

N.S. Vol. 26 No. 11 November 2022 #381

**Annual Veterans Day Dinner**  
**Friday, November 11, 2022**

Ann Sather Restaurant ★ 909 W Belmont Ave

\$40 per person  
6:30pm Open Bar and Silent Auction  
7:30pm Dinner with Program

**Keynote Speaker: Ale Hernandez**  
*Veteran Outreach Coordinator*  
Rush Road Home Program



Payment via **averchicago.org** website  
or checks to AVER  
P.O. Box 29317, Chicago, IL 60629

For information, contact  
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[secretary@averchicago.org](mailto:secretary@averchicago.org)



AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS



**PLEASE JOIN US!!**



**Newsom • Eggman • Atkins • McDonough**

★ ★ ★ Annual Veterans Day Dinner ★ ★ ★

**Please mark your calendars for a return to the Ann Sather Restaurant 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, and post it on the [averchicago.org](https://www.averchicago.org) website.* 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. Doors open around 6:15pm with a No-host Bar and Silent Auction, followed by a buffet dinner and short program. For more information, check the AVER Chicago website (<https://www.averchicago.org/>) or the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AVERChicagoChapter>). **Please reserve your spot beforehand so that we can plan ahead. You can pay on the [averchicago.org](https://www.averchicago.org) via PayPal or mail a check to the AVER P.O. Box.**

### More VA News

As in previous years, there are dozens of nationally available Veterans Day discounts for meals, car washes, inns, haircuts, shopping, and more as way to reward Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors for their service. Check out <https://news.va.gov/109711/veterans-day-discounts-free-meals/>. Many are national chains, like 7-Eleven (free coffee or big gulp), Applebee's (free meal), Denny's (free breakfast), Hard Rock Café (free burger, 15% other items), Morton's Steakhouse (20% off), Olive Garden (free entrée), Red Robin (free meals), Rock Bottom (free entrée), White Castle (free meal options), Bed Bath & Beyond (25% off), Target (10% off), and more.

### VA Closes Gap in Benefits for LGBTQ+ Veterans and their Survivors

On October 13, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs issued a memo announcing that it is closing a gap in survivor benefits for certain survivors of LGBTQ+ Veterans; specifically, for those who were unable to wed until the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court decision, and who, there, were not married to their now-deceased Veteran spouses for long enough to qualify for survivor benefits. This extension of survivor benefits is effective immediately. Eligible survivors can apply for these benefits here. VA Secretary **Denis McDonough** noted that the "...VA is righting a wrong that is a legacy of the discriminatory federal ban on same-sex marriages. It is VA's mission to serve all Veterans—including LGBTQ+ Veterans—as well as they've served our country, and this decision is a key part of that effort." Due to bans on same-sex marriages, many LGBTQ+ Veterans were unable to get married until Obergefell v. Hodges (6/26/2015) despite being in "marriage-type" relationships long before that. This wrongly precluded many survivors of those LGBTQ+ Veterans from becoming eligible for survivor benefits because their Veteran spouse died before the marriage met VA's length-of-marriage requirements (one year for survivor benefits, eight years for a higher rate of benefits). This decision addresses that problem by counting the duration of marriage from when the surviving spouse can establish a "marriage-type" relationship—such as a commitment ceremony, joint banking account, or joint purchase of a house. Importantly, these benefits are not retroactive. The memo noted that the VA is committed to delivering world-class care and benefits to LGBTQ+ Veterans. As a part of this effort, last year, VA began providing benefits to Veterans who were given "Other than Honorable" discharges due to their sexual orientation. Learn more about VA's current health offerings on the LGBTQ+ Health Program website: check out <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>.

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

We 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](https://www.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.

## VA Releases 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report

The latest report shows a downward trend in Veteran suicide counts and rates and is the first report to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on veteran suicides. Critical work remains to address veteran suicide. In 2020, there were 6,156 Veteran suicide deaths, which is 343 fewer than in 2019. The unadjusted rate of suicide in 2020 among U.S. Veterans was 31.7 per 100,000. Check out <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>.

Recently, the VA announced major funding support for community-based suicide prevention efforts with \$52.5M awarded to 80 programs in 43 states, DC, and American Samoa for 2022-2023 through the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program (SSG Fox SPGP) which is part of the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act. These programs combine. Partnerships with the community to implement tailored, local prevention plans while also focusing on evidence-based clinical strategies for intervention. The grants support outreach to those at risk of suicide, mental health screening for risk, education on suicide risk and prevention to families, emergency treatment, peer support services, assistance with emergent needs, like daily living services, personal financial planning and counseling, transportation, temporary income, or child care. SSG Fox SPGP honors Veteran Parker Gordon Fox who joined the Army in 2014 and was a sniper instructor at the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, GA. Known for a life of generosity and kindness to others in need, Fox died by suicide on July 21, 2020 at the age of 25.

Relatedly, the VA had launched a \$20M grand challenge to develop new suicide-prevention strategies through the Mission Daybreak program. Over 1300 submissions were reviewed, and 30 finalists were selected to receive \$250,000 and 10 teams were awarded \$100,000 each. Solutions ranged from technology-enhanced lethal means safety concepts to targeted virtual care programs. Another \$11.5M is forthcoming for ten of the teams. "Suicide is one of the most serious public health issues facing our Veterans today," said VA Under Secretary for Health **Shereff Elnahal**. "Through Mission Daybreak, the VA is driving groundbreaking collaborations to transform suicide prevention efforts for Veterans and all Americans." The initiative hopes to foster transformative changes that could dramatically improve health outcomes. For more info, check out <https://www.missiondaybreak.net>.

## California Steps Up to Help Veterans

Enlisted members of the military would get an automatic 30-day cooling off period in California when they buy or lease vehicles under a proposal backed by the state's Attorney General and leader of the State Senate earlier this year. They argued that enlisted servicemembers are often the target of predatory auto sales practices since they offer "special deals" for military personnel but in fact promote inflated prices and financing packages. The same legislation would also make it easier for servicemembers to end auto leases when they are reassigned or deployed. The legislation grew out of investigations of businesses that targeted military families. The bill was drafted by State Senator **Susan Talamantes Eggman** and Senate President pro Tempore **Toni Atkins**. Both women have been champions for the military, veterans, and the LGBTQ community for decades. Dr. Eggman joined the U.S. Army right out of high school and served as a medic for four years; she and her lifelong spouse and partner of 30 years, Renee, live in Stockton where they are raising a daughter. Senator Atkins helped care for her sister's son while her sister served in the U.S. Navy, and now lives in San Diego with her lifelong spouse and partner, Jennifer. Senator Atkins was sworn in as Senate President pro Tempore in March 2018, becoming the first woman and first openly gay person to lead the California Legislature's upper house.

Another new law in California seeks to help military servicemembers who were discharged under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy. The Department of Defense created a path for veterans who had been discharged under the policy to receive the full range of veterans' benefits. "But many veterans sadly don't know or can't even access this important process," said Governor **Gavin Newsom**. The law will require the California Department of Veteran Affairs to establish the Veterans Discharge Upgrade Grant Program to help advise LGBTQ Veterans who were discharged under DADT, and to help those who qualify to update and correct their records and access the full range of their veteran benefits.

## Are You Out?

National Coming Out Day was October 11 and established as a day to honor those LGBTQ+ people who recognize their true self to others. The date is based on the anniversary of the National March on Washington in 1987. Over the past year, we've seen progress in equality as well as challenges, e.g., protecting marriage equality in the wake of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, "Don't Say Gay" efforts in schools, or the lack of adequate healthcare for transgender individuals. Surveys still note that 1-in-4 LGBTQ+ individuals consider suicide, and more than 4 out of 5 LGBTQ+ people keep their true identities hidden from friends and family. Nearly 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ adults have been homeless sometime in their lives, which is twice the rates of their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Rates of violence have climbed in recent years according to FBI statistics. Coming out isn't a one-time event but an ongoing decision on revealing your identity in your own way safely. Help those in your community by creating positive and affirming environments. To hear more about LGBTQ+ Veterans living open, healthy lives, view the videos posted at <https://www.va.gov/initiatives/recognizing-lgbtq-veterans-during-pride-month/>.

### = Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

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**Halsted Memorial**



**Lincoln National Cemetery**

**VETERANS DAY**  
HONORING ALL WHO SERVED