

**October 5, 2018**

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**Vote on Agent Orange Reform**

Now Is the Time to Call SVAC Chairman to Get Vote on Agent Orange Reform

The "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R.299) has stalled in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC). The bill already passed the House (382-0). Now is the time to call the SVAC Chairman Johnny Isakson (Ga.) to urge him to call a committee vote on this legislation, without amending it. (202) 224-3643

Tell the Senator that you believe Congress should recognize these veterans, who served off the coast of Vietnam and were exposed to Agent Orange herbicide. Suggest that the committee should authorize presumptive status for VA disability claims associated with this exposure.

Members are also encouraged to use the [FRA Action Center](#) to weigh in on this issue with their Senators.

**Convention Wrap up**

The FRA Annual Convention elections were held this past week during the third business session, followed by the installation of the officers and board. Here are your new FRA officers and board:

- National President, Robert Washington, Navy Department Branch 181 Arlington, Va.
- National Vice President Donna M. Jansky, North Shore Branch 31 Peabody, Mass.
- National Executive Director Thomas J. Snee, Navy Department Branch 181 Arlington, Va.
- Jr Past National President William E. Starkey, South Jersey Branch 57 South Jersey, N.J.
- Regional President North East/New England Joyce M. Harris, Groton Branch 20 Groton, Conn.
- Regional President East Coast Randy L. Phillipp, Triangle Branch 182 Bethesda, Md.
- Regional President Southeast James P. Richmond, Pensacola Branch 22 Pensacola, Fla.
- Regional President North Central Barry M. White, Mo Kan Branch 161 Kansas City, Kan.
- Regional President South Central Emmett H. Smith, Jr., Shreveport Bossier Branch 98 Shreveport, La.
- Regional President Southwest John F. Quesnel, Jr., Imperial Beach Branch 289 Imperial Beach, Calif.
- Regional President West Coast Rick Athenour Sierra Tahoe Branch 137 Minden, Nev.
- Regional President Northwest William H. Hall, Gem State Branch 382 Bosie, Idaho
- National Chaplain Valerie Toulotte, Annapolis Branch 24 Annapolis Md.

- Finance Officer Bryan M. Proctor, Headquarters Alexandria, Va.
- National Parliamentarian George P. Hyland, Groton Branch 20 Groton, Conn.

### **HVAC Reviews Veterans Suicide Issue**

House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) chaired by Rep. Phil Roe, M.D. (Tenn.), recently held a hearing on veteran suicide prevention and how to maximize effectiveness of Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) programs aimed at suicide prevention.

Recent data indicates that 20 veterans commit suicide each day. VA testimony at the hearing provided new findings that fourteen of those twenty veterans have not sought medical care at VA, which mean that only 30 percent of veterans who commit suicide have been to a VA campus for an appointment. In addition veteran's suicide rate is 1.5 times higher than non-veteran suicide rate. Women veteran's suicide rate is 1.8 times higher than their non-veteran counterparts.

Because of the high rate of suicide among veterans, suicide prevention is a priority issue for the FRA. In 2005 the VA had 13,000 mental health professionals providing care for veterans. Today there are more than 20,000 mental health professionals at the VA. That number should continue to increase. The VA/DoD crisis hot line has assisted more than 640,000 people and rescued over 23,000 from potential suicide. There must be readily-available counseling support and expanded awareness of the help that is available to veterans in crisis.

The VA/Military crisis line has caring, qualified responders standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is available at: 1-800-273-8255 (press1).

### **Now is the Time for Deployed Troops to Ask for Absentee Ballot**

The Federal Voter Assistance Program (FVAP) wants deployed service members to know that now is the time to apply for an absentee ballot for the 2018 General Election. Most states require deployed service members to complete an absentee ballot application to start the absentee voting process. From October 1 to October 8, 2018 during Absentee Voting Week, FVAP, U.S. military installations, embassies, consulates and overseas citizens groups will be reminding U.S. Service members, their families and overseas citizens to vote now — and helping them do so from anywhere in the world.

Most registered overseas service members who requested an absentee ballot should have received it by now, as election offices nationwide were required to send these voters their absentee ballots by September 22, 2018. Those who did not receive their ballot in time to return it by their state's deadline have the option of using a special backup ballot, the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), available at [online](#).

Absentee voters should check their state voting deadlines, follow all ballot instructions and send back their ballot in plenty of time for it to arrive. FVAP offers an interactive online tool that helps voters fill out their backup ballot, sign and send it to their election office. Voters who end up receiving an official ballot after sending in a backup ballot should go ahead and fill it out and send it back, as well. States will ensure only one ballot is counted per voter.

The voting rights of service members and their eligible family members, are protected by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). FRA worked to improve the process by which military overseas ballots are processed. FRA successfully supported UOCAVA provisions in the FY2010 Defense Authorization that streamlined military overseas voting.

FVAP provides comprehensive information about overseas citizens here:

<https://www.fvap.gov/info/reports-surveys/overseas-citizen-population-analysis>. Information about the approximately 95 percent of U.S. military members who are eligible to vote absentee through the UOCAVA process (they are stationed away from their voting residence and polling place) is available [online](#).

For additional information, visit FVAP.gov, email [vote@fvap.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.gov) or call 1-800-438-VOTE (8683). ....