



The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Dept. of Veterans Services
October & November, 2022

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New Mexico Department of Veterans Services Cabinet Secretary to Leave DVS



Sonya Smith
Outgoing DVS
Cabinet Secretary

New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith will step down as head of the department on Friday, November 11—Veterans Day.

“I am very grateful to Secretary Smith for her service to New Mexico’s veterans and their families while leading the Department of Veterans Services,” said Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, who on November 8 was re-elected for a second four-year term. “I wish her and her family all the best moving forward.”

Under her leadership as DVS cabinet secretary, Secretary Smith supported the enactment of an income tax exemption for armed forces retiree pensions. She also helped successfully galvanize New Mexico’s push-back against a nationwide VA proposal to close 700 community-based outpatient clinics—

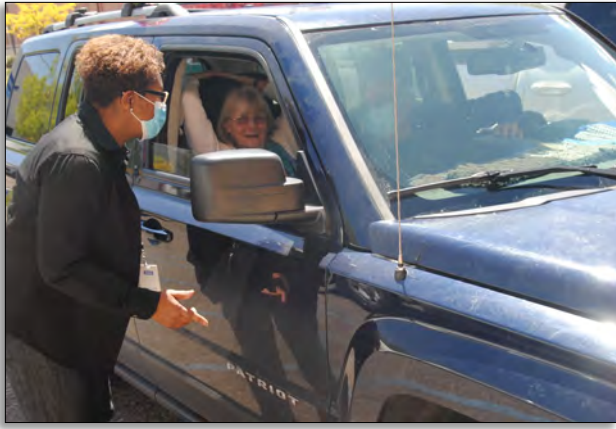
including four in New Mexico, along with the VA PTSD clinic at the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center.

Secretary Smith also oversaw the DVS launch of the Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program, which provides cost-free round-trip transportation for New Mexico veterans from 15 counties categorized as “highly rural” to any VA or VA-approved medical appointment. She also increased the number of veterans service officers (VSOs) to the department’s highest number ever, increasing ready access to services for veterans throughout the state; reinstated the Women Veterans Program, increasing service to the fastest-growing demographic in military affairs; and established a full-time department tribal liaison to better support Native American veterans.



“I’d like to express my deepest thanks to the governor for trusting me to serve New Mexico’s veterans. It has been an honor and a privilege to be a member of her administration,” said Secretary Smith, who previously worked at the department of health.

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"I have loved my many years of service in New Mexico, but I am looking forward to being able to be closer to family, and am excited about this next chapter in my life."

A veteran of the Gulf War, Secretary Smith served as a medical technician in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm as a member of the U.S. Air Force Reserve, from which she received an honorable discharge. She earned a bachelor's degree in health services management from Norfolk State University in Norfolk, Va., and a master's in health care compliance from Argosy University.

"I also want to express my appreciation to New Mexico's veterans," she said. "Thank you for your service. America would not be the great nation that we are if it weren't for your sacrifice to serve and protect us."

"And last, but not least, to the DVS family that I've had the privilege of working with—thank YOU for your hard work to make sure that, in New Mexico, *Every Day is Veterans Day*. You make this the BEST state agency in New Mexico. I know you'll continue giving your very best for New Mexico's veterans."





DVS Presents \$8.6 Million Budget to the Legislative Finance Committee

DVS presented its fiscal year 2024 (FY24) agency budget request to the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) on October 19 at the state Capitol in Santa Fe.

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith requested an \$8.6 million FY24 budget—an increase of 19.8% from the budget of the current fiscal year (FY23) which ends June 30 of next year. She testified that the proposed budget is needed to enable the agency to grow and keep up with new challenges to its mandate of serving New Mexico's veterans and their families.

Among the immediate goals and needs for the agency are:

Increase staffing and outreach

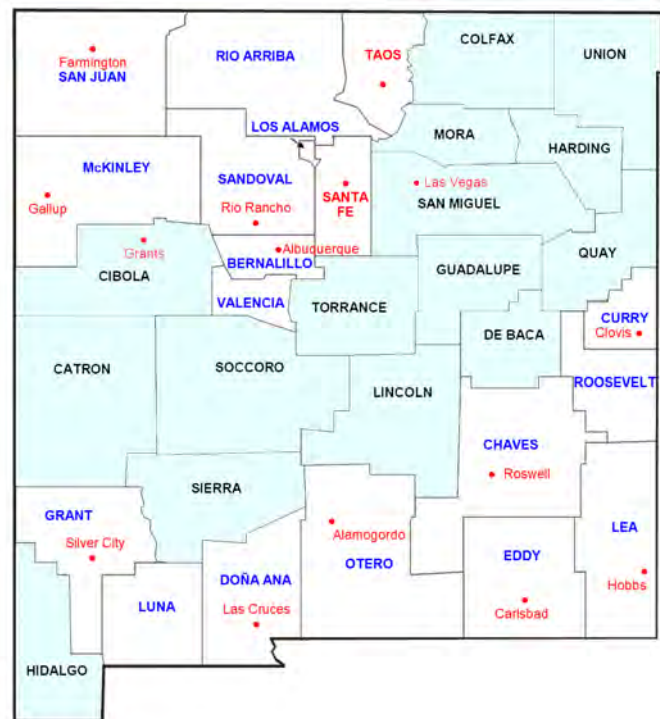
- Increase service and outreach to the state's rural areas. Many veterans, particularly those living in Native American pueblos and on other tribal land, do not have internet access—which DVS offers as an alternative to in-person office visits for veterans seeking help with their benefits needs.
- DVS also anticipates a rise in VA claims filings by veterans due to the recent passage of the PACT Act. This new federal law allows Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan War veterans to file VA medical treatment claims for treatment of health issues linked to exposure to toxic smoke from “burn pits” and exposure to other toxic materials while in service.
- The new law also allows Vietnam War veterans to finally file claims for health conditions linked to exposure to the “Agent Orange” herbicide used by the U.S. military as a jungle defoliant in southeast Asia.

Expand coverage of its existing Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program

The lack of a reliable transportation options is one of the top complaints by veterans throughout the state—and is cited as a reason why many do not seek medical care.

DVS would like to expand its existing Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program (HRVTP) offering free round-trip rides to and from a veteran's home and any VA medical appointment.

The current HRVTP is funded by an annual VA grant limiting service to veterans in fifteen counties categorized as “highly rural” by VA (less than seven veterans per 1,000 residents). *(continued on next page)*



Continue funding of the DVS Honor Guard Program

DVS manages the state's honor guard program--overseeing 40 honor guards that render military honors at the majority of veterans funerals in the state. DVS holds two training conferences every year for these all-volunteer units, and provides a stipend for each funeral performance. The number of funeral services rendered by these honor guards has jumped 150% over the past three years. DVS expects this trend to increase in the coming years, especially with the expected groundbreaking of a Carlsbad state veterans cemetery next summer—with completion expected by late 2024.

“I feel really good about our budget proposal,” said DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith. “I think it will allow DVS to not only keep up with our continued mission, but to also allow to expand and take on these expected situations.”

Video Highlights of the 2022 Forgotten Heroes Funeral

[DVS has produced a short video](#) highlighting the 2022 Forgotten Heroes Funeral on September 29 at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. The unclaimed cremated remains of 29 veterans were interred with military honors.



DVS, Bernalillo County Sign \$300K Agreement to Restore Historic Cemetery

The Bernalillo County Commission, on a 4-0 vote, approved a one-time \$300,000 appropriation to DVS for overseeing the restoration and help support the Albuquerque Historic Fairview Cemetery.

The cemetery, located at 700 Yale Blvd SE, is the final resting place for an estimated 500 veterans—including some who served in our nation's Civil War. It was the city's first public cemetery, but has fallen into a severe state of disrepair since it was closed twenty years ago. To facilitate the transfer of funds, a memorandum of agreement (MOA) has been signed between the county, DVS, and the Historic Fairview Cemetery non-profit group which owns the 17-acre site.

Under the MOA, DVS will oversee the restoration effort, which had been done until now by the non-profit group and volunteer members of the public. DVS, which manages state veterans cemeteries in Angel Fire, Fort Stanton, and Gallup, will:

- build an 18-inch block wall around designated veterans burial areas
- finish the clearing of debris and weeds/overgrown vegetation
- install xeriscape landscaping
- restore and align grave markers for veteran gravesites
- restore the existing “Unknown Dead” monument
- and other restoration projects as needed

DVS is targeting completion for late spring of next year.



Veterans Property Tax Exemption/Waiver Backlog

The DVS state benefits division is currently experiencing a heavy influx of veterans property tax exemption and waiver applications.

As a result, delays from between 30-45 days to process the applications should be expected. DVS is asking for your patience as staff works diligently to process these applications and sending approved exemption and waiver certificates.

If you have any questions, please call the state benefits office at (505) 827-6300, or email us at vet.benefits@dvs.nm.gov.

DVS Staff Provide Assistance at Four “Stand Downs” For Homeless & Low-Income Veterans

DVS was among the many state, federal, local, and tribal/Native American agencies providing assistance at “stand downs” for homeless and low-income veterans in Gallup, Farmington, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces in October. Veterans were able to get assistance from the agencies, as well as free clothing, back packs, footwear, blankets, sleeping bags, and a hot meal.

On October 7, DVS Veterans Service Officer (VSO) John Livingston and DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Theresa Figueroa made sure veterans were aware of their VA and state veterans benefits at the city of Gallup’s 10th annual “Project Stand Down & Hand Up” stand down at Red Rock Park.



On October 14 in Farmington, Ms. Figueroa (*upper left photo, in red shirt*) and DVS Farmington VSO Robert Guinn (*upper right photo/in tan slacks*) and Ms. Figueroa assisted veterans at the annual San Juan County Stand Down for Homeless Veterans at San Juan College—which was organized by DVS Pueblo & Tribal Liason Beverly Charley, who also provided assistance.

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On October 20, Ms. Figueroa was joined by (*right photo, from L to R*) DVS VSOs Dayle Bad Warrior, DVS Social Worker Connie Vargas, and DVS VSO Patrick Abney at the annual “Project Stand Down & Hand Up” stand down presented by the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center at the Rock at Noonday near downtown Albuquerque. [DVS has produced a brief video](#) highlighting the event.



And on October 21 in Las Cruces, DVS VSO Vince Tellez (*left photo/at left*) provided assistance at a stand down hosted by VFW Post 10124.

Upcoming Homeless Veterans Stand Down: November 11-12 in Santa Fe

Santa Fe Vet Center
2209 Brothers Road

(9 a.m.—3 p.m. both days)

For more information: Phillip Chavez (505) 988-6562

Donations sought/appreciated!

DVS Provides Benefits Assistance at Clovis Veteran Benefits Fair



On October 25 in Clovis, DVS Clovis-based Veterans Service Officer Matt Barela (*top left photo, in red*) and DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Theresa Figueroa (*top right photo*) provided VA and state veterans benefits assistance at a veterans benefits fair hosted by American Legion Post 25....while Veterans Business Outreach Center Director Rich Coffel (*right photo*) provided help for veterans interested in opening their own business, or expanding an existing operation.



VBOC “Boots to Business: Reboot” Class in Colorado



On October 31, VBOC Business Advisory Johnny Martinez (*standing at top/center*) presented a *Boots to Business: Reboot* class at Front Range Community College Small Business Development Center in Ft. Collins, CO.

The VBOC, which is the business development division of DVS, also presents these classes in Colorado..Additionally, the VBOC has classes on military bases to help transitioning service members who are interested in opening their own business after their military service. Information will be

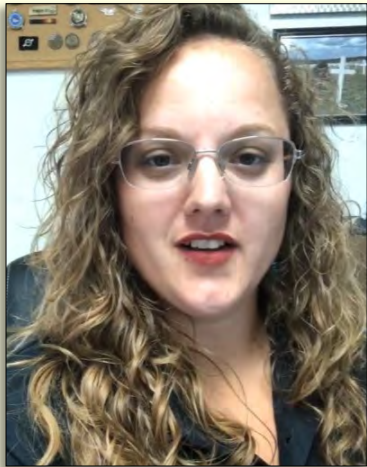
released about upcoming classes in Gallup and Colorado Springs.

DVS VSO of the Month

In this October issue of *The Guardian*, DVS is starting a new feature: DVS VSO of the Month.

DVS VSOs—veterans service officers—are the heart and soul of the agency. These men and women, who are all veterans themselves, are “boots-on-the-ground,” nationally certified staff members who work one-on-one with veterans and their eligible dependents to file VA claims, state veterans benefits, or helping with anything else a veteran needs help with.

Each month in this space, the spotlight will shine on a VSO to highlight a job well done.



Danielle Thompson
DVS Roswell VSO

The October 2022 VSO of the month is Roswell-based VSO Danielle Thompson. In nominating her for the honor, DVS Southeast Region Supervisor Matt Barela highlighted Danielle’s willingness to go above and beyond her duty as a VSO.

“Danielle’s advocacy for veterans, her ability to build relationships with partners within the veteran network, and her willingness to mentor new members of the team is an asset to the entire agency,” said Barela. “She is also recognized for her desire to grasp and utilize information to assist her veterans and for her outstanding ability to communicate with veterans and their families. In addition to making sure veterans who are eligible have access to healthcare and disability benefits, she can assist in getting lost medals replaced; tracking down military records; housing and transportation; and ultimately burial and survivor benefits.”

Barela added, “as a Navy veteran, Danielle knows of the difficulties she and other veterans may have in understanding and accessing benefits. She sees it as her purpose to make sure her fellow veterans receive the services and benefits to which they are entitled.”

DVS Field Services Division Director Robin Wilson agreed.

“Danielle has showed incredible empathy, compassion and knowledge in the CVSO services that she provides to the veterans in her area,” said Director Wilson. “She offers ideas and thoughts that improve morale within the agency and takes a mentoring approach to new staff. She seeks to increase her personal knowledge of VA and state benefits and shares what she learns with all staff.”

Congratulations to Danielle Thompson, the inaugural DVS VSO of the month!

Nov. 11 Is Veterans Day

November 11 is Veterans Day, the day designated by Congress to honor the service of all men and women who have served our country as members of the United States military.

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith will be joined by DVS division directors in commemorating the day at the 2022 Southwest Native American Veterans Health & Wellness Symposium at the Isleta Resort and Casino in Albuquerque (see *page 12* for more information).



There are many other Veterans Day ceremonies and events going on around the state. Below and on the next page is a list of events based on information provided to DVS by members of the veteran community. DVS urges veterans to attend a ceremony to celebrate the day dedicated to them and their sacrifices made to serve our country.

<u>City</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>For info:</u>
Nov. 7 (Monday)				
Albuquerque	Ceremony	11am	Sandia Nat'l Labs/Schiff Auditorium	(505)845-0011
Nov. 9 (Wednesday)				
Roswell	Grand Opening	11am	Eastern NM University Vet Center	(575) 624-7065
Roswell	Ceremony	1130am	ENMU-ITC Commons	(575) 624-7065
Nov. 10 (Thursday)				
Dulce	Breakfast	8am	Dulce High School	(575) 759-2961
Dulce	Ceremony	10:30am	Dulce High School	(575) 759-2961
Dulce	Parade	1:30pm	Dulce High School	(575) 759-2961
Albuquerque	Ceremony	2pm	Bear Canyon Senior Center	(505) 767-5959
Roswell	Ceremony	1:30pm	Goddard High School Little Theater	(575) 627-4800
Santa Fe	Resource Event	10am	Santa Fe Community College	(505) 428-1305
Silver City	USMC Birthday Ball	6pm	Western NM Univ. Student Mem. Bldg.	(575) 313-9369
Nov. 11 (Friday) VETERANS DAY				
Albuquerque	Symposium	9am	Isleta Resort & Casino	(575) 241-3322
Albuquerque	Ceremony	10am	Historic Fairview Cemetery	(505) 382-3760
Albuquerque	Ceremony	11am	Indian Pueblo Cultural Center	(505) 843-7270
Albuquerque	Ceremony	11am	NM Veterans Memorial	(505) 786-4496
Albuquerque	Ceremony	7pm	NM Nat'l Guard Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony	(505) 407-3363
Angel Fire	Ceremony	11am	Vietnam Veterans Memorial	(575) 377-2293
Belen	Ceremony	3pm	Eagle Park/Veterans Memorial	(575) 760-3374
Corrales	Ceremony	11am	La Entrada Park	(505) 350-1541
Hagerman	Ceremony	10am	Hagerman High School Auditorium	(575) 752-3283

(list continues on next page)

Nov. 11 (Friday) VETERANS DAY (continued)

<u>City</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>For info:</u>
Isleta Pueblo	Health Symposium	8am	Isleta Resort & Casino	(575) 241-3322
Las Cruces/NMSU	Ceremony	10am	NMSU-Trader's Plaza	(314) 704-9445
Las Cruces/DACC	MilVetPgm Dinner	6pm	Doña Ana Community College	(314) 704-9445
Los Lunas	Ceremony	11am	Daniel Fernandez Memorial Park	(505) 839-3840
Rio Rancho	Parade	10am	Country Club Drive	(505) 891-5015
Roswell	Ceremony	10am	Gen. McBride Veterans Memorial Park	(575) 626-3157
Roswell	Dinner	5pm	First United Methodist Church	(575) 910-4648
Santa Fe	Stand Down	9am	Santa Fe Vet Center	(505) 988-6562
Santa Fe	Concert	11am	Downtown Plaza	(505) 955-6509
Taos	Clean-Up	10am	Veteran's Living Memorial Park	(310) 633-3481
TorC	Parade	10am	State Veterans Home (residents only)	(575) 894-4200
Albuquerque	Ceremony	7pm	NMNG Hall of Honor Induction Ceremony	(505) 407-3363

Nov. 12 (Saturday)

Las Cruces	Parade	11am	Downtown Las Cruces	(575) 621-7002
Las Cruces/NMSU	ROTC Alum Tailgate	Noon	Aggie Memorial Stadium/Crimson Lot	(314) 704-9445
Roswell	Parade	9am	County Courthouse-to-Wool Bowl	(720) 272-1455
TorC	Car Sho	9am	Albert J. Lyon Events Center	(575) 894-2375

A Brief History of Veterans Day

(story courtesy of nationalveteransday.org)

Although World War I officially ended with June, 28, 1919 signing of the Treaty of Versailles, fighting ceased seven months earlier after an armistice between the allied nations and Germany commenced on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month—11 a.m. on November 11, 1918. In November 1919, President Wilson proclaimed November 11 as the first commemoration of Armistice Day. Armistice Day was set aside to honor veterans of World War I.

But after World War II, which required the greatest mobilization of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen in the nation's history, a World War II veteran from Birmingham, Alabama, Raymond Weeks (*right photo/in dark suit*) had an idea to expand Armistice Day to celebrate all veterans.

In 1947 he led a delegation to Washington, D.C., to urge then-Army Chief of Staff General Dwight Eisenhower (*photo/at left*) to create a national holiday that honored all veterans. In 1954, President Eisenhower signed legislation establishing November 11th as Veterans Day.



President Ronald Reagan honored Weeks as the driving force for the national holiday with the Presidential Citizenship Medal in 1982 at the White House. Weeks

led the first National Veterans Day Parade in 1947 in Alabama, and he continued the tradition until his passing in 1985.

DVS to Take Part in the 2022 Southwest Native American Veterans Health & Wellness Symposium on Veterans Day

To celebrate Veterans Day, Native American veterans and their families are invited to attend the *2022 Southwest Native American Veterans Health & Wellness Symposium* on November 11 in Albuquerque at the Isleta Resort and Casino, located at 11000 Broadway SE.

This free symposium is presented by Isleta Pueblo, the Pueblo of Isleta Veterans Association, the new Mexico VA Health Care System, AARP New Mexico, and the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services.

Doors open at 7:15 a.m. for conference and free raffle registration. Complimentary self-serve pastries, coffee, and juice will be available. Lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m., with the symposium concluding at 4 p.m.

The symposium will honor and celebrate all men and women who have proudly served our country. Further recognition will focus on Native American veterans, women veterans, and service members still listed as Missing-In-Action (MIA).

There will also be [a full day of presentations and break-out sessions](#) covering several key VA, state, and local veterans benefits and programs available for veterans and their families here in New Mexico—including programs offering assistance to rural and Native American veterans.

Several veterans community leaders are scheduled to attend, including New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith, Isleta Veterans Association Commander Fred Lujan, AARP New Mexico State Director Joseph Sanchez, New Mexico VA Health Care System Director Robert “Mac” McKenrick, Albuquerque VA Regional Office Director Cesar Romero, Santa Fe National Cemetery Director Victor Vasquez, and New Mexico Veterans Integration Center Director Brock Wolff.

U.S. Air Force Col. Jason Vattioni, the 377th Air Base Wing & Installation Commander at Kirtland Air Force Base, is also scheduled to attend, as are several pueblo/tribal leaders.

For more information, please contact DVS Pueblo & Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley at beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov or (575) 241-3322.



Heron Lake State Park

Local Veterans and Active-Duty Service Members Get Free Admission at any New Mexico State Park on Veterans Day

The State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) would like to thank local veterans, current military, and their dependents for their service with free entry to any New Mexico State Park on Veterans Day, November 11.

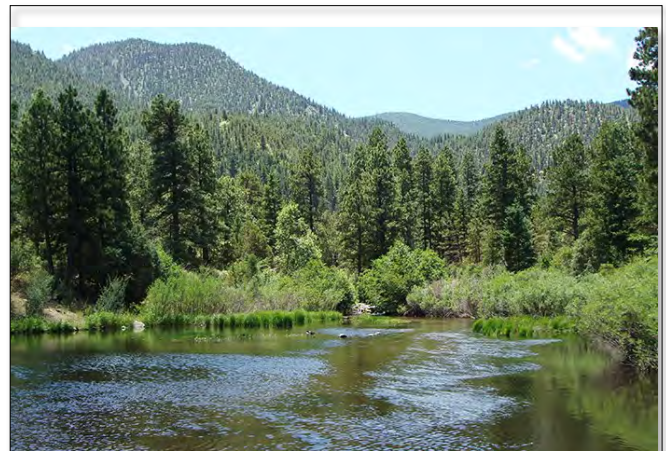
“We want to encourage our active service members

and veterans to explore the many recreational opportunities that their New Mexico State Parks offer without worrying about paying any fees,” said Toby Velasquez, State Parks Director. “Veterans and service members deserve a day to relax—whether it's taking in fresh air, trying a new outdoor experience, or having fun doing something they love like hiking, fishing, or boating.”

Any New Mexico resident who provides satisfactory proof that they are currently serving or have served in the United States military—and the resident's spouse and dependent Children—are entitled to free use of any park on Veterans Day, including the waiving of all day use, camping, or other fees.

In partnership with DVS, the State Parks Division also honors New Mexico veterans who have a 50%, or greater, service-connected disability with an annual day-use pass and one three-day camping pass per year. For more information:

[Disabled Veterans Program](https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/), <https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/>, or call 1-888-NMPARKS (1-888-667-2757).



Cimarron Canyon State Park



Rockhound State Park



Bottomless Lakes State Park



New Mexico PBS / KNME -- Ch. 5.1, Ch. 5.4 & Streaming
presents

Veterans Day Programs

For more details, please visit www.nmpbs.org

Programs are Also Available for FREE Streaming following the broadcast on the PBS Video App...

...or For PBS Members, on PBS PASSPORT



Credit: TPT, Twin Cities Public Television

THE PEOPLE'S PROTECTORS

Ch. 5.4 - Tuesday, November 8, 7:00 a.m. & Streaming

Meet four Native American veterans who reflect on their experiences in the military during the Vietnam War and how their communities helped them carry their warrior legacy, even as they struggled with their relationship to the U.S. government.

AMERICAN VETERAN – 4-part series – Back-To-Back on One Night

Ch. 5.4 - Sunday, November 6, 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.



This series illuminates the veteran experience with a stunning range of voices from today and across the arc of American history.

Every voice featured is a veteran's. From the historical citizen-soldiers to today's warrior class, it highlights the evolving relationship between Americans who have served in the Military—and those who have not.

(continued on next page)

The Crossing

Ch. 5.4 - Sunday, Nov. 6, 7 p.m.



Sgt Drew Carey US Marine Corps (1980-1986)

As recruits take the oath to serve, they leave the civilian world to become a soldier, sailor, marine, airman or woman. This is the start of their transformation. Narrated by TV host and former Marine Drew Carey.

The Mission

Ch. 5.4 - Sunday, Nov. 6, 8 p.m.

Military life shapes servicemen and women in profound, unexpected ways. Veterans' stories showcase the raw impact of these experiences. Hosted by Iraq War Army veteran Senator Tammy Duckworth (*right photo*).



The Return

Ch. 5.4 - Sunday, Nov. 6, 9 p.m.

Hollywood war stories seem to end with the hero's triumphant return. But in reality, the road back to civilian life is often less certain.

Hosted by actor, Vietnam War veteran, and New Mexico resident Wes Studi (*left photo*)

Credit: Courtesy Wes Studi

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The Reckoning

Ch. 5.4 - Sunday, Nov. 6, 10 p.m.

Veterans reflecting on their service ask how we -- veterans and civilians together -- can move America forward. Hosted by Army veteran, actor, and motivational speaker J. R. Martinez.



USO - FOR THE TROOPS

Ch. 5.1 - Friday, Nov. 11, 9:00 p.m.

Examine the ways the USO has lifted the spirits of American service personnel for more than 75 years. See how the organization keeps military men and women connected to country, home, family and hope, abroad and on the home front.

SONGWRITING WITH SOLDIERS

Ch. 5.1 - Friday, Nov. 11, 10:00 p.m.

A unique collaborative of professional artists working with veterans to tell their stories of war and the return home through song. This concert special celebrates music's power to heal and bring diverse people together.



COLORES! – A New Mexico PBS Production

Ch. 5.1 - Saturday, Nov. 12, 4:00 p.m.;

**Ch. 5.4 - Friday, Nov. 18,
8:00 p.m. & Streaming**

Local N.M. Story – Overcoming PTSD, Osage artist Dante Biss-Grayson, a combat veteran of Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan, finds healing through painting.



News from the VA



Veterans Enrolled in VA Health Care Now Eligible for New Toxic Exposure Screenings

VA medical centers and clinics across the country are now offering VA health care-enrolled veterans a new toxic exposure screening.

These screenings are a key part of the [PACT Act](#)—the new law that empowers VA to deliver care and benefits to millions of toxic-exposed veterans and their survivors. The screening takes around five to 10 minutes and begins by asking veterans if they believe they experienced any toxic exposures while serving in the armed forces. Veterans who answer “yes” will then be asked about specific exposures, including open burn pits/airborne hazards, Gulf War-related exposures, Agent Orange, radiation, Camp Lejeune-contaminated water exposure and other exposures. Veterans enrolled in VA health care will be offered an initial toxic exposure screening then follow-up screenings at least once every five years.

“These screenings are an important step toward making sure that all toxic exposed veterans get the care and benefits they deserve,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “At the end of the day, these screenings will improve health outcomes for Veterans — and there’s nothing more important than that.”

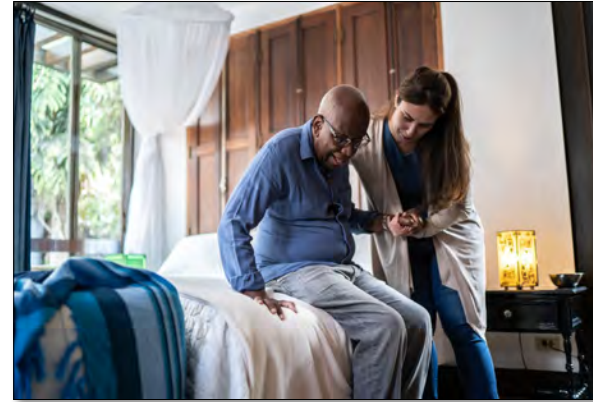
After completion of the screening, VA will connect veterans who are concerned about toxic exposures to information about benefits, registry exams and clinical resources. Medical concerns will continue to be addressed through existing care teams or other facility resources as appropriate. Veterans can ask about receiving the screening at their next VA primary care provider appointment. If veterans are not assigned to a primary care team or wish to be screened sooner than their next appointment, they are invited to contact their local facility and ask to be screened by the toxic exposure screening navigator.

On September 6, VA began a pilot of this program — screening 13,380 Veterans across 12 medical centers over a 2-week period and finding a 37.4% concern of exposure among those veterans. VA encourages veterans not currently enrolled in VA health care to apply now. Learn more at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction>. You can access the following links for more information:

- [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT)
- <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures>
- <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/education/toxicexposurescreeninformation.asp>

VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Expands to Veterans of All Eras

VA has expanded its [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) to include [eligible](#) veterans and family caregivers of all eras.



Previously, PCAFC was only available to eligible veterans who served on or after Sept. 11, 2001. This expansion opens the program to eligible veterans of all eras, including those who served after May 7, 1975, and before September 11, 2001.

PCAFC provides caregivers of eligible veterans with resources, education, financial assistance, health insurance, beneficiary travel, peer support and more. The program is a cornerstone of VA health care, ensuring that veterans get the world-class care they deserve and that caregivers get the comprehensive support they need.

“For the first time, eligible veterans of all service eras can participate in the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers,” says Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Donald Remy. “We recognize the critical role family caregivers play in caring for veterans, and through this expansion, we’re able to ensure that family caregivers of all eligible veterans have access to the comprehensive support they deserve.”



This is the second expansion of PCAFC, and it will expand access to the program for tens of thousands of veterans and their family caregivers. The first expansion of PCAFC began in Oct. 2020, as part of implementation of the VA MISSION Act of 2018. PCAFC has added approximately 20,000 active veteran and family caregiver participants during the past two years.

Earlier this month, VA announced an interim final rule that will extend PCAFC eligibility for legacy participants, legacy applicants and their family caregivers, by three years to Sept. 30, 2025. Legacy participants or legacy applicants are veterans and their family caregivers who participated in PCAFC prior to Oct 1, 2020.

[Learn more](#) about the PCAFC expansion and VA’s Caregiver Support Program, reach out to a [local CSP team](#) or call our Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET.

New VA Life Insurance Program to be Offered by VA

Important changes are coming to VA's Life Insurance programs. [Veterans Affairs Life Insurance \(VALife\)](#) is launching on Jan. 1, 2023, as



a new guaranteed acceptance whole life insurance program for service-connected veterans. VA's current offering for service-connected veterans—service-disabled veterans life insurance (S-DVI)—closes to new enrollment after Dec. 31, 2022. Veterans currently enrolled in S-DVI may keep their coverage or switch to VALife.

While both VALife and S-DVI cover veterans with any level of service-connected disability (0-100%), there are key program differences to consider before deciding which program is right for you.

So, What is the Difference Between VA Life Insurance and Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance?

Coverage amounts

- VALife offers up to \$40,000 in coverage, available in \$10,000 increments.
- S-DVI offers up to \$10,000 in basic coverage. Up to \$30,000 in supplemental coverage is available only if you are totally disabled, unable to work and qualify for a premium waiver.

Premium waiver

- VALife does not offer a premium waiver option.
- S-DVI offers a premium waiver if you are totally disabled and unable to work.

Premium amount

- VALife premium rates are based on age and coverage amount. Once your VALife policy is issued, premium rates do not increase.
- S-DVI premium rates are based on age, coverage amount and coverage plan.

Medical requirements and waiting period

- VALife does not require you to answer health questions for enrollment. Because of this, there is a two-year waiting period for full coverage to begin, a common feature of guaranteed acceptance whole life policies.
- S-DVI requires proof of good health, other than your service-connected condition(s), prior to enrollment. Once enrolled, there is no waiting period for coverage to begin.

(continued on next page)

Application timelines

- VALife has no time limit to apply if you are age 80 and under. Veterans age 81 and older may qualify if they meet certain criteria.
- S-DVI requires application within two years of receiving notification of a new service-connected disability rating, or by December 31, 2022, whichever comes first.

Learn more

You can learn more about VALife and S-DVI by visiting the websites below:

- VALife: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp>
- S-DVI: <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/s-dvi/>



VA Closes Gap in Benefits for LGBTQ+ Veterans and Their Survivors

VA has announced 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, therefore, 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](#), and more information about this announcement can be found [here](#).

“VA is closing a gap in benefits for surviving spouses of LGBTQ+ veterans, righting a wrong that is a legacy of the discriminatory federal ban on same-sex marriages,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “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.

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. LGBTQ+ Veterans can learn more about VA’s current health offerings on the [LGBTQ+ Health Program website](#).



DVS Field Offices in New Mexico

DVS has field offices throughout the state that are staffed with nationally-certified veterans service officers. These VSOs are military veterans themselves who are dedicated to helping their fellow veterans with filing VA claims, filing for state veterans benefits, or helping with anything else a veteran or their family needs.

Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, (excluding holidays). Though this service is free, appointments are required and can be made by contacting the offices below. **Please note that in addition to**

in-office assistance, veterans from anywhere in the state can contact *any* DVS VSO for phone or email assistance.

Also listed below and on the following page is the contact information for the DVS women veterans program for women veterans who prefer assistance by a woman VSO, and the DVS Tribal/Pueblo Liaison for Native American veterans preferring assistance from a Native American VSO. Contact information is also listed for the Angel Fire, Fort Stanton, and Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries, and the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) for veterans who want to open, expand, or purchase a business—or bid on state or federal government contracts.

Alamogordo/Southern NM

David Henley

411 10th Street #107

(575) 937-5620

david.henley@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque Metro Area

Dayle Bad Warrior

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE/Suite 2

(505) 383-2400

dayle.badwarrior@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque Metro Area

Patrick Abney

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE/Suite 2

(505) 525-3331

patrick.abney@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque Metro Area

The third Albuquerque VSO position is temporarily vacant. Please contact the two other Albuquerque VSOs for assistance...or any other DVS VSO for phone/email help.

Carlsbad/Southeast NM

Dagmar Youngberg

101 N. Halagueno

(575) 988-5900

dagmar.youngberg@dvs.nm.gov

Clovis/Eastern New Mexico

Matt Barela

904 W. Sixth St.

(575) 825-9602

matthew.barela@dvs.nm.gov

Farmington/Northwest NM

Robert Guinn

San Juan College Vet Center/
Room 1715-B

(505) 327-2861

robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov

Gallup/Western NM

John Livingston

908 E. Buena Vista Ave/Room 1A

(505) 389-8731

john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov

Grants/Western NM

April Ball

551 Washington Ave.

(505) 521-8132

april.ball@dvs.nm.gov

(more offices are listed on the next page)

Hobbs/Southeast NM**Fred Solis-Littlejohn**

2120 North Alto St.

(575) 241-0714

fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov**Las Cruces/Southern NM****Miguel Martinez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov**Las Cruces/Southern NM****Vincent Tellez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov**Las Cruces/Southern NM**

The third Las Cruces VSO position is temporarily vacant. Please contact the two other Las Cruces VSOs for local assistance—or any DVS VSO for assistance by phone or email.

Las Vegas, NM/Northeast NM**Martín Márquez**

917 Douglas Ave.

(575) 520-5079

martin.marquez@dvs.nm.gov**Las Vegas/Northeast NM****Arturo Marlow**

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 331-8838

arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov**Rio Rancho/Central NM****Dustin Newsom**

Sandoval County Administrative Bldg.

1500 Idalia Rd./Bldg. D, Room 2041

(505) 221-7190

dustin.newsom@dvs.nm.gov**Roswell/Southeast New Mexico Santa Fe/Northern NM****Danielle Thompson**

1600 SE Main St./Suite “A”

(575) 416-2284

danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov**Nick McKenzie**

Bataan Memorial Bldg/1st floor

407 Galisteo St./Room 134

(505) 218-3125

nicholas.mckenzie@dvs.nm.gov**Silver City/Southwest NM****Chris Teran**

Western New Mexico University

Juan Chacon Bldg./Room 138-A

1000 West College Ave.

(575) 313-5627

christopher.teran@dvs.nm.gov**Taos/Northern New Mexico****Leticia “Lety” Cano**

Health & Human Services Bldg/

145 Roy Rd

(575) 709-5263

leticia.cano@dvs.nm.gov**Women Veterans Program****Theresa Figueroa**

DVS Albuquerque Office

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE/Suite 2

(505) 916-7449

theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov**Pueblos/Tribal Liaison****Beverly Charley**

San Juan College Veterans Center

4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B

(575) 241-3322

beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov**Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)****Rich Coffel (Director)**

DVS Albuquerque Office

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE/Suite 2

(505) 220-9932

richard.coffel@dvs.nm.gov**Angel Fire
State Veterans Cemetery****Randy Myklebust (Supervisor)**

34 Country Club Rd.

(505) 225-4341

randal.myklebust@dvs.nm.gov**Ft. Stanton
State Veterans Cemetery****Stephen McConnell
(Supervisor)**

1398 State Highway 220

(505) 383-4381

stephen.mcconnell@dvs.nm.gov**Gallup
State Veterans Cemetery****Gilbert Lopez (Supervisor)**

333 National Cemetery Dr.

(505) 905-9771

gilbert.lopez@dvs.nm.gov