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# CAPE CORAL COMMUNICATOR

May 2026

Volume 7 • Issue 5

## CCMOAA Monthly Breakfast Meeting

*Second Saturday  
of the Month  
January - May  
September - December*

### **NEXT MEETING:**

**Saturday, May 9  
10 a.m.**

**Cape Royal  
Golf Club  
11460 Royal Tee Circle  
Cape Coral**

**Cost \$12**  
*(Prefer exact change please)*

*Breakfast Reservations to:  
Cindy Nolan  
capecoralmoaa@gmail.com  
618-580-2368*

PLEASE WEAR YOUR  
NAMETAG  
*(If you need one, contact  
Gary Nolan)*



## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE: Col Gary Nolan, USAF (Ret)

First, some hopeful news as our Vice President Tom Wagner is now home following being hospitalized for arterial blockage in both of his legs. They



did arterial bypass surgery on his right leg, after which he went into inpatient rehabilitation. He still has trouble with his left leg, but they are now trying some blood thinners to attempt to solve the issue. Please keep Tom in your thoughts and prayers as he continues to recover from this serious health issue.

Next, at last month’s meeting, we were treated to presentations on the JROTC programs in Lee County by Major Bryan Williams and three of his impressive cadets from Mariner High School. A full story on their presentation is included in this issue of The Communicator.

For our May meeting, we have invited the three Lee County high school JROTC cadets who were awarded one of our \$2,000 college scholarships that we award each year. Their parents have also been invited. Our chapter presented the scholarships, plus 16 medal sets and certificates at the Major General James Dozier JROTC Awards Ceremony on April 30. Full details about the three scholarship winners is also in this newsletter issue.

Don’t forget about our annual fundraising event, the Memorial Day Team Golf Scramble at Cape Royal Golf Club on May 25. We are still looking for teams to enter and anyone wishing to help us with either a donation or assisting during the tournament will be welcomed. Let me know if you can help. More information on the tournament is also in this newsletter.

MOAA members and staff visited hundreds of legislative offices as part of Advocacy in Action 2026 on April 15 in Washington, D.C., advocating for four major pieces of legislation: 1. The Major Richard Star Act; 2. The Shutdown Fairness Act; 3. The Guard VA Benefits Act; and 4. The Military Care Act. While the major lobbying event has passed, there’s still time for Cape Coral Chapter members to write our Congressional delegation urging them to support these initiatives.

A simple, automated process to send letters can be found at [https://moaa.quorum.us/active\\_campaigns/](https://moaa.quorum.us/active_campaigns/). I urge you to let your views be known.

Don’t forget that May 25 is Memorial Day, a time to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice while serving in the United States military; and May 16 is Armed Forces Day, a time to honor and acknowledge all the men and women who are now serving in our armed forces.

“Never stop serving!”

## Three Lee County JROTC cadets awarded CCMOAA scholarships

Three Lee County high school JROTC students have been picked to be awarded \$2,000 scholarships from the Cape Coral Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America.

All three students have been invited to speak at the May 9 breakfast meeting at the Cape Royal Golf Club. Parents of each scholarship winner have also been invited to attend.

The three scholarship winners are:

### JROTC Cadet Elyssa Vazquez

Mariner High School JROTC Cadet Elyssa Vazquez has been recognized as one of the most accomplished and impactful cadet leaders in the Mariner High School program's history.

A four-year member of the Mariner JROTC battalion, Cadet Vazquez currently serves as Battalion Commander, the highest leadership position in the unit. In that role, she is responsible for the performance, discipline, training, and morale of more than 350 cadets—one of the largest JROTC battalions in the nation. Under her leadership, the program has not only sustained excellence but expanded its reach and impact across the school and community.

Academically, Vazquez stands among the very top of her class, maintaining an exceptional 5.09 weighted GPA. Her record of achievement includes four consecutive years on the Superintendent's List and earning the JROTC Highest GPA award all four years. She is a multi-year member of several prestigious honor societies, including the National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society, National Hispanic Honor Society, and National Math Honor Society—reflecting both intellectual discipline and a sustained commitment to academic excellence.

While her academic credentials are



remarkable, it is Vazquez's leadership at scale that truly distinguishes her. As Battalion Commander, she has led complex operations, mentored subordinate leaders, and fostered a command climate rooted in accountability, respect, and high performance. Her leadership is defined not just by position, but by results.

Among her most notable achievements, Vazquez played a central role in organizing and executing large-scale service learning projects that delivered tangible benefits to the community. Under her leadership, cadets conducted food drives that collected more than 5,500 pounds of food, followed by an even more ambitious effort yielding 7,700 pounds, directly supporting families in need throughout the Cape Coral area.

Her excellence extends to national-level competition. As Marksmanship Team Commander and Team Captain, Vazquez has led one of the top programs in the country. During her tenure, the team captured eight Florida State Championships and six National

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- PRESIDENT:**  
Col Gary Nolan  
US Air Force (Retired)
- VICE PRESIDENT:**  
COL Tom Wagner  
USAR (Retired)
- SECRETARY:**  
LtCol Gary Peppers  
US Air Force (Retired)
- TREASURER:**  
CAPT Timothy Cook  
US Navy (Retired)
- BOARD MEMBER:**  
(at large)  
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- FINANCE:**  
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- CHAPLAIN:**  
Cindy Nolan
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Col Gary Nolan
- SPEAKER PROGRAMS:**  
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- WEBMASTER:**  
COL Tom Wagner  
USAR (Retired)
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LtCol Gary Peppers
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- VETERANS AFFAIRS:**  
(Vacant)
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Col Gary Nolan
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(Vacant)
- PARLIAMENTARIAN:**  
Marilyn Stout
- NEWSLETTER EDITOR:**  
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(Vacant)
- SURVIVING SPOUSES:**  
(Vacant)
- FCOC SW AREA VP:**  
Col Gary Nolan



## FIVE STARS Chapter Excellence Award

2006, 2008, 2009,  
2010, 2011, 2012, 2018,  
2019, 2020, 2023, 2024  
& 2025



## FOUR STARS Chapter Excellence Award

2005, 2007, 2013,  
2016, 2017 & 2021



## Marvin C. Harris Newsletter Communications Award

**FIVE STARS**  
2003, 2018, 2019,  
2020, 2021, 2022, 2023,  
2024 & 2025

## Marvin C. Harris Website Communications Award

**FIVE STARS**  
2019, 2020, 2021,  
2022, 2023, 2024  
& 2025

# May Speakers (Continued)

(Continued from previous page)

Championships. Individually, she ranked as the No. 3 precision air rifle shooter in the United States as a sophomore, an elite accomplishment that underscores her discipline and competitive focus. She has competed at the highest levels of the sport, including national competitions at Camp Perry, and earned the Civilian Marksmanship Program Gold Junior Distinguished Badge—one of the highest honors in junior marksmanship.

Her list of achievements also includes selection as a Girls State delegate, recognition as a Cape Coral Student of the Month, and membership on a 2024 JROTC Marksmanship National Championship team, along with multiple state championship teams. These honors reflect not only performance, but the respect she commands among peers, instructors, and the broader community.

Beyond accolades, Vazquez has dedicated hundreds of hours to volunteer service, particularly in support of veterans and local community initiatives. Her consistent focus on service reflects the core values of both JROTC and MOAA—placing mission and community above self.

Her Senior Army Instructor offered an unequivocal endorsement, stating, “In over seven years mentoring more than 3,000 cadets, Elyssa stands firmly in the top tier of leaders I have ever developed. She is not simply an outstanding cadet—she is the standard.”

Following graduation, Vazquez plans to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where she will participate in Army (or Air Force) ROTC with the goal of becoming an Army Aviation Officer.

### JROTC Cadet Ezekiel Florian

Cadet Ezekiel Florian, a four-year member of the Riverdale High School JROTC program, serves as the Battalion Command Sergeant Major, one of the highest-ranking cadet positions. In this role, he works closely with a staff of more

than 20 cadet leaders while helping oversee the training, discipline, and readiness of a battalion of more than 330 cadets. His leadership has been instrumental in strengthening the program’s cohesion and performance.

Academically, Florian has excelled, earning a 5.06 weighted GPA while balancing the demands of JROTC leadership and extracurricular involvement. He serves as Captain of the JROTC Leadership Academic (Leadership Bowl) Team, which earned second place at the district level, demonstrating both intellectual ability and teamwork under pressure.

Florian’s leadership extends beyond traditional responsibilities. Recognizing opportunities to grow the program, he developed and implemented a plan to increase cadet participation in after-school activities—an initiative that strengthened engagement and visibility for JROTC within the school community. His advocacy for the program and commitment to its success set him apart among his peers.

His achievements have been recognized externally as well. Florian was awarded the West Point Society of Naples and Southwest Florida Award for Leadership Excellence, a distinction reserved for cadets who demonstrate exceptional potential for future leadership.

Within the battalion, he is a multifaceted contributor, serving not only as Command Sergeant Major but also as a Color Guard team member and a key leader in the JROTC academic team. Beyond JROTC, he is a founding member of Youths for Christ at Riverdale High School, reflecting a strong personal commitment to faith, service, and mentorship.

Florian has completed more than 82 hours of community service, consistently demonstrating a willingness to give his time and energy to others. His approach to service is rooted in building relationships and making a meaningful, lasting impact.

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# May Speakers (Continued)

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“Cadet Florian has demonstrated that he is mature beyond his years, with outstanding judgment, character, community service, and leadership qualities,” his nominator wrote. “He does not succumb to peer pressure and has proven himself to be a leader with limitless potential.”

Following graduation, Florian has been accepted to Florida State University, where he plans to pursue his education while enrolling in ROTC courses and competing for a scholarship. Looking ahead, he intends to launch a nonprofit organization focused on serving the homeless—providing not only meals, but also long-term support and spiritual encouragement. His vision includes expanding the organization to multiple campuses, creating opportunities for students to serve while addressing critical needs in their communities.

## **JROTC Cadet Drazen Fortunic**

Cadet Drazen Fortunic, a four-year member of the Island Coast JROTC program, serves as President of the Cadet Board (PCBO)—a key leadership position responsible for guiding cadet development, overseeing advancement processes, and helping shape the structure and effectiveness of the battalion. In that role, he demonstrated initiative by refining and enhancing the program’s promotion study guide and procedures, improving clarity, organization, and overall success for cadets preparing for

advancement.

Academically, Fortunic has maintained an outstanding 4.9 weighted GPA, earning recognition as a member of the National Honor Society and consistent placement on the Honor Roll. His achievements have been further distinguished through several prestigious awards, including the American Legion Academic & Leadership Award, the Scottish Rite Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement, and recognition through the College Board National Recognition Program.

What sets Fortunic apart is his ability to excel across multiple demanding commitments. In addition to his academic and JROTC responsibilities, he maintains a 30-plus hour per week work schedule, demonstrating discipline, time management, and a level of personal responsibility well beyond that of most high school students.

His accomplishments extend into competitive and technical arenas. Fortunic is a graduate of the National Flight Academy, a highly selective program focused on aviation, leadership, and STEM development. He also contributed to a State Raider Challenge Overall Championship team and earned third place in the AI & HI Innovation Challenge, highlighting both physical and intellectual versatility.

A strong advocate for academic enrichment, Fortunic founded the Science Olympiad Club at Island Coast High School, creating new opportunities for students to engage in

STEM-based competition and collaboration. His efforts reflect a forward-thinking mindset and a commitment to expanding opportunities for his peers.

“Cadet Fortunic has demonstrated exceptional leadership and initiative,” his nominator noted. “His ability to balance rigorous academics with significant outside responsibilities, while continuously improving the program around him, speaks directly to his character and potential.”

Following graduation, Fortunic plans to pursue a degree in nuclear engineering, with long-term goals of serving as a Naval officer. He intends to enlist in the U.S. Navy Reserves while attending college, with the objective of earning a commission through the Naval ROTC program. His academic focus and career goals align closely with the technical and leadership demands of modern naval service.

## **The scholarships**

The \$2,000 Cape Coral MOAA scholarships are awarded annually to cadets who exemplify leadership, academic excellence, and a commitment to service. They were presented April 30 at the Major General James Dozier JROTC Awards Ceremony at South Fort Myers High School.

Presenting the three scholarship awards, plus 16 medal sets and certificates to other Lee County JROTC cadets were Cape Coral MOAA Chapter President Gary Nolan and Board Member At-Large Bill Deile.

# Chapter Reports

## CAPE CORAL MOAA BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

### April 11, 2026, Cape Royal Golf Community

President Gary Nolan called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. with 23 present for breakfast. Our guest speaker was MAJ Bryan Williams, USA (ret), JROTC Commander at Mariner High School in Cape Coral. Guests included his wife Mary Beth and three JROTC cadets from the MHS rifle team, each of whom spoke to the members present about their experiences: Cadets Zoe Enslin, Elyssa Vazquez, and Jakobe Changasie. To open the ceremony, the Mariner High Color Guard presented the colors, followed by the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.

After breakfast, President Nolan introduced the Major, who spoke to the members about the marksmanship competition the JROTC squad had participated in this school year, with several overall wins and top tier finishes. Further details about those competitions can be found further in this edition of *The Communicator*.

After Major Williams's talk, President Nolan noted several items for the members' attention:

1. Members are encouraged to log onto the MOAA account to send four letters to our Congressmen supporting MOAA's top priority issues.

2. Chapter Vice President Tom Wagner, COL, USA (ret) was in Lee Health Hospital for leg surgery and did inpatient rehab recovery in the Lee Health facility off Pondella Road. We all pray for his swift recovery.

3. The JROTC Awards Ceremony will be held April 30 at South Fort Myers High School. Our chapter will present three \$2,000 scholarships and 16 medals outstanding cadets.

4. President Nolan has requested two grants from MOAA National—one for \$2,000 that our chapter traditionally pays for trophies at the JROTC drill competition, and another for \$1,000 for the Brotherhood of Heroes Museum in Cape Coral.

5. The CCMOAA golf tournament will be held in conjunction with the Cape Royal Memorial Day Golf Tournament on May 26. All members are invited, volunteers are requested, and hole sponsorships are available for a \$100 donation.

With no further business issues to discuss, President Nolan adjourned the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

**Gary Peppers, Lt Col USAF (ret)**  
**Chapter Secretary**

## TREASURER'S REPORT

**CAPT Timothy Cook, USN (Ret)**  
**March 26, 2026 -- April 23, 2026**

Beginning Balance 3/26/2026 ..... \$1,438.32

### **DEPOSITS:**

Golf Tournament ..... \$400.00

**TOTAL DEPOSITS:** ..... \$400.00

### **EXPENSES:**

**TOTAL EXPENSES:** ..... \$0

Ending Balance 03/25/2026 ..... \$1,838.32

## Mariner JROTC program showcases leadership, growth and community impact

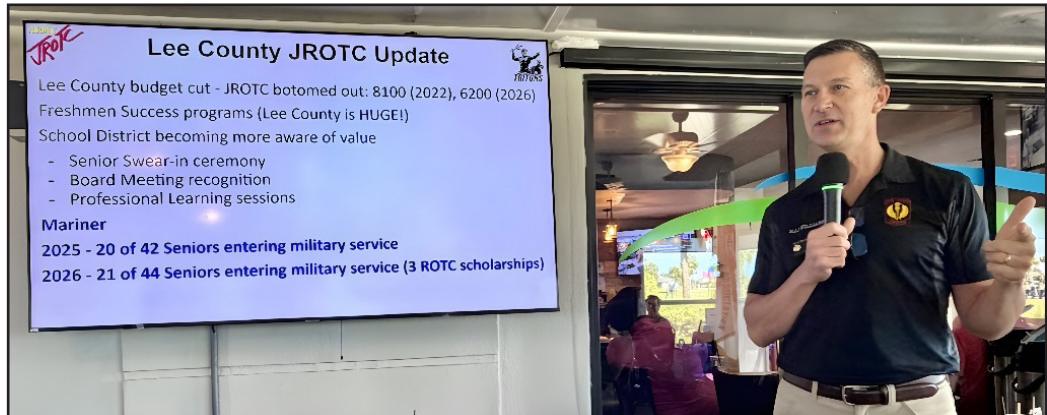
A compelling mix of personal story, hard data and student leadership was on full display April 11 as MAJ Bryan Williams (USA, Ret.) and three top cadets from Mariner High School addressed members of the Cape Coral Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America during the group's monthly breakfast meeting at Cape Royal Golf Club.

Williams, the school's senior Army instructor and JROTC department head, delivered an in-depth look at the state of Junior ROTC in Lee County — one of the largest and most influential programs in the nation — before turning the spotlight over to the cadets who represent its success.

The result was more than a briefing. It was a clear demonstration of how leadership training at the high school level is shaping future military officers, community leaders and engaged citizens.

### From combat to classroom

Williams brings significant credibility to his role. Over a military career spanning more than 25 years, he served both as a senior enlisted soldier — rising to Sergeant First Class — and later as a commissioned logistics officer. His service included multiple



Major Bryan Williams provides data on the Lee County JROTC program

overseas deployments and two combat tours in Iraq.

Today, his mission has shifted from battlefield logistics to leadership development, but the stakes, he emphasized, remain just as real.

"It's real what we're doing," Williams told the audience, referencing not only his students but also his own daughter, now serving as an Army logistics officer preparing for a potential deployment.

That personal connection underscored a central theme of his presentation: JROTC is not simply an elective — it is a pipeline that instills values directly tied to military service and national defense.

### National leader in JROTC

Williams provided a detailed overview of JROTC across the School District of Lee County, describing it as the largest JROTC program anywhere — including overseas Department of Defense schools.

At its peak just a few years

ago, Lee County enrolled more than 8,000 cadets across 16 high schools. Even after a post-COVID decline to approximately 6,000 cadets, the program remains unmatched in size and scope.

To put that in perspective, Williams noted that Chicago — a city with more than twice as many participating schools — enrolls fewer than half as many JROTC students.

"That tells you something about what's happening here in Lee County," he said.

A key driver of that growth was an innovative approach known as "freshman success," first implemented at Mariner High School. By introducing ninth-grade students to JROTC principles — leadership, discipline and accountability — schools saw immediate benefits, including a dramatic reduction in disciplinary referrals.

"The first year we tried it, referrals dropped by 50 percent," Williams said.

The model quickly spread

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# April Speaker Report *(Continued)*

*(Continued from previous page)* across the district, fueling rapid expansion of the program.

Like many educational initiatives, JROTC faced setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent staffing changes. Enrollment declined, and some instructors struggled to adapt to the younger freshman population that had become central to the program's success.

Williams said the district has responded with renewed focus on instructor training and student engagement, particularly at the ninth-grade level.

"You've got to win their hearts and minds early," he said. "That's how you retain them."

Despite financial pressures — including a reported \$43 million district salary shortfall — Williams expressed cautious optimism that JROTC will continue to grow again in the coming years.

## **Mariner: A program apart**

Within that broader system, Mariner High School stands out as a model of excellence.

With more than 700 cadets, the school's JROTC unit is not only one of the largest in the country but also one of the most successful.

While most programs graduate only a handful of seniors each year, Mariner routinely produces 40 or more — and approximately half of those pursue military service, far exceeding national averages.

Equally impressive are the academic results. Williams noted that the program's marksmanship team alone maintains a grade

point average of 3.58, dispelling common misconceptions about student-athletes in military-style programs.

"These are not just good cadets," he said. "They're outstanding students."

## **Building leaders**

Williams also highlighted the role of extracurricular teams — particularly marksmanship — in developing leadership skills.

He and his wife coach a nationally recognized youth air rifle team, which has earned multiple state championships and recently captured a national title.

But he emphasized that competitive success is not the ultimate goal.

"Our objective is to win at a high level," he said. "But even if we fall short, they've learned commitment, teamwork and sacrifice — and that translates into everything else they do."

## **Cadet leadership**

Following Williams' remarks, three of Mariner's top cadet leaders — representing the battalion's "top five" leadership team — addressed the audience.

Their presentations reinforced the effectiveness of the program not just in theory, but in measurable results.

## **Cadet COL Jakobe Changasie Brigade Commander**

Cadet Col. Jakobe Changasie, the program's senior student leader, delivered a detailed overview of Mariner's operations, highlighting both scale and achievement.

The program currently includes



**Cadet Col. Jakobe Changasie**

approximately 730 cadets, making it the fourth-largest JROTC unit in the world.

Changasie outlined a wide range of accomplishments:

- 100% senior graduation rate sustained for 15 consecutive years
- 24 color guard presentations supporting community and veteran organizations.
- Record participation in public events, including 232 cadets in the Cape Coral Veterans Day Parade.
- Strong representation in academic and leadership programs such as Boys State and Girls State.

He also pointed to growing success in preparing students for military careers. A significant number of cadets achieved high scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, qualifying them for a wide range of career opportunities.

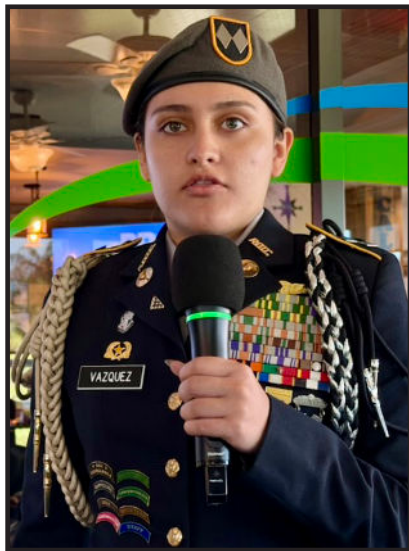
"Our goal is not just to graduate," Changasie said. "It's to prepare cadets for whatever path they choose — and give them the tools to succeed."

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# April Speaker Report *(Continued)*

*(Continued from previous page)*

**Cadet LTC Elyssa Vazquez**  
*Battalion Commander*



**Cadet Lt. Col. Elyssa Vazquez**

Cadet Lt. Col. Elyssa Vazquez focused on one of the program's defining characteristics: community service.

At Mariner, she explained, service is not an afterthought — it is central to the JROTC mission.

Cadets participate in a wide range of activities throughout the year, including:

- 9/11 remembrance ceremonies
- Holiday outreach through "Cards for Troops."
- Participation in Wreaths Across America ceremonies honoring fallen service members.
- Volunteer support for community events such as Night to Shine.

"These activities teach us what it means to give back," Vazquez said. "They show us how we can make a difference."

Vazquez's own accomplishments reflect that ethos. A top national marksmanship competitor, she

recently earned a prestigious \$10,000 scholarship and plans to pursue a commission as an Army aviation officer.

**Cadet Zoe Enslin**  
*Chief of Staff*



**Cadet Zoe Enslin**

Cadet Zoe Enslin brought a deeply personal perspective to the presentation.

Originally from South Africa, she and her family immigrated to the United States under political asylum. While current immigration status prevents her from serving in the U.S. military, her commitment to service remains unwavering.

Williams noted that Enslin has worked with elected officials and legal advisors in hopes of one day achieving that goal.

In the meantime, she has distinguished herself through academic achievement and community leadership, including recognition as a Cape Coral Student of the Year for citizenship.

Her story, Williams said, highlights the broader impact

of JROTC beyond military recruitment.

"She represents what this program is really about — character, leadership and a desire to serve," he said.

## **Community partnership**

Williams also emphasized the strong partnership between Mariner JROTC and the Cape Coral MOAA Chapter.

MOAA's ongoing support — particularly through scholarships and event participation — plays a critical role in sustaining the program and encouraging cadets to pursue military careers.

Upcoming events, including a district-wide military signing ceremony and scholarship presentations, will further highlight that collaboration.

For MOAA members in attendance, the April 11 program offered more than an update — it provided a clear view of the next generation of leadership.

From Williams' seasoned perspective to the cadets' measurable achievements and personal stories, the message was consistent: JROTC is building capable, motivated young leaders prepared to serve their communities and, in many cases, their nation.

"These cadets are proving every day what leadership looks like," Williams said.

And judging by the caliber of the students who spoke that morning, the future of leadership in Cape Coral — and beyond — appears to be in very capable hands.

# April Meeting Events



Mariner High School JROTC Color Guard members (left to right) Brigade Commander Jakobe Changasie, Chief of Staff Zoe Enslin and Battalion Commander Elyssa Vazquez present the colors as Cape Coral MOAA President Gary Nolan stands on the right.



Cindy Nolan (left) holds the winning 50/50 drawing ticket, representing \$50 won by Christina Cook.



Robert Sutter (right) visits with MAJ Bryan Williams at the April 11 meeting.



Cape Coral MOAA Chapter President Gary Nolan (right) presents MAJ Bryan Williams with a chapter Tervis mug in appreciation of the Mariner High School JROTC Leadership Academy Department Head's presentation to the chapter members at the April 11 breakfast meeting at the Cape Royal Golf Club.



Mariner High School JROTC Cadet Zoe Enslin helps herself to pancakes, as Cadet Elyssa Vazquez, Marybeth Williams and her husband MAJ Bryan Williams wait in line to get breakfast.

# CCMOAA Awards

## Cape Coral MOAA Chapter wins three national MOAA awards

The Cape Coral MOAA Chapter has been presented three five-star awards by MOAA National for 2025, Chapter President Gary Nolan told members at the April 11 breakfast meeting.

Five-star awards are the highest level of awards given by the Military Officers Association of America national organization. Cape Coral Chapter received the Five-Star Level of Excellence Award, MOAA's most prestigious affiliate award, honoring councils and chapters for their efforts across the full scope of our association's mission. Chapters are judged on their efforts regarding: Advocacy, community engagement and outreach, recruiting and retention, leadership



succession, training, and council involvement. The Cape Coral Chapter website, managed by Chapter

Vice President Tom Wagner was also awarded the Five-Star Col. Marvin J. Harris Communications Award. The Chapter's newsletter, Cape Coral Communicator, edited by Larry Atkinson, was also awarded the Five-Star Col. Marvin J. Harris Communications Award.

Col. Marvin J. Harris Communications Awards are MOAA's annual program identifying councils and chapters that do an outstanding job communicating with their members. The award honors Col. Marvin J. Harris, USAF (Ret), MOAA's director of public relations from 1996 until 2011.

Colonel Harris delivered effective communications to both military and civilian audiences.

## Cape Coral Communicator to feature Member Profiles

The Cape Coral MOAA newsletter regularly publishes profiles on one of our members. We started with the officers, so you can learn about those leading our organization and will then feature other members. An online Microsoft Word form can be found on the CCMOAA Website at: [www.capecoralmoa.org](http://www.capecoralmoa.org). Members are encouraged to download the form, fill it out and return it to newsletter editor Larry

Atkinson at [publisherlarry@gmail.com](mailto:publisherlarry@gmail.com). For those who would rather just fill out the form by hand, copies of the questionnaire will be available at each monthly breakfast meeting. We also request that photos be provided, including a current photo, one in uniform while in the service and any other photos you think other members might enjoy seeing.

# Golf Fundraiser

## ★ MEMORIAL DAY ★ TEAM GOLF SCRAMBLE



CAPE CORAL CHAPTER MOAA  
presents:



**WHEN: MAY 25, 2026**

**TIME: 8 a.m. SHOTGUN START**

**WHERE: CAPE ROYAL GOLF CLUB**

11460 Royal Tee Circle, Cape Coral, FL 33991



**FORMAT:**



**30**

**FOUR-PERSON  
TEAMS**



**PRICING:**



**\$36**

**ANNUAL  
PASS  
PLAYERS**



**\$76**

**GUEST  
PLAYERS**



**INCLUSIONS:**



Price includes:  
Tax, Green Fee,  
Cart Fee, Range  
Balls, Prizes,  
Outdoor Cookout,  
and Gratuities

**REGISTER YOUR TEAM TODAY!**

**Teams can register with  
payment at the Golf Shop.**

## Cape Coral MOAA member advocates for expansion of VA clinic to full service hospital

A local effort is underway to bring a full-service Veterans Affairs hospital to Cape Coral—an initiative led by local resident and retired U.S. Air Force member and Cape Coral MOAA Chapter member Earl H. Morgan Jr.

In addition, Republican candidate for Florida 19th Congressional District Jim Oberweis has endorsed the idea and started a petition drive in support of it.

Through formal correspondence with city leaders and public comments at local meetings, Morgan is calling for the expansion of the existing Lee County VA Healthcare Center into a comprehensive VA Hospital/Medical Center to serve the growing veteran population of Southwest Florida.

### A growing need

Morgan's advocacy centers on a simple but pressing reality: Cape Coral is one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation, and infrastructure—particularly healthcare—is struggling to keep pace.

While the Cape Coral VA clinic provides valuable outpatient services, it lacks hospital beds, emergency care, and many specialized services. As a result, veterans often must travel outside the area or rely on already burdened civilian healthcare systems.

Citing national data, Morgan notes that many veterans experience delays in accessing care, including difficulty securing timely appointments for urgent needs. In a region with more than 56,000 veterans in Lee County alone, he argues that the current system is no longer sufficient.

### Window of opportunity

Morgan emphasizes that the timing for action is critical.



Photo by Moris Moreno, courtesy of HOK

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) recently announced a major restructuring initiative—the most significant since the 1990s. This effort includes realigning resources, upgrading facilities, and potentially expanding direct-care services across the country.

“This creates a unique opportunity for Cape Coral to position itself for future VA investment,” Morgan said in his correspondence.

He also points out that the current VA facility appears to have available surrounding land that could support expansion—an advantage that may not last if development pressures continue.

### Raising the issue

Morgan has not limited his efforts to written correspondence. He recently raised the issue during a public “listening session” at the North Fort Myers Recreation Center, posing a direct question to local officials: “Has the possibility of a VA Hospital/Medical Center in Cape Coral been formally explored—and if not, why not?”

He framed the proposal not as a replacement for additional civilian hospitals, but as a complementary solution that would strengthen the region's overall healthcare system.

### Impact

Beyond improving access to care for veterans, Morgan highlights the broader economic potential of a VA hospital.

In other regions—such as San Antonio and major metropolitan areas across Florida—VA hospitals often operate in close proximity to civilian healthcare systems, creating a synergy that expands services and drives economic activity.

He notes that under the VA's Community Care Program, substantial federal funding is being directed toward contracted healthcare services, potentially totaling hundreds of billions of dollars over the next decade. Local healthcare providers could benefit from partnerships tied to such funding.

### Call for leadership

At the core of Morgan's message is a call for proactive leadership.

He urges the City of Cape Coral, along with Lee County, state officials, and federal representatives, to formally establish the pursuit of a VA Hospital/Medical Center as a strategic priority.

“This is not something that can happen overnight,” Morgan emphasized. “It will require coordination across all levels of government, as well as strong public and private support. But the first step is making it a clear and stated goal.”

Morgan believes the initiative would receive overwhelming support from the region's veteran community and beyond.

“I am submitting this request on behalf of the many veterans who reside in Southwest Florida,” he wrote, “and on behalf of all citizens who would benefit—both healthwise and economically—from a full-service VA hospital in Cape Coral.”

As Cape Coral continues to grow, the question raised by one veteran may soon become a broader community conversation: how best to ensure that those who served have access to the care they need—close to home.

## Advocacy in Action 2026: MOAA's mission is continuing

By: *Terry Waters*

For decades, MOAA has stood as a powerful voice in Washington for those who wear and have worn the uniform and their families. From preserving earned benefits to adopting policies to protect and sustain the full force, MOAA exists to serve the uniformed services community in the halls of Congress.

Last week, MOAA executed our signature advocacy event, Advocacy in Action. This year, our advocates went to Capitol Hill on behalf of four critical, bipartisan priorities, the Major Richard Star Act, the Shutdown Fairness Act, the GUARD VA Benefits Act, and the Military CARE Act. Each of these bills represents a key effort to fix real problems affecting servicemembers and their families, and each one is within reach with sustained pressure from constituents like you.

[[ADVOCACY IN ACTION 2026: Event Recap](#) | [Photo Gallery](#)]

### Record-setting campaign

This year's Advocacy in Action delivered results on two fronts — in person on Capitol Hill, and across the country through a coordinated digital campaign. Here's what our community accomplished:



- 160 MOAA volunteers participated in the Capitol Hill event.
- Over 300 in-person office visits conducted across both chambers.
- More than 50 meetings held directly with lawmakers.
- Nearly 25,000 constituent messages sent to lawmakers by MOAA advocates from all 50 states ... the most ever during a campaign.

That last number is especially significant. Lawmakers pay close attention to the voices from their districts. When our in-person advocates sat down in congressional offices April 15, they were reinforcing a message those lawmakers already had been receiving from constituents across their districts and states.

That coordination -- digital outreach followed by face-to-face advocacy -- is what tells lawmakers these issues matter to servicemembers, veterans, and families at home.

### What's next

With the release of the president's budget, the National Defense Authorization Act process has begun in earnest, and MOAA is engaged at every level. As the 119th Congress enters its final stretch, we will continue to keep members informed and ready to act as these priorities move through the legislative calendar.

MOAA's council and chapter leaders will also be leading a Summer Advocacy in Action event later this year, bringing grassroots advocacy directly to communities across the country. Details are coming soon; in the meantime, connect with your local chapter and prepare to engage.

None of this happens without you. The nearly 25,000 messages sent, the 300 office visits, the direct conversations with lawmakers — all of them reflect a community that refuses to let these issues be forgotten. Thank you for your commitment to Never Stop Serving.

But it is never too late to join the effort. If you haven't yet visited MOAA's Legislative Action Center, please act today. It takes just minutes to send a personalized message to your lawmakers, and in the final stretch of this Congress, every message counts.

## The next steps: Three upcoming moments that matter for your benefits

*By: Kevin Lilley*

The issues at the heart of MOAA's signature spring advocacy campaign will remain at the top of our priority list, but they are far from the only issues involving service-earned benefits on Capitol Hill.

And as the legislative calendar rolls ahead, it's critical that MOAA members remain engaged.

Here's a look at three upcoming touchstones for the 119th Congress and what each could mean for the wider uniformed services community.

### Building the NDAA

**What:** The must-pass FY 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) will be the year's largest legislative vehicle for critical defense issues, to include military pay rates, quality of life reforms, TRICARE changes, and much more.

**When:** Legislators and staffers already have begun crafting the legislation. House lawmakers reportedly are targeting early June for the official NDAA mark-up session, where much of the final bill takes shape.

**MOAA's Role:** With Congress passing fewer standalone bills than in previous sessions, the NDAA may provide the only practical path for some MOAA legislative priorities to become



law. As negotiations continue and amendments move forward, we will look to key legislators to champion a range of issues, to include Advocacy in Action priorities and other benefits protections.

### Passing a Budget

**What:** The administration released its FY 2027 budget proposal in early April, including \$1.5 trillion for national defense and nearly \$490 billion for the VA.

**When:** The fiscal year ends Sept. 30, giving Congress about five months to pass a budget without relying on a continuing resolution to keep the government open. Lawmakers haven't passed a budget on time since 1997.

**MOAA's Role:** Not only will MOAA continue to advocate for the full funding of national defense and veterans programs, but we will continue to urge Congress to break the cycle of continuing resolutions, which result in wasted resources,

misaligned funds, and financial uncertainty for servicemembers and their families. We will also push for passage of the Shutdown Fairness Act, an Advocacy in Action priority that would protect military servicemember pay during federal funding lapses.

### Election Season

**What:** Voters will go to the polls to determine who holds every House seat and one-third of Senate seats for the 120th Congress.

**When:** Election Day is Nov. 3, but campaign season is in full swing in many parts of the country. After a lame-duck session, the new Congress will begin Jan. 3, 2027.

**MOAA's Role:** MOAA does not endorse candidates, but it's no secret that lawmakers on the campaign trail are more likely to listen to constituent concerns as they court votes. Members who engage their legislators on MOAA priorities – either through our Legislative Action Center or in person in their home districts – can show the importance of these issues as supporters of the uniformed services community head to the ballot box.

Keep up with the legislative timeline, and learn how you can help grow MOAA's influence on Capitol Hill, by visiting our advocacy news page.

## FLCoC President Bond urges Florida members to keep up advocacy efforts

In his final newsletter column in the Florida Council of Chapters April newsletter, outgoing President COL Steve Bond, USA (Ret) urged all Florida MOAA members to get involved with advocating for the issues MOAA National is working on.

“MOAA’s Advocacy in Action (AiA) campaign is here and we need you! This is where we demonstrate the power of our collective voice on behalf of the entire Uniformed Services Community and support MOAA’s lobbying efforts,” Bond wrote.

On April 15 the Florida delegation met with members of Congress on Capitol Hill.



COL Steve Bond, USA (Ret)

Bond urged every Florida MOAA member to show their support by **TAKING ACTION** through the

MOAA Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/>. Last year, Florida led all of MOAA in advocacy—but only a small percentage of the 30,000 MOAA members in Florida participated. “We can—and must—do better,” Bond wrote. “Take a few minutes today to send the four prepared messages to your elected officials. It is easy and only takes a few minutes of your time, but the impact you make on our legislators is immeasurable. Even if you’ve already participated, your voice still matters—send them again. Every message strengthens MOAA’s

influence and directly supports those we serve. That is our No. 1 mission.”



### Legislative Action Center Card



#### TAKE ACTION!

##### GROUND ZERO

Open your browser and go to [www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org)

##### STEP 1

Click Log In and enter your MOAA username and password **\*IF this is your first time, you must enter correct address that is displayed in the box that is shown.\***

##### STEP 2

From the top menu, click Advocacy

##### STEP 3

Select Legislative Action Center from the dropdown

##### STEP 4

Browse the list and choose a campaign you support **\*IF responding to a "Take Action" Alert, the campaign will appear on screen.**

##### STEP 5

Review the pre-written message and personalize if desired

##### STEP 6

Click Send to submit your message to Congress

##### STEP 7

Look for the confirmation screen – your action is complete

**\*IMPORTANT: Make sure cookies are enabled in your browser or the site may not load properly.**

NEVER STOP SERVING

## Trump orders faster federal review of psychedelic treatments

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Matthew Perrone and Seung Min Kim, originally published by Associated Press*

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order directing federal agencies to accelerate the review of certain psychedelic drugs, including ibogaine, as potential treatments for serious medical conditions.

The move aims to expand research and potentially speed access to therapies for issues such as severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance addiction—areas where conventional treatments have often fallen short.

### Expanding research

Despite their continued classification as Schedule I drugs—meaning they are considered to have high abuse potential and no accepted medical use—psychedelics like ibogaine are drawing increasing attention from veterans groups, policymakers, and medical researchers.

Ibogaine, derived from a plant native to West Africa, has been promoted by some advocates as a possible breakthrough for treating addiction and trauma-related conditions. However, it also carries significant safety risks, including the potential for dangerous heart complications.

### Fast-track reviews

Under the directive, the Food and Drug Administration plans to introduce a priority review system that could significantly shorten approval timelines for certain psychedelic treatments—from months to just weeks in some cases.

The agency is also preparing to allow initial human clinical trials of ibogaine in the United States, a step that



**President Donald Trump signs an executive order April 18 that would fund research into certain psychedelic therapies for mental illness, a move championed by many veterans. (White House photo)**

researchers say has long been difficult due to safety concerns and regulatory barriers.

The initiative has gained backing from veterans and advocates who say these therapies could offer relief for individuals struggling with conditions linked to military service. Some former service members have sought treatment abroad, particularly in Mexico, where ibogaine clinics operate.

Public figures, including podcaster Joe Rogan and former Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, have also voiced support for expanding access and research.

In addition, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other officials have expressed interest in easing restrictions to better study potential medical uses.

The executive order calls for at least \$50 million in federal funding to support state-level programs focused on psychedelic research and treatment for serious mental health conditions. The effort is designed to encourage collaboration between federal and state governments, including data sharing and technical assistance.

### Safety concerns

While interest in psychedelics is growing, experts caution that ibogaine remains a high-risk substance. It has been linked to irregular heart rhythms and multiple deaths in prior cases, and earlier research efforts in the U.S. were halted due to these concerns.

Researchers emphasize that more rigorous, controlled studies are needed to determine whether the drug can be used safely and effectively.

Although no psychedelic drug has yet received FDA approval in the United States, several—including psilocybin, MDMA, and LSD—are currently undergoing clinical trials. Meanwhile, states such as Oregon and Colorado have already taken steps to legalize certain forms of psychedelic-assisted therapy.

Trump's directive signals a potential shift in federal policy, moving these substances from the fringes of medical research toward broader scientific evaluation.

### Looking ahead

The order is not expected to immediately change access to psychedelic treatments, which remain unapproved and typically not covered by insurance. However, advocates say it represents an important step toward legitimizing research and reducing longstanding regulatory barriers.

As studies expand and more data becomes available, policymakers and medical professionals will continue to weigh the potential benefits against the risks—particularly for vulnerable populations seeking new treatment options.

## Strengthening emotional well-being

By: Roy Yenchsky

The death of a military spouse reshapes emotional well-being in ways that reach far beyond grief itself. It is a loss that touches identity, daily rhythm, and the quiet sense of safety that comes from sharing life with someone who understood both the burdens and the pride of service.

For many, the brain responds to this kind of profound disruption with a mix of numbness, hypervigilance, and deep fatigue — natural reactions to a heart trying to make sense of a world suddenly changed. Yet within that upheaval, emotional well-being becomes not just a hope but a necessity: a steadying force that helps the mind process sorrow, rebuild resilience, and slowly rediscover moments of connection, purpose, and peace. This journey is neither quick nor linear, but it reflects the same courage and endurance that military families have always carried.

Emotional well-being and brain health are deeply interconnected, shaping how we think, cope, and experience daily life. Strong emotional balance supports healthier brain function, while a well-nourished brain strengthens our ability to manage stress, build relationships, and maintain resilience.

Research shows that chronic stress can harm key brain regions involved in emotional control, memory, and decision-making, including the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus. When these areas are disrupted, people might experience anxiety, irritability, or difficulty concentrating.

### How Emotions Shape the Brain

Positive emotional states — such as purpose, connection, and calm — help regulate stress hormones



and support cognitive performance. People who report higher emotional stability and life satisfaction tend to support stronger memory and decision-making abilities as they age.

Conversely, chronic stress elevates cortisol, which can shrink the hippocampus and overactivate the amygdala, making emotional regulation more difficult and increasing vulnerability to depression or anxiety.

### The Brain–Body Connection

The brain communicates constantly with the body through neural pathways and chemical messengers. Neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine influence mood, motivation, and focus. When these systems are imbalanced, emotional well-being can suffer.

Physical factors such as sleep, inflammation, and fatigue also affect how the brain processes emotions, reinforcing the need for whole-body care.

### Strengthening Emotional and Brain

Several habits support both

emotional balance and neurological resilience:

- Regular physical activity boosts serotonin and dopamine, improving mood and cognitive flexibility.
- Quality sleep helps the brain detoxify and consolidate memories.
- Social connection reduces stress responses and protects cognitive health.
- Mindfulness and gratitude practices calm the nervous system and enhance emotional regulation.
- Balanced nutrition, especially omega-3s and antioxidants, supports neural communication.

Together, these practices create a reinforcing cycle: A healthier brain supports stronger emotional well-being, and emotional well-being protects the brain.

Suggested reading: [Dial Down: Holistic Strategies to Move from Chaos to Calm](#) by Lt. Col. Raquel Durden, USA (Ret), a transformative guide offering simple, actionable wellness practices, interwoven with real-life stories. (Note: MOAA is an Amazon Associate and earns money from qualifying purchases, with the revenue supporting [The MOAA Foundation](#).)

## This account can keep ‘gray area’ retirees informed on pay, benefits

By: Lila Quintiliani

Reserve-component retirees who have stopped drilling but aren't yet eligible to receive retirement pay can register for a myPay account that will keep them connected and informed while they are in the so-called “gray area.”

These Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Air Force Reserve retirees can register for a Gray Area Future Retiree myPay account via the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). Created in 2021, the account allows those in this specific group a convenient way to keep DFAS updated with their contact information and to receive important news on their upcoming benefits from DFAS and their branch of service, according to the DFAS website.

Account holders receive DFAS and service-specific retiree newsletters and are reminded as they approach retired pay eligibility.

[\[MOAA MEMBER PUBLICATION: Guard and Reserve Retirement Guide\]](#)

The application process for these accounts depends on whether a retiree has access to an existing myPay account. Download this DFAS guide (PDF format) for step-by-step instructions.

DFAS also maintains service-specific websites addressing the needs of gray area retirees,



Members of the Oklahoma Army National Guard takes part in Exercise Thunderstruck 2.0 at Camp Gruber Training Center, Okla., on Sept. 13, 2025. (Photo by Master Sgt. Amber Monio/Oklahoma Army National Guard)

including guidance for the retirement pay application process:

- Army National Guard and Reserve Gray Area Retirees
- Marine Corps Gray Area Retirees
- Navy Gray Area Retirees
- Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Gray Area Retirees

DFAS suggests checking myPay annually to ensure that the correct contact information is on file. To update a mailing address, log in to the Future Retiree account and click on “Mailing Address” under “Pay Changes” in the left-hand column.

To update an email address or phone number, use the “Personal Settings” menu in the blue bar at the top of the page.

If you need additional assistance with updating your mailing

address, contact the Retired & Annuitant Pay Customer Care Center at (800) 321-1080 or (317) 212-0551.

[\[MOAA'S RETIREMENT GUIDE: The Right Financial Risks\]](#)

Gray area retirees should be updating contact information with three entities: DFAS, the Defense Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), and their branch of service. Updates to DEERS do not automatically update DFAS or the service branch.

The Coast Guard Pay and Personnel Center does not have a similar option for Coast Guard gray area retirees to access a Direct Pay account.

## Pentagon proposes record \$1.5 trillion budget for 2027

By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Tanya Noury, *Military Times*

The U.S. Department of War has unveiled a proposed \$1.5 trillion budget for fiscal year 2027, marking the largest military spending plan in modern U.S. history. The proposal represents a dramatic increase over the previous year and reflects growing concerns about global security threats.

### Threat environment

Pentagon officials say the request is driven by an increasingly complex global landscape, with adversaries expanding capabilities across air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.

Jules J. Hurst III, the department's chief financial officer, described the plan as a long-term investment aimed at strengthening U.S. military readiness after years of strain on the defense industrial base.

### Key priorities

The proposal aligns with priorities set by Donald Trump, including funding for a "Golden Dome" missile defense system designed to protect the homeland. Additional emphasis is placed on artificial intelligence, drone warfare, and expanding data infrastructure.

All branches of the military would see funding increases under



the plan, along with proposed pay raises for service members ranging from 5% to 7%, depending on rank.

### Naval expansion

A major portion of the budget focuses on growing the Navy. The plan includes more than \$65 billion to procure dozens of ships, part of a broader effort to build what has been described as a "Golden Fleet."

This shipbuilding push would represent the largest such investment in decades.

### Drone focus

The Pentagon is also prioritizing unmanned systems, with tens of billions allocated for drone development, counter-drone capabilities, and advanced autonomous platforms. These investments reflect the growing importance of unmanned systems in modern warfare.

### Weapons funding

Another significant share of the budget is earmarked for next-generation weapons, including

missiles, armored vehicles, and air defense systems. Programs such as Patriot and THAAD interceptors are among those included in the funding request.

### Iran impact

Officials noted that the budget was developed before the launch of recent U.S. operations in Iran, meaning additional funding may

be requested to support ongoing military activity and replenish supplies.

### Political debate

The proposal is expected to face strong scrutiny in Congress. Critics argue that the scale of military spending could come at the expense of domestic programs, while supporters contend that national defense must remain the top priority.

Speaking privately, Trump defended the focus on military funding, emphasizing the need to ensure national security in a time of active global conflicts.

### Looking ahead

As lawmakers begin reviewing the proposal, debates over defense priorities, spending levels, and broader national needs are likely to intensify. The outcome will shape not only military capabilities but also the federal government's overall spending direction in the years ahead.

## Automatic draft registration for eligible men set to begin in December

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Cristina Stassis, originally published by Military Times*

Eligible men in the United States will soon be automatically enrolled in the nation's military draft registry, marking a significant shift from the long-standing requirement that individuals sign up on their own.

The change is expected to take effect in December and stems from provisions included in the fiscal 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, signed into law by Donald Trump.

### Self-registration

Under the new system, the Selective Service System will handle registration by drawing on existing federal data sources. This replaces the current process, which requires most men ages 18 to 25 to register within 30 days of turning 18.

Officials say the shift is designed to simplify compliance and improve efficiency by reducing the need for outreach campaigns aimed at encouraging young men to sign up.

The Selective Service has already submitted a proposed rule outlining how the automatic system will operate. That proposal is now under review by the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs as part of the federal rulemaking process.

Lawmakers and agency officials worked together during the NDAA process to include the



Future soldiers take the oath of enlistment at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia, June 12, 2024. (CPL Aaron Troutman/Army Photo)

change, citing both administrative challenges and costs associated with the current system, which runs about \$30 million annually.

### Current requirements

At present, failure to register can carry significant consequences under the Military Selective Service Act, including potential fines, imprisonment, or loss of eligibility for certain federal benefits.

However, registration rates have declined in recent years, partly due to the removal of Selective Service registration from federal student aid applications in 2022—a step that had previously accounted for a substantial portion of new registrations.

The requirement continues to apply to nearly all male U.S. citizens and immigrants between the ages of 18 and 25. Women are not included under current law, despite periodic discussions in Congress about expanding

eligibility.

### Historical context

The Selective Service System dates back to 1917, when Woodrow Wilson established it during World War I. Although the draft itself was suspended in 1975 by Gerald Ford and later reinstated in 1980 by Jimmy Carter, the United States has relied on an all-volunteer force since the Vietnam War era.

### Looking ahead

While the draft has not been activated in decades, maintaining an up-to-date registry remains a key component of national preparedness.

With automatic enrollment set to begin later this year, officials expect the new system to improve accuracy, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure that eligible individuals are properly accounted for in the event of a national emergency.

## Lawmakers push bill to preserve women's access to all military roles

By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Hope Hodge Seck, originally published by *Military Times*

A group of military veteran lawmakers in Congress has introduced legislation aimed at ensuring women can continue serving in all military occupations, including ground combat roles, as the Pentagon reviews current policies and performance standards.

The proposed measure—known as the Women Add Resourcefulness and Resilience to Improve Operational Readiness (WARRIOR) Act—was introduced by Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, a former Air Force officer. The bill seeks to prohibit any branch of the military from restricting assignments or career fields based on gender.

### Veteran lawmakers

Houlahan is joined by several fellow veterans in Congress, including Rep. Jason Crow, a former Army Ranger, and Rep. Maggie Goodlander, a former naval intelligence officer. Dozens of additional co-sponsors—all Democrats—have also signed on to support the legislation.

The effort comes as the U.S. Department of Defense evaluates the effectiveness of women serving in combat roles, a review that has drawn attention following comments from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth questioning whether existing standards are appropriate.

### Gender-neutral standards

Supporters of the bill say it would



codify current policy by ensuring that all service members are evaluated based on performance and ability—not gender. The legislation would also update older laws from the 1990s and early 2000s to reflect the modern military.

In addition, the WARRIOR Act would require the Secretary of Defense to provide annual reports to Congress detailing any changes to occupational standards, including how those changes relate to real-world job performance.

The bill also calls for transparency in how personnel decisions are made, including tracking how many service members are reassigned or separated from service for reasons unrelated to misconduct.

### Oversight

The proposal outlines an 18-month period for evaluating and implementing any new job standards. It also establishes clearer categories—technical, tactical, cognitive, and physical—to ensure that requirements align with the actual demands of each military role.

Lawmakers are also seeking access to the Pentagon's ongoing study of combat effectiveness, which has recently been reassigned to researchers at Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory.

### Broader context

Women have been eligible to serve in all combat roles since 2015, and thousands currently serve in such positions across the Army and Marine Corps. Advocacy groups and veterans organizations say maintaining that access is critical to both fairness and military readiness.

Supporters argue that women have consistently demonstrated the ability to meet established standards and contribute meaningfully across the force.

### Looking Ahead

While there has been no formal move to reverse current policy, the ongoing Pentagon review has prompted lawmakers to act proactively.

If enacted, the WARRIOR Act would solidify gender-neutral standards in law and help ensure that future policy decisions continue to be based on performance, capability, and mission needs—rather than gender.

## US Air Force extends life of A-10 to 2030

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Michael Scanlon, originally published by Military Times*

The U.S. Air Force has decided to keep the iconic A-10 “Warthog” in operation through 2030, extending the aircraft’s service beyond previously announced retirement plans.

Air Force Secretary Troy E. Meink confirmed the move on April 20, noting that the decision was made in coordination with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. The extension pushes the timeline past an earlier plan that would have phased out the aircraft by 2029.

Officials say the decision is intended to preserve operational strength while the defense industry ramps up production of newer combat aircraft. Keeping the A-10

in service ensures continued availability of a platform known for its effectiveness in close air support missions.

### Recent operational use

The A-10 has remained active in current operations, including missions tied to Operation Epic Fury in Iran. The aircraft has been used for maritime close air support in the Strait of Hormuz and played a role in a recent search-and-rescue effort involving downed F-15E Strike Eagle airmen.

During that rescue mission, one A-10 was lost, though its pilot was safely recovered.

Under the fiscal 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, the Air Force had planned to retain a limited number of A-10 aircraft—103 in total—through late 2026, with a gradual drawdown

leading to full retirement by 2029.

The revised timeline reflects shifting operational needs and ongoing demands for the aircraft’s capabilities.

### Details emerging

It is not yet clear how many A-10s will remain in the inventory through 2030, and additional decisions regarding the fleet’s long-term role are expected.

Often referred to as the A-10 Thunderbolt II, the Warthog has long been valued for its durability, firepower, and ability to support ground forces in challenging combat environments.

By extending its service life, the Air Force is signaling continued reliance on the aircraft as it transitions to newer systems in the years ahead.



US Air Force photo

## Air Force prioritizes space-based radar as airborne systems are questioned

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Thomas Novelly, originally published by Defense One*

The U.S. Air Force is placing increasing emphasis on developing space-based radar capabilities, even as concerns grow over the vulnerability of its existing airborne surveillance fleet.

Speaking at the Space Symposium, Air Force Secretary Troy Meink said the service is moving forward with a new satellite-based system designed to track airborne targets. The initiative has already reached the contracting stage, with a group of vendors selected and initial awards expected in the near future.

### Space-Based Surveillance

The proposed system—known as space-based Air Moving Target Indicator (AMTI)—has strong backing in the fiscal 2027 budget request, which includes roughly \$7 billion for its development. Officials believe the capability could significantly improve battlespace awareness, particularly in high-threat environments.

At the same time, funding for the E-7 Wedgetail airborne radar aircraft was not included in the latest budget proposal, raising questions about the future balance between space- and air-based surveillance systems.

### Concerns

The push toward space-based



Air Force E-3 Sentry (US Air Force Photo)

solutions comes amid heightened concerns about the survivability of traditional radar aircraft. The Air Force's aging E-3 Sentry fleet has been reduced to only a limited number of operational planes following a recent missile strike in Iran that damaged one of the aircraft.

Defense analysts warn that adversaries are increasingly targeting critical support assets such as airborne warning and control systems and refueling aircraft—platforms essential to projecting airpower.

### Debate Over Future

While Meink emphasized the advantages of space-based systems—particularly their survivability—he acknowledged that aircraft like the E-7 still provide valuable capabilities. Decisions about future investments are still being finalized within the Pentagon and will be presented to Congress at a later stage.

The debate is not new. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth previously

questioned the survivability of airborne platforms and advocated for greater reliance on space-based technologies. Although the Air Force reduced funding for the E-7 in its 2026 budget proposal, lawmakers later restored more than \$1 billion to continue development.

### Complementary Systems

Air Force leaders stress that space-based AMTI is not expected to replace all existing systems. Instead, it will be part of a broader network that integrates multiple sensors and platforms to create a comprehensive operational picture.

Officials say early demonstrations of the space-based capability have been promising, with expectations that it could become one of the most advanced tracking systems ever fielded.

### Looking Ahead

As the Air Force refines its strategy, the tension between investing in resilient space-based systems and maintaining proven airborne platforms remains a central issue.

What is clear, however, is that future conflicts will demand more survivable, integrated, and technologically advanced tools to monitor and respond to threats—whether from the air or from space.

## Future upgrades could see Chinook helicopters launch drone swarms

By ChatGPT,  
rewritten using  
reporting by Thomas  
Newdick, originally  
published in *The War  
Zone* newsletter

The iconic CH-47 Chinook helicopter may soon take on a dramatically expanded role on the modern battlefield, with Boeing exploring new capabilities that include launching swarms of drones and advancing toward partially or fully autonomous flight.

At a recent Army aviation summit, Boeing showcased a concept in which Chinooks deploy “launched effects”—a growing class of unmanned systems that can serve as scouts, electronic warfare tools, decoys, or even strike platforms. These drones can operate individually or as coordinated swarms, providing flexibility across a range of missions.

While the capability has not yet been demonstrated from the Chinook, Boeing officials say the company is actively investing in the technology and evaluating how quickly it could move into testing, depending on interest from the U.S. Army and international partners.

The Chinook’s large cargo bay could make it especially well-suited for this role, allowing it to carry and deploy far more drones than smaller helicopters that rely on external launch systems.

### Expanding Mission

Future versions of these launched effects could be significantly larger and more capable than today’s systems, potentially flying hundreds of miles and remaining airborne for extended periods. Some concepts envision



The U.S. Army announced that its next-generation assault aircraft would carry the name “Cheyenne II” in honor of the Native American tribes. (Bell photo)

drones weighing over 200 pounds, far exceeding the size of many current models.

Such developments could dramatically enhance the Chinook’s mission flexibility, enabling it to support reconnaissance, strike, and electronic warfare operations from a single platform.

### Toward Automation

Beyond drones, Boeing is also working toward an “optimally crewed” Chinook—an aircraft that could operate with reduced pilot workload or, in some cases, without a pilot at all.

Recent advances include the integration of systems designed to assist pilots and improve flight precision. One such system functions similarly to advanced driver-assistance technology in cars, helping stabilize the aircraft and enhance situational awareness during complex maneuvers.

In addition, upgraded flight control software has already enabled test flights in which a Chinook completed an automated approach and landing without pilot input—an important step toward greater autonomy.

Engineers describe these technologies as foundational building

blocks. Over time, they could enable increasingly sophisticated automation, potentially leading to fully autonomous operations from takeoff to landing.

Other manufacturers are pursuing similar efforts, signaling a broader shift across military aviation toward pilot-optional or uncrewed aircraft capable of handling

dangerous or repetitive missions.

### Continued Demand

Despite being first introduced in the early 1960s, the Chinook remains in high demand worldwide. The U.S. Army continues to invest in upgraded versions, while allied nations—including Egypt, South Korea, Germany, and the United Kingdom—are either receiving or preparing to receive new aircraft.

Production of the latest CH-47F Block II models is ramping up, with additional aircraft already on order and more expected in the coming years.

### Platform Evolving

With ongoing upgrades and new mission capabilities under development, the Chinook is positioned to remain a key component of military aviation for decades to come.

If Boeing’s plans come to fruition, future Chinooks may not only transport troops and cargo—but also deploy coordinated drone swarms and operate with unprecedented levels of autonomy.

## Army receives first shipment of new XM8 Carbine Rifle

*By ChatGPT,  
rewritten using  
reporting from Stars  
and Stripes*

The U.S. Army has taken delivery of its first batch of the new XM8 Carbine, marking another step in its ongoing effort to modernize small arms for close-combat troops.

Manufactured by SIG Sauer, the XM8 is designed to complement—not replace—the Army’s recently adopted M7 rifle. Instead, it provides a lighter, more compact option tailored for soldiers operating in confined or fast-moving combat environments.

### Lighter

Compared to the legacy M4A1 carbine, the XM8 is shorter and lighter, improving mobility for troops in the Close Combat Force. It is also more compact than the M7, measuring several inches shorter and weighing about a pound less.

The design includes a fixed buttstock and is chambered for the Army’s newer 6.8mm ammunition, which officials say offers improved performance against evolving battlefield threats.

The XM8 is one element of the



A soldier with the Army Marksmanship Unit conducts rifle drills with the XM8 Carbine at Fort Benning, Ga, February 2026. The Army on Friday, April 3, 2026, accepted its first delivery of the carbine. (U.S. Army photo)

Army’s Next Generation Squad Weapon program, launched to replace decades-old rifles and ammunition with more advanced systems. Under a 10-year contract awarded in 2022, soldiers have been testing both the M7 rifle and the M250 automatic weapon—intended to succeed the M4 and M249, respectively.

The introduction of 6.8mm ammunition is a key component of that effort, offering greater accuracy and lethality compared to older calibers.

### Testing to fielding

Weapons in the program originally carried experimental “X” designations during development. As systems have matured and been approved for

broader use, some—like the M7—have transitioned into standard service.

The XM8, however, is being positioned as a specialized companion weapon, giving units greater flexibility depending on mission requirements.

### Moving forward

With the first delivery now complete, the Army will continue evaluating how the XM8 performs in operational settings.

As modernization efforts continue, the addition of lighter, more adaptable weapons like the XM8 reflects a broader push to equip soldiers with tools better suited for the demands of future combat.

## Space Force outlines vision for operating in space by 2040

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Courtney Albon, originally published by Air & Space Forces Magazine*

The U.S. Space Force has released a forward-looking blueprint describing how it expects the space domain to evolve by 2040—and what capabilities it believes will be required to operate effectively in that environment.

Two newly published documents, titled “Future Operating Environment” and “Objective Force,” provide a long-term perspective on emerging threats, advancing technologies, and the structure the service will need to succeed in space over the next 15 years.

### Vision

Chief of Space Operations Gen. Chance Saltzman emphasized that the documents are intended to spark discussion rather than serve as a definitive roadmap.

He encouraged industry partners, allies, and military personnel to challenge the assumptions presented and contribute ideas to refine the vision. The effort reflects an understanding that predicting future conflict—especially in space—comes with uncertainty.

The Space Force anticipates a dramatically more crowded and competitive environment by 2040, potentially involving more than 30,000 satellites in orbit. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum sensing, and reusable launch systems are expected to transform how space operations are conducted.

At the same time, the service warns of increasing threats from



Gen B. Chance Saltzman at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, Colo., on April 15. (Photo courtesy of the Space Foundation)

adversaries, including cyberattacks, electronic warfare, and interference with satellites. Without sustained investment, officials believe these risks could undermine U.S. capabilities and erode confidence in space-based systems.

### Competing

The documents highlight concerns that countries like China and Russia are developing advanced space capabilities, including distributed satellite networks and AI-enabled decision-making tools. These developments could challenge U.S. dominance and disrupt critical military operations.

However, the Space Force argues that with the right investments and partnerships, the United States can maintain its edge—deterring aggression and ensuring reliable space-based support for joint forces.

### ‘Objective force’

The second document outlines how the Space Force should evolve to meet these challenges. It identifies key mission areas for future investment, including:

- Space control

- Missile warning and tracking
  - Satellite communications
  - Navigation warfare
  - Space-based sensing and targeting
  - Launch and access to space
- Officials note that some additional mission areas—such as electromagnetic and orbital warfare—are addressed in classified materials.

### Focus

Among the priorities highlighted is the modernization of navigation systems, including GPS. The Space Force envisions a more resilient architecture that integrates allied and commercial capabilities alongside U.S. systems, ensuring reliability even in contested environments.

Similarly, the service plans to develop a more flexible satellite communications framework through a Space Data Network. This system would combine military and commercial assets into a unified, adaptable network capable of supporting a wide range of missions.

### Building future

Leaders stress that defining this future force is only the first step. Achieving it will require faster acquisition processes and a shift in how space systems are developed and deployed.

The documents underscore a central message: the Space Force must evolve significantly to meet the demands of future conflict.

If successful, officials say, the service will not only keep pace with emerging threats but maintain a decisive advantage in the increasingly critical space domain.

## USS Nimitz conducts joint live-fire drills with Ecuadorian Navy

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Gary Warner, originally published by Stars and Stripes*

The USS Nimitz recently carried out a series of joint live-fire and air combat training exercises with the Ecuadorian navy as part of a multinational operation in the eastern Pacific.

The drills took place during Southern Seas 2026, an exercise designed to strengthen cooperation among regional partners. Participating alongside the Nimitz were Ecuadorian naval vessels, including missile corvettes, as well as the USS Gridley, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer.

### Air and sea coordination

Aircraft from both nations played a central role in the training. Ecuadorian A-29 Super Tucano planes conducted patrol operations alongside U.S. Navy F/A-18 Super Hornets operating from the carrier.

During the exercise, Navy crews loaded live ordnance onto the Super Hornets, which then executed simulated attack runs and released the bombs in designated areas at sea.

Pilots also demonstrated tactical maneuvering, including mock aerial engagements. In one instance, a Super Hornet deployed defensive flares—countermeasures designed to divert incoming missiles in real



An Ecuadorian Air Force Embraer A-29 Super Tucano and an F/A-18E Super Hornet, attached to the “Kestrels” of Strike Fighter Squadron 137, cruise above USS Nimitz during exercises in the Pacific Ocean on April 8, 2026. (William Shortal/U.S. Navy)

combat scenarios.

### Building interoperability

In addition to air operations, the exercise included maritime interdiction scenarios, gunnery drills, and air defense training. These activities are intended to improve coordination and readiness between allied forces.

Rear Adm. Cassidy Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11, emphasized the importance of such partnerships, noting that joint training builds the trust and experience needed for effective combined operations.

### Regional engagement

The Nimitz is expected to participate in additional exercises with partner nations across South and Central America as it continues

its deployment. The carrier is currently transiting from Naval Base Kitsap in Washington state to its new homeport at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia.

### Veteran carrier

Commissioned in 1975, the Nimitz remains the oldest active aircraft carrier in the U.S. Navy fleet. Although initially scheduled for retirement this year, its service has been extended until at least 2027, when the next-generation carrier USS John F. Kennedy is expected to join the fleet.

As the Navy continues to rely on the Nimitz, exercises like Southern Seas 2026 highlight both its enduring capabilities and the importance of international cooperation in maintaining maritime security.

## Coast Guard seeks contractor-operated drone services for maritime surveillance

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Jon Harper, originally published by DefenseScoop*

The U.S. Coast Guard is exploring the use of contractor-provided drone systems to expand its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities across both sea and shore operations.

Through a recently issued request for information, the service is seeking industry input on medium-range unmanned aerial systems and related support services. The effort is being managed by the Coast Guard's Robotics and Autonomous Systems Program Executive Office, which was established to support modernization goals outlined in its Force Design 2028 initiative.

### Contractor-operated model

Officials are considering a contractor-owned, contractor-operated (COCO) approach, in which private companies would supply not only the drone platforms but also trained personnel, maintenance, logistics, and mission support.

These systems would be used to provide continuous ISR coverage, operating around the clock to deliver imagery and sensor data in support of Coast Guard missions. Contractors would also be responsible for deployment logistics, regulatory compliance, and sustaining operations before, during, and after missions.

### Mission applications

The proposed drone services would support a variety of maritime missions, including detecting and tracking "targets of interest." These could range from small, fast-moving



**Coast Guard members conduct Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) training aboard Cutter Robert Ward (WPC 1130) off the coast of San Pedro, Dec. 18, 2025. (Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Roberto Nieves)**

vessels used in smuggling operations to individuals in distress requiring rescue.

In addition to surveillance, the drones may assist with communications relay between Coast Guard units and provide targeting support, enhancing coordination across air, sea, and land assets.

### Deployment

The Coast Guard envisions these systems operating from a wide array of locations, including cutters, patrol vessels, and shore-based sites. Potential deployment areas span the Atlantic and Pacific regions, as well as Alaska and the Arctic.

The drones would need to integrate with existing Coast Guard systems, transmitting real-time data to ships, aircraft, and command centers via compatible communication links.

Industry responses to the request are due in early May, with the Coast Guard planning to award contracts

under a long-term agreement that could extend up to 10 years, including an initial five-year period and an optional extension.

This approach reflects a broader trend across U.S. maritime services, as both the Coast Guard and Navy look to leverage commercial drone technologies and services to enhance operational flexibility and reduce the burden on government-owned systems.

### Modernizing

As the Coast Guard continues to balance its military and law enforcement roles, integrating advanced unmanned systems is seen as a key step toward improving situational awareness and mission effectiveness.

By tapping into contractor expertise and rapidly deployable technologies, the service aims to strengthen its ability to monitor vast maritime areas and respond more effectively to emerging threats and humanitarian needs.

## Trump VA budget proposal reaches record levels for Fiscal year 2027

*By ChatGPT, rewritten using reporting by Patricia Kime, originally published by Military Times*

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) could see a significant funding boost under President Donald Trump's proposed federal budget for fiscal year 2027, with total VA spending projected to reach a record \$488 billion.

According to administration budget documents, the proposal represents a 7.7% increase for the VA as part of a broader \$2.2 trillion federal spending plan. Of that total, \$205.6 billion would fund discretionary programs such as operations and medical services, while \$282.6 billion would be allocated to mandatory spending, including disability compensation, pensions, and insurance benefits.

### Infrastructure

The proposal includes several major construction and infrastructure initiatives aimed at expanding care capacity for veterans nationwide. Among the highlighted projects:

- \$500 million for permanent housing facilities at the National Center for Warrior Independence in West Los Angeles
- \$1.3 billion for a new VA medical center in Manchester, New Hampshire
- Nearly \$2 billion to replace the existing VA hospital in Indianapolis
- \$30 million to acquire land for a future VA facility in San Antonio

These investments reflect continued efforts to modernize VA infrastructure and address growing demand for services.

### Health Care

The budget proposal also supports



ongoing reforms within the Veterans Health Administration, including restructuring community care programs that allow veterans to receive treatment outside VA facilities.

Funding is included to restart the VA's electronic health record modernization program, which has been paused since 2022. The system is expected to resume implementation at select facilities this year, with additional sites to follow.

If approved, the budget would support care for approximately 9.2 million enrolled veterans and provide disability compensation to more than 7.4 million individuals.

### Workforce

The VA projects a workforce of 443,327 full-time employees under the plan—fewer than in 2025 but slightly higher than anticipated 2026 levels. Officials say the changes reflect a shift toward efficiency rather than staffing growth alone.

In a statement included in the budget documents, VA Secretary Doug Collins emphasized that the department aims to measure success based on outcomes for veterans rather than spending levels or staffing numbers.

### Community Services

The proposal increases funding for both in-house VA medical services and community care programs. Specifically:

- \$96.2 billion is designated for care within VA facilities
- \$42 billion is allocated for care delivered through non-VA providers

Additionally, the administration is seeking continued flexibility in funding for health conditions tied to toxic exposures, requesting \$52 billion be shifted into discretionary spending. This approach has drawn scrutiny from some lawmakers concerned about protecting dedicated funds.

### Broader Federal Context

The VA proposal is part of a wider federal budget plan that includes increased funding for the Department of Defense—approaching \$1.5 trillion—as well as boosts for the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security. At the same time, the plan proposes reductions in several domestic programs, including education, housing, and public health initiatives.

### Looking Ahead

The VA budget request also includes advance funding for fiscal 2028, designed to ensure uninterrupted benefits and services in the event of a government shutdown.

Ultimately, the proposal serves as a starting point for congressional negotiations as lawmakers begin the appropriations process for fiscal 2027. If enacted, it would mark a dramatic increase in VA funding over the past quarter-century, rising from approximately \$45 billion in 2001 to nearly half a trillion dollars today.

## VA drops appeal in key court case, ending a threat to veterans' benefits

By: Kevin Lilley

A court ruling that prevents the VA from downgrading disability ratings based on effective medical treatment will stand thanks to the department's decision last month to end its appeal.

The 2025 ruling by U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in favor of Army veteran Carlton Ingram ensures that “unless the VA’s own rating schedule says otherwise, the VA must not give a lower disability rating to a veteran because they take medication that helps treat their condition,” according to an April 6 press release from the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), which represented Ingram.

MOAA and other veteran advocacy groups called for the VA to end its legal fight in February, after the department published, then rescinded, a rule the department said would “clarify existing policy and protect veterans’ benefits in the wake of an ongoing court action.”

MOAA disagreed with that interpretation of the rule, saying

instead that it “fails to account for treatment burdens, creates harmful incentives, destabilizes access to benefits, and was promulgated without adequate public input.”

### More Work Ahead

MOAA appreciates the decisions to rescind the rule and drop the appeal, and looks forward to continued dialogue to ensure that service-connected disability ratings are never reduced due to the effects of treatment.

It should also be made clear that keeping to a treatment plan will not result in a lower disability rating, ensuring veterans are not incentivized to skip treatments prior to evaluations or otherwise risk their health to preserve

service-earned benefits.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) recently introduced the Carlton H. Ingram Veterans’ Benefits Protection Act (S. 4140) to codify the discounting of the beneficial effects of medication or treatment when determining a disability rating. This legislation recognizes that using medication to cope with chronic illness, injury, or disease is not the same as an improvement in the condition itself.

MOAA will continue to engage with the VA on this and other veterans’ concerns, and will work with lawmakers throughout the upcoming budget process to ensure the department has the resources to provide health care and benefits to our nation’s veterans.

**COURT RULING WILL STAND FOR VETERANS**

A court ruling that prevents the VA from downgrading disability ratings based on effective medical treatment **WILL STAND** thanks to the department's decision last month to **end its appeal.**

**COURT RULING:** VA cannot lower disability ratings based solely on improvement from effective medical treatment.

**VA DECISION:** The department ended its appeal, allowing the ruling to stand.

**IMPACT:** Veterans are protected from unfair rating reductions and can focus on their health and future.

**RULING UPHELD**

**PROTECTING VETERANS. HONORING SERVICE.**

**A WIN FOR VETERANS. A VICTORY FOR JUSTICE.**

**VA** U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

# Florida Veteran News



## 2026 FLORIDA MISSION OF MERCY VETERANS DENTAL EVENT

MAY 14, 2026 • JACKSONVILLE

The Florida Mission of Mercy Veterans First Initiative will provide FREE dental care to military veterans beginning on May 14, 2026 at Prime Osborn Convention Center (1000 Water St. Jacksonville, FL 32204). You **MUST** register for an appointment. Registration opens on March 2, 2026 at [FLAMOM.org](http://FLAMOM.org).

### What is the Florida Mission of Mercy?

Florida Mission of Mercy is a charitable dental clinic that provides free dental care to the underserved and uninsured. Patients are seen on a first-come, first served basis.

### Veterans First Attendees will:

- Register for an arrival time on Thursday, May 14 to complete paperwork, X-rays and dental exam
- Return at 7 a.m. on Friday, May 15 for dental treatment

### What services are provided?

- Dental exams, cleanings, fillings, extractions and some root canals

### Who can receive treatment?

- Military veterans willing to wait in line who do not have medically compromising conditions can be treated.
- Photo identification, Social Security Number, insurance information or other personal identification/documentation is NOT required.
- Interpreters will be available to assist some languages, but please bring an interpreter if you do not speak English.

### Sedation and narcotics will NOT be available.

- If you have dental pain, please do NOT wait to seek care, as this could be a sign of a serious condition.
- If dental pain is severe and accompanied by fever or swelling, go to a hospital emergency room immediately.
- For a list of low-cost dental clinics in the state, please visit [fdacares.com](http://fdacares.com).



FLORIDA VETERANS  
— F O U N D A T I O N —

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [FLAMOM.ORG](http://FLAMOM.ORG)

# UPCOMING EVENTS:

## Cape Coral MOAA Board Meeting

10 a.m.

Thursday, May 7

**Cape Royal  
Golf Club**

*All members are welcome*



### About CCMOAA

*Serving All Military,  
Veterans, & their families  
in the Cape Coral area*

*... and beyond!*

Members of the Cape Coral Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America, P.O. Box 100508, Cape Coral, FL 33910-0508, publish the Cape Coral Communicator monthly, except June, July and August.

The Chapter is a non-profit, non-partisan, and tax-exempt IRS 501(c)(3) and a 501(c)(19) organization, affiliated with National MOAA and the Florida Chapter of Councils, MOAA, not associated with the Department of Defense.

The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of MOAA, the Florida Council of Chapters, this Chapter, or DOD.

# MAY Calendar of Events

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
					<b>1</b> <i>Silver Star Service Banner Day</i>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> <i>Cinco de Mayo</i>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> <i>CCMOAA Board Meeting 10 a.m.</i> <i>National Day of Prayer</i>	<b>8</b> <i>VE Day</i> <i>Military Spouse Appreciation Day</i>	<b>9</b> <i>CCMOAA Breakfast Meeting 10 a.m.</i>
<b>10</b> <i>Mother's Day</i>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> <i>Children of Fallen Patriots Day</i>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> <i>Armed Forces Day</i>
<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> <i>Memorial Day</i>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>31</b>						

## Memorial Day to be observed on Monday, May 25 this year

Memorial Day is an American holiday, observed on the last Monday of May, honoring the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military. Memorial Day 2025 will occur on Monday, May 25.

While many Memorial Day events are usually planned in the area, at the time of this publication, nothing had been announced.

Originally known as Decoration Day, it originated in the years following the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971. Many Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries or memorials, holding family gatherings and participating in parades. Unofficially, it marks the beginning of the summer season.

### Birthplace of Memorial Day

The Civil War, which ended in the spring of 1865, claimed more lives than any conflict in U.S. history and required the establishment of the country's first national cemeteries.

By the late 1860s, Americans in various towns and cities had begun holding springtime tributes to these countless fallen soldiers, decorating their graves with flowers and reciting prayers.

It is unclear where exactly this tradition originated; numerous different communities may have independently initiated the memorial gatherings. And some records show that one of the earliest Memorial Day commemorations was organized by a group of formerly enslaved people in Charleston, SC less than a month after the Confederacy surrendered in 1865. Nevertheless, in 1966 the federal government declared Waterloo, NY the official birthplace of Memorial Day.

Waterloo—which first celebrated the day on May 5, 1866—was chosen because it hosted an annual,



community-wide event, during which businesses closed and residents decorated the graves of soldiers with flowers and flags.

Each year on Memorial Day a national moment of remembrance takes place at 3:00 p.m. local time.

### Decoration Day

On May 5, 1868, General John A. Logan, leader of an organization for Northern Civil War veterans, called for a nationwide day of remembrance later that month. "The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the land," he proclaimed.

The date of Decoration Day, as he called it, was chosen because it wasn't the anniversary of any particular battle.

On the first Decoration Day, General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery, and 5,000 participants decorated the graves of the 20,000 Civil War soldiers buried there.

Many Northern states held similar commemorative events and reprised the tradition in subsequent years; by 1890 each one had made Decoration Day an official state holiday. Southern states, on the other hand, continued to honor the dead on separate days until after World War I.

### History of Memorial Day

Memorial Day, as Decoration Day gradually came to be known, originally honored only those lost while fighting in the Civil War. But during World War I the United States found itself embroiled in another major conflict, and the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars, including World War II, The Vietnam War, The Korean War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For decades, Memorial Day continued to be observed on May 30, the date General Logan had selected for the first Decoration Day. But in 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which established Memorial Day as the last Monday in May in order to create a three-day weekend for federal employees. The change went into effect in 1971. The same law also declared Memorial Day a federal holiday.

### Traditions and Rituals

Cities and towns across the United States host Memorial Day parades each year, often incorporating military personnel and members of veterans' organizations. Some of the largest parades take place in Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C.

Americans also observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries and memorials. Some people wear a red poppy in remembrance of those fallen in war—a tradition that began with a World War I poem. On a less somber note, many people take weekend trips or throw parties and barbecues on the holiday, perhaps because Memorial Day weekend—the long weekend comprising the Saturday and Sunday before Memorial Day and Memorial Day itself—unofficially marks the beginning of summer.

## Armed Forces Day to be observed on Saturday, May 16 this year

Armed Forces Day is observed on the third Saturday of May each year. This year, it will be celebrated on May 16.

How is Armed Forces Day different from Veterans Day and Memorial Day? Veterans Day, previously known as Armistice Day, commemorates those who served in the military during wartime. Memorial Day honors those who died in service. Armed Forces Day, on the other hand, is dedicated to honoring all individuals currently serving in the military, as well as those who have served and sacrificed for our freedom.

Armed Forces Day was established on August 31, 1949, by then-Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson. It was created to replace separate Army, Navy, and Air Force Days, following the unification of the Armed Forces under the Department of Defense by President Harry S. Truman when he signed the National Security Act into law on July 26, 1947.

Originally, Armed Forces Day was intended as an educational program for civilians to increase awareness of the Armed Forces. It aimed to



expand public understanding of the military's role in civilian life and showcase state-of-the-art equipment. It is a day to honor and acknowledge the people serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

Armed Forces Day honors all individuals currently serving and all who have served, both active and former, in the reserves, National Guard, or on active duty. In his proclamation announcing the establishment of the holiday, President Truman invited the Governors of the States, Territories, and possessions to issue proclamations calling for the celebration of the day to honor the Armed Forces and the millions of veterans who have returned to civilian life.

In his proclamation,

President Truman called upon citizens to display the flag of the United States at their homes on Armed Forces Day and to participate in exercises recognizing the skill, gallantry, and devotion to duty characteristic of the Armed Forces. One way to express this recognition is by volunteering with or donating to the USO, a congressionally-chartered nonprofit organization

committed to serving active-duty military and their families.

The first Armed Forces Day was celebrated on May 20, 1950. The annual Army Day Parade held in Washington, D.C., during the first week of April was replaced by an Armed Forces Day Parade held during the third week of May.

Armed Forces Day is part of National Military Appreciation Month, which begins on May 1st with Loyalty Day and includes Public Service Recognition Week, VE (Victory in Europe) Day, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, and Armed Forces Week, leading up to Armed Forces Day. The month concludes with Memorial Day, a day to honor our fallen.

# National Observations

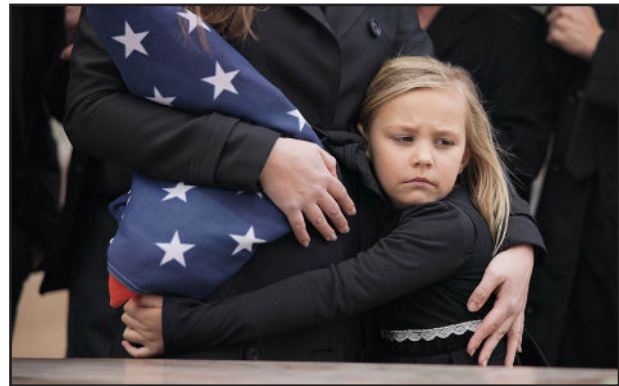
## May 13 honors children of the fallen

Children of Fallen Patriots Day is observed on May 13 every year. The day aims to honor the pain and sacrifice of children who have lost a parent to martyrdom. The objective is to appreciate the young individuals who live tragically altered lives due to a parent passing away in the line of duty. Children of Fallen Patriots Day was established by the Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation in 2014, an organization that provides financial education and educational counseling to Gold Star scholars who have a martyred parent. May 13 was chosen as Children of Fallen Patriots Day because it was the day the Arlington National Cemetery was established in 1864.

The individuals who form the U.S. Armed Forces risk losing their

lives in the line of duty. These martyrs may often leave behind families, especially children. Children of Fallen Patriots Day aims to honor the pain and sacrifice of children who have lost a parent to martyrdom. The objective is to appreciate the young individuals who live tragically altered lives due to a parent passing away in the line of duty.

Children of Fallen Patriots Day was established by the Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation in 2014, an organization that provides



financial education and educational counseling to Gold Star scholars who have a martyred parent. May 13 was chosen as Children of Fallen Patriots Day because it was the day the Arlington National Cemetery was established in 1864.

## Honor military spouses on May 8

National Military Spouse Appreciation Day is an annual observance that takes place on the Friday preceding Mother's Day — May 8 this year. It shows appreciation for the commitment and sacrifice that the spouses of service members make, together with the rest of the family, while they're away on the mission to defend the country. The day was initiated to recognize the importance of empowering military spouses and ensuring they have what they need to thrive.

National Military Spouse Appreciation Day was first observed in 1984 when President Ronald Reagan recognized the importance of spousal commitment to the readiness and well-being of military members with Proclamation 5184, dated April 17, 1984. Shortly after, in 1999, Congress officially made Military Spouse Appreciation Day part of National



Photo by Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Rob Trubia, National Guard

Military Appreciation Month before the Department of Defense standardized the date by declaring the Friday before Mother's Day every year as the day to show appreciation for the sacrifices of military spouses — in other words, National Military Spouse Appreciation Day.

The 2021 celebration was held on

May 7 and was the first of such under the democratic administration of Biden and Harris. National Military Spouse Appreciation Day is also sometimes known as Military Spouse Day, and this year's event highlighted how an initiative of the present government, through the office of the First Lady, has empowered more than 100,000 military spouses with employment and training. Along with the tremendous strength and patriotism they have, military spouses have been noted to endure job losses,

adjustments to new environments, and having to learn new survival skills with the frequent and often unexpected developments that sometimes require them to move halfway across the country or even the world, together with their serviceman spouse.

# Golden Age Games

**NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES**  
**TAMPA | JUN 27 - JUL 2, 2026**

Come Support our Nation's Veterans as they go for the gold!

For Volunteer Opportunities scan code, for more information email us at:  
[VACONVGAGVolunteers@va.gov](mailto:VACONVGAGVolunteers@va.gov).

**SCAN ME**

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Medical Healthcare System

## Florida Veteran Resources

### VETERAN RESOURCES

<p><b>ANY</b> VA-RELATED QUESTIONS</p> <p>call <b>1-800-MyVA411</b> 24/7/365</p> <p>or submit your question to <b>ask.va.gov</b></p>	<p><b>VETERANS CRISIS LINE</b></p> <p>Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?</p> <p><b>Dial 988 and press 1.</b></p> <p>It's confidential and available 24/7/365.</p> <p>For more information, visit <a href="http://veteranscrisisline.net">veteranscrisisline.net</a></p>	<p><b>VETERAN HOMELESSNESS</b></p> <p>If you are a Veteran at risk of homelessness or a family member, friend, or advocate,</p> <p>call <b>1-877-4AID-VET</b> 24/7/365</p> <p>Or chat online: <a href="http://va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp">va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp</a></p>	<p><b>BENEFITS RESOURCES</b></p> <p>Log in to <b>www.va.gov</b></p> <p>Use the <b>VA Health &amp; Benefits App</b></p> <p>to directly message your health care provider or schedule 1-on-1 help with a VA benefits expert at <a href="http://va.my.site.com/VAVERA">va.my.site.com/VAVERA</a></p>
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**TO FIND A VA FACILITY NEAR YOU: visit [va.gov/find-locations](http://va.gov/find-locations)**



# Membership

**Cape Coral  
Military Officers Association of America  
(CCMOAA)**

*PO Box 100508, Cape Coral, FL 33910-0508*

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION • DIRECTORY UPDATE

Make sure all of your contact information is up-to-date by using this membership form

### ADD TO YOUR CONTACT LIST:

info@capecoralmoaa.org

*All correspondence from the chapter will come from this address only.*

**If you have any questions, please contact our membership chair: Col Gary Nolan**

*Email:*  
capecoralmoaa@gmail.com

*Phone:*  
618-407-6945

### Websites

**Cape Coral MOAA**  
[www.capecoralmoaa.org](http://www.capecoralmoaa.org)

**FCoC**  
[www.moaafl.org](http://www.moaafl.org)

**MOAA National**  
[www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org)

**Legislative Action Center**  
[www.moaa.org/takeaction](http://www.moaa.org/takeaction)

New Chapter Member       Change of Address/Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please Print*

Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please Print*  
*(Spouses, Widows, Widowers are welcome as chapter members)*

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Service \_\_\_\_\_

*Check appropriate boxes:*

Retired       Active Duty       Widow(er)       Associate•

• Associate members have the same privileges as other members, except that they are ineligible to vote.

Regular       Reserve       National Guard

Former Officer       Senior NCO

MOAA National Membership No. \_\_\_\_\_ MOAA Life Member \_\_\_\_\_

*A lifetime MOAA membership does NOT mean your chapter membership is lifetime*

MOAA National Website: <https://www.moaa.org>

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### NO FEES FOR MEMBERSHIP

Scholarship Program Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Please use this form for new membership and/or updating your information.*

**Mail to:**  
CCMOAA, ATTN: Secretary,  
PO Box 100508, Cape Coral, FL 33910-0508