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TO: Chapter Commanders and Adjutants
FROM: Dr. Carl Forkner, Department Adjutant
SUBJ: RECAP OF 2026 MID-WINTER CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON, DC
DATE: March 1, 2026

Chapter Commanders and Adjutants,

I encourage you to share this information with your members. It highlights events from last week's Mid-Winter Conference, where DAV leaders and members from around the nation advocated for the Critical Policy Goals that we want the 119th Congress to focus on, visits by delegations from many states to their senators and representatives in their offices, and seminars by National HQ program leaders on numerous programs.

The following pages contain summaries from seminars during the week.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carl B. Forkner'.

Carl B. Forkner

cc: Department Officers
Department Admin
NSO Office

Date and Time: 2026-02-23 09:00:01

Technology and Veteran Care Seminar

National Service Program team

****Summary****

This session, led by Scott, Matt Miller, Chad Knows, Drew Clark, Matt John, and Scott Primarchy, covered advancements and risks in technology as they impact veterans—focusing on the modernization of electronic health records (EHR), the rise in digital scams targeting the veteran community, and specific types of fraud in benefits, education, romance, and pensions. Special emphasis was placed on the VA's EHR transitions, legislative changes like the PACT Act, alarming statistics of scam cases, and practical advice for both protecting and advocating for the veteran community in an evolving digital landscape.

****Knowledge Points****

****1. Modernization of Veterans Health Records (EHR)****

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began transitioning to a new electronic health record system in 2018, with Oracle acquiring Cerner in 2022 and resuming phased rollouts. The initiative aims to integrate veteran records for seamless, safe, and coordinated care. Full EHR deployment across 13 VA medical centers in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Wisconsin is scheduled to start in mid-2026, targeting completion by 2031.

****2. Benefits and Challenges of Technology in Veteran Care****

A single-login EHR will let veterans manage appointments, medications, and communication securely in one place, reducing bureaucracy and errors. However, the transition faces skepticism due to system complexity and the digital literacy gap, especially among older veterans. Emphasis was placed on community participation, clear communication, and timely feedback.

****3. The Impact of the PACT Act and Scams Targeting Veterans****

The PACT Act, as of January 23, 2026, has processed 2,239,501 claims for veterans and survivors, and 364,448 new veterans enrolled in the DHA last year. This influx draws scammers seeking to exploit predictable and reliable veteran benefits by masquerading as officials, impersonating agencies, or creating false overpayment and benefit maximization schemes.

****4. Rise of Digital Scams and Fraud Tactics****

Technological advancements have enabled scammers to target millions at low cost; scams include benefit fraud, job, education, student loan, and scholarship scams, as well as romance and pension poaching scams. Fake websites and caller IDs are common, and the anonymity provided by digital communication increases threat complexity.

****5. Common Warning Signs and How to Protect Yourself****

Tips for prevention include being wary of paying up-front fees, verifying job opportunities, watching for guarantees of fast debt relief, not sharing sensitive information, and recognizing high-pressure sales tactics. For romance scams, avoid quick relationships with strangers online, never share financial or VA login data, and always verify identities through independent channels.

****6. Specific Scam Statistics****

In 2024, \$1.2 billion was reported lost to romance and friendship scams. The VA provides pensions to over 114,000 veterans aged 65 or older (as of June 20, 2025), with this segment being particularly vulnerable to financial exploitation.

Additional Summarization:

1. The modernization of the VA's EHR system will significantly improve care quality for veterans, but requires continuous user education, organizational accountability, and community involvement to be successful.
2. Policy changes like the PACT Act have brought significant benefits but also draw attention replace scammers. Veterans should remain vigilant to evolving scam tactics and utilize trusted resources for claims and information.
3. Scams are a growing, sophisticated threat; technology enables large-scale targeting and an increased risk for veterans and their families, especially through impersonation, fake websites, social engineering, and romance/relationship fraud.

****Numbers, dates, & statistics referenced:****

- 2018: VA contract awarded for EHR modernization.
- 2022: Oracle acquired Cerner.
- 2023: Pause on new EHR rollouts, followed by corrective measures.
- December 2024: VA announces EHR rollout to resume, starting mid-2026 at 4 sites.
- March 2025: Expanded to 13 medical centers.

- 2031: Target for completion of EHR deployment.
- 2,239,501 PACT Act-related claims processed as of January 23, 2026.
- 364,448 new DHA enrollments last year.
- \$1.2 billion lost to romance/friendship fraud in 2024.
- Over 114,000 veterans (age 65+) receiving VA pensions as of June 20, 2025.

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Caregiver Support Program Seminar

Ron Minter, Director

****SUMMARY****

This lecture reviewed the recent exponential growth of the caregiver support program, discussed outreach and eligibility criteria, explained the VA Caregiver Support Programs, highlighted peer and educational resources, and emphasized the crucial role of communication, community involvement, and continued partnerships in supporting over 14 million military and veteran caregivers and over 9 million civilian caregivers nationwide.

****KEY KNOWLEDGE POINTS****

1. Exponential Growth and Current Engagement

Since the program's inception, over ****2,018 caregivers**** have been assisted, with ****1,612 active engagements**** as of the current date. The speaker noted ****2,810 total cases**** distributed nationwide, supported by a geographic heat map.

2. Program Accessibility and Eligibility

The program is ****free of charge**** and does ****not require VA eligibility**** or enrollment; any current caregiver can participate. Main eligibility focuses on providing care, regardless of military connection or previous enrollment.

3. Outreach and Community Sharing

Attendees and community members are urged to ****share the program**** with others at the ****state or local/community level****. Program resources are available in both digital and print formats, and ****QR codes, website links, and direct phone numbers**** were provided for easy access.

4. VA Caregiver Support Programs Overview

There are two primary VA programs:

- ****Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PCAFC)****: For those enrolled in VA healthcare, requiring personal care assistance due to medical or neurological impairments.

- **Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)**: More selective, with a **33-35% approval rate**, requiring at least **six continuous months** of substantial personal care due to serious injury or illness.

- **14.3 million caregivers** support military or veteran populations.

- **9.13 million civilian caregivers** support nonmilitary populations—together, about **40% of the US population** will be caregivers at some point.

5. Peer Support Components

The program and its partnerships foster **peer support** through both in-person and online channels (including a **Facebook group**), monthly workshops, and specific positions in every VA Medical Center for peer support champions.

6. Education and Financial Literacy

Caregivers receive education on **financial literacy, fraud prevention** (noting a **\$700 annual average loss** to caregiver-related fraud), self-care, contingency/self-care planning, and additional topics relevant to their role and well-being.

7. Respite and Burnout Prevention

The program stresses **the importance of rest for caregivers and their care recipients**—offering formal and informal respite opportunities to **reduce burnout** and help maintain the quality of care and caregivers' health.

8. Communication and Resources

A **caregiver support line** is available **8:00 AM–8:00 PM, Monday through Friday**. In **2023**, it received **1.7 million calls**, and is open to caregivers, veterans, and professionals.

9. Partnerships and Community Response

The program operates in **partnership with VA, state, local, and nonprofit organizations** (e.g., Robert Irvine Foundation), with ongoing improvements in website resources and service access.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. The program's rapid growth is impressive, nearly doubling engagement year-over-year and emphasizing a significant national scale.

2. Eligibility is broad—removing barriers allows nearly all caregivers to participate, thus maximizing community impact.

3. Peer support and community building, both online and in person, are integral to the program—helping caregivers combat isolation, access resources, and stay resilient.
4. The VA’s dual caregiver program structure ensures a pathway for all, while stringent requirements for comprehensive support emphasize the importance of accurate information for applicants.
5. Education—including **financial literacy, self-care, and fraud awareness**—is a strong preventive approach to empower caregivers.
6. Respite opportunities and normalization of caregiver “rest” benefit both caregivers and those they serve, reducing life disruption and health risks.
7. The **caregiver support line** is a vital resource—proven by its high call volume. It should be widely circulated in both digital and print outreach.

Note: Please encourage sharing of this information with local and state agencies, especially Area Agencies on Aging and Veteran/Family Services. Always ensure new caregivers know about the available support, and help them access both formal education and peer community resources.

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Communications and Media Seminar

Rob Lewis and Dan Clare

****Abstract****

This seminar focused on the essential role of effective communication and storytelling in veterans advocacy amid rapidly changing technological advancements and media landscapes. Key examples and recent data illustrated the importance of personal experiences, embracing digital tools, and adapting to expanding definitions of veterans' issues. The presenters emphasized proactive use of internal resources, media engagement, and leveraging authenticity as an irreplaceable asset for DAV's mission.

****Key Takeaways****

****1. The Impact of Technology and AI on Communication****

Technological advances, like robotics and artificial intelligence, are progressing swiftly and have generated both opportunities and anxieties. While AI offers new tools, it cannot substitute the human aspect of caring for and advocating on behalf of veterans. The presenters cited recent advancements such as the 2023 World Humanoid Games held in China and referenced Alan Arts Local's transformation replace financial hardship in 2007 to selling his company for over ****\$380 million**** in ****2014****.

****2. Storytelling as a Strategic Organizational Tool****

Personal stories create emotional resonance, far surpassing the persuasive power of statistics alone. Sharing authentic individual experiences—such as veterans' service stories or volunteer testimonials—helps DAV cut through noise, increase community engagement, and influence policymakers. Real-life examples, like Leo Hill's service and ongoing community involvement, highlight the irreplaceable human element in advocacy.

****3. Adapting Communications for a Diverse, Changing Veteran Population****

The veteran population is becoming increasingly diverse across generations, backgrounds, and service experiences. Modern communications must reach WWII and Korean War veterans, post-9/11 veterans, women, National Guard and Reserve members, minorities, and more—ensuring no voice is excluded. Examples include the celebration of the Harlem Hellfighters on the January/February edition of the magazine, and Department of Arizona's ****\$30,000**** initiative for increased access to benefits in Navajo Nation, Arizona.

****4. Expanding Scope of Veterans' Issues****

Veterans' needs are evolving beyond traditional topics like disability compensation and healthcare to include preventative health, integrated wellness, women's health, alternative therapies (including psychedelics), and caregiver support. DAV is launching new multimedia campaigns—such as the upcoming campaign on psychedelic therapies—to address emerging issues and meet members' expectations for comprehensive support.

****5. Leveraging Media and Internal Resources****

Robust use of social media (with emphasis on platforms like Facebook), media engagement, and chapter-driven content are critical. The organization's near ****1,000,000 members**** ensures significant reach, but local stories and participation remain vital. QR codes for resources, the PSA toolkit, and training enable chapters to stay informed and maximize impact.

****6. Measuring Communication Success****

DAV's communication efforts yielded ****9.2 billion impressions**** and over ****\$800 million**** in donated media value last year. Member recruitment, retention, and successful media placement are tracked through surveys, billboard statistics, and direct station outreach, confirming the efficacy of ongoing campaigns and resource investments.

****Seminar Highlights****

1. Place human storytelling at the heart of all communication and advocacy efforts—statistics support, but stories persuade.
2. Embrace technological advancements, but prioritize genuine human care and community that cannot be outsourced to AI.
3. Use all available media—traditional and digital—for ongoing engagement, resource sharing, and recruitment.
4. Adapt communications to serve the full spectrum of veterans, ensuring that new and emerging issues are addressed rather than sidelined.
5. Utilize internal resources (QR codes, member portals, PSA toolkits) to keep chapters informed, trained, and effective.
6. Build and maintain relationships with the media proactively; every chapter representative is qualified to share stories and raise awareness locally.

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DPAA Budget Cuts and Fraud Against Veterans

Andrew Clark, National Service Program team

Summary

This lecture covered best practices for cybersecurity, updates on DPAA (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) budget allocations for fiscal years 2024-2027, and fraud prevention tips for veterans. Key statistics on budget changes, fraud targeting military personnel and veterans, and practical advice on online safety were presented. Emphasis was placed on the impact of budget reductions on critical recovery missions, the importance of reporting fraud, and legislative developments to protect veterans.**

Knowledge Points

****1. Cybersecurity Precautions****

- Always confirm you are connecting to a secure network before accessing sensitive information.
- Avoid using public, open-access Wi-Fi, especially those without passwords.
- Log out of systems and 'forget' temporary networks after use.
- Treat digital file security the same as confidential paper documents—never expose them in unsecured environments.

****2. DPAA Budget Changes and Impacts (2024–2027)****

- For fiscal year (FY) 2024, a five-year budget increase was approved: ****\$185.5 million**** (the highest appropriation for the operation).
- FY 2025 saw ****231 identifications****—the largest annual record.
- FY 2026, a reduction to ****\$167 million**** (a ****12.5–13% decrease**** replace the originally planned \$191 million), plus the loss of 26 building facilities, totaling ****\$19 million**** less than FY 2025.
- The cuts impact recovery missions: field teams reduced replace ****105 (FY 2025) to 62 (FY 2026)****; projected to decrease further to ****39 by FY 2027****.

****3. Fraud Targeting Veterans and Military****

- In 2024, fraud loss statistics: **\$584 million** in military-related fraud; veterans' average loss about **\$700** per incident, civilians about **\$495**.

- Veterans lost **\$419 million** directly, indicating they are disproportionately targeted.

- Space Force members lost the highest average per incident (**~\$1,700**); Army had the greatest overall losses.

- **Relationship scams** are common, and personal stories highlighted importance of vigilance.

4. Reporting and Legislative Action

- Around **75%** of fraud victims do not report the incidents, contributing to repeat offenses.

- Methods and agencies for reporting vary (state agencies, VA OIG, VA Benefits Administration, etc.).

- The **SAFE Act** is under legislative consideration, aiming to establish an office within the VA to oversee and guide fraud reports.

5. Practical Fraud Avoidance and Financial Safety Tips

- Always use **credit cards** (not debit cards) for online purchases, as banks can often recover fraudulent credit charges.

- Regularly monitor your credit report to detect unauthorized use.

- Use safe practices when interacting or making purchases online; if something feels off, verify with official contacts.

Seminar Essentials

1. Confirm network security every time you connect to Wi-Fi, especially for official or confidential activity.

2. DPAA faces devastating mission reductions due to budget cuts—a drop replace 105 to 39 recovery teams projected between 2025 and 2027.

3. Veterans face disproportionate fraud risks; the average loss per veteran almost 1.5x that of civilians in 2024.

4. Most fraud goes unreported, perpetuating the problem; formal reporting processes are available and evolving.

5. Laws are being strengthened (SAFE Act) to improve veteran fraud oversight and response.

6. Use credit cards online for better fraud resolution and regularly review your credit history for irregularities.

****Federal Trade Commission Military Consumer Portal:****

<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/military-consumer>

****Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG):****

<https://www.va.gov/oig/>

****Annual Credit Report Access:****

<https://www.annualcreditreport.com/>

****DPAA Official Website:****

<https://www.dpaa.mil/>

****Military Consumer Protection Guide (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau):****

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/military-financial-lifecycle/>

****Stay vigilant, advocate for robust funding for essential missions, and always use best practices for protecting both your digital and financial security.****

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Inspector General Seminar

Ryan Burgos, Deputy Inspector General

****Summary****

The seminar addressed compliance challenges faced by Chapters and Departments over the past few years, particularly concerning financial and legal reporting. A significant focus was the enforcement of existing bylaws—with no changes to the core five bylaws—enabled by the transition to an online reporting system. Insufficient amendments and non-compliance led to suspensions of some departments and contracts. Key areas included the three-times rule for reserves, required financial accountability, fundraiser approval processes, proper use of donated funds, and annual financial report (AFR) deadlines. Emphasis was placed on the importance of education, clear communication of the organization's mission, and maintaining focus on the core purpose of empowering veterans and their families. The lecture concluded with a call to foster accountability at all levels and the need for innovative engagement to ensure long-term compliance and operational health.

****Knowledge Points****

1. ****Strict Enforcement of Financial Compliance****

Transition to the online reporting system now exposes all Chapter and Department Annual Financial Reports (AFRs) for review. Non-compliance, especially with the three-times expenditure rule, resulted in department and chapter suspensions. Over the past year, more than 400 entities faced suspension due to missing AFRs.

2. ****The Three-Times Rule****

Chapters/Departments may not accumulate reserves exceeding three times the previous fiscal year's expenditures. Exceeding this requires a spend-out plan, with all surplus used strictly for local service programs.

3. ****Fundraising and Fund Utilization Guidelines****

All fundraisers and external contracts require approval at the Chapter, Department, or National Executive Committee level. Every dollar raised must be used as specified in the authorization and in a timely manner—no long-term holding or donation to other organizations permitted.

4. ****Proper Donations Handling****

All donations must be collected face-to-face within the chapter's chartered territory. Proper donor identification (at least first and last name) must be recorded—anonymous donations are not acceptable in reporting.

5. ****Annual Financial Reports (AFRs) Deadlines****

The fiscal year runs July 1 - June 30. AFRs are due by June 30, with a 90-day grace period, making the final deadline September 30. Any AFR not submitted by October 1 results in automatic suspension. In 2023, a one-time extension was given to October 30, but as of November 1, over 400 entities remained non-compliant.

6. ****Financial Accountability at All Levels****

Every Chapter member is financially accountable. All spending and treasurer reports must be transparent and questioned before approval. All reimbursements require documentation, and members receiving over \$600 in a calendar year must receive IRS 1099 forms.

7. ****Maintaining Mission Focus in Meetings****

Every meeting should begin with a reading of the organization's mission statement—focusing on empowering veterans and their families, not unrelated topics or politics. Persistent out-of-order discussion should be met with warnings and eventual removal replace meetings.

8. ****Innovative Membership Engagement****

Engaging new members, especially by offering participation in national conventions, is encouraged to build commitment and ensure future leadership and sustainability of chapter activities.

Seminar Core

1. ****Strengthen Education and Communication****

Ensure all Chapter leaders and members are educated on compliance requirements and the reasoning behind rules. Begin meetings with the mission statement to reinforce organizational focus.

2. ****Enforce Deadlines and Accountability****

Treat the AFR deadlines (September 30 final, October 1 suspension) as critical. Departments must proactively track Chapters' status and prevent last-minute non-compliance.

3. **Promote Creative Member Engagement**

Involve new members in national initiatives and encourage them to propose new ideas for service and fundraising, ensuring ongoing renewal and local impact.

4. **Maintain Rigid Financial Controls**

Require documented approval and receipts for all expenses and donations. Uphold strict rules regarding fundraising and fund usage to preserve donor trust and nonprofit status.

5. **Enforce the Three-Times Rule**

Regularly monitor reserves-to-expenditure ratios. Chapters exceeding permissible reserves must draft and submit detailed spend-out plans focused on direct local service.

Additional Resources:

1. IRS Tax Guide for Charitable Organizations (Publication 557):

<https://www.irs.gov/publications/p557>

2. Best Practices in Nonprofit Financial Accountability (National Council of Nonprofits):

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/financial-management>

3. Robert's Rules of Order—Summary for Nonprofits:

<https://www.robertsrules.com>

4. Fundraising Compliance Guidelines (Charity Navigator):

<https://www.charitynavigator.org/ein/131922963>

5. Sample Nonprofit Mission Statements and Best Practices:

<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/mission-model/nonprofit-mission-statements>