

**2022 Texas VFW Mid-Winter Convention National/State Legislative Committee Report
By Mitch Fuller, Chairman**

National Legislative Committee Report

The Texas VFW National Legislative Committee includes Mitch Fuller, Chairman; and Comrades Benny Guerrero, Lupita Perez, and Shenna Lawless. I send a monthly report to the VFW National Legislative Office monthly on the 7th. VFW National Legislative staff in Washington, D.C. are great to work with and very responsive to emails and phone calls. Each committee member reports their contact with U.S. Senators John Cornyn and Ted Cruz and congressmen and their activity in signing up people for the VFW Action Corps Weekly (it is not necessary to be a member of the VFW or VFW Auxiliary to receive Action Corps weekly; we are encouraged to sign up members of the public, especially congressional staffers). I send a consolidated report of the National Legislative Committee to National VFW Legislative office for our monthly report. This report is tracked on the Department dashboard at National VFW, and also includes photos of in-person meetings and screen shots of virtual meetings.

There are 36 members who represent congressional districts in the US House of Representatives. Each of the four members of the National Legislative Committee is responsible for contacting nine members of the Texas congressional delegation. Based on the 2020 Census and population growth, Texas will gain two additional congressional seats beginning in the 2022 mid-term elections. This means Texas will now have 40 electoral votes (38 US House members + 2 US Senators) in the 2024 Presidential election.

The Fall 2021 VFW National Legislative Conference was conducted virtually due to Covid-19 pandemic from September 27-29, 2021. The focus of the National Legislative Conference is advocacy for the *2021 National VFW Priority Goals*, which include four categories of policy/legislation: *Benefits* (e.g., toxic exposure); *Economic Opportunity* (e.g., homeless veterans and employment); *Retirement and Military Personnel* (e.g., concurrent receipt and "I Am Vanessa Guillen Act), and *Health Care* (e.g., medical cannabis, vacancies in VA health care provider positions, and health care for women Veterans).

Each member of the committee conducted in-person meetings if possible or in most cases Zoom meetings during the period of September 27-29, 2021 with as many of their nine members of Congress as possible—either the Wash, DC office or the district office in Texas. I was able to invite two senior staff members from the office of US Rep Michael McCaul (TX-10; Austin area) to the Texas Department HQ in Austin for a meeting that included State QM Ben Lowrance and State Adjutant Lupita Perez for an in-person meeting.

The Spring 2022 National VFW Legislative Conference will be conducted virtually from Feb. 28-Mar. 2.

State Legislative Committee Report

The focus on advocacy in Texas is not just with the Texas Legislature. There is constant contact with key state agencies including the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), the Texas Veterans Land Board (VLB), and the Texas Lottery Commission (and its Bingo Advisory committee; the Texas VFW is the largest bingo license holder in Texas with 75 licenses held by VFW Posts or VFW Post Auxiliaries). I regularly interact

with gubernatorial appointees/commissioners of these agencies and their agency staffs and attend meetings of the commissions.

There were three Special Sessions of the Texas Legislature called by Gov. Abbott in the summer and early fall of 2021. The focus on these Special Sessions included state election legislation, redistricting of congressional and legislative seats, and appropriation of the \$16 billion in federal Covid-19 relief funds.

We did work with a coalition that came together during the 2021 Regular Legislative Session on getting \$1.7 million of the \$16 billion in federal Covid-19 relief funds to conduct a study of Ketamine for treatment of PTSD for 250 Veterans. We were unable to secure these funds through the legislative appropriation process in the 3rd Special Session but there is momentum for this moving forward working with Travis County.

I met with TVC Commissioner Mary Dale in late September 2021 at the Texas VFW State HQ. This meeting included State Adjutant Lupita Perez and Beth West, Exec. Director of the Texas VFW Foundation. Commissioner Dale is one of five TVC Commissioners appointed by Gov. Abbott. We discussed the Texas VFW Foundation grant from the TVC Fund for Veterans Assistance and the TVC's grant and administrative oversight and state legislative priorities.

I met with Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush on Nov. 18, 2021 at his office in Austin. We discussed VFW National and State Legislative priorities, including the 18 bills supported by the Texas VFW that became law after the 2021 Legislative Session. We also discussed the controversy surrounding the State Veteran cemeteries in Texas that Commissioner Bush and the Texas VLB are responsible for. Rusty Martin, Chief Investment Officer with the Texas VLB made some outrageous comments about State Veterans cemeteries, calling them "money losing propositions" in a virtual meeting of the Veterans cemetery committee that includes representatives of the TVC and VLB. These comments went public and generated television and print media stories and facilitated the resignation of the Eric Brown, Director of the State Veterans Cemeteries, who had been in his position for more than eight years. The Texas VFW issued a press release on December 2, 2021 expressing outrage over Mr. Martin's comments and included a quote in the press release from State Commander Norm Macey.

Another key issue late last year was the Delta 8 lawsuit initiated by members of the hemp industry, including Hometown Hero, a veteran owned company that sales Delta-8 products (cannabinoid/hemp based), which are very beneficial for sleep and minor pain management and much better than the pharmaceutical cocktail that the VA gives to Veterans for pain and anxiety. The State of Texas (i.e., the Dept of State Health Services) attempted to declare Delta 8 illegal despite the 2018 Federal Farm Bill and the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) stating otherwise. At the request of State Quartermaster Ben Lowrance, I consulted with the VFW National Legislative office about the Delta 8 lawsuit and how it related to the National VFW Legislative priority to study the efficacy of medical cannabis. This conversation led to a position paper that facilitated my testimony on behalf of the Texas VFW in the Travis County District Court hearing on Nov. 5, 2021. The District Court ruled in favor of the Hemp Industry coalition who were collectively the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. Feedback from Hometown Hero and other members of the hemp industry indicates that our testimony was instrumental in winning the lawsuit case in District Court. The Texas 3rd Court of Appeals and the Texas Supreme Court affirmed the Travis County District Court decision that Delt8 is legal in Texas.