of Kelly Dobens as Treasurer for the next term. Unanimous vote. Motion passed.

## #3. Summer Outing

Chairman Paul Lloyd received an email from Bill Roy. The Sweeney Post is willing to host the summer outing for SVAC this year in August before our next meeting in September. Paul made a motion for a summer outing. It was seconded. Unanimous vote. Motion passed.

## #4. In-Person Meetings

Chairman Paul Lloyd said he thinks we will start back up with in place in person meetings. He will coordinate with the training facility in Pembroke if everybody is ok with that. If you do no want to say so here, then send an email.

## #5. Army Birthday Celebration

The Army birthday celebration will be the 14th of June, two weeks from today at the National Guard Headquarters in Concord at noon. There will be a zoom link if you cannot attend. If attending by zoom, you or your members can send Chairman Paul Lloyd an email.

## #6. Our Community Salutes

Greg D'Arbonne thanked everybody who contributed. Many of you are here. Your organization contributed. It was a resounding success. We had more donations than we used. He would like to hold onto the money for next year. The Fisher Cats already approached Greg and said they loved it so much that they would be willing to have another Our Community Salutes and Military Appreciation Day game at the Fisher Cat stadium next year. All the parents and kids that Greg talked to loved it. Everyone did a tremendous job. Greg said he cannot thank everybody enough. He will send everybody out a report of how much was collected and how much is left over. So when next year comes, we may be able to use that money for the whole thing. It was a great venue. Thank you very much.

## #7. State Conventions

Bill Roy said that the American Legion Department will have a one day Convention on July 10th at the Greenville Legion pavilion on Route 31. It will start at 9:30 AM.

Andy Patterson said that the Disabled American Veterans will have a one day hybrid Convention at the Doubletree Hotel in Nashua on Saturday, June 5th. It will start with a Memorial service at 9:00 AM. There will be a free lunch at 1:30 PM.

#### #8. Swim With A Mission - Philip Taub

Philip sees a lot of names on the Zoom meeting that he recognizes. This is a really excellent group of people. Swim With A Mission is a relatively new charity. We are only four years old and we have already given away over \$6 million. Most of that is in New Hampshire. We have given money to every NH Veteran Service Organization that we have been able to find. We have found more than 30 of them.

We have our big fundraising events coming up July 8th, 9th, and 10th. We will be bringing about 40 Navy Seals and 20 Green Berets into the state. So I apologize in advance if that offends anybody. But it's a great group. We are doing a lot of events, five events in three days. The biggest and most impactful event will be at the Fisher Cats Stadium on July 10th. It is all afternoon. What we are advertising to the public is that they will get to see the Navy SEALs do a demonstration of skills. They will be parachuting in fast, roping from hilos. They will have their K9 unit. We are also very proud that the Coast Guard will be doing a demonstration. Our Army National Guard will be doing a flyover. It is going to be an opportunity for our crowd to thank the National Guard for everything they have done with COVID and everything else. Our State Police SWAT team is going to do a demo as is the Manchester K9 Unit. So it is going to be a great day. We have also invited all of our Veteran Service Organizations. Anyone here who has not heard about it and wants to have a booth, let me know. We will have about 7000 people in a stadium with a veteran heavy crowd and 30 plus services. Veterans will find services on that day beyond all the fun and the fundraising.

Tickets are on sale on our website: [www.swimwithamission.org](http://www.swimwithamission.org). There is a ton of information there. I would be very grateful if each of you could help us spread the word about this event at the Fisher Cat Stadium. We have learned a lot in four years about the state of our veteran community. We are trying as best as we can in a very cooperative fashion. We welcome input from the group. We have learned a lot and we have raised a lot of money. We will raise more in those three days. We want to spend that money as wisely as we can. We want to make New Hampshire a great destination for veterans to come and live here and to make this a better place for veterans in general. We are creating therapy programs and equine immersion programs. We want to help veterans with homelessness. There is a lot of stuff going on.

We have actually convened a summit next week with veteran groups. That will be a continuing effort. So you will hear some more from me. We would love to get input from as many people as we can. We want to continue to be as thoughtful as we can about how we spend this money to make the most impact for our NH veterans. Thank you.

Comment by Jim Goss: A big shout out to Phil and Julie for everything that they have done over the years for this program and the resulting funding. We certainly do appreciate it.

**LEGISLATIVE BRIEFINGS:** Kevin Grady - Legislative Chair

We are looking at five bills in the house and only two of them actually advanced anywhere. The first one, House Bill 117, was left over from last year because it got put on a bill the Governor vetoed with 61 of its friends relative to the use of force at National Guard facilities just aligning the language with the National language that's been signed by the Governor.

The other bill, House Bill 451, was combined with the Masons about a decal plate. We put in there that a Gold Star family would not have to pay the \$10 fee for gold star decal plate. That has also been signed by the Governor. So our two House Bills both have been signed by the Governor. There is going to be no more activity there.

On the Senate side, we have two bills that we are still following. Both of these bills have been amended slightly. They are both carrying and ought to pass. They are both on the consent calendar which means that Thursday and Friday of this week when they had a marathon house session, I would expect both these bill to pass and then be on their way to the Governor. Just to refresh the members' memory, Senate Bill 120, relative to Physician's Assistants at the Manchester VA, they just want to be able to make sure that a Physician's Assistant who has a New Hampshire license can be supervised by someone who works at the VA that carries a license from another state. And we are just going to try and fix that up, clean that language up a little bit.

Senate Bill 143 was about the National Guard enlistment incentive program. It was in with 11 of its closest friends. The session for that executive session was rather lengthy. And during the process of that, we used to be 12 of 12. Now we are 7 of 8. So basically, they took five bills out of this bill and then they added one more after that. It is on the consent calendar. Kevin expects it will pass later on this week. Then it will be on its way to the Governor for signature. He will keep an eye on this stuff over the summer.

Comment by Warren Perry: For the enlistment incentive program, that entire omnibus bill was amended pretty heavily in the House. So before it goes to the Governor, the Senate will have to consent to the amendments before it goes to the Governor. So don't forget that part.

HB 117 - relative to the use of force at NH National Guard facilities. This was one of last year's bills.

HB 451 - waive the fees for the decals for the Gold Star Families.

HB 317 - relative to the treatment of veterans' disability payments for purposes of determining child support

HB 443 - relative to an extended term of imprisonment for assaulting military personnel.

HB 580 - requiring the approval of the Governor before the NH National Guard can be deployed overseas.

SB 120 - relative to physicians assistants employed at the Manchester VA Medical Center.

SB-132 - adopting omnibus legislation related to COVID-19.

SB 143 - New title: adopting omnibus legislation relative to certain agency requests (Old title: National Guard Enlistment Incentive Program).

#### **LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:**

**Jane Graham (Governor's Office):** Oral briefing.

We are mostly focused on trying to get the budget through. I also wanted to let everyone know, in case you had not seen, the state as the Governor puts it is trying to get out of the vaccination business right now. So all the state has right now is transferring to doing only second vaccine appointments. We are ending first appointments. The vaccinations are going to transition back over to your local doctor's office. As far as I know, the pharmacies are still going to continue their programs. Hannaford's is now doing walk-in appointments. So there will be wide availability. We are just going to ramp down the Guard run sites. The Guards are great. A lot of people need to return to work. So we are working on getting that going. The budget is the focus right now.

The Governor really enjoyed going to the Memorial Day ceremony. It was quite a wet one. It was good to see everybody there and it felt really great to be face to face. It has been a while.

**Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen):** Briefing attached.

Thank you for everything that this group does. Senator Shaheen was really happy to be able to join the other night over at the Veteran's Cemetery. The weather was what it was but she absolutely enjoyed being able to see lots of friendly faces. There have been a couple of things since we last met.

Question by Greg d'Arbonne: Did you say that the legislation will prevent the purchase of anything that has PFAS in it?

Response: Right. There is a lot of stuff that has PFAS in it including the wrapper of the Big Mac I bought last night. So I am going to unwrap that one no pun intended a little bit more for you. I will report back to you and Paul for the group.

Comment by Greg: I think it is important that we make sure it does not get into the environment, leak into the ground. That's more important and beneficial to everybody.

**Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan):** Oral briefing.

It was really wonderful seeing some of you at the Veteran's Cemetery over the weekend. Despite the weather, spirits were high. I look forward to seeing you all more in person as things get back to normal.

May 5, 2021: Senator Hassan and Senator Rubio introduce Bipartisan legislation to expedite the Public Service Loan Forgiveness for Service Members. This would allow service members to pause their student loan payments while deployed or on extended active duty orders and to count that period of time toward their student loan forgiveness which is currently not allowed.

May 10, 2021: Senator Hassan joined Senator Shaheen in introducing the Veterans Family Health Services Act.

May 12, 2021: Senator Hassan joined Senator Shaheen in introducing the Greatest Generation Memorial Act. This would authorize the Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC and the proceeds would go to much needed repairs.

May 19, 2021: Senator Hassan joined the New Hampshire delegation in announcing that the New Hampshire Veterans Home will receive \$1.32 million from the American Rescue Plan. The funds will be used to support veterans homes, enhancing cleaning services, obtaining personal protective equipment and other equipment, or temporarily expanding staffing levels to care for veterans.

May 26, 2021: Senator Hassan helped advance a big piece of legislation for our veterans. The comprehensive and overdue support for troops or the Comprehensive

and Overdue Support for Troops (COST) of War Act of 2021 passed the Veterans Committee. It also includes key pieces legislation which will allow all veterans who were at risk of toxic exposure to obtain immediate and lifelong access to health care from the VA. It would also establish a new science based and veteran focused process for the establishment of new presumptive conditions and would provide thousands of toxic exposure veterans who have been long ignored or forgotten, including our Agent Orange veterans suffering from hypertension.

On the same day, the VA Committee also passed their Hire Veterans Health Heroes Act. This would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to actively recruit and hire transitioning service members. The VA has over 45,000 open healthcare positions.

Committee Work on May 20, 2021: During a Veterans of Affairs Committee hearing for nominations to the VA, Senator Hassan secured key commitments on supporting veterans mental health care and improving VA accountability. Senator Hassan pushed for the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs nominee Donald Remy to commit to prioritizing the mental health of approximately 200,000 service members who transition to civilian life each year. Mr. Remy discussed the importance of supporting veterans mental health and was looking at the Solid Start Act. This is one of Senator Hassan's bills which would strengthen a current VA program to promote communication with veterans after they first leave duty. Senator Hassan also pushed for Mr. Remy to create a culture of accountability at the VA. She cited whistleblower complaints from 2019 at White River Junction which involves allegations of serious misconduct by doctors.

Letters - May 9, 2021: The Office of Secretary of Defense signed a memorandum which will enable members of the National Guard and Reserves to concurrently use federal tuition assistance and GI Bill benefits to fund their education. This is similar to what active duty service members currently have. The Secretary of Defense signed this memorandum after a letter was sent by a group of Senators.

State Activity: In the beginning of the month, the Senator held a virtual roundtable as part of Mental Health Awareness Month in May. Her and Congressman Pappas discussed their bills on the green alert systems which would help find missing and at risk veterans. Over the Memorial Day weekend, Senator Hassan had the opportunity to attend the Memorial Day ceremony at the State Veterans Cemetery as well as provide remarks at the field of honor event in Rochester, NH. That was put on by a group called Vouchers for Veterans. It was a great event for anybody on the seacoast. I would encourage you to put that on your calendar for next year.

Question by Peter Burdett: I noticed that the VA came out with some guidance concerning toxic exposure but they seem to have focused on only the time period after 9/11, not to Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Did you take note of that and see if it can get married up to the bill you were just talking about? Make sure that those that served underneath the big clouds of the Kuwait Oil Well Fires are also going to be on that bill.

Response: We did get some email traffic on that as it pertains to the current legislation. And I know our initial understanding is that those veterans should be covered. But I am definitely happy to circle back and let you know for sure.

**Tom Giancola (Rep. Annie Kuster):** Oral briefing.

I am on the phones tonight. It was good to see so many of you at the Veteran's Cemetery despite the weather. It was really good to see so many folks turn out for that.

My colleagues had touched upon the funding for the veteran fertility treatments. We are certainly excited to see that.

Ghost Army Congressional Gold Medal Act: The members of the ghost army under this bill would receive the Congressional Gold Medal. This Bill passed 350 to 75. So it was really great to see all that support. We are looking towards getting that bill through the Senate. Our office is in touch with several members on the Senate side. There is also a National touring exhibit on the Ghost Army that is actually going to be launching on Monday at the Cheshire Historical Society. The Keene folks are interested in that. So that's a happy circumstance.

**Patrick Carroll (Rep. Chris Pappas):** Briefing attached.

We also had a nice time and moving experience at the Veteran's Cemetery on Sunday night and then Rochester on Monday. The veterans event in Rochester really had a great turnout. After that event, the Congressman and I went to Manchester for the event at Veteran's Park and the unveiling of a new Memorial there which is beautiful. Then we headed over to the Sweeney Post with Mr. Mike Lopez. It was nice to see a room full of people there and to see people out. So we definitely met a lot of good veterans the past couple of days. It was really nice to just be face to face with veterans and to hear how it has been for them for the past year under COVID. What that experience has been like helps us a lot.

Comment by Dave Kenney: Maybe this is something we can take up at the next advisory meeting with the Congressman. Since we are getting ready to pull out of Afghanistan, one of the things that comes to light is what is going to happen to the interpreters and their families. The Taliban has already started increasing and they are flexing their muscle. They are increasing a lot of their attacks, roadside bombs, etc. The fact of the matter is that we had a lot of people over there, Afghanistan nationals who supported our troops directly by providing interpretive services. Now they are going to be bailed on and left behind. I'm just curious if Congress is addressing that issue in some way or expediting a process where these people can be vetted and essentially allowed to leave Afghanistan because we know their life is going to be in danger should they remain.

Response: I do not have a lot right now. But we have open cases for some interpreters from people here in the district, veterans who are trying to get some people over from Afghanistan. So I will have more stuff for you in the next week or two, but it is definitely something we can bring up. It is something we have been aware of for a little while now. We are currently working with the State Department to see exactly where things stand on some of the special visa programs. I am glad you brought that up. We will have more to talk about.

Comment by Bruce Duffy: The civilian contractors will be in the same boat as the interpreters. The contractors are feeding our guys and taking care of the septic and all those things for sustainment, particularly when we stopped the open burn pits. These contractors will face the same fate if we let troops go.

Response: I agree. I would say probably in the past few days when the Congressman was out at events, it was the number one issue that was brought up by veterans. There was concern about Bagram Air Base. A lot of stuff came up. So I can assure up that it is some stuff we are going to be digging into and looking at the opportunity costs that come from moving troops out of there. They are not going to be able to take cues and fly them out to the aircraft carriers like they did in 1975 out of Vietnam. We have heard from some Afghanistan veterans that have had some concerns that they brought up to the Congressman. To follow up on your Dave's question, there was a pretty large bipartisan letter on the Senate that went to the administration. It's on the radar.

Comment by Dave Kenney: I hope so. It is concerning because we are hitting June already. Time is of the essence if we are to meet the timeline that President Biden has set. It is not one of those things where we could just say we will grant them visas. It is going to be after our troops pull out and that is too late. They really need to start the vetting process ASAP before security is pulled out completely. It is important that it really gets a high priority now.

Question by Darwin Beeman: For veterans that were in Iraq and Afghanistan, do they have to register and get on the burn pit registry to be covered under this new bill?

Response: I will find out and get more details for you.

### **Good of the Order:**

No July meeting.

Date to be determined for an August outing at the Sweeney Post.

Peter Duffy: There are openings on the NH Selective Service Boards. There are 10 local boards in the state and they are staffed by volunteers who are serving under a Presidential appointment. If the draft were ever to return, these local boards would hear classification appeals of draftees. We have openings on all boards and we are looking

for applications. If you are remotely interested in serving your community, contact me. The government recommends and the President appoints. It is a way to serve the country and it is strictly voluntary. The training is provided by the Selective Service for each member of the board. Thank you.

**Calendar of Events:**

1st Wednesday- Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Veterans Park, Manchester, NH.

4th Tuesday - Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Langdon Park, Portsmouth, NH.

Every Thursday - Weekly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Hesky Park, Meredith, NH.

June 14, 2021: Army birthday.

June 17, 2021: The big vigil - the Freedom Ride during the Laconia Bike Week.

June 27, 2021: Homeland Heroes Motorcycle Ride to benefit Captain Ryan Phaneuf who died in the line of duty last year. Senator Birdsell is on the Board of Directors at Homeland Heroes Foundation. If interested, let Senator Birdsell or Julie know. They are also looking for sponsors.

**Next meeting date:** Tuesday, September 7, 2021.

**Adjourn Meeting:** 1807.

A motion was made by Ray Goulet to adjourn, seconded. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M DeBlois  
Secretary



**MAY 10, 2021**

**Senators Shaheen, Hassan Join in Introducing Bill to Help Wounded Veterans Start Families**

**\*\*The Veteran Families Health Services Act Would Repeal the VA's Outdated Ban on Certain Fertility Treatments for Veterans with Service-Connected Injuries\*\***

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) joined in introducing the Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2021, comprehensive legislation that would, among other things, ensure that service members' and veterans' fertility treatments, such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), and counseling are covered by their health benefits.

Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is prohibited from covering the costs of certain fertility services, despite that fact that there are thousands of service members who are unable to conceive naturally due to injuries that they obtained during their service in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the VA and the Department of Defense offer some forms of fertility treatment and counseling, far too often they fail to meet the needs of these service members and veterans. Today, service members are faced with the choice of pursuing fertility treatments before leaving service or paying thousands of dollars out of pocket later.

"Many service members sustain injuries in the line of duty that make fertility treatments or IVF the only path to start families," said Senator Shaheen. "It's unacceptable that these treatments and counseling are out of reach for many military families because of sky-high costs. It's long past time we modernize our health care system by ensuring these costs are covered – providing our veterans and service members with the health benefits they deserve."

"I met with women veterans in New Hampshire earlier this year who raised their concerns about the challenges that wounded service members and veterans face in particular in accessing fertility treatments in order to have children and start a family," said Senator Hassan. "This legislation would ensure that those who bravely served our country can access fertility treatment and counseling through the VA, and I am proud to work with my colleagues to gain support for this commonsense legislation."

The Veteran Families Health Services Act would expand VA and Department of Defense's current fertility treatment and counseling offerings and empower service members and veterans to start families when the time is right for them. This legislation would:

- Allow service members to cryopreserve their gametes before deployment to a combat zone or hazardous duty assignment and after an injury or illness.

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- Permanently authorize fertility treatment and counseling, including assisted reproductive technology like IVF, for veterans and service members and allow for the use of donated gametes.
- Ensure that veterans' and service members' spouses, partners, and gestational surrogates are appropriately included in eligibility rules.
- Provide support for service members and veterans to navigate their options, find a provider that meets their needs, and ensure continuity of care after a permanent change of station or relocation.
- Expand options for veterans with infertility by allowing VA to provide adoption assistance.
- Require VA and Department of Defense to facilitate research on the long-term reproductive health needs of veterans.
- 

Senators Shaheen and Hassan are working to expand and improve veterans' health care. The American Rescue Plan that Senators Shaheen and Hassan helped pass into law strengthens veterans' health care services, including to support mental health and telehealth, and also includes significant funding for job training to help veterans get good-paying jobs. Senators Shaheen and Hassan also helped secure key priorities for Granite State veterans in the bipartisan veterans package that was signed into law earlier this year, including the Deborah Sampson Act, which Senators Shaheen and Hassan joined in introducing to eliminate barriers to care and services that many women veterans face. The bipartisan package also included a number of other measures cosponsored by Senator Hassan, including supporting veterans experiencing homelessness, helping veterans safely dispose of unwanted medication, and helping address the high rate of unemployment among veterans as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, last year Senators Shaheen and Hassan cosponsored bipartisan legislation, which is now law, to improve veterans' access to mental health care.

**May 11, 2021**

### **Shaheen & Warner Introduce Legislation to Help Reduce Veteran Disability Claims Backlog & Veteran Homelessness through Free Legal Clinics**

*\*\*Bill would provide pro bono legal services to veterans to help expedite claims assistance and legal counsel\*\**

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Mark Warner (D-VA) today introduced legislation to increase cooperation between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and veterans legal clinics. The *Veterans Legal Support Act of 2021* would allow the VA to provide funding to law school legal clinics that provide pro bono legal services to veterans.

Law schools and their student volunteers have helped address disability claims backlogs and veterans homelessness in communities across the country. Under attorney supervision, students provide a range of *pro bono* legal services, including assistance with disability claims, foreclosures, bankruptcies, divorce, child custody and some minor criminal cases. By assisting veterans with complicated benefits claims, legal clinics are turning the VA's most time consuming cases into organized applications that are significantly easier to process. In addition, preventative services like expedited claims assistance and legal counsel offer veterans an opportunity to address challenges before they deteriorate, often resulting in significant long-term savings to the government.

"Veterans legal clinics do tremendous work serving our most vulnerable veterans, allowing them to access essential, high-quality legal services. With many veterans facing bureaucratic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – on issues like foreclosure, accessing public benefits and processing disability claims – ensuring they have access to legal assistance has never been more important," **said Senator Shaheen**. "My bill with Senator Warner allows the VA to work more closely with law school legal clinics to provide critical assistance to the brave men and women who have served and sacrificed for our nation."

"It's an unfortunate reality that too many of our nation's veterans encounter bureaucratic obstacles in accessing the assistance or benefits they've rightfully earned. In order to help address these challenges, veterans legal clinics have stepped in to provide free quality legal services to help veterans cut through the red tape," **said Senator Warner**. "Given the extraordinary sacrifices our veterans have made for our country, I'm proud to be introducing this bill to help our veterans get the timely assistance they need."

**MAY 12, 2021**

### **Shaheen, Rounds Introduce Bill to Support National World War II Memorial**

**\*\*Commemorative coin proceeds would fund Memorial repair at no cost to taxpayers\*\***

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) today joined Senator Mike Rounds (R-SD) to introduce the Greatest Generation Memorial Act to authorize the U.S. Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. Proceeds from coin sales will go toward much-needed repairs and maintenance at the Memorial, and support commemorative and educational programming. Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH) also cosponsored the bill.

"For the millions of U.S. soldiers who served in World War II and the 400,000 who died, the National World War II Memorial is a monument to honor their sacrifice. This memorial helps educate generations of Americans about World War II and our nation's achievements, and its crumbling granite must be repaired to ensure visitors continue to reflect and remember this historical milestone," said Shaheen. "I'm proud to join Senator Rounds in introducing bipartisan

legislation to create commemorative coins whose proceeds will finance critical repairs at the memorial, ensuring we continue to pay tribute to those who bravely fought to defend America during World War II.”

“The National World War II Memorial is a special place for our nation’s veterans and citizens, both young and old, to remember the tremendous sacrifices made by the Greatest Generation,” said Rounds. “I’ve had the honor of visiting this Memorial alongside some of South Dakota’s World War II veterans and I can tell you that it was an unforgettable experience. We must make sure this Memorial is properly maintained for generations to come. Our bipartisan legislation will support the restoration of this Memorial and further education about the Greatest Generation through the creation of a commemorative coin.”

“As the proud daughter of a World War II veteran, I am glad to be a part of this bipartisan push to help honor the Greatest Generation and maintain the National World War II Memorial,” said Hassan. “The World War II Memorial is such a powerful tribute to the incredible sacrifices that these veterans made in order to defeat the Axis powers and keep Americans, safe, secure and free. I urge my colleagues in the Senate to pass this bipartisan bill.”

The National World War II Memorial has hosted over 70 million visitors, including tens of thousands of World War II veterans, since its dedication in 2004. The Memorial is the first in the nation dedicated to all who served during World War II and acknowledges the commitment and achievement of the entire nation. The Memorial honors the 16 million who served in the Armed Forces of the U.S. during World War II, the more than 400,000 who died and the millions who supported the war effort here at home.

Large, growing cracks in the Memorial’s granite columns resulted in partial closure of the monument in 2019. While the Memorial is funded by the National Park Service, the Park Service currently has a \$12 billion capital construction backlog. This legislation will support quick repairs to this important monument.

The commemorative coin will honor the selfless spirit and sacrifice of America’s “Greatest Generation” who bravely fought to defend the nation during World War II. Coin sale proceeds will go to the Friends of the National World War II Memorial, a 501(c)(3) non-profit founded in 2007, to maintain and repair the Memorial, and to make certain educational and commemorative programming remains robust and substantial. The organization plays a vital role in educating the American public about World War II; preserving and maintaining the National World War II Memorial as a treasure for the American people; and facilitating key commemorative programs at the Memorial to pay a fitting tribute to America’s “Greatest Generation.”

**MAY 19, 2021**

**NH Delegation Announces More Than \$1.3 Million to NH Veterans Home from American Rescue Plan**

WASHINGTON – Senator Jeanne Shaheen, U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan, a member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and Representatives Annie Kuster and Chris Pappas, Chair of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee on the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, announced today that the New Hampshire Veterans Home will receive \$1.32 million from the American Rescue Plan that the NH Delegation worked to pass into law to help support veteran care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“One of my top priorities during negotiations for the American Rescue Plan was to secure emergency assistance needed to protect the health and well-being of residents and staff at the New Hampshire Veterans Home, which has suffered heartbreaking losses during this pandemic. Our veterans have made immense sacrifices in service to our nation and we have a duty to provide them with the care and support they deserve,” Senator Shaheen said. “This funding will allow the New Hampshire Veterans Home to obtain critical personal protective equipment, increase staffing and ensure veterans receive the highest quality care possible. I’m pleased the Veterans Home will receive these federal dollars and will continue to connect our veterans with the resources they need to get to the other side of this crisis.”

“The NH Veterans Home is a critical resource and special place, and Granite Staters were devastated that the COVID-19 pandemic took the lives of so many veterans whose sacrifices have allowed the rest of us to live in freedom,” Senator Hassan said. “We must ensure that this major loss of life is never repeated, and that is why I am glad that the New Hampshire Veterans Home is receiving more than a million dollars from the American Rescue Plan to help strengthen their services. This federal funding will provide the dedicated workers at the Home with additional resources to help keep staff members and the veterans who they care for safe.”

“Our Granite State veterans and their families have made incredible sacrifices in service to our state and our country, and it is critical that we continue to deliver the high quality care and support they need as we work to end the COVID-19 pandemic,” Representative Kuster said. “I’m thrilled our NH State Veterans Home will receive this much-needed funding from the American Rescue Plan, and I will continue advocating on behalf of all our active duty, reserve, and retired servicemembers in Congress.”

“The losses suffered by the residents of the New Hampshire Veterans Home and their families over the last year have been simply tragic,” Representative Pappas said. “COVID-19 hit our veterans community especially hard, exacerbating existing issues while creating a host of new health and financial challenges. As Chair of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee on the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, I worked hard to secure the \$1.32 million in funding

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announced today for our veterans in the American Rescue Plan. These dedicated funds for the New Hampshire Veterans Home will help keep patients, families, and staff safe as we continue to deal with COVID-19 and work to put this pandemic in the rear view mirror. More reinforcements are on the way to our veterans, and I am committed to ensuring that these and future funds get to the Veterans Home as quickly as possible.”

This American Rescue Plan funding that the NH Delegation worked to secure will be used to support operational needs at state veterans homes, such as enhancing cleaning services, obtaining personal protective equipment or other equipment, or temporarily expanding staffing levels to care for veterans.

**MAY 25, 2021**

### **Shaheen, Blumenthal Introduce Legislation to Reduce PFAS Exposure Among Service Members & Military Families**

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced legislation today to reduce exposure of harmful PFAS chemicals to service members and their families. The PFAS Free Military Purchasing Act prohibits the Department of Defense from procuring, purchasing and selling items that contain per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), dangerous and toxic chemicals commonly found in many everyday items like food service ware, carpets and rugs, clothing and cosmetics. PFAS exposure has been linked to a number of serious health conditions, including cancer, liver damage, decreased fertility and increased risk of asthma and thyroid disease.

“New Hampshire service members and veterans know all too well the alarming health implications tied to PFAS exposure. We know these harmful chemicals are not only in our water supplies, but also everyday items. It’s unacceptable that taxpayer dollars are being spent on household products that expose our military members and their families to these toxic chemicals,” said Shaheen. “It’s past time we require the Department of Defense to purchase safer, PFAS-free alternatives for our service members so they can use everyday products like cleaning supplies and food packaging without worrying about their personal health. I’m proud to join Senator Blumenthal in this effort to incentivize the Pentagon to protect our military families by banning the purchase of products with well-documented health risks.”

“Service members risk everything to keep us safe. We should do everything we can to keep them safe as well,” said Scott Faber, Environmental Working Group’s Vice President for Government Affairs. “We applaud Senator Blumenthal and Senator Shaheen for introducing legislation to phase PFAS out of everyday products procured or purchased by the DOD. There’s no reason toxic forever chemicals should be in the products our service members take into their homes.”

The items covered by this bill would include non-stick cookware and food service ware for use in galleys or dining facilities, food packaging materials, furniture and floor waxes, carpeting, rugs, curtains, upholstered furniture, personal care items, dental floss, toothpaste, sunscreen, umbrellas, luggage and bags, ski wax, car wax and car window treatment, cleaning products, and shoes and clothing for which PFAS treatment is not currently necessary for an essential function.

Senator Shaheen leads efforts in Congress to uncover the potential health effects related to PFAS contamination, respond to the chemical exposure and remediate polluted sites. Shaheen has consistently secured and boosted federal funding for the PFAS health impact study that she worked to establish four years ago. Because of her efforts, Pease is serving as a model site for the nationwide study. The study at Pease is actively seeking participants. In February, Shaheen reintroduced bipartisan legislation with Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) to provide rural communities under economic strain during the COVID-19 pandemic with \$1 billion in emergency assistance to repair, modernize and renovate failing water infrastructure. She has also championed legislation, the PFAS Testing and Treatment Act that would provide substantial federal funding for PFAS remediation in drinking water, and groundwater, including private wells. In addition, Shaheen joined a bipartisan group of Senators in urging Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to allow state, tribal and local governments to use funds allocated through the American Rescue Plan to address contamination from PFAS, including in local water supplies. Last week, Shaheen asked leaders from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about the agency's efforts to address exposure to toxic PFAS chemicals in New Hampshire during a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing.

## Rep. Pappas DC Action for Vets – May 2021

### Sponsored Bills

- **On Tuesday, May 4, the House Veterans Affairs Committee marked up and passed out of Committee the following bills that Rep. Pappas introduced:**
  - H.R. 2935, VA Beneficiary Debt Collection Improvement Act: would make reforms to the VA's broken and onerous debt collection process.
- **On Wednesday, May 19, the House passed the following bills that Rep. Pappas introduced:**
  - H.R. 2704, Improving VA Accountability to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Act of 2021: would update the VA's antiquated policies and create stronger reporting requirements to address sexual harassment and discrimination. This bill is based on recommendations from a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report.

### Sponsored Letters

- N/A

### Co-Sponsored Bills

- **On Tuesday, May 4, the House Veterans Affairs Committee marked up and passed out of Committee the following bills that Rep. Pappas helped introduce as co-lead:**
  - HR 2082 VA Supply Chain Resiliency Act: would require VA to partner with DOD and join their Warstopper program to ensure that we never face critical supply shortages as we did during the peak of COVID-19
- **On Wednesday, May 19, the House passed the following bills that Rep. Pappas helped introduce as co-lead:**
  - H.R. 2419, Affordable Housing for Homeless Veterans Act of 2021: would reauthorize and amend a program to allow VA to sell, lease, rent, or donate a home which was acquired by VA, to house veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
  - H.R. 2911, VA Transparency & Trust Act of 2021: would require VA to report to Congress on the tens of billions of dollars in emergency funding given to the Department to respond to COVID-19.
- **Armed Forces Transgender Dependent Protection Act**: would ensure gender dysphoria is protected by law as a qualification for EFMP enrollment. AFTDPA would also prohibit DoD from assigning service members with transgender dependents to assignments in states or countries that prohibit or otherwise restrict medically necessary treatments for gender dysphoria. AFTDPA would give service members currently serving in a state that restricts medically necessary care for their dependents the option to PCS to another duty location within 30 days of the law's enactment.
- **Army Security Agency Monument Act**: would establish a monument for Army Security Agency (ASA) veterans at Arlington National Cemetery.
- **Military Spouse Hiring Act**: would incentivize employers to hire spouses of members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

- **CARS for Vets Act:** would expand the auto-adaptability grant from a one-time benefit, to a benefit every 10 years.
- **Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program Extension Act:** would make permanent the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants for the transportation of highly rural veterans to medical care.
- **Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act:** would allow TRICARE recipients to stay on their parents health care plans until the age of 26.
- **Memorial Day resolution recognizing and honoring those who have died in service to our country**

### Co-Signed Letters

- N/A

### Meetings

- **May 3, 2021:** Green Alert Act roundtable with Sen. Hassan and local advocates
- **May 4, 2021:** Meeting with Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Denis McDonough
- **May 5, 2021:** Hosted Veterans Tele-Town Hall on TeleHealth
- **May 10, 2021:** Hosted first Veterans Advisory Committee monthly meeting
- **May 11, 2021:** Meeting with Undersecretary of Veterans Affairs
- **May 13, 2021:** Meeting with Military Officers Association of America
- **May 19, 2021:** Participated in the Jack Health Veterans Count Radio-a-thon
- **May 20, 2021:** Meeting with National Association of Superintendents of U.S. Naval Shore Establishments' (NAS NSE) chapter at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard
- **May 24, 2021:** Meeting with VA General Counsel

### Additional Actions

- **May 19, 2021:** announced the New Hampshire Veterans Home will receive \$1.32 million from the American Rescue Plan that he and other members of the NH delegation worked to pass

### Committee Hearings

- **HVAC Full Committee Markup**
  - Tuesday, May 4, 2021
  - Reported 26 bills favorably, including:
    - H.R. 2704, Improving VA Accountability to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Act of 2021
    - H.R. 2935, VA Beneficiary Debt Collection Improvement Act
    - H.R. 2419, Affordable Housing for Homeless Veterans Act of 2021
    - H.R. 2082, VA Supply Chain Resiliency Act]
- **HVAC Full Committee Legislative Hearing**
  - Wednesday, May 5, 2021
  - Considered Rep. Pappas' PFAS Registry Act
- **HVAC Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Hearing on Diversity and Inclusion Efforts at the VA**
  - Thursday, May 6, 2021

- Asked how the diversity and inclusion effort at the VA not only makes moral sense and is the right thing to do, but also how it will improve the VA's results for veterans
- Asked if the VA has the resources it needs to truly implement its diversity and inclusion efforts
- Asked how best the VA can design and implement outreach programs and efforts to improve its record on diversity and inclusion
- Asked how the technical assistance reviews the VA utilizes to review facilities across the country are implementing a model EEOO program and how the VA chooses which facilities to review, what the review process entails, how the findings from that process can improve the VA's diversity and inclusion efforts, and which activities the VA should prioritize when conducting these reviews
- Asked when the VA would have feedback on his legislation, the Improving VA Accountability to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Act
- **HVAC Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Hearing on Military Transition during the COVID-19 Pandemic**
  - Wednesday, May 12, 2021
  - Asked what resources there are during the military transition process that is tailored to LGBT transitioning servicemembers
  - Asked what recommendations they would have for how policymakers can better support LGBT veterans during the transition process
  - Asked how the DoD and the VA are working together to ensure that servicemembers who are transitioning have stable housing
  - Asked how the Honor Foundation incorporates families and loved ones into its transition program and how lessons learned from its experience could inform improvements to the TAP program
  - Asked what the DoD has heard from the White Mountain National Forest Service about its Skillbridge program partnership experience and if DoD would be interested in expanding the program
- **HVAC Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Hearing on Protecting VA Whistleblowers and Promoting Accountability**
  - Wednesday, May 19, 2021
  - Asked the VA who is responsible for implementing the OAWP's recommendations for disciplining those who act out against whistleblowers
  - Asked the VA about the OAWP's role in tracking settlement agreements between individuals and the VA to make sure the VA follows through on its promises
  - Asked how the Office of Special Counsel ensures that the whistleblower is made whole after it concludes their investigation.
  - Asked what additional authorities and/or reforms would the OAWP need to be more effective in its mission
  - Asked about progress with VA's handling of whistleblower cases in the last two years
  - Asked why the VA and OAWP's "duty to assist" is important and how they can help whistleblowers better navigate the whistleblower system more effectively
  - Asked about issues involved with the VA's process for negotiating and enforcing settlement agreements

- **HVAC Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Hearing on Military Transition during the COVID-19 Pandemic**
  - Wednesday, May 26, 2021
  - Asked about the relationship between veteran homelessness and veteran employment and any trends as the economy recovers from COVID-19
  - Asked how the pandemic has affected demand for the VA's employment and education assistance programs and how the VA has addressed this increased demand and what resources are needed to make sure veterans have access to these services
- **HVAC Full Committee Hearing on the American Jobs Plan and VA Infrastructure**
  - Thursday, May 27, 2021
  - Asked the VA if they have any estimate for how many appointments or procedures are delayed due to infrastructure issues or how much care VHA is referring to the community because of unplanned physical plant issues
  - Asked the VA which properties need expanded use lease authority for, where they are, what they will be used for, and how much revenue the VA anticipates generating from those properties.
  - Asked the VA how the diversification of the servicemember and veterans populations can inform the infrastructure repairs and investments the VA plans to make.
  - Asked how increased broadband connectivity investments will help veterans' access to VA healthcare through telehealth services.