



2018

2019 | December



# THE BORDER BULLETIN

EL PASO CHAPTER OF MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA



Nationally Ranked Five-Star Chapter • MOAA Affiliate from January 23, 1956 • Our 63rd Year

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### The Border Bulletin NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

**Editor:** LTC William L. Moore 842-9650

**EDITORIAL ADVISOR**

MG Edward Greer, USA 755-2244

**Advertising Manager:** LTC William L. Moore  
publications@elpasomoaa.org

**Printer:** Northeast Printing, 755-6089

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### Statement of Publication

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**The advertisements that appear in this publication/website do not reflect an endorsement by MOAA or the El Paso Chapter.**

### Chapter Staff Emeritus

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LTC Rafael G. Garcia	593-1469
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Major E. Dexter Lyerly	585-9619
Mrs. Blanche J "Maggie" Maguire	584-7682
LTC James L. McLaughlin	566-4976
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COL Lennie Enzel	755-2325
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COL Forrest Smith	449-8944
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LTC William Moore	842-9650
COL Steve Barrett	222-8307
Mrs. Janet Rasmussen	598-3835
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**DANIEL S. WASHBURN, M.D.**

OPHTHALMOLOGY-EYE SPECIALIST

8815 Dyer, Suite 130  
PH. 915-757-3937  
FAX. 915-757-3946

## EL PASO CHAPTER NATIONAL AWARDS

### Levels of Excellence

Runner-up	2000 and 2001
<b>Five-Star Chapter</b>	2001 thru 2018
<b>Communications Award Print Newsletter</b>	
Five Star	2015, 2016, and 2018
Four Star	2017
Winner	2004, 2012, 2013 and 2014
Runner-up	2008 thru 2011
<b>Communications Award Print Legislative Coverage</b>	
Winner	2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012
<b>Communications Award Website</b>	
Five-Star	2015 thru 2018
Winner	2010 thru 2013
Runner-up	2009 and 2014

### Editorial Policy

MOAA national and the El Paso Chapter (a MOAA affiliate) are independent, nonprofit, and politically nonpartisan organizations.





## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

COL Forrest Smith, USA, Retired

After having served as the President of the El Paso Chapter for 8 of the past 10 years, this will be my final Border Bulletin message. In my previous President's message, I highlighted the significant transition that the El Paso MOAA Chapter will undergo in December 2019. Several outstanding leaders will transition out of key billets, providing several opportunities for new leaders to step forward and take the reins of this outstanding chapter.

The El Paso MOAA Chapter has been recognized annually at the national level, earning Five Star recognition every year for the past 15 years. The Border Bulletin and our online website have received national recognition annually, due directly to Bill Moore's personal leadership and efforts. The success at the national level has largely been due to the personal efforts of the members of the board, and past members of the board, who continued to volunteer their free time, weekends and evenings, long after having served their nation with distinction on active duty.

At the local level, BG Jack Kotter has literally transformed the Chapter's 501c3 Outreach program enabling chapter contributions to a wide range of active duty and retiree programs. We are all indebted to Bob Pitt, Connie Sullivan, Steve Barrett, and Martha Caldwell for ensuring we have first class luncheons and social events.

Most chapter members will not remember when Elma Smith took over the treasurer's duties and overhauled, and automated, all processes, establishing enduring systems, which ensured disciplined, transparent, fiscal accounting practices. I remember it well. Those were tough times. I think she may well have saved the chapter at that time.

I am also indebted to Lennie Enzel for her sage advice and sense of humor. Lennie recently left her key position at the El Paso VA, but you can bet she will still find ways to volunteer her time and commitment to the El Paso military community. What an honor to have served with so many great folks and special people, so completely committed to the military and our community.

I want to thank all of the members of the board for their total commitment and support while I served as president of the chapter. I will continue to pursue opportunities to volunteer locally, and I look forward to future opportunities to collaborate closely with the members of this great chapter.

"Professional Leaders belong to Professional Organizations."  
Become part of the solution. Join MOAA.

"Never Stop Serving

---

## JUNIOR ENLISTED FAMILY CENTER YMCA FOOD PANTRY

The Junior Enlisted Family Center's Food Pantry serves Fort Bliss needy families E-6 and under with non-perishable food. Presently, 1200 families are being assisted. The Food Pantry is open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 12 noon until 4:00 p.m. Phone #: 915-562-8462 ext.351 Approximately 150 people are helped each day.

Located in the Trading Post (old Commissary), 1717 Marshall Road, the entrance is located behind the building on the loading docks that face the Post Office. There are steps up to a door. Once you enter the doorway, immediately turn left and go down a hallway. The Family Center is straight ahead.

If a soldier is in need, the soldier

must get a form from a chaplain or someone in his unit who is authorized to provide the form. Upon entering the Family Center, the soldier or spouse must provide the form and their military ID. The Pantry is dedicated to helping the truly needy families.

What can you do to help? You may take donations of non-perishable food to the Pantry during the hours they are open. Please don't leave donations on the docks as those items are often "lost." Those food items that are in great demand are boxed macaroni and cheese, Ramen noodles, cereal, oatmeal, pasta and pasta sauce. If you have gently used furniture that you no longer want or other items such as baby strollers, a call to Hanna

Okura, Program Director, will get those unwanted items to families on Fort Bliss who need them. Furthermore, the Commissary will place a large carton near the exit for donations of non-perishable food from time to time during the year. Also, several times a year, there are brown paper sacks pre-packaged with food in the commissary which you may purchase and place in a carton near the exit.

Any help that you might provide will be greatly appreciated. Please contact Hannah Okura if you have questions. Thank you.



# EL PASO MOAA OUTREACH FOUNDATION

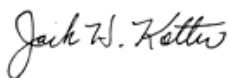
## DECEMBER 2019

The El Paso MOAA Chapter has established two \$25,000 college scholarships: the COL Joseph C. Rodriguez, HOM, Memorial Scholarship and The 1st Armored Division – El Paso Chapter Scholarship. These two scholarships were fully funded by contributions made by the chapter members and friends. The Outreach Foundation has established two scholarships. The first scholarship; \$500, was for a local JROTC cadet who will enroll in ROTC when they go to college. The Outreach Foundation is proud to announce a new scholarship, the Sergeant Locklear Scholarship; \$1000. Sergeant Locklear is the son of Sergeant Major Locklear who was casualty while deployed.

Once again the Chapter and the Outreach Foundation will be collecting food cans and money donation at our 7 December luncheon. Additionally the Foundation Board has approved another financial support donation to the Junior Enlisted Food Bank at Ft. Bliss. The Board also approved to provide financial assistance to their Thanksgiving Basket effort to provide food to military families. The Board is considering several other projects for financial assistance for the active soldiers at Ft. Bliss.

It has been my privilege to lead the El Paso Chapter Outreach Foundation for the past two years. I appreciated all of the input and assistance from the Outreach Foundation Board Members. Most of all I appreciated the Chapter Members who have made significant financial contributions to the Foundation for the distribution of monies to viable assistance projects. I believe the Foundation has been able to make a difference in the lives of many local veterans and military families because of your generosity and gratitude.

Never Stop Serving



Jack H. Kotter  
BG, USA, Retired

### TEXAS DRIVER LICENSE, REAL ID AND YOU

Please be advised that beginning October 1, 2020, federal agencies will only accept Texas driver licenses and identification cards for official federal purposes - including air travel and entering federal facilities - provided the Texas driver license or identification card is marked REAL ID compliant. REAL ID compliance is indicated by a gold circle with an inset star located on the upper right of the driver license or identification card. For additional information regarding the REAL ID Act, please visit <http://www.dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense/federalRealIdAct.htm>.

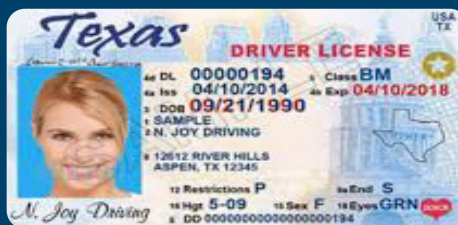
Texas Department of Public Safety strongly encourages you to renew your license prior to October 1, 2020, to ensure that you have a REAL ID compliant card.

If you already have a REAL ID compliant card, as indicated with a Gold Star in the upper righthand corner, you do not need to take any action before October 1, 2020.

If you have any questions, please email [realid@dps.texas.gov](mailto:realid@dps.texas.gov).

Fort Bliss offers Texas driver license services at 505 Pershing Ave, Room A154

Real ID frequently asked questions for the public are available here <https://www.dhs.gov/real-id-public-faqs>.



### Board of Directors:

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Brigadier General Jack Kotter

#### Vice-President

Colonel Lennie Enzel

#### Secretary

Lieutenant Colonel Bill Moore

#### Treasurer


Ms. Elma Smith

#### Programs

Captain David Thackston

#### Advisory Director

Colonel Forrest Smith



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## DECEMBER GUEST SPEAKER



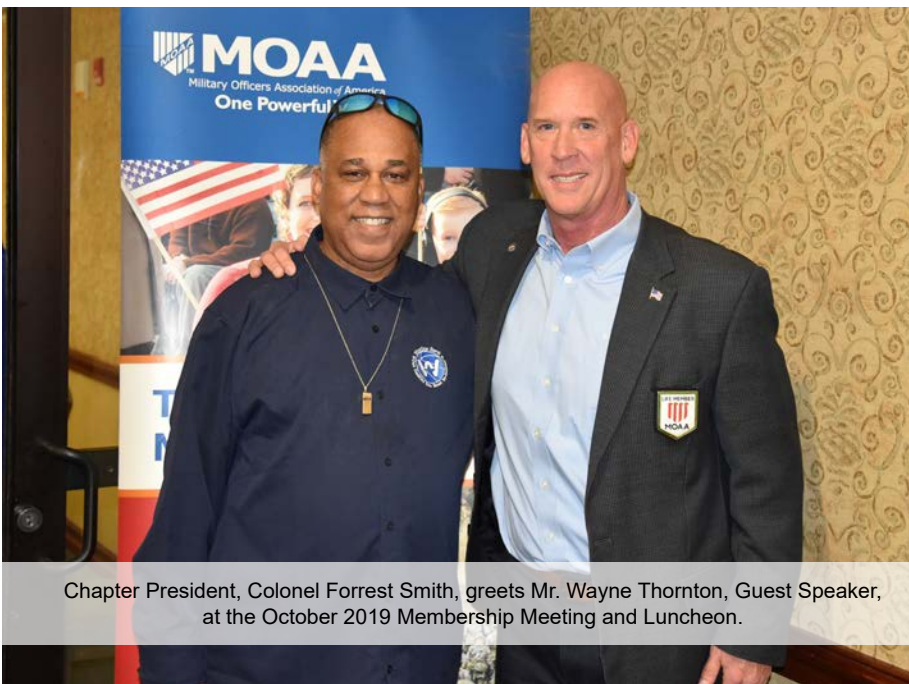
**JUDGE ANGIE JUAREZ BARILL,  
346TH STATE DISTRICT COURT JUDGE**

Judge Angie Juarez Barill, 346TH State District Court Judge, was elected in 2004 and is presently serving her 4TH term. Judge Barill started the El Paso Veterans Treatment Court in 2012, a program that serves to treat our active military and veterans who suffer from PTSD, TBI and other mental illnesses. She also handles a criminal and a civil docket.

Judge Barill previously was elected as a Municipal Court Judge from 1993-2003. Prior to being elected, she worked as a Sole Practitioner, was an Assistant City Prosecutor and an Adjunct Professor at UTEP.

In 2015 Judge Barill was recognized by the Texas Veterans Commission with the Patriotism Award for the Veterans Treatment Court. She received Congressional Recognition by Congressman O'Rourke for her work with the Treatment Court and her contribution in the Veteran Community. In 2014, Judge Barill received from the Paso Del Norte Civil Rights Project the Outstanding Achievement in Legal Services Award for her Contribution with the Veterans Treatment Court. In 2013, she was selected as the Outstanding Jurist and received the award from the American Board of Trial Advocates. In 2012, Judge Barill also received an Outstanding Achievement Award from the 1ST Armored Division/Old Ironside Association. And in 2006, Judge Barill was appointed by Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson, Supreme Court of Texas to service to the 8th Court of Appeals.

She has also contributes annually to the International Military-Sergeant Major's Academy-Fort Bliss regarding our Judicial System. She is presently a current member for the Juvenile Board, Current Law Library Board Committee Member, Founding Member of the LSPI advisory Board at UTEP and she has served for the last 10 years as the Presiding Chair of the El Paso County Bail Bond Board – which recently initiated E-Bond – the 1ST in the State of Texas.



Chapter President, Colonel Forrest Smith, greets Mr. Wayne Thornton, Guest Speaker, at the October 2019 Membership Meeting and Luncheon.

## LUNCH MENU DECEMBER

Chicken Cordon Bleu  
Green Bean Almandine  
Scalloped Potatoes  
Tossed Green Salad  
with Dressing  
Roll & Butter  
Coffee, Iced tea and Water  
MOAA Cake

### Meeting Program

**Saturday, 7 December  
Underwood Golf Course**

#### Sequence of Events

11:00 — 11:45	Social Hour
11:45 — 1200	Opening Ceremony
12:00 — 12:45	Meal Service
12:45 — 13:30	Program
13:30 — 13:45	Door Prize Drawing
13:45 — 14:00	Closing Ceremony

**Please submit your Lunch  
Reservations no later than  
Monday, 2 December 2019**

Treasurer: MOAA  
PO Box 6144  
El Paso, TX 79906-0144  
All dinner reservations  
with payment to our  
postal mail box

**\$20** Per Person

**REMITTANCE  
ENVELOPE ENCLOSED**



## Report a Retiree Death

**Monday - Friday:**

0730 - 1700

915-568-5207

After Hours (Installation)

915-569-6950/6951

or visit:

<https://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary>



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### NEW MEMBERS

COL Daniel Washburn

CPT Ashley Sperry

### RENEWALS

CW3 Christopher Saindon

MAJ Rodney Gilbert

Mrs. Eva Haggard

LTC Donald Haggard

Mrs. Sylvia McGriff

LTC Bruce Gramlich

CW5 Stephen Ikeda

COL Blake Wayman

Mrs. Betty Barter

Mrs. Elisabeth Brinkley

MG James Maloney

## WBAMC PHARMACY

**New Hours of Operation**

**EFFECTIVE 05 October 2019**



**Due to Operational Requirements ALL Sites are Open  
Monday - Friday ONLY!**

### WBAMC Main Pharmacy

**Monday - Friday 7:30 am - 4:30 pm**

Closed 3rd Thursday until 8:30am for Staff Training

### Mendoza Pharmacy

**Monday - Friday 7:30 am - 4:30 pm**

Closed 3rd Thursday until 8:30am for Staff Training

### SFMC Pharmacy

**Monday - Friday 7:30 am - 4:30 pm**

Closed 3rd Thursday until 8:30am for Staff Training

### East Bliss Pharmacy

**Monday - Friday 7:00 am - 11:45 am**

### Freedom Crossing Pharmacy

**REFILLS ONLY**

**Monday - Friday 9:30 am - 6:00 pm**

Prescriptions called into the pharmacy automated refill line ONLY

## EL PASO VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PHARMACY

There are four convenient options for refilling prescriptions which can then be mailed directly to your home.

Choose any process that is easy for you to use:

- Call the automated phone system at (915) 564-6100 ext. 6110 or 1-800-672-3782 ext.6110.

Follow the directions to process your refill.

- Mail in your refill slips.

- Drop the refill slip in the mail-out box located in the pharmacy.

- Use the MyHealthVet Website: [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)

Please note, window service at the Pharmacy will be limited to new prescriptions only. So, for all refills, please use one of the 4 options listed above.

**Location:** 2nd Floor, West Hallway.

#### Hours:

Mon - Fri., 8:00am-4:30pm;

Except Tues., 9:00am-4:30pm



## DOC'S CORNER

DR. DANIEL WASHBURN.

Unfortunately, we are all familiar with the dreaded symptoms; fever, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches and fatigue. Flu season will very soon be upon us as it begins each year in November and peaks December through February.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 8-10% of the U.S. population gets the flu each year, or approximately 30 million people. Influenza is so rampant in the winter because it spreads easily. Someone with

the flu coughs, sneezes or even speaks and tiny droplets loaded with virus are released into the air. We then pass by, inhale those droplets and very quickly begin to feel ill.

If you catch the flu, it will at least make you feel miserable and cause you to miss work or school. However, it can also cause other more serious complications such as pneumonia, ear infection, sinus infection and worsening of medical conditions such as diabetes and congestive heart failure. Complications may require hospitalization and an estimated 30,000 people even die from flu complications every year. Very young children, people over the age of 65 and those with chronic medical conditions are at highest risk of developing serious flu related complications.

There are a few things you can do to avoid the flu this year. Stay away from people that are ill, cover you face when coughing or sneezing, avoid touching your eyes/mouth or nose, disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated and wash hands frequently. However, the most important deterrent is the flu vac-

cine. The CDC recommends that everyone older than 6 months should get the flu vaccine every season with rare exception.

For those that are unfortunate and do catch the flu this winter, most can rest and recover at home if symptoms are mild. Contact with others should be limited until 24 hours after the fever is gone. If you can see your primary care doctor early in the illness, antiviral medication is sometimes beneficial. Anyone that is over 65, has a serious medical condition or has severe flu symptoms should seek medical care promptly to watch for flu related complications.

The Ft Bliss 2019 flu campaign began the middle of October. Flu shots are mandatory for WBAMC staff and those on active duty. For all others seeking the flu shot, it should be available at your primary care clinic, the VA clinic or any TRICARE network pharmacy.

Daniel Washburn, M.D.  
Former Chief Eye Surgeon at  
WBAMC

## RETIREE PAY DATES FOR 2020

## ANNUITANT PAY DATES FOR 2020

MONTH	DIRECT DEPOSIT DATES	MONTH	DIRECT DEPOSIT DATES
JANUARY	JANUARY 31	JANUARY	FEBRUARY 3
FEBRUARY	FEBRUARY 28	FEBRUARY	MARCH 2
MARCH	APRIL 1	MARCH	APRIL 1
APRIL	MAY 1	APRIL	MAY 1
MAY	JUNE 1	MAY	JUNE 1
JUNE	JULY 1	JUNE	JULY 1
JULY	JULY 31	JULY	AUGUST 3
AUGUST	SEPTEMBER 1	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER 1
SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER 1	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER 1
OCTOBER	OCTOBER 30	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER 2
NOVEMBER	DECEMBER 1	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER 1
DECEMBER	DECEMBER 31	DECEMBER	JANUARY 4, 2021

## Con'td from page 13

protect the work that we do," she said, matching caregivers with clients and providing back-up support. All of this represents gray areas of law and government practice, and Grigerek said she'd prefer to work with the state to clear up the non-solicitation ban. As for the VA transition, it will work out fine for disabled veteran clients in the end, as these things do. But the medical designation for non-medical work is frustrating for affected families and firms because, at the rates they're paying, the VA is not getting medical care, period, no matter what the documents show.

Linda Stewart, a Bristol resident and part-time caregiver for Companions, lost a client in the changeover and isn't leaning toward signing up with the new firm, for just over \$11 an hour and travel expenses not covered. "I enjoyed working for him," Stewart said, adding, "He has issues with trusting people because he has PTSD."

[Source: CT Post | Dan Haar | October 25, 2019 ++]





## CHAPLAIN CORNER

MRS. CONNIE SULLIVAN

In life, sometimes very difficult decisions have to be made. With our military a lot of sacrifices have to be done in order to accomplish a goal or a purpose.

When soldiers are deployed, the challenges that the wives or husbands

go through of becoming the father and mother for the children, are sometimes unbearable. The decisions that the parents make, are often not understood because when the sons and or daughters are small, the parents do their best to protect them by deciding what is best for them, but lots of the times they ( the children ) don't understand because they do not see the bigger picture.

It is the same way with God. He sacrificed His Son for the sins of the world, for believers, in order for the people that believe in Him can go back to Heavenly Father. For those who don't believe in Christianity, it's also the same way. There is a prize to pay to be able to accomplish a goal or a project.

With our national leaders, as well, the situations are similar. It is possible that if we don't take care of our own people, perhaps we will not be able to take care

of others, because we might not have the strength to help other entities or countries.

If we are not united and are too spread out, there could not be enough fortitude even for us to survive.

We all know that when sacrifices are made and that when the focus is to make the right choices, we also know as well, that with God all things are possible and that everything will turn out alright and for the best with His help.



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# WORLD WAR I NIGHT NURSE

BY COL. CONSTANCE J. MOORE, USA (RET.), ARMY NURSE CORPS ASSOCIATION HISTORIAN

Over 21,000 Army nurses served during World War I. Many of the nurses were assigned night nurse duties, one of the least glamorous jobs of the war. They experienced physical danger, poor staffing, high patient acuity, adverse weather conditions, and long hours of unrelenting and difficult duty.

Nursing at night was extremely challenging when only low lights were allowed because of the frequent air raids. "The night nurse inspected the dressings, watching for hemorrhages, going from bed to bed with a lantern which was shaded to prevent the light from being seen through the windows." She had to be on her toes. Despite working in a pitch black environment, "one nurse detected eight hemorrhages in a single night," and did not lose any patients. <sup>1</sup>

"Convoys In" often time required surgeons to operate throughout the night on critical injured soldiers. One night nurse recalled, "Last Thursday we received a large convoy at an early morning hour—and we stayed on duty until noon—seventeen hour stretch—off duty until after our evening meal—That evening sixteen of our patients went to surgery. . . . These are busy nights." <sup>2</sup> "Convoys Out" occurred almost nightly too because it was safer for the ambulances and trains to move about in the dark. The night nurse was responsible for changing dressings and wrapping their outgoing charges in dry, clean sheets and blankets. The nurse told the ambulance and transport staff about patients' health status and sent pertinent records. She also gathered food for the injured to eat and take with them. <sup>3</sup>

The weather was always a factor that tested that night worker. Grace Allison remembered, "The entire fall of 1917

was cold and rainy: in fact it rained almost every day for months so that the hospital huts or tents sat in the middle of a sea of mud. Temperatures inside the wards would stay below 50 degrees, frequently hovering right at freezing. Intravenous solutions would freeze in the bottles and dressings would freeze onto the patients." In Basra, a night nurse had the opposite problem. "Temperatures rarely went below 110 at night and ranged from 120 to 126 in the shade during the day." This individual had to deal with heat casualties among the staff as well as the patients. <sup>4</sup>

While officers, soldiers, and civilians scrambled for dugouts when enemy bombs fell, the night nurse remained on the wards no matter what happened. "Each building was separately barricaded with evenly embanked piles of sand bags on every side. This protection was effective in case of a bomb dropping between huts, as it prevented the huge pieces of steel from tearing into the side walls of the wards in their rebound after striking the ground. [But] no protection was possible against a



direct hit." Some night workers became casualties with their patients. <sup>5</sup>

Army nurses, who were assigned duty at night, demonstrated professionalism and showed compassion toward their fellow soldiers. They understood the importance of their work within the milieu of war. As Julie Stimson so eloquently stated, "Sometimes it is hard if one's own head aches, but it really is not hard for those of us who understand the meaning of our being here."



1. Grace Allison, "Some Experience in Active Service: France, Part III, American Journal of Nursing 19 no. 6 (March 1919), 433.

2. Alma Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France: The World War I Diary of Maude Frances Essig," Indiana Magazine of History 82, no. 1 (March 1986), 56.

3. Grace Allison, "Some Experience in Active Service: France, Part III, American Journal of Nursing 19 no. 6 (March 1919), 433.

4. Katherine Johnson, "Called to Service: American Nurses Go To War, 1914-1918" (master's thesis, University of Louisville), 69-70.

5. Grace Allison, "Some Experience in Active Service: France, Part IV, American Journal of Nursing 19 no. 7 (April 1919), 514-515.



**2019  
EL PASO  
CHAPTER  
MOAA  
EVENTS  
SCHEDULE**

NOVEMBER 28	THANKSGIVING
DECEMBER 3, 2019	GIVING TUESDAY
DECEMBER 7, 2019	DECEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND LUNCHEON
DECEMBER 14, 2019	ARMY-NAVY FOOTBALL
DECEMBER 25, 2019	CHRISTMAS
JANUARY 1, 2020	NEW YEAR'S DAY
FEBRUARY 8, 2020	MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND LUNCHEON





# OCTOBER 2019

## LUNCHEON





## PERSONAL AFFAIRS

### JOSE LUIS HERNANDEZ

This year, MOAA has consolidated the annual State Report Card and State Tax Guide. The color-coded maps below assess each state on the taxability of military retired pay and survivor

Note that state policies are subject to change. Information is current as of the dates noted below; consult state authorities for additional/more current information

#### State Tax Comparison Map for Military Retirement Pay and SBP

**Green:** Both military retired pay (MRP) and Survivor Benefit Plan payments (SBP) are fully exempt from state taxation.

**Yellow:** MRP and/or SBP receive partial exemption from state taxation.

**Red:** Neither MRP nor SBP is exempt from state taxation

#### Texas— Tax Guide

##### Sales Tax

- Statewide: 6.25%
- Municipalities can levy sales tax of no more than 2%.
- Current average sales tax (with local taxes included): 7.604%
- Exceptions at state level:
  - o Unprepared Foods: Exempt
  - o Prescriptions and OTC medicine: Exempt
  - o Certain medical devices such as hearing aids and canes: Exempt
- Gasoline Tax: 38.40 cents/gallon (Includes all state, local and federal taxes)
- Diesel Fuel Tax: 44.40 cents/gallon (Includes all state, local and federal taxes)
- Cigarette Tax: \$1.41/pack of 20
- Sales Tax Comments: Many services are taxed

# STATE REPORT CARD & STATE TEXAS GUIDE

#### Personal Income Tax

- Texas has no personal income tax.

#### Property Tax

Local municipalities average 1.83% of the property's assessed value. Calculation of assessed value: Fair Market Value, but allowed annual increase is limited.

Relief programs for:

- Owner-occupied: School districts must offer a \$25,000 exemption for qualified properties.
- Over 65 or Disabled: School districts must offer an additional \$10,000 exemption for qualified properties. School district taxes cannot increase as long as owner resides in home.
- Disabled Veterans: Full or partial exemption based on percentage of service-connected disability. Also applies to surviving spouse and children.
- 100% Disabled or Spouse of service member killed in action: Total exemption (surviving spouse cannot be remarried).

#### Personal Property Tax:

Yes. Rates and exemptions vary.

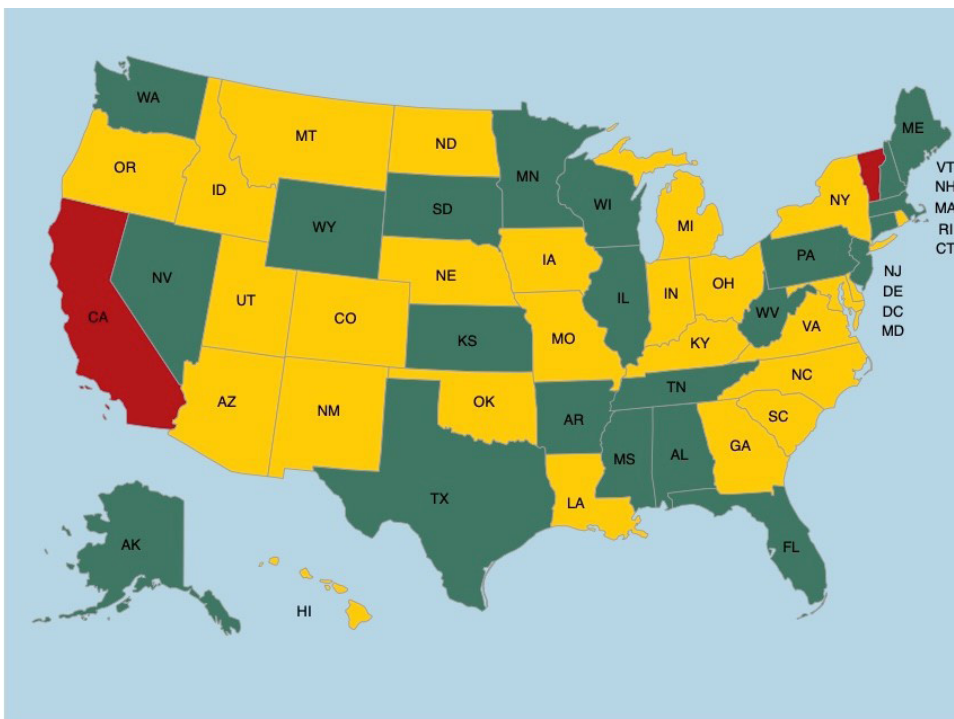
**Property Tax Comments:** The above exemptions are mandatory, but other optional exemptions at the local level may be available.

**Inheritance & Estate Taxes:** None

**Department of Revenue website:** [www.comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/](http://www.comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/)

#### Get the Latest on Your Military Benefits

Your military benefits are undergoing significant changes - are you prepared? Watch our webinar to learn more from our experts about the latest information on your benefits and what MOAA is doing to support you. Watch Now at <https://www.moaa.org/content/benefits-and-discounts/transition-and-careers/transition-center-webinars/know-the-legislative-status-of-your-benefits/>.





# VA HOME CARE | NEW MEDICAL CARE REQUIREMENT CAUSING PROBLEMS

Once a week for the last couple of years, a home care worker named Lori has shown up at Steve Viera's house to do laundry, carry in food, clean and generally help the disabled veteran live his life. Viera is a former sheet metal worker who served in the Navy in the Middle East from 1979 to 1981, so the U.S. Veterans Administration pays for the visits. It's just a short few hours, but for Viera, a divorced New Haven resident, it's a lifeline. "If it wasn't for them I wouldn't exist," the 59-year-old Viera said 25 OCT.

Lori works for Companions & Homemakers Inc., a large, statewide agency that had more than 200 home care clients through the VA until recently. Starting 1 OCT, Companions lost that work for reasons that make little sense. Lori is still coming to help Viera every week, but under murky circumstances, as Companions — probably not being paid for the visits — tries to sort out what's happening. The VA home care system changed under the sweeping MISSION Act in 2018. Home care for veterans such as Viera, which was arranged by local VA offices, is now organized by giant third-party administrators. In the Northeast, that's Optum, a health services business owned by UnitedHealthcare. And as we might expect when centralized bureaucracies grow because of grand, flawed visions of efficiency, this reform includes useless rules. To participate in the VA program, home care companies must now certify that they're medical providers.

Trouble is, they're not medical providers under a strict federal definition. Claiming they are could put their separate Medicaid business — a huge amount of their revenues — in jeopardy. "We will not lie under oath," said Linda Grigerek, the Companions & Homemakers president. Her company has lost two-thirds of its VA clients, about \$1.2 million a year of work, as a result of the rule she can't meet, even as the VA and Optum apparently struggle to find caregivers. Although the VA did not confirm that it's having problems filling the needed shifts, Companions & Homemakers is still working with more than 60 of the former clients because,

Grigerek and other executives said, the VA has not found others to do the work under the new rules.

We all understand, of course, that business conditions and contract requirements change and that causes disruption with winners and losers. If this profitable company loses a few clients and other firms pick them up, that's all part of the landscape, not my concern or the nation's. But this change is nettlesome because it represents a boneheaded government screw-up for no clear benefit. The home assistance companies — about 600 registered in Connecticut, many of them mom-and-pop firms — are not providing medical care such as blood pressure screenings and administering drugs. That's a different level of care, not covered by the low-cost contracts for caregivers who spend hours at a time with clients. The VA pays \$16.48 an hour to home care providers in Connecticut for most contracts, meaning the workers typically make barely more than the minimum wage.

So all we have is a needless ruse creating chaos for vulnerable clients. "There are other businesses that have signed a contract," Grigerek said. "I don't know if they know they're lying under oath." Two of those smaller firms, which are on board in the new system, did not return calls on Friday 25 OCT. Late Friday, U.S. Rep. John B. Larson (D-CT- 01) sent a letter to Robert Wilkie, secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, offering help in straightening out the issue. "The local VA has assured us that there will be no disruption of care," Larson said in the letter he sent after Companions & Homemakers reached out to him. "However, this change has undoubtedly caused a disruption in the lives of the veterans impacted by it." But as Larson said, it's unclear how many caregivers have been replaced by new firms. Viera said the head of a home care agency has called him about 20 times, hoping to recruit Lori away from Companions & Homemakers. "He wants to talk to her and try to convince her to come to him. I can't give him her number," Viera said.

Among other issues, he said, Lori — the home care employee — would lose seniority she has at Companions, and would make less money with the new agency, he said she told him. "She wants to work, she wants to help me. She's like emotionally involved with her clients. She calls up to check on me to see if I'm okay," Viera said, noting that's not true of all caregivers. As for jumping to a new firm, "She's not gonna unless they come up with money and pay her, which is the American way." That raises a related issue of controversy. With the state budget adopted in June and signed by Gov. Ned Lamont, home care agencies such as Companions & Homemakers lost the right to enforce so-called non-solicitation agreements with their caregivers. That means as of this year, the agencies can't stop employees from poaching the very clients they're serving, as they're serving them, to take the work away.

Most of us would agree it's unseemly for employers to impose non-compete agreements on low-wage workers, preventing them from working for competitors. Advocates including Sen. Chris Murphy have fought for states and the federal government to outlaw non-compete clauses, and the state of California has set an outright ban. That's good policy. But Connecticut barring the non-solicitation agreements — with no debate in a hidden paragraph in the state budget — was bad policy, a measure too far. Groups such as New Haven Legal Assistance, which have fought for an end to non-compete agreements for low- and moderate-wage workers, have not sought an end to non-solicitation agreements — although James Bhandary-Alexander, a staff attorney there, said the solicitation issue may not pose a significant threat.

Grigerek at Companions & Homemakers says it does threaten the company — and insists the VA issue is a perfect illustration, as competing firms try to hire her caregivers for the very clients she had. "There's just nothing to

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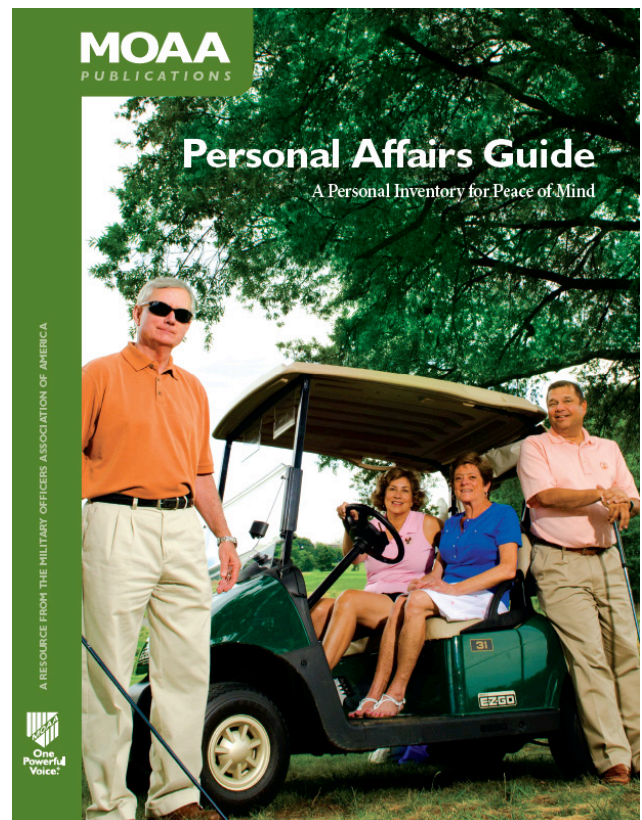
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**Add your own voice to the fight.**





**El Paso Chapter**  
 Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)  
 PO Box 6144  
 Fort Bliss, TX 79906-0144

**December 2019 Membership Meeting & Lunch**  
**General George Underwood Golf Complex**  
 3200 Coe Ave., El Paso, TX 79916

**Date:** Saturday, 7 December 2019  
**Time:** 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

**Guest Speaker**  
 Judge Angie Juarez Barill  
 346<sup>TH</sup> State District Court Judge



**Menu**  
 Chicken Cordon Bleu  
 Green Bean Almandine  
 Scalloped Potatoes  
 Tossed Green Salad w/Dressing  
 Roll w/Butter, Coffee, Iced tea and Water  
 MOAA Cake

**Dress:** Casual / Christmas attire  
**Cost:** \$20.00 per person

Lunch Treasurer: [treasurer@elpasomoaa.org](mailto:treasurer@elpasomoaa.org)  
 Membership or email queries: [membership@elpasomoaa.org](mailto:membership@elpasomoaa.org)  
 Mail To: El Paso Chapter MOAA, Attn.: Treasurer, PO Box 6144, Fort Bliss, TX 79906-0144

Please fill in this acceptance slip, and return to the Treasurer by Monday, 2 December 2019 with a check for \$20 per person, the cost of the luncheon. **Late Reservations**, call Bob Pitt, 915-533-5111 or Bill Moore, 915-842-9650, by Noon, Wednesday, December 4, and pay at the door.

Lunch will be on Saturday 7 December 2019 at 11:00 a.m.  
 Please print guest names clearly to ensure the correct spelling on the registration listing.

I will    /    will not attend the lunch and there will be \_\_\_\_\_ attendees in my party.

My check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$20.00 per person) made payable to the "El Paso Chapter" is enclosed.

Name of Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of Guests:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





## **SURVIVING SPOUSE LIAISON**

### **MRS. CONNIE SULLIVAN**

One day I was looking out through the window of my dining room and was contemplating about the fruit on the pomegranate bush. It was so amazing to see the beautiful fruit, the size of small grapefruits, just hanging on the branches.

The fact that they are being nourished by the vine of the bush in such a mysteriously wonderful way, is mi-

raculous. To see that fruit like a red ball bouncing on the branches, it's really incredible.

With our Savior, for those of us that believe in Him, the same thing happens. From Him, like a vine, we draw spiritual nourishment that run through our whole beings.

For those that are unbelievers, it still is fascinating to watch that fruit dangling on the branches and seeing the birds swirling around waiting for them to ripe.

Life can also be like that pomegranate bush that is adorned with that red delicious fruit. The excitement and enthusiasm for each passing day can be a beautiful experience if we so choose to embrace it to enjoy the blessings that come with its trials, challenges and particularly with gratitude.

It's good to reminisce about our past but to stay steadfast in what the future will bring. I found this saying somewhere a long time ago but had no au-

thor and thought it was sad because it is beautiful and so true.

- Face your past without regret
- Handle your present with confidence
- Prepare for your future without fear
- Life is wonderful if you know how to live it

We in this earth have the freedom to believe or not to believe in God, but if we do, we can enjoy comfort, peace, love and joy and all we have to do is exercise a little bit of faith.

For God loves us so very, very much.



**The below article is a reprint from the Council and Chapters update in the MOAA Newsletter.**

## **Surviving Spouse Corner: Making the Best of the Holidays After Loss**

**The holiday season can be tough for some, especially those who recently have lost a love one.**

**By Cindy Bondi, Surviving Spouse Advisory Committee member**

Holidays come around at their own pace, whether we're ready for them or not. Personally, I've always enjoyed the season, which starts around Halloween and really doesn't end until the New Year.

After the loss of my husband, that first set of holidays was a whirlwind. My blended family came around with little planning, as they made sure I wasn't alone or sad. They were grieving too, and it seemed natural to be together.

The years since that first set of holidays after my husband's death have not been as traditional. I'm ready to set a new tradition, but I find it difficult because the circumstances in my life have changed, as has my growing and changing family.

Last year, all the kids decided to coordinate spending every other year with their in-laws, and so it was the first year that I would have to find another way to spend Christmas without them. My sister invited me to spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with her and her husband and her two grown kids. I accepted, but I had not expected it to be much fun.

It turned out to be one of the best times I'd had in years. We opened presents one by one, and it literally took six hours! It reminded me of the way my sister and I opened presents in our family when we were kids. Our dad always examined every gift and made a big deal out of the smallest things.

I left her house with a new perspective. I will try to keep an open mind about the holidays and remind myself the following:

- I am not alone.
- I'm thankful for even the smallest things.
- I know there are people who care and want to help. I need to learn to accept help.
- I try not to worry or let fear take over. It's usually a waste of time.
- It becomes more evident that everyone who I have crossed paths with has been there for a reason.

As I move into the 2019 holiday season, I know there will be some struggles, but there also will be joys along the way.



## LEGISLATIVE

CW2 DAVE GARCIA, USA, RETIRED

Greeting Comrades,

It's been a journey on legislative issues this year, And I want to thank all the chapter members for contacting our elective official to support these bills that pertain to benefits we are entitled to...Let's continue the fight and together MOAA organization and chapters we will prevail...I wish everyone in the chapter a blessed and safe upcoming happy holidays...And may God bless you all...

Congresswoman Escobar contacted me that I have overwhelmed there legislation staff with so many legislative bills that they may not be able to respond to support for co-sponsoring... So, I have selected the 4 Top priorities that MOAA and other veteran organization support strongly...And, the legislative team in DC agreed to work on these priorities...which will make it easier for them to research and prepare for Congresswoman Escobar support...listed below:

**Federal - HR 333** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated less than 50 percent to receive concurrent payment of both retired pay and veterans' disability compensation, to extend eligibility for concurrent receipt to chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service, and for other purposes.

**Federal - HR 553** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to repeal the requirement for reduction of survivor annuities under the Survivor Benefit Plan for military surviving spouses to offset the receipt of veterans depen-

dency and indemnity compensation, and for other purposes. Eliminate the widow's Tax...Which Congresswoman Escobar has co-sponsored...with 308 other representatives have co-sponsored... awaiting for the Senate to support this bill...and forward to the President to become law... In a 94-0 vote on Wednesday, senators advised lawmakers to include language in the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act that would repeal the widows tax.

Sen. Doug Jones told Senators the time is now to repeal this penalty for widows, known as the Survivor Benefit Plan- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (SBP-DIC) offset.

Jones pushed for Wednesday's vote, which was a "motion to instruct." While nonbinding it does serve as a strong recommendation to the conferees (the members of the House and Senate tasked with finalizing the NDAA). The conferees will now meet to hash out this and many other differences between the House and Senate versions of the NDAA. The House version includes the language that would repeal the SBP-DIC offset.

"We have been fighting day in and day out," Jones said, after voting. "Today it was a 94 to nothing vote of the U.S. Senate, sending a clear message that this needs to get done this year. Now is the time to make this happen."

**Federal- H.R. 4451**, the Support Our Services to Veterans' Caregivers Act. The bill would amend the law to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to assist caregivers who are supporting the needs of veterans with serious illnesses related to military service. Such illnesses of veterans might include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease), cancer or other devastating illnesses due to toxic and environmental exposures in the military that can leave veterans completely dependent upon others for help. Please write your Representative asking him or her to cosponsor and support the enactment of H.R. 4451.

Female Veterans Legislation: Which I have submitted 14 bills and the con-

gresswoman has co-sponsored 6 bills...There's still a lot work to be done and hopefully our female veterans will be taken care of...

On September 26, 2019, President Trump signed Public Law 116-58, which provides a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase of 1.6 percent, effective December 1, 2019, for veterans disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for survivors and certain other benefits.

Important Defense Bills provisions up for debate in the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

\* Sec. 718 delays a proposed reduction of up to 18,000 medical billets until Congress conducts a full and transparent assessment of how this proposal would affect military health care.

\* Sec. 630A eliminates a \$12,000 a year financial penalty on military survivors known as the widow's tax. Which involves... H.R. 533

\* Sec. 627 improves early Guard and Reserve retirement credit for troops activated under certain orders.

\* Sec. 2811 establishes essential rights for military families in privatized base housing.

**TRICARE Pharmacy Fees  
Set to Increase in 2020  
By: Kathy Beasley  
SEPTEMBER 26, 2019**

MOAA makes it a priority to prepare our membership well ahead of changes that will impact their earned benefits. In that regard, please consider this an advance notice for your planning purposes.

The cost shares for your medications, if you do not receive them at a DoD military treatment facility, will increase on Jan. 1. Recall back in the 2017 NDAA, TRICARE's pharmacy cost shares changed across all medication tiers, and a new fee table was introduced. Beneficiaries saw their prescription fees start to rise in 2018 and



## Con'td from page 18

2019. As we published at the time, these fees will accumulate and continue to rise annually until 2027.

Urge Congress to Protect Commissaries and Exchanges

The Defense Department is moving too fast to merge commissaries and

exchanges. Tell Congress to pump the brakes and mandate additional review on how this will impact servicemembers, families, and the MWR funds. To support for the inclusion of Section 631 of the House-passed version of the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

# USPS 2019 HOLIDAY MAILING SCHEDULE

Domestic Mail Services	Mail-By Date
USPS Retail Ground	Dec 14
First-Class Mail	Dec 20
Priority Mail	Dec 21
Priority Mail Express	Dec 23

**Military Address (APO/FPO/DPO) Holiday Mail-By Dates.**

Military Mail Addressed To/From	First-Class Mail	Priority Mail	Priority Mail Express
AE ZIPs 090-092	Dec 11	Dec 11	Dec 18
AE ZIP 093	Dec 9	Dec 9	N/A
AE ZIPs 094-098	Dec 11	Dec 11	Dec 18
AA ZIP 340	Dec 11	Dec 11	Dec 18
AP Zips 962-966	Dec 11	Dec 11	Dec 18

**International Holiday Mail-By Dates.**

International Mail Addressed To	First-Class International	Priority Mail International	Priority Mail Express International
Africa	Nov 30	Nov 30	Dec 7
Asia/Pacific Rim	Dec 7	Dec 7	Dec 14
Australia/New Zealand	Dec 7	Dec 7	Dec 14
Canada	Dec 7	Dec 7	Dec 16
Caribbean	Dec 7	Dec 7	Dec 14
Central & South America	Nov 30	Nov 30	Dec 7
Mexico	Dec 7	Dec 7	Dec 14
Europe	Dec 7	Dec 9	Dec 14
Middle East	Dec 7	Dec 9	Dec 14

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