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Brandon Chong and Larry Simpson accept donation from Nirmalpal Sachdev



Gifford and Devincent with Bidens in 2010



Secretary Austin

President's Column

As an educator in Illinois, I try to follow the national pulse on educational and diversity issues across the country. Most recently, I came across the news about a Texan county temporarily closing its libraries to do a thorough review and elimination of “inappropriate” books about racism and LGBTQ+. For example, Texas State Rep Matt Krause questioned whether a book about gay teenagers as well as one about Quinceañera (Latina coming of age) were appropriate in a school library; he's flagged *850 titles* that deal with issues of race, U.S. history, or sexual identity. Often labeled as “no pro homo” laws, many states have enacted laws that forbid talking positively about queer issues and our LGBTQ+ community. Seemingly average people lose faith in their communities—distrust in their politicians, medical experts, schools, and libraries. I am thankful that Illinois has established legal protection for LGBTQ+ students but the creation of an inclusive curriculum and school environment is still in its infancy. I ring in the New Year to promote greater awareness and activism, and I hope that you all will join me.

Best wishes for a very happy New Year from me and the entire Chicago Chapter Board!!

Brandon Chong

Chicago Chapter AVER

We thank **Steamworks** for their very generous donation of proceeds from a Veterans Day fundraiser. They have been helping to support the Chicago Chapter of AVER for years through this annual fundraising event. **Brandon Chong**, President of the Chicago Chapter, and **Larry Simpson**, Treasurer of the Chicago Chapter, met with **Nirmalpal Sachdev**, General Manager, to receive the check in early December. Nirmalpal is also involved with health information and education, community outreach, LGBTQ+ advocacy, and marketing for Steamworks, and has been on the Board of the Northalsted Business Alliance for years.

Defense of Department Memorial for Servicemembers

The U.S. Defense of Department (DoD) launched the *Military In Lasting Tribute* online memorial in December which recognizes all servicemembers who died while serving honorably on active duty from 1985 to the present. It is the only DoD memorial to include peacetime deaths. The memorial honors the service and sacrifice of these servicemembers and provides enduring recognition and support for the military survivor community. The website, <https://tribute.militaryonesource.mil>, allows family members and friends to view, remember, honor, and share the servicemembers with their extended survivor community and military family. The Defense Manpower Data Center tracks more than 47,000 deaths of servicemembers on active-duty status since January 1, 1985, impacting hundreds of thousands of family members. Each servicemember on the site will have a dedicated webpage that lists the honoree's name, their branch of service, rank, and date of death, as well as their photo or a service branch seal. Servicemembers on the memorial site will be based solely on outside submissions. The DoD invites family members to submit their loved ones to the recognized and remembered.

Reminder: No-Fee Chicago City Sticker Program

In 2019, the Office of the City Clerk launched a pilot program expanding its No-Fee Chicago City Sticker Program for many of our City's Veterans. Residents who have an unexpired Illinois Driver's License or State ID with a Veteran designation will be eligible to receive one City Sticker for a passenger, large passenger, or motorbike at no fee. Ex-Prisoners of War, Purple-Heart Veterans, or disabled veterans with Illinois PW, PR, IS, or DV plates will remain eligible for City Stickers to no fee. Residents can *only* take advantage of this offer at the Office of the City Clerk locations. There will be no refunds for previously issued stickers. Residents will qualify when their sticker is up for renewal. Check out <https://www.ChiCityClerk.com/sticker>. (*This is a repost from a previous newsletter.*)

Gifford Confirmed as State Department Protocol Chief

Rufus Gifford, former Ambassador to Denmark, has become the latest high-ranking out official in President Biden's administration. The Senate confirmed his appointment in late December as Chief of Protocol for the U.S. State Department, a position that will once again give him the rank of ambassador. The Chief of Protocol serves as a liaison between the President and leaders of other countries. "For example, Gifford would likely be a point person for any meeting between Biden and Russian President Putin, making an openly gay man the face of the United States for a country in talks with a leader who has rolled back LGBTQ rights and looked the other way from violence against LGBTQ people in Chechnya," noted Chris Johnson, *Washington Blade*. Gifford was married to Dr. Stephen DeVincent in 2015 while Ambassador in Denmark. He is a graduate of Brown University and has been involved with a variety of non-profit organizations which include the Human Rights Campaign, The LGBT History Museum in New York, and UTEC, a group serving at-risk youth in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Military Events That Happened on Christmas

We know that often U.S. servicemembers must serve year around including holidays. What major military events occurred on Christmas? One of the earliest was during the winter of **1776** when General George Washington's Continental Army suffered many defeats in the first few months of the American Revolution and had been pushed out of New York and New Jersey into Pennsylvania; morale was low. Washington gambled that the Hessians, German troops hired by the British and stationed in Trenton, NJ, would be unprepared around Christmas. He and his troops crossed the Delaware River on Christmas night, and at dawn on December 26 about 2400 cold Continentals pushed into Trenton, surprised their enemy, and captured the Hessians with a few hours. It was a turn in the war for the colonists. In **1864**, though North Carolina's Fort Fisher saw little combat, the Union decided it wanted to capture the last port of the Confederates held on the Atlantic Ocean. The Union packed a warship with explosives to blow up the fort's walls but blew up the ship instead and alerted the Confederates of an imminent attack. On Christmas Eve, the Union tried again, bombarding the fort with heavy gunfire but missed the target. On Christmas morning, they tried again, this time shelling north of the fort, but the fort remained largely undamaged. It was a massive failure then, but the Union captured the fort later in January 1865, cutting off the Confederates from global trade and supplies and leading to the end of the Civil War a few months later. In **1972**, American troops were in the middle of the greatest bombing mission in military history during Christmas. The air campaign, known as Operation Linebacker II, is considered one of the major actions that ended the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and led to peace negotiations within months.

Secretary Austin Makes Christmas Calls

U.S. Secretary of Defense **Lloyd J. Austin III** spoke with servicemembers from each branch of the armed forces just before Christmas Day to wish them Happy Holidays and a Merry Christmas. He expressed his appreciation for their service in defense of the nation and the support they provide to the Allies and partners around the world. He highlighted the professionalism with which these men and women continue to perform their duties and offered his gratitude for their—and their families'—service and sacrifice during the holidays. In particular, he spoke to the following units: The 443rd Air Expeditionary Squadron at Al Asad Air Base; they provide continuous airfield support to partner nations across Iraq for Operation Inherent Resolve. To the Sailors aboard the USS Harry S. Truman, Carrier Strike Group 8; the flagship of the CSG8 conducting routine deployment in the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of operations to work alongside allied and partner maritime forces. To the Marines assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 365, Marine Aircraft Group 26, who are supporting North African Response 22.1. To the Soldiers from the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army National Guard, conducting multinational partnering with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. To the Guardians from the 10th Space Warning Squadron, Space Delta 4, stationed at Cavalier Space Force Station, North Dakota, to provide strategic and theater missile warning to the U.S. and international partners.

Managing Holiday Stress

The holidays can be a difficult time for many LGBTQ+ people, from college-aged individuals to older adults. Be sure to make time for yourself and reflect on your strengths of intellect, empathy, love, and advocacy. Identify places and individuals to connect to when you experience bouts of anxiety and discomfort, especially when in a non-affirming space. Try to prepare for confrontational environments by remembering that there are countless others who relate to you and support you. Touch base with them because the holidays are not only for family but familial ties that transcend biological origins. Recognize that you don't need external approval to affirm your queerness and value yourself. Enjoy the holidays with less stress and spend time to recharge for the New Year!!

Washington Blade Gets A Seat at the WH

The nation's oldest LGBTQ+ newspaper has been assigned a designated seat in the White House James S. Brady Press Briefing Room. The updated seating arrangements are intended to "enhance diversity in the briefing room" according to a memo from the White House Correspondents Association, the organization that is responsible for seat assignments. The *Washington Blade* will share the spot with the *Boston Globe* and rotate on a weekly basis. The *Washington Blade*, originally called the *Gay Blade*, was launched in October 1969 and consisted of one single-sided page which was distributed monthly by hand to gay bars throughout the city. By 1972 it had expanded to a multi-page page edition of four pages, and then eight pages a year later. Soon after, it evolved from being a small newsletter to a newspaper that helped to organize and inform the community, and the circulation grew substantially to over 4,000 copies in 1975 available at 35 locations throughout the city. While its circulation peaked at over 33,000 in 2007, its current circulation is around 20,000 as a weekly edition now.

Please help us reduce publication costs!

A **digital** version of *VetPride* is also now available. If you wish to receive a **PDF file of the newsletter by email**, instead of a printed copy by U.S. postal mail, **please send an email message to avernewsletter@gmail.com**.

Thanks! You get less postal mail and it *helps to reduce our newsletter printing and postage costs*.

All AVER meetings at the Center on Halsted postponed until further notice

Remember that we meet up every month on **First Thursdays** via Zoom, so come join us to say hi and share gossip. Everyone is welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings at 7pm. *Check the averchicago.org website for the link (click on the highlighted "Zoom" link near the bottom of the webpage) to get to the Zoom meeting. To call in: 312-626-6799 with meeting ID 488-863-384 and passcode 328090.*

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