**EVENT TRACKER** 

Military Influence Conference

**DC Office Closures for Holidays:** 

November 27, 28; December

24, 25; January 1

(MIC): November 10 (TBD)

LETTER FROM OUR VP

## Greetings, and welcome to the fourth edition of the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) quarterly policy update, Project Advocacy News. WWP's

advocacy efforts connect wounded warriors with their elected officials, provide them with a voice, and empower them to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.

Before we share some news about what we have been working on since our last newsletter, I wanted to thank you for your service and the work you do in this space. November 11, 1918, is generally regarded as the end of "the war to end all wars," and the marking of the first Veterans Day. All of us who have served our nation share a special kinship that spans generations because of our shared sacrifice, and we owe you our deepest appreciation. Thank you for your service.

While we stopped to reflect on Veterans Day, we have remained busy heading into the holiday season, shepherding the passage and movement of critical legislation, supporting our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and in the Veterans Service Organization (VSO) community, and releasing Wounded Warrior Project Annual Warrior Survey data. At the America's Warrior Partnership Symposium on August 26, several of our organization's leaders and subject matter experts joined WWP Chief Program Officer Jen Silva to discuss WWP's strategic planning for programs and advocacy, the importance of complementary efforts and

On September 25, WWP released the results of our 11th Annual Warrior Survey, the largest and most comprehensive survey of America's wounded, ill, and injured post-9/11 veterans. This year, nearly 30,000 WWP-registered warriors participated, giving us the chance to identify trends and compare their outcomes to other military and veteran populations. You can read the full survey here. Even though we have all experienced challenges through the height

Survey and the ongoing engagements with women veterans.

of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also made significant strides and come out with legislative victories thanks to your help. Thanks to your advocacy, Congress passed <u>S.785, the Commander John Scott</u> <u>Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act,</u> which was signed into law by President Trump on October 17. Just as important, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs passed, with bipartisan support, <u>S.4393</u>, the TEAM Act of 2020. The TEAM Act would expand health care coverage and provide free treatment for many veterans with illnesses

related to toxic exposures. We will continue to need your help, as gaining access to care for veterans with illnesses related to toxic exposures will continue to be one of our legislative priorities going into the next congress. As part of our advocacy efforts to ensure that the challenges warriors face are heard and understood by our nation's leaders, we have sent six position letters to House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committee leaders in Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Lead-Kevin McCarthy, and others, on issues including

**TEAM National Defense Authorization Act priorities The Agent Orange Exposure Fairness Act The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act** Mental health and suicide prevention Toxic exposure treatment and care

Just as exciting is the fact that 15 new veterans were elected to Congress. While these men and women are not strangers to serving their country, we want to welcome them to their new roles here in Washington. We look forward to meeting with each and every new member.

As we head into a new year, I want to wish you all happy holidays and again thank you for your support in helping us accomplish so much this year. WWP's Government Affairs team is gearing up to hit the ground running in 2021 and looks forward to engaging with Congress and the administra-

Jose Ramos

The Veterans Economic Recovery Act

Vice President, Government and Community Relations, U.S. Navy Veteran

**KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR ANNUAL WARRIOR SURVEY** The Annual Warrior Survey is a critically important part of the Wounded Warrior Project® mission. The data we collect from this <u>survey</u> of post-9/11 wounded veterans registered with WWP helps us meet warriors' evolving needs. We launched our 11th annual survey findings in partnership with The Brookings Institution at an event hosted by Dr. Michael O'Hanlon, Brookings Institution senior fellow of foreign policy, WWP Chief Program Officer

MENTAL

HEALTH

93% OF WARRIORS live with mental health

conditions that are considered severe — most

have not received treatment but are enrolled in the VA Burn Pit Registry.

faced."

need to live full, prosperous lives.

several of the challenges veterans are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

here to learn more about registering so you can participate in next year's survey.

well lead to dramatic im-

provements in years to

come. This year's Annual

Warrior Survey showed us

that PTSD, depression, and

anxiety remain among the

most common challenges

WWP warriors face. The

Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) 2019 National

Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report showed us

that veterans - particularly those between the ages of

18 and 34 — continue to be at a higher risk for suicide

Take, for example, a new pilot program that will help direct more VA investment into partnerships with

many others — will serve a dual purpose of connect-

ing more veterans to VA's care system and providing

more opportunities for "upstream interventions" that

mitigate the risks of suicide. This approach has worked

We've also learned from our Annual Warrior Survey

that many warriors have used prescription medica-

tions in an attempt to address their mental health

challenges, but too few are satisfied with the results.

Biomarker research may hold the promise of making

pharmaceutical intervention far more individualized and precise for mental health, just as it has for cancer and heart disease. For these reasons, WWP aggres-

for WWP, and we believe it will work for VA.

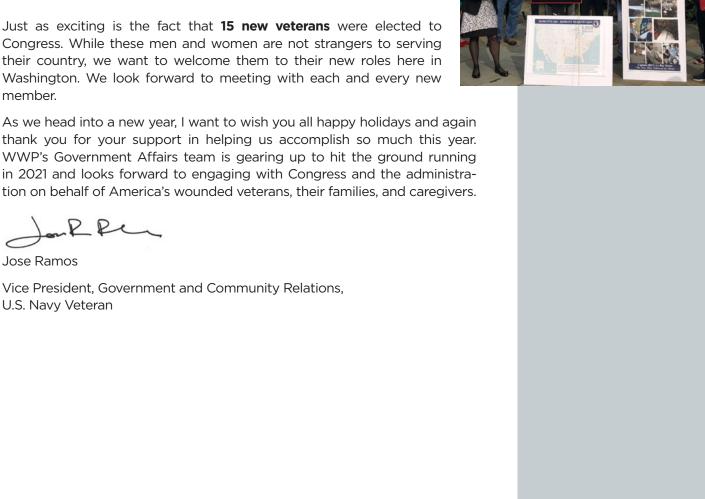
warriors and give us reason for hope.

Vice President Tom Kastner joined him to discuss the data.

partnerships, and the evolving needs of women veterans. Much of this discussion was informed by the findings from WWP's Annual Warrior







**FINANCIAL WELLNESS** 

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic:

**EXPERIENCING SEXUAL HARASSMENT.** 

Lastly, a key priority for WWP has been encouraging

more access to alternative and complementary mental

health treatments. Integrative services like yoga, med-

itation, acupuncture, equine therapy, and recreation

therapy contribute to a growing body of research show-

ing clinically relevant improvements to mental health

and resilience when combined with evidence-based

treatment. Some of that research is happening through

WWP's Warrior Care Network®, which has shown tre-

mendous results not only in clinical outcomes, but also

in completion and satisfaction rates. The Hannon Act

provides new momentum to programs at VA — one

## experience more than one **OVER ONE-THIRD** of warriors say they either have Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, **61% OF WARRIORS** or expect to run out of money feel more disconnected from their family, **41% OF WARRIORS** friends, or community. However, say they've experienced challenges **69% AGREED THEY KNOW WHERE** related to their employment. TO TURN FOR HELP IF THEY NEED IT.

Jennifer Silva, Program Operations and Partnerships Vice President Dr. Melanie Mousseau, and Financial Wellness

This year's survey was conducted during a challenging time for warriors, as it was administered at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in May and June. Many warriors face the long-term effects of their injuries every day, which

can be compounded by the pandemic environment. Here are some of the key findings:

TOXIC **VOMENS VETERANS' ISSUES EXPOSURE** Among warriors who **DEFINITELY OR PROBABLY 44% OF WOMEN WARRIORS EXPERIENCED TOXIC EXPOSURE (89%)**, the majority self-identified as having experienced were exposed to BURN PITS (86%) or SAND, DUST, military sexual trauma (MST). **AND PARTICULATES (76%)**. Even more acknowledged specific experiences often related **16% OF WARRIORS** reported they received treatment for toxic exposure at the VA, and to MST, with **61% OF WOMEN WARRIORS SLIGHTLY LESS THAN ONE-THIRD (32%)** 

Rep. Mark Takano, Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, also spoke at the event, discussing

"I've had numerous discussions with officials at the VA regarding the economic fallout," Chairman Takano said. "We're going from 2.9% veteran unemployment pre-pandemic to over 10% unemployment post-pandemic. We can expect more veterans turning to the VA for their health care, and so we need to start planning now for that. The question of how adequate the benefits are needs to be reviewed in light of this major event veterans have

This survey shows us the greatest needs of veterans. Insights on housing, jobs, mental health, and VA care satisfaction help our Government Affairs team in Washington, DC, advocate most effectively on behalf of our nation's wounded, ill, and injured warriors. They work closely with national leaders in Congress, and their staff, to write legislation and implement policy changes that can help veterans get better access to the resources and care they

And that's where we need your help: adding your voice to the chorus of many other veterans helps us ensure the greatest challenges are being addressed. If you're a veteran who is not registered with WWP, please click

HOW WE CAN WORK TO REVERSE THE TREND OF VETERAN SUICIDE By Brian Dempsey, Wounded Warrior Project Government Affairs Director The trends that drive WWP sively pursued a new provision in the Hannon Act to legislative advocacy efforts create a Precision Medicine for Veterans Initiative at continued through 2020, VA, focused on mental health and suicidal ideation, so but a new law could very that we improve diagnosis and treatment faster.

than those who did not serve. But help is on the way. new and one ongoing - that will continue to study After passing Congress with overwhelming bipartisan the effectiveness of complementary and integrative support, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans treatments on veterans' mental health. Mental Health Care Improvement Act was signed into law by President Trump on October 17. This new law enacts 34 new policies to improve veteran mental health and reverse tragic trends in veteran suicide. Several of those policies are based on our own experiences serving



During the incoming 117th Congress, the halls of Capitol Hill will be filled with approximately 80 former

**SENATE** 

**HOUSE** 

Navy

Army

Army

military service members. Fifteen of these veterans are freshman members of Congress looking to make a difference in Washington. Learn more about them below.

Arizona

Kansas

Alabama-2

Mark Kelly

Roger Marshall

Barry Moore

Peter Meijer

Darrell Issa

Scott Franklin Florida-15 Navy Georgia-9 Andrew Clyde Navy Kaiali'i Kahele Hawaii-2 Air Force Jake Auchincloss Massachusetts-4 Marine Corps Pat Fallon Texas-4 Air Force August Pfluger Texas-11 Air Force Ronny Jackson Texas-13 Navy

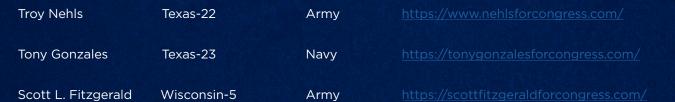
Michigan-3

California-50

**MEET THE NEWEST VETERAN MEMBERS OF CONGRESS** 

coverage of how these policies are implemented and

join us in hoping for their success.



Army

Army

and must require personal care services. Illnesses are now included, and there is no longer a required connection between the qualifying serious injury (or illness) and the need for personal care services.



AND WHY THIS HAS BEEN SUCH AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR YOU.

to help our nation's veterans. For example, Charlotte and Phoenix are two cities where we saw the entire community coming together and working together. In Charleston, South Carolina, Dr. Mark George demonstrated the amazing new technologies, such as transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), that are helping our veterans. In Georgia, at the Emory Healthcare Veterans Program facility, they showed me their virtual reality technology. These are a few that stood out, although everywhere I go, I am so impressed with what the VA is doing for our vets. And we want our vets to reach out because help is there. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WHO WANTS TO HELP IMPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH LANDSCAPE FOR VETERANS OR EVEN THEIR FRIENDS, FAMILIES, AND **NEIGHBORS?** In July, we launched a public health campaign called REACH. And it is very simple. We want people to reach out to those they think might be in need and start the conversation. We also want those who need help to feel confident to reach out and say, "I need help." We want people to understand and to know, especially in this time of COVID-19, that it is okay to say you are not okay. Right now is an opportunity for us to take away the stigma surrounding mental health. Everyone is feeling a sense of isolation, and a degree of anxiety, some type of despair or fear. So, right now we want people to reach out and get the help that they need.

or change plans.

The MISSION Act, the Forever GI bill, and expansion of the caregiver program Improving veterans' experiences at VA health facilities Increasing funding for suicide prevention and seeking an end to veteran homelessness Implementing electronic health record modernization Most recently, during his time in the 116th Congress, he led efforts to: Direct VA to implement a retraining assistance program for unemployed veterans Provide Vet Center readjustment counseling and mental health services Improve access to in-state tuition for veterans using VA educational assistance Authorize VA to continue providing educational assistance for distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, the Forever GI Bill, the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, the Veteran Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, and - more recently - the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act and the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act. Together, these bills improve upon virtually every aspect of the care, benefits, and services that veterans have earned and further the transformation underway to make VA the gold standard for federal service. WWP's leadership was critical to getting each of these bills across the finish line and will be just as critical moving forward to ensure that they live up to their promise as they are implemented. I know that I am leaving our nation's heroes in good hands with WWP, am grateful for your friendship

In honor of his incredible service and years of support, we're proud to present Dr. Roe with this award. We wish you all the best, sir, in your retirement. Thank you for all your years of hard work and service on

We proudly serve as a voice of wounded warriors in our nation's capital, providing advice and expertise to the legislative and executive branches of the federal government on the issues America's 20 million veterans care about most. It's ongoing work, and it needs your voice too. We work with our nation's leaders to represent the interests of the wounded warriors we serve and the unique challenges they face upon returning to civilian life. But no one can speak to these important issues better than you, the warriors who experience them. Currently, there are numerous pieces of legislation that we're working to move forward through Congress, on issues including toxic exposure, veteran mental health and suicide prevention, and ensuring veterans receive the full benefits they have earned. These are all issues that have strong bipartisan support — but we need your support too, and your voice, to make the changes warriors need to get the care they have earned through their service and sacrifice. Help us take action

6/27/2019

INTRODUCED SENATE

6/18/2019

2/14/2019

INTRODUCED SENATE

3/4/2020

Deborah Sampson Act - S.514/H.R.3224 INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE

Specially Adaptive Housing (SAH) - <u>S.2022/H.R.3504</u>

Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act - S.1881/H.R.3356

PASSED HOUSE

7/30/20 **Ensuring Veterans Access Act - H.R.7926** PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE

> WWP **RESOURCE**

> > CENTER

resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or 904.405.1213 Fax: 904.405.1301 ★ woundedwarriorproject.org

> **HOURS OF OPERATION** Monday - Friday 9 am - 9 pm ET

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE** 

https://armedservices.house.gov

www.veterans.senate.gov

https://veterans.house.gov

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Twitter: @HASCDemocrats

202-224-9126

202-225-9756

202-225-4151

Twitter: @VAChair

2/27/2020 **Veteran Families Financial Support Act - H.R.6013 INTRODUCED HOUSE** PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE 2/28/2020 **TEAM Act of 2020 - S.4393** INTRODUCED HOUSE PASSED HOUSE INTRODUCED SENATE

Major Richard Star Act - S.3393/H.R.5995

PASSED HOUSE

**INTRODUCED HOUSE** 

Wounded Warrior Project has a strong history of advocating on behalf of wounded warriors and their families. Our efforts were instrumental in helping pass the legislation that launched the Department of Veterans Affairs' Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) for seriously wounded post-9/11 veterans. Similarly, our advocacy alongside others helped to pass the VA MISSION Act of 2018, which will make this important program available to veterans of all eras. The first phase of the expansion began October 1, 2020. New regulations in place now require all current beneficiaries to reapply and undergo reevaluation for PCAFC. What is the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for **Family Caregivers?** 

The PCAFC provides qualifying caregivers of eligible veterans with key benefits to recognize and support their signif-

icant role in their veteran's life. Training, respite care, coun-

seling, technical support, travel benefits, a monthly stipend

payment, and access to health care (if qualified) through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of

Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) are all a part of the PCAFC. The

When will caregivers of veterans from all eras become

Phase 1: The first phase, which began October 1, expanded

eligibility to include eligible veterans who incurred or aggra-

vated a serious injury in the line of duty in the active military,

Phase 2: The second phase of expansion is set to occur

PCAFC is expanding to eligible veterans in two phases:

naval, or air service on or before May 7, 1975.

PCAFC launched in May 2011.

eligible for the PCAFC?

**★ TRICARE OPEN SEASON** 

★ FEDVIP OPEN SEASON

TRICARE

Eligible beneficiaries can:

During his 12 years in Congress, Ranking Member Roe has spear-

headed numerous efforts for America's veterans, including:

support, we're proud to present Dr. Roe with this award."

over the years, and look forward to cheering you on from afar."

**Current Wounded Warrior Project Legislative Priorities** 

on these critical pieces of legislation.

**\* BILL TRACKER** 

INTRODUCED HOUSE

behalf of this nation.

of America's wounded warriors.

Nov. 9 — Dec. 14, 2020

What can you do during TRICARE Open Season?

Enroll in a plan. No coverage yet? Enroll in a TRICARE Prime® option or

ge plans. Already enrolled? You can switch plans and between

Establish on Allotment. Starting January 1, 2021, TRICARE Select Group A Retirees have to pay enrollment fees.

**OUT TO YOU?** 

THAT ARE CONTRIBUTING TO OUR NATIONAL EFFORT TO PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE. WHAT HAS THAT EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE? HAVE ANY ORGANIZATIONS OR APPROACHES STOOD I have visited with some of our nation's most impressive organizations that are doing powerful work

> The 2020 TRICARE Open Season began on November 9 and will end on December 14, 2020. During TRICARE Open Season, you can continue with your current health plan, enroll in a plan, Visit <a href="https://www.tricare.mil/">https://www.tricare.mil/</a> to learn more.

> > The Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) is a dental and vision program available to federal employees and annuitants, certain retired

> > uniformed service members, and active duty family members. This year's FEDVIP

> > Open Season began on November 9 and

will end on December 14, 2020. To enroll in FEDVIP, please visit www.BENEFEDS.com.

Ranking Member Dr. Phil Roe (center) being honored for his years of service by WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington (right) and WWP VP of Government Affairs Jose Ramos (left) "For his entire life, Ranking Member Roe has served this nation with distinction," said WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington. "Since being elected to Congress in 2009, Dr. Roe has been a champion for the needs and challenges facing all generations of America's wounded warriors. In honor of his incredible service and years of "Working to improve the lives of my fellow veterans and their families has been the highlight of my political career," said Ranking Member Roe. "Due in no small part to the steadfast support and advocacy of organizations like WWP, I have had the honor of working on many important legislative efforts that have been signed into law by President Trump. Those include the MISSION Act, the

> **SHOW YOUR SUPPORT** Passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on Jan. 29, 2020

> > PASSED SENATE

PASSED SENATE

PASSED SENATE

9/10/2019

PASSED

NOT PASSED

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

8/08/2020

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT** 

SIGNED BY POTUS

SIGNED BY POTUS

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT** 

SIGNED BY POTUS

PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS SIGNED BY POTUS PASSED SENATE

PASSED SENATE SIGNED BY POTUS

mental health of many Americans - veterans and non-veterans alike — has suffered through a barrage of uncertainty, social isolation, and financial hardship. But as organizations like WWP continued to push the importance of addressing mental health through aggressive and ambitious new policies, Congress did its part and has now passed tremendous new authority to VA to lead our country's effort to improve and modernize our approach to mental health care and support. We hope you will continue to follow our

This list is comprised of new members with races called as of November 17, 2020. **Expanding the VA's Caregiver Program** 

> Activities of Daily Living (ADL) standards: To qualify based on an inability to perform ADLs, a veteran must require personal care services each time he or she completes at least one of several defined ADLs. Some examples include dress-

> Supervision/protection: To qualify based on a need for supervision or protection (e.g., for neurological impairments), a veteran will need to show functional impairment that directly impacts his or her ability to maintain personal

> Monitoring: The new rules require "wellness contacts" at

least once every 120 days to review veteran and caregiver

Benefits: Primary caregivers are now entitled to financial

planning services and legal services. Both benefits are

Stipend Payments: Moving from a three-tier system based on hours worked, the new rules offer a two-level system

that pays either a 100% stipend or a 62.5% stipend. A 100%

stipend would be the Office of Personnel Management

(OPM) General Schedule (i.e., the federal government pay

scale) Grade 4, Step 1, with adjustments based on where the

In September, WWP hosted a webinar for nearly 300 par-

ticipants to guide veterans and their families through the

changes coming to the PCAFC. The final regulation can be

designed to help with the care and support of the veteran.

well-being and at least one visit per year in the home.

ing, bathing, and eating, among others.

safety on a daily basis.



found here.

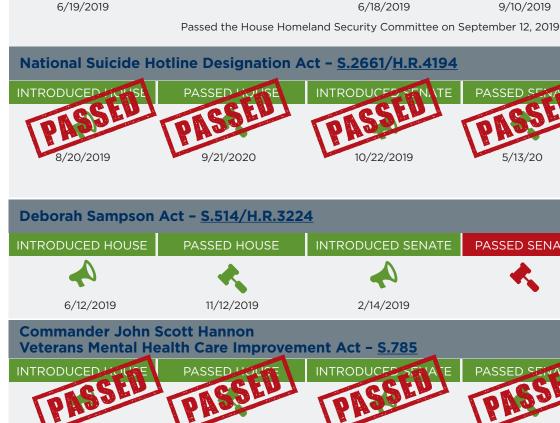
Q&A WITH SECOND LADY OF THE UNITED STATES

veteran and caregiver live.



Recognizing a Lifetime of Service: Rep. Phil Roe, M.D. For his entire life, Dr. Phil Roe has served this nation with distinction; both as a member of the U.S. Army Medical Corps, discharging as a Major in 1974, and as the elected representative from

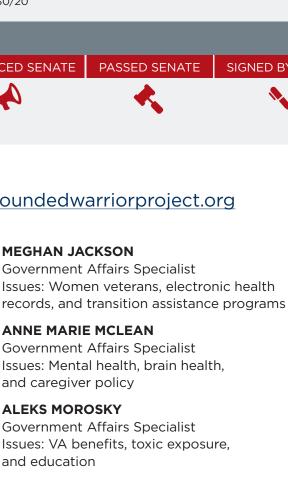
Tennessee's 1st district, since 2009. Both as a veteran himself, and as the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Dr. Roe has been a champion for the needs and challenges facing all generations



INTRODUCED HOUSE 8/4/2020 \* CONTACT US

**JOSE RAMOS** Vice President of Government and Community Relations **BRIAN DEMPSEY** Government Affairs Director Issues: Mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy DEREK FRONABARGER

Government Affairs Director Issues: VA benefits, toxic exposure, and education **RAMSEY SULAYMAN** Government Affairs Director Issues: Women veterans, electronic



Military
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**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS** 

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202-224-3871

www.va.gov

844-698-2311

www.defense.gov

Veterans Crisis Line

advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org **MEGHAN JACKSON** Government Affairs Specialist **ANNE MARIE MCLEAN** Government Affairs Specialist Issues: Mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy **ALEKS MOROSKY** Government Affairs Specialist Issues: VA benefits, toxic exposure, and education **MEDIA INQUIRIES JOE PLENZLER** health records, and transition Communications Director assistance programs JPlenzler@woundedwarriorproject.org **★ RESOURCES**