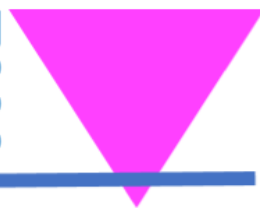


THE



ETPRIDE

AVER NEWSLETTER

AMERICAN
VETERANS
FOR
EQUAL RIGHTS
CHICAGO ILLINOIS CHAPTER

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OCTOBER IS LGBTQ+ HISTORY MONTH



SPOTLIGHT: James D. Rodriguez

The Honorable **James D. Rodriguez** was confirmed as the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) a year ago. He is responsible for preparing veterans, servicemembers, and their spouses for meaningful careers, providing employment resources and expertise, protecting their employment rights, and promoting their employment opportunities. In Fiscal Year 2021, over 2800 DOL VETS staff, contractors, and grantees served more than 331,000 veterans and military spouses. He previously served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Office of Warrior Care Policy, from 2014-17. Programs include the HIRE Vets Medallion Program (HVMP), Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). HVMP provides a federal-level award to companies that hire veterans through criteria that monitor the percentage of new veteran hires, high veteran hire retention, and the availability of integration programs, like affinity groups, leadership training, and tuition assistance. HVRP provides counseling, training, and job placement for homeless veterans. In 2020, more than 14,500 homeless veterans were supported by the program. JVSG provides federal funding to states to hire individualized career and training-related services to veterans with significant barriers to employment, like disabled veterans, as well as promoting state programs that increase job opportunities for veterans. TAP assists over 200,000 servicemembers who leave the U.S. military service and return to life as civilians through workshops and online curriculum. Finally, USERRA helps those experiencing service-connected problems with their civilian employer by mediating allegations of discrimination. For more information, check out <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>.



VR-Assisted Healing

Virtual Reality (VR) technology is being tested as an effective way to help veterans recover from PTSD at the Institute for Creative Technologies at the University of Southern California. VR imaging is used to recreate the environment of a traumatic event and then allow the individual to process through the incident. Clinical studies have shown that the best approach for treating PTSD is to help the individual confront their trauma in a safe space and detune the nervous system response through multiple sessions rather than avoid trigger stimuli. While initial systems only involved a visual headset and headphones, more intricate VR-assisted exposure therapy (VRE) involves stations with vibrating platforms, a fake rifle, and scent machines to evoke memory-triggering smells. "Smells are really important, because we know that from your olfactory bulb to the center of your brain, that's a straight run inside your brain. It goes straight to your hippocampus, which is your memory center, and your amygdala, which is the center for emotion," says Dr. Deborah Beidel, Executive Director of a research center at the University of Central Florida. VRE have been created for scenarios from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as 40 other scenes, in over 100 clinical sites across the country, including VA hospitals. VRE, coupled with conventional therapy, offer new hope for those suffering from PTSD.

★ ★ ★ Annual Veterans Day Dinner ★ ★ ★

Please mark your calendars for a return to Ann Sather on Veterans Day, Friday evening, November 11, with your AVER friends. We hope to return in person after a two-year hiatus due to restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic. *We will also try to broadcast or record the event for those who can't make it.* We look forward to all of you joining us as we honor those military veterans who have served in both wartime and peacetime. It is a major fundraising event for our group, and a wonderful opportunity to see each other together again. The restaurant is located at 909 West Belmont Avenue. For more information, check the AVER Chicago website (<https://www.averchicago.org/>) or the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AVERChicagoChapter>).

Monthly In-person AVER Meetings for the Chicago Chapter Started Up!

We now meet up every month on *First Thursdays* at 7pm (Chicago, Central time zone) at the **Center on Halsted**. **Everyone** is welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings *in-person* or via Zoom!! For Zoom, check the averchicago.org website for the active link (click on the highlighted “Zoom” link near the bottom of the webpage) to get into the Zoom meeting. To join via audio: call 312-626-6799 with ID 488-863-384 and passcode 328090.

Federal Bill Signings Affecting Veterans

Here is a recap of some of the bills affecting veterans that were signed into law by President Biden over the past two years. On *March 24, 2021*, President Biden signed into law the “Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse (SAVE LIVES) Act” which expanded the VA’s authority to provide COVID-19 vaccinations. On *June 8, 2021*, the President signed into law the “Training in High-demand Roles to Improve Veteran Employment (THRIVE) Act” which clarified provisions of the COVID-19 Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) and revised the John Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Act of 2020. VRRAP offers education and training for jobs to veterans who are unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. VRRAP covers education and training programs approved under the GI Bill and “Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses”—VET TEC—that lead to high-demand jobs. See <https://www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance/> or VET TEC at <https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/how-to-use-benefits/vettec-high-tech-program/>. On *June 30, 2021*, the President signed into law the “Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021” which requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to expand the Rural Access Network Growth Enhancement Program, a program that provides intensive case management services, including homeless outreach, to seriously mentally ill Veterans in rural areas (<https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov>). On *August 25, 2021*, the President signed into law the “Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy (PAWS for Vet Therapy) Act” which requires the VA to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy and provide service dogs to qualifying veterans. On *October 8, 2021*, the President signed into law the “Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021” which provided for a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for veterans’ disability compensation equal to the Social Security COLA. On *August 26, 2022*, the President signed into law the “Ensuring the Best Schools for Veterans Act of 2022” which improves the process of VA evaluation and approval of education programs. For help or information on any of these programs, contact the **White House VA Hotline: 855-948-2311**; calls are answered by a live agent 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Chapter Elections

We held our elections at the September Board meeting with a record number of people in attendance!! The President and Vice Presidents were re-elected for another term, and the Board rotated, with Heather Yang and Bernie Santarsiero moving up as Senior Board Members, and Stanley Jenczyk and Ben Diceroad joining as Junior Board Members. Thank you to everyone for joining us at the Board meeting and for those willing to serve!! Remember that you can **always** join us via Zoom if you can’t join us in person at the Center on Halsted.

= Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

AVER Board of Directors

President Brandon Chong
VP/Treasurer Larry Simpson
VP/Secretary Ben Saucedo

Senior Board Members

Bernie Santarsiero
Heather Yang

Junior Board Members

Ben Diseroad
Stanley Jenczyk

Social Media: Ben Saucedo

President-Emeritus: Jim Darby

VetPride: Bernie Santarsiero/Jim Darby

Parliamentarian: Larry Simpson

Web page: Ben Saucedo

White House Adds Policy Staff

There were some notable appointments in the past year to the White House Staff in relation to Veterans issues.



In March 2021, the WH announced the appointment of **Terri Tanielian** as Special Assistant to the President for Veterans Affairs. She is a nationally recognized expert in veteran policy as well as mental health policy, and served as a Senior Behavioral Scientist at the RAND Corporation where she led several landmark studies examining the needs of military servicemembers, veterans, their families, and their caregivers. She has expertise in suicide prevention, sexual assault prevention and response, and behavior health. In 2019, she served as a RAND Congressional Fellow with the House Committee on Veterans Affairs where she informed evidence-based policy making designed to reduce veteran suicide. She also co-wrote the book “Invisible Wounds of War” which highlights combat-related stress over multiple deployments.

James L. “Jimmy” Anderson was appointed earlier this year as Director of Veteran Engagement in the Office of Public Engagement at the White House; he is a U.S. Air Force reservist. Anderson previously served for 11 years as an Air Force intelligence officer at U.S. Air Forces Central Command with a deployment to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, was Special Assistant to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and Deputy WH Liaison at the Department of Veterans Affairs. He was a Fulbright Fellow at the Centre for International and Defence Policy in Canada, and had Fellowships with the Truman National Security Project and Veterans in Global Leadership.



Maria Carolina González-Prats was appointed earlier this year as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Benefits at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and is a U.S. Army veteran (1998-2004, Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, OEF/OIF). As a member of the Third Infantry Division, she deployed to Iraq and lead 30 soldiers to manage 24-hour warehouses in three concurrent locations in Kuwait and Iraq, which supported over 10,000 soldiers with mission-critical supplies for combat operations. She then led a company of 155 American and Korean soldiers in the Republic of Korea, followed by an appointment in the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

Chris Díaz was appointed as Deputy Chief of Staff and WH Liaison at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and is a U.S. veteran. During his service in the U.S. Navy from 2007 to 2012 as an Aviation Boatswain’s Mate and then as a Fleet Marine Corps Hospital Corpsman, he saw duty aboard the USS Harry S. Truman and, in support of OEF, deployed with the 6th Marines to Marjah in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan. He was the founder and former executive director of the veteran-led Action Tank, a Philadelphia-based non-profit company leveraging veterans’ experience, leadership, and relationships with service-minded citizens to tackle challenges like the opioid crisis, gun violence, and food insecurity.



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*.

PAST EVENTS

Battle Betties Drag Brunch

A few members of the Chicago Chapter of AVER, including our President, attended the Drag Brunch on Sunday, September 4, at Diamond Jim's in East Dundee. Proceeds from the event helped to raise funds for AVER and Battle Betties. We thank Diamond Jim's for hosting the event, and for the performance by "4 Queens."



CURRENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Rush Road Home Program (RHP) Events

Thursday, September 19, 5-7pm, Grand Opening: *Veteran's Mask Art Exhibit*, College of DuPage, 425 Fawell Blvd., Student Services Center, Room 2210, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137. In partnership with the College of DuPage, the exhibit features masks created by veterans in the RHP Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP). RHP is holistic in its approach to treating PTSD and other service-related mental health concerns, and a big part of that is art therapy. In the IOP, veterans have several sessions with their art therapist and are challenged to create a mask using all different mediums: the outside signifies what they show the world and what they think their families and friends want to see, and the inside of the mask signifies what they keep inside, what they feel they need to hide, or what causes them shame. The exhibit will be displayed from September 19 to November 11, and is open to the public. **FREE**

Saturday, October 15, 2-6pm, Family Military Event: Arcade and Mini Golf at Funway. Funway is Illinois' largest entertainment center, and RHP is hosting a family day event. There will be food catering, arcade, mini golf, and much more. Veterans, active duty or reservist, with their families and friends are invited. **FREE**

Participate in and/or Donate to the Chicago AIDS RUN/WALK

October 2 • AVER • <https://give.classy.org/AVERChicago>

There's still time to join in the Run/Walk or Donate!!

Palm Center Closes

The Palm Center, an independent research institute that used scholarship to guide the national conversation about military policy concerning LGBTQ servicemembers, officially closed on Friday, September 30, 2022. The institute was named in honor of Michael D. Palm, an educator, musician, athlete, businessman, and philanthropist, who contributed millions to benefit the arts, gay rights, and AIDS support organizations. He died in 1998 at the age of 47 due to complications from AIDS. Over the past two decades, the Palm Center has provided detailed scientific and medical information to foster inclusive public policy. For example, from the very first event in January 2000, at an international conference on DADT and military personnel policies, the Center worked to shift the public conversation in recognizing that British, Canadian, Israeli, and other foreign forces enlisted openly gay and lesbian servicemembers. In 2002, the Center broke the store of Alastair Gamble, an Army Arabic linguist, who was fired for being gay. In 2007, the Center prompted General John Shalikashvili, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to call for a repeal of DADT in a NYT op-ed. In 2008, the Center created a national media story by gathering 104 retired Generals and Admirals that supported the repeal of DADT, and reached out to over 4,000 officers to undermine the assertion that the ban had universal military support. The Center put pressure on the White House by releasing a report that stated the President could end the ban with an executive order with support from 77 members of Congress. The list goes on and on. We thank **Aaron Belkin**, the Founding Director of the Palm Center, and a passionate and talented staff, who led the repeal of DADT and continued to progressively promote equality for all LGBTQ+ servicemembers and veterans.

Women Marines (and Docs) Weekend at the Lake

The Women Marines Association (WMA) will be holding its second annual “Women Marines (and Docs) Weekend at the Lake” from Friday, October 21 to Sunday, October 23. The weekend get together is all about camaraderie and connecting with our fellow Women Marines and Corpsmen from all eras. All Women Marines, and Navy Corpsmen who served with Marines, are invited to attend. The event is at Lat’s Cottages on the Lake, 9393 Shore Acres Lane, Lakeside, MI. Activities at 100% optional, and include yard games, card and board games, beach walking, kayaking, shooting range time, antiquing, wine tasting, grilling, and more. Lodging is provided at NO COST at Lat’s Cottages (www.latscottages.com); please RSVP at www.eventbrite.com/e/42893740917 for adequate space and planning. There is NO COST for meals as we plan to “potluck” and share meals together (can be prepared on site or pre-made and brought to event). Guests are welcome to start arriving by Friday noon and staying through Sunday. You do NOT need to stay for all three days, so consider stopping by for a short visit or partial stay. Please share this event information widely!

