VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA
NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION'S WEEKLY REPORT

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June 15 – June 21, 2024

Meetings

- NS Staff participated in an MSO/VSO Executive Roundtable hosted by the Department of Defense. The discussion focused on various aspects of mental health and the implementation of new policies to support servicemembers and their families.

- NS Staff participated in the *Service for America Summit*, hosted by the U.S. Department of Defense, AmeriCorps, Selective Service System, Peace Corps, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. This summit focused on developing short- and long-term actions to promote awareness, aspiration, and accessibility of military, national, and public service.

- NS Staff and Director met separately with the National Adjutant to discuss a full range of matters involving the Staff.

- NS Staff reviewed budget and closed out expense reports for the Europe travel with the National Commander.

- NS Director attended the 2024 POW/MIA Recognition Day Poster Unveiling

- NS Staff attended the American Legion 80th Anniversary of the GI Bill Signing ceremony at the Navy Memorial in Washington D.C.

- NS Director met with various retired senior enlisted leaders to discuss National security matters.

Policy

- NS Staff reviewed a 2023 memorandum of understanding between the DoD and the USCIS regarding the naturalization process for current servicemembers. The MOU aims to address a problem that impacts an 20,000 to 25,000 active duty servicemembers, including deported veterans and related matters.

- NS Staff received the Air Force's monthly e-mail update which covers a full range of personnel, operational and administrative issues. This month the Air Force focused on

National Safety Month, Juneteenth, and also recognized the contributions that servicemembers who are also members of the LGBTQ community have made to the institution. The update also addressed its participation in humanitarian air drop operations in Gaza and also provided Space Force updates involving progress with the organization's operational capabilities.

- National Security Staff worked on various policy papers involving the G7 Summit, Sudan, and an assessment of the Russia/North Korea Summit.

Programs

- NS Staff spoke with both a Legion Department and TACOM/JMC regarding the Conditional Deed of Gift, a contract outlining a post's responsibilities regarding the retention, maintenance, and condition of ceremonial rifles. Stressed the importance of maintaining a current email address with the TACOM/JMC.

- NS Staff Engaged with the new Senior Instructor at Meade Senior High School regarding their participation in the American Legion's J/ROTC program for the upcoming year. They were provided with the necessary forms and a detailed, step-by-step submission process to recognize their outstanding cadets.

- NS Staff provided support to TACOM/JMC by thoroughly identifying defunct posts and pinpointing posts that had not completed the necessary certifications for military surplus items. This assistance ensured compliance with regulations.

The American Legion Military Surplus Equipment

- Items requested: Ammo – 2480; Rifles – 10; Clips – 0; Static Displays – 0
- Requests submitted by: Posts – 3; Departments – 3

POW/MIA

DPAA has identified/repatriated 80 service members this year.

June 10, 2024

- USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted for from WWII (Thompson, G.)
- Airman Accounted for from WWII (Pyle, E.)

Be The One (BTO)

- NS Staff participated in a roundtable discussion hosted by the Department of Defense, focusing on the new Suicide Prevention Campaign Plan. This comprehensive plan includes over 80 enabling actions to improve quality of life, reduce stigma, promote lethal means safety, and provide comprehensive prevention training. The investment in these resources is set to increase from $18 million in FY2024 to a requested $261 million for FY2025.

Focus Topic

MSO/VSO Summary Discussion

Leadership and Resource Investment

- The conversation emphasized the unprecedented leadership attention and resource investment in addressing harmful behaviors such as sexual assault, suicide, and domestic violence in the military.
- Secretary Austin's leadership has prioritized these issues, allocating significant resources to tackle them, including over $1 billion annually for sexual assault prevention and response.

Integrated Primary Prevention

- Emphasis on moving upstream to prevent harmful behaviors by addressing common risk and protective factors.
- The integrated primary prevention workforce is being built to target these issues more effectively, with over 40% hired towards a target of 2500 by FY2028.
- Efforts include the on-site installation evaluation to identify and address issues methodologically.

Sexual Assault Prevention

- The Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military's recommendations are being implemented.
- The creation of the Offices of Special Trial Counsel to handle sexual assault cases with specialized prosecution.
- Initial signs of progress with a decrease in sexual assault prevalence for the first time in nearly ten years, but the need for sustained effort and investment is critical.

Specific Service Initiatives

- The Department of the Navy has established an Implementation Advisory Panel to address the IRC recommendations and integrate suicide prevention efforts.
- Embedded mental health professionals in the Navy to provide direct access to support.

Key Areas of Concern

- Leadership training and accountability for addressing toxic leadership environments.
- Importance of addressing chronic pain, sleep deprivation, and access to behavioral health care as factors influencing suicide.
- Addressing the stigma of seeking help and the potential career repercussions, especially in specialized communities like SOF (Special Operations Forces).

Data and Measurement

- Data is needed to measure the effectiveness of new initiatives like the Offices of Special Trial Counsel.
- Concerns about ensuring visibility and access to mental health and behavioral health services.

Key Takeaways

- Continuous leadership focus and resource allocation are essential to sustain progress in reducing harmful behaviors.
- Integrated prevention approaches and improved data infrastructure are crucial for effective intervention.
- Addressing leadership training and mitigating the career impacts of seeking help is critical to reducing stigma and encouraging service members to access necessary support.