

Newsletter for SGT Michael A. DiRaimondo Chapter 750 Military Order of the Purple Heart

<http://moph-chapter-750.com>

Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid.
They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices.
Harry S. Truman, April 16, 1945.



From the Commander

Next Meeting will be in Santa Barbara at the Veterans Memorial Building on West Cabrillo Boulevard at the beach: 112 W Cabrillo Boulevard (Chapala Street); Tele. (805) 568-0020. Park on W. Mason Street one block above Cabrillo; walk through a small park toward the beach. The building does not allow pets without a doctor's authorization.

A major thank you to former Capt. Jon Williams for generously hosting the May Family Picnic at his home in Camarillo. This was a fun picnic and great success. Well done, sir. See photos page 4.

Unit 750 LAMOPH

Thank you Patriot Jon Williams for hosting 750's May annual meeting and delicious tri-tip picnic. Thank you to all for snacks, desserts, beverages and all your help on deck. It was a great celebration of accomplishments and shared hopes for the year ahead.

LAMOPH Department's annual meeting in May was a useful exchange of ideas on ways to assist Veterans, educational with presentations by National and Regional officers and as always fun to see friends. Two scholarships were awarded – the essays on why Vietnam Veterans should never be forgotten were so touching that both were featured in the current Purple Heart Magazine. With all the clever and generous donations of items from Units, the Department's raffle was successful in raising nearly \$1,200 and helped assure next year's offering of scholarships to members of LAMOPH/MOPH. We're proud that Unit 750 members continue to serve as officers of the Department. Please join me in congratulating and thanking Vicky Manjarrez, Susie Seydel-Pitman, MaryLee Maline and Kitty Hurliman for stepping up again in leadership roles for the Department. The Department approved grants of up to \$500 to each Unit that applies for funds to be used for the service and welfare of Veterans.

Our June 9th meeting will be at the Santa Barbara Veteran's Memorial Building at 6 p.m. followed by dinner with the Patriots. On the agenda is a discussion of ideas for fundraising, ways to assist with Veteran's needs and vote on application for \$500 grant from Department, support for the Chapter's Thanksgiving food baskets, and thoughts on 750's proposed clothing donation program. MaryLee is leading the June meeting's potluck. Sausages/pepper sandwiches are on the menu. We have dessert, coffee and water covered. Who can help with a pasta salad, green salad, some sodas or snack preceding the meeting? Planning and effort go into the potluck dinners so please let us hear in advance that you will be attending. Thank you ladies for all that you do in caring for our Patriots and Veterans. Questions or ideas you'd like to share – call or email me at 805-565-3759 or ms@west.net. Sally Irving, Unit President.

Department of California MOPH 2016 Convention

Jim Anderson is the new Commander, good man, he was longtime finance officer.

Pierre Claeysens Veterans Foundation Santa Barbara Granada Theater Events

Summer hiatus, tickets will be back this fall.

Update Purple Heart Trail – Santa Barbara County

The check to Caltrans is in the mail. Finance Officer Jon Williams wrote the check at the May Family Picnic. I checked with the bank and they have not canceled the check, but the PH Trail is IN THE WORKS!

Our Newest Project: Parking Signs



There are an estimated 2-million Purple Heart recipients who made great sacrifices to ensure our fellow countrymen's freedoms, but often go unrecognized.

Wounded Warriors Family Support Foundation founder, Col. John Folsom, decided to give Combat Wounded Parking Signs, free of charge as a way of honoring and recognizing Purple Heart recipients.

Stretching from coast to coast. The signs have been placed in the parking lots of businesses, churches, schools and colleges, government, and medical facilities.

The 12" x 18" signs are intended to designate parking for those awarded the Purple Heart. They must be erected according to the same local guidelines that apply to similar handicap parking signs.

So what do you think? The process is simple, the Patriots and Ladies visit shopping malls, government buildings,

city councils, parking authorities, military bases, super markets, big box stores and make a simple request, "Would you be so kind as to recognize those who gave so much to our country". In many cases we will have to go to small business owners, governing bodies and corporate hierarchy to make the request. This effort will build visibility within our communities; instill pride and patriotism with many who see these signs. The signs will stand as silent recruiters for membership and we'll probably pick up financial donations. The signs are free, we pay shipping. How many can you distribute? We'll get a count and order the signs.

The parking sign will be attending the next meeting.

Amanda Flener, Region IV LAMOPH President (Tel. 229-325-8106) Has a Request

I would love for you to complete the survey attached. It is completely anonymous and will not require you to add any personally identifying details. I'm very interested in why people do or do not participate in Veteran Service Organizations, what organizations which with they are familiar.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HQ8ZGMD>

The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor

<http://www.thepurpleheart.com/recipient/>

Pins, Violas and Collection Cans Available at the May Meeting

The money goes to support Chap. 750, collection cans and violas are for public donations.

Chapter Meeting Schedule for 2015

Need a ride to the meeting? Contact me. Members may be able to car pool with you. Meetings are generally on the second Thursday of the month at 6:00 pm at the Veterans Home of California, Ventura (805-659-7500); located at 10900 Telephone Road Ventura or at the Santa Barbara Veterans Memorial Building on the beach. LAMOPH meets same time/same place as the Patriots.

Upcoming Meetings
June 9 – July 14 – August 11

Family Picnic



At Patriot Williams Lovely Home

Chapter and Unit
Swearing in Ceremony

Maury McGuire Chapter
Patriot of the Year



Dept. Convention
Lunch



California lawmakers battling to access VA records to help resolve complaints

WASHINGTON D.C.

May 13, 2016

California lawmakers, distressed by the number of veterans experiencing difficulties accessing benefits, want to use their congressional allowance to pay to train members of their staffs to access veterans' records.

More veterans live in California than in any other state. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs statistics show that 1.85 million veterans live in California. And most of them – roughly 1.38 million of them – are wartime veterans.

Those veterans call or show up at congressional district offices whenever they feel the department has failed them. That's why lawmakers say they want their staffs to have read-only access to records to determine if there are errors or missing information preventing veterans from receiving housing and health benefits.

Cosponsoring the legislation that would make that access possible are Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, Rep. Mark De Saulnier, D-Concord, Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, Edward Royce, R-Fullerton, and Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena.

"We've had veterans who were misclassified; veterans who had their request for classification or disability put on hold, get lost or buried in the bureaucracy," Thompson said.

He cited the case of a homeless veteran who had been unable to gain benefits that would help him find a place to live and medical care. "He was misclassified, so he couldn't get health care and he couldn't get any help getting into housing and, as a result, we got him into [Department of Veterans Affairs] healthcare and into an apartment where he's living," Thompson said.

Florida Rep. Ted Yoho, a Republican, crafted the legislation, known as the WINGMAN Act, following a failed effort to convince Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald that lawmakers needed additional oversight of veterans' records.

The legislation would allow staff to have read-only access to the status of a pending claim, medical records, comp-and-pen records, rating decisions of a case and supplementary statement of the case as well as notices of disagreement, he said.

Yoho began publicly prodding McDonald to allow lawmakers to have read-only access to the records of their veteran constituents in April 2015. McDonald initially seemed to warm to the idea, but by early 2016 it was clear that his support was wavering and Congress would have to take legislative action, Yoho said.

Some of these poor individuals have passed away by the time we're able to address their issue in the way that we would have liked to in the beginning. Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno

“When I first met Secretary McDonald, he said: ‘Well, that’s kind of a no brainer,’ ” Yoho said. “He goes: ‘I don’t know why we wouldn’t do that.’ And then we were starting to get a little bit of blowback and we were finding out that it was privacy issues, you know, looking over the shoulder of the service workers in the regional service centers. And we’re not looking over anybody’s shoulder other than, ‘I want to find out the status of Veteran A’s claim.’ ”

Only a small number of the California congressional delegation initially expressed interest in Yoho’s early 2015 crusade. They cosigned two letters, dated April 20, 2015, and Aug. 11, 2015. McDonald encouraged the collaborative effort, but said in his response letters that the issue was complicated because it crossed “many areas of concern,” including privacy, legal, regulatory and system limitations.

By early 2016, lawmakers from several states decided to support Yoho’s efforts. Costa, DeSaulnier, LaMalfa, Thompson signed a February letter to McDonald. Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista, and Rep. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, also signed the letter.

About 27,000 veterans reside in Costa’s district, according to staff data. DeSaulnier has 5,115 veterans in his district; LaMalfa, about 59,000; and Thompson, roughly 45,000, according to data from their offices. Lowenthal has about 8,375 veterans in his district, and Issa has more than 46,800 veteran constituents, the data indicate.

Collectively, the California legislators continued to press McDonald on why the department was preventing them from playing a more significant role in helping their constituents.

“In our combined experience, by the time a constituent advocate begins working on a veteran’s case, they are the only staff working the issue because all other avenues have been exhausted,” the letter said. “Given that our staffs are typically contacted in many cases as a last resort – after having first sought help from the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs] or a service officer – to help veterans navigate significant issues they are facing at the [department], we request further information clarifying why congressional offices continue to be denied access.”

The Department of Veterans Affairs does not have the legal authority to provide congressional staff members with unrestricted access to its electronic benefits processing system, Veterans Affairs Benefits Chief Allison Hickey said in a letter to Congress dated Oct. 6, 2015. Also, the records plan would likely cause “substantial administrative burdens” on the department and “instances in which the representatives would not be notified of developments and deadlines in the Veterans’ cases,” she said.

Hickey resigned 10 days later, but a VA spokesman used essentially her same words to respond to a recent request for comment.

Lawmakers say that veterans in their late 60s, 70s, or 80s often have health and disability issues that need to be addressed quickly and cannot have those needs postponed due to a cumbersome government system. Unfortunately, some veterans face monthlong waits for answers that sometimes come too late, Costa said.

“Some of these poor individuals have passed away by the time we’re able to address their issue in the way that we would have liked to in the beginning,” he said.

If the WINGMAN Act gains enough congressional support and the approval of President Barack Obama, then each lawmaker could have a certified staff member with read-only access to veterans’ records sometime in 2017, according to Yoho spokesman Brian Kaveney. It would cost a few thousand dollars to train a staffer to work with those records, Yoho said. Lawmakers who choose to spend their congressional allowances on that training would be reimbursed for those funds, according to the Members’ Handbook, which spells out how members of Congress can spend their office funds.