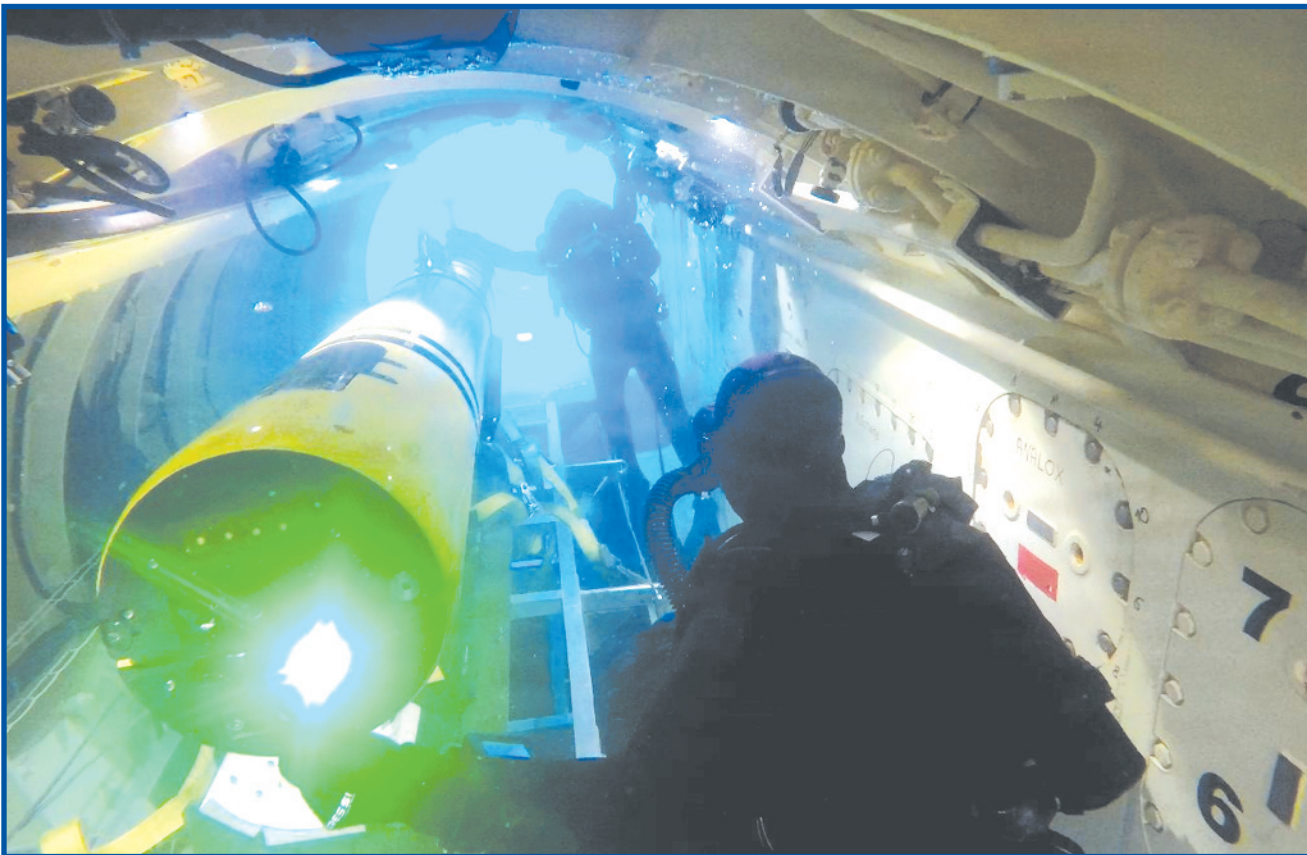


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 APRIL 8, 2026



SUBMERSIBLE WORK The U.S. Navy's Unmanned Undersea Vehicle Group ONE (UUVGRU-1) and the French navy launch an American Razorback underwater drone from a French nuclear submarine in the Atlantic on March 25, 2026. This joint operation demonstrated advanced technical ability to deploy U.S. assets from allied platforms, significantly enhancing their combined undersea warfare capabilities. U.S. Navy photo by Loren Nichols

Hegseth authorizes off-duty service members to carry private firearms on installations

by Matthew Olay, Pentagon News

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth signed a memorandum directing military installation commanders to allow War Department personnel — namely, uniformed service members — to request to carry privately owned firearms while in their nonofficial duty capacity on DOW property within the United States.

“Before today, it was virtually impossible ... for War Department personnel to get permission to carry and store their own personal weapons aligned with the state laws where we operate our installations. ... Well, that’s no longer,” Hegseth said during a social media video released April 2.

“The memo I’m signing today directs installation commanders to allow requests for personal protection — to carry a privately owned firearm — with the presumption that it is necessary for personal protection,” he said.

At the video’s outset, Hegseth said the U.S. Constitution’s Second Amendment applies to all Americans, including those in uniform.

“The War Department’s uniformed service members are trained at the highest and unwavering standards. These warfighters — entrusted with the safety of our nation — are no less entitled to exercise their God-given right to keep and bear arms than any other American,” Hegseth said.

He then cited several active-shooter incidents on U.S. military installations in recent years as examples of when personnel having the ability to return fire on the threat could potentially have reduced the human damage inflicted.

Specifically, Hegseth mentioned the Dec. 9, 2019, terrorist attack at Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, which killed three men and injured eight others; the Aug. 6, 2025, shooting and wounding of five soldiers by one of their fellow soldiers at Fort Stewart, Georgia; and the shooting of two individuals — one whom died — at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, as recently as March 17.

“Recent events ... have made clear that some threats are closer to home than we would like,” he said, adding, “In these instances, minutes are a lifetime, and our service members have the courage and training to see **Firearms, page 4**

U.S. continues strikes into Iran after successful rescue of F-15E aircrew

TAMPA, Fla. - On April 4, U.S. forces successfully completed the rescues of two American service members from Iran after their F-15E fighter jet was shot down April 2 during a combat mission.

The service members were safely recovered during separate search and rescue missions.

U.S. strikes into Iran continue as U.S. Central Command forces dismantle the Iranian regime’s ability to project power beyond its borders.

FAITH, NAVY SEALS, AND A DESIRE TO HELP

by Scott Sutherland
 Staff writer

“When you change to way you look at things, the things you look at change.” Dr. Wayne Dyer

Sometimes all it takes is one moment to change a thought process, and sometimes a life.

It was after Kameryn Rein Schwarz saw the film ‘Act of Valor’ in 2012 that she became inspired by the courage and sacrifice of U.S. Navy SEALs depicted in the movie. The movie

starred active-duty SEALs in a fictionalized story about a team on a global manhunt to stop a terrorist plot.

One would think that as a former Chicago police officer, Schwarz has seen it all, on and off the streets of that city. But a pivotal training visit with Naval Special Warfare in Chicago set a new direction for her life, ultimately leading her to establish the faith-based charity Operation Christian Fellowship alongside recently retired SEAL Christian Mullan.

“Our mission is clear and urgent,” according to her bio on OCF’s website, “to ensure that no warrior loses his faith or his marriage while serving our country.”

Nearing the end of the week with her time with the special warfare team, Schwarz felt a bold prompting to pray with the team - a completely unconventional request. Before that moment, she admits she had a “full-on argument with God.”

“I thought, ‘There’s no way. If I pray this prayer, I’m never getting invited back tomorrow.’”

As stated in her bio, what followed was one of the boldest prayers of her life. “The Holy Spirit was so present during and after that prayer,” she remembers. “I literally thought, ‘I can’t believe I’m saying these words in front of these men right now.’”

A single prayer can change everything.

Schwarz said her work with

see **OCF, page 7**



(from left) Kameryn Rein Schwarz, Christian Mullan, and Tricia Kirchmeyer of Operation Christian Fellowship. Photo courtesy of Kameryn Rein Schwarz

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Former Air Force NCO pleads guilty to multi-year bid rigging

A former active-duty U.S. Air Force master sergeant pleaded guilty April 1 to fraudulently inflating the cost of information technology contracts for the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, according to information provided by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The defendant, Alan Hayward James, 51, of Texas, inflated costs by at least \$37 million - and using the excess funds to enrich himself, enrich co-conspirators, and channel bribes to a federal public official in PACAF whom the conspirators nicknamed "Godfather."

James pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, bribery, and conspiracy to rig bids. James also agreed to pay over \$1.4 million in restitution to the Department of War.

"Over 37 million dollars — that's how much the U.S. Air Force overpaid because of the scheme that the defendant admitted to, under oath and in open court," said Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Daniel Glad of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division.

"Criminals who rig bids and commit fraud on government contracts steal from taxpayers and threaten the public's confidence in government institutions. The Antitrust Division's Procurement Collusion Strike Force will detect and prosecute those who rig bids and defraud their government customers."

"Through this bid-rigging scheme, the defendant not only stole from American taxpayers and harmed companies seeking to compete honestly for government contracts, he also ultimately harmed essential military services designed to keep our nation safe by diverting resources away from other services," said U.S. Attorney Ken Sorenson for the District of Hawaii.

"Bid-rigging and anti-competitive behavior in government contracts erodes trust in our institutions, harms taxpayers, and will not be tolerated. We will continue to investigate and

tor General, Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), Western Field Office. "DCIS, along with our law enforcement partners and the U.S. Department of Justice, will aggressively investigate those who seek to enrich themselves through fraudulent schemes targeting the U.S. Department of Defense and American taxpayers."

"This case highlights the capabilities and strength of joint

fraud are not victimless crimes; they erode public trust, distort fair competition, and harm honest businesses who play by the rules," said Special Agent in Charge Christopher Bjornstad of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Western Investigations Division. "GSA OIG special agents and our law enforcement partners remain committed to pursuing those who engage in procurement fraud."



According to a plea agreement and information filed in the U.S. District Court in Honolulu, Hawaii, from at least April 2016 until about April 2025, James and his coconspirators falsely inflated the cost of IT contracts serving U.S. Air Force installations across the Pacific. James and his coconspirators agreed to use the excess funds to pay James, James' family members, the family of an Air Force civilian employee, and other co-conspirators.

As part of this scheme, the conspirators diverted government funds to pay for an all-expenses-paid multi-day stay at a luxury resort on the North Shore of Oahu in 2023. Also, from at least May 2019 until about October 2022, the defendant directed co-conspirators — who were

supposed to be competitively bidding against one another to win government contracts — on the amounts they should bid to circumvent the competitive bidding process. As a result of the defendant's actions, the government overpaid for IT contracts by at least \$37 million.

The maximum penalty for conspiracy to commit wire fraud is 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The maximum penalty for bribery is 15 years in prison and a fine of either \$250,000 or three times the monetary value of the bribe, whichever is greater. The maximum penalty for a conspiracy to rig bids in violation of the Sherman Act for an individual is 10 years in prison and a \$1 million fine. The fines may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime or twice the loss suffered by the victims of the crime if either amount is greater than the statutory maximum fines. James agreed to pay a restitution of at least \$1,451,656.80 to the Department of War. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The Antitrust Division's San Francisco Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Hawaii are prosecuting the case, which was investigated with the assistance of DOD-

OIG-DCIS, AFOSI, and GSA-OIG. Rebecca A. Bers, Don Daniel, Matthew Chou, and Albert B. Sambat of the Antitrust Division's San Francisco Office, and Darren W.K. Ching of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Hawaii, are prosecuting this case.

The Justice Department's Procurement Collusion Strike Force (PCSF) is a joint law enforcement effort to combat antitrust crimes and related fraudulent schemes that impact government procurement, grant and program funding at all levels of government — federal, state and local. To learn more about the PCSF, or to report information on bid rigging, price fixing, market allocation and other anticompetitive conduct related to government spending, go to www.justice.gov/procurement-collusion-strike-force.

Whistleblowers who voluntarily report original information about antitrust and related offenses that result in criminal fines or other recoveries of at least \$1 million may be eligible to receive a whistleblower reward. Whistleblower awards can range from 15 to 30 percent of the money collected. For more information on the Antitrust Whistleblower Rewards Program, including a link to submit reports, visit www.justice.gov/atr/whistleblower-rewards.

James and his conspirators all agreed to share the extra money among James, James' family members, the family of an Air Force civilian employee, and other coconspirators. They also spent the money on a three-night stay at a luxury resort in Hawaii and channeled bribes to a federal public official they nicknamed Godfather. The trip to the resort on the North Shore of Oahu included golf, horseback riding and massages and cost more than \$234,000, according to court documents. An e-mail sent about the trip noted it occurred during a holiday weekend in October 2023 and provided "airfare for our off-island crew."

prosecute any and all who would seek to manipulate markets and undermine fair competition for their own personal gain."

"James's guilty plea acknowledges his role in a long-running conspiracy to rig bids and defraud the U.S. government for personal financial gain," said Special Agent in Charge John E. Helsing of the Department of Defense Office of Inspec-

investigative efforts to defend and protect sensitive Department of War (DoW) acquisition systems," said Special Agent Nicole Vanourek of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI), Procurement Fraud. "Ensuring companies adhere to robust contracting requirements is integral to maximizing the Air Force's lethality and readiness to address evolving security challenges."

"Bribery, bid rigging, and wire

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Trump, Hegseth, Caine laud rescue of downed airmen in Iran

by Matthew Olay
Pentagon News

During a White House press conference April 6, President Donald J. Trump, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, lauded the military's success in a harrowing Easter weekend rescue of two airmen.

The two service members' F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jet was downed by enemy forces in Iran, April 3, while flying in support of Operation Epic Fury.

"This has been one of our better Easters, I think, in a lot of different ways [and] I can say, militarily, it's been one of the best," the president said at the outset of his remarks.

Both service members were successfully recovered in just under 48 hours from when the mission to save them began.

Trump described his decision to launch the operation as "risky" because it could have put the lives of a significant number of U.S. personnel at risk while trying to rescue the two individuals.

"It's a hard decision to

make, but in the U.S. military, we leave no American behind; we don't do it," Trump said.

"Over this Easter weekend, the United States military has once again proved why we possess the greatest fighting force the world has ever known. In two extraordinary combat search and rescue operations deep inside enemy territory — in Iran — our warriors executed missions of breathtaking skill, courage and precision," Hegseth told the media.

"When our warriors are unleashed — as this president has allowed them to be — they are unstoppable," he continued.

Caine explained that shortly after the F-15's downing in the early morning, April 3, the joint personnel recovery center

operating in U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility declared an isolated personnel event after both the pilot and the weapons system officer had successfully ejected from the aircraft behind enemy lines.

Shortly thereafter, a rescue force composed of 21 aircraft, including A-10 Thunderbolt attack planes, KC-130 search and rescue aircraft, HH-60W Jolly Green IIs and a package of Air Force special warfare combat rescue officers and pararescue operators, went into enemy territory to locate and recover the downed airmen.

"Over the next hours, the search and rescue task force crossed the beach, entered into Iranian airspace - protected by a fighter strike package - and moved into the objective area,

all under [enemy] fire," said Caine.

Trump said the first wave of search and rescue forces was able to locate and extract the pilot in an HH-60W while taking on heavy fire, but without casualties.

"It's amazing that, when you look at the [damage to the] machinery ... that nobody was even injured," Trump said.

Meanwhile, Trump said, the second crew member had landed at a significant distance from the F-15's pilot.

He found himself badly injured and, in an area teeming with members of the enemy Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, besieged by Iranian

military militia and Iranian citizens who were incentivized by the regime to try to locate the downed airman.

Still, the airman managed to evade capture by scaling treacherous mountain terrain, ascending in altitude and scaling cliffs until he was in an adequate spot to contact rescue forces and transmit his location, Trump said.

The president added that the second rescue mission involved 155 aircraft, many of which were involved in subterfuge to trick regime forces into thinking the rescue personnel were looking for the downed airman at various decoy sites.

"We wanted to have them think he was in a different location, because [the regime] had

An F-15E Strike Eagle assigned to the 494th Fighter Squadron launches for a training sortie at Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England, March 3, 2019. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Master Sgt. Matthew Plew

a vast military force out there; thousands of people were looking," Trump said.

The president also noted that the downed F-15 was the U.S. military's only manned aircraft to be downed by enemy fire since Epic Fury began Feb. 28.

"It was a lucky hit; [Iran] got lucky," Trump said. "But we got lucky, too, because we got both [of the airmen] back."

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Standards 'vital' to Navy, NASA mission, Butch Wilmore says

by C. Todd Lopez
 Pentagon News

In early 2025, NASA astronauts Barry "Butch" Wilmore and Suni Williams — both retired Navy captains — were nearing nine months aboard the International Space Station, where they had been stranded since June 2024. The two were rescued and returned to Earth March 18, after spending 286 days in space.

During a recent visit to the Pentagon, Wilmore spoke with service members about service, space, leadership and the importance of standards.

Wilmore joined the Navy after finishing college in 1986. He attended flight school and served as a pilot in tactical jets, including the A-7E Corsair II and the F/A-18 Hornet. He served in Operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield and Southern Watch and has logged over 8,000 flight hours and 663 carrier landings. As a test pilot, he participated in developing the T-45 Goshawk trainer aircraft.

It wasn't until 2000, Wilmore said, that he was accepted into NASA's astronaut program.

"I didn't join the Navy to become an astronaut," he said. "I joined the Navy to serve my country. And how I thought I would do it, I had a jet in my mind's eye."

After completing a couple of master's degrees and flight school, he said he was looking for more.

"I'm like, 'Hey, you can't fly any higher and faster than the space shuttle — let's try that,'" he said. "So again, the Lord gave me that desire in my heart as well."

Preparation for becoming an astro-

naut, he said, came from everything he'd done previously as a Navy pilot.

"Think about putting on a one-man space capsule and going out into the vacuum of space, and the responsibility required for that," he said. "This is something obviously that I did with NASA, but you don't get prepared for this type of thing to be able to do it well and take on that responsibility without the foundation that takes place before you get there, and that was, for me, ... in our United States military."

Commitment, preparation and resilience, Wilmore said, are things he brought to the NASA job, things he learned in the Navy. The jobs of service members and of astronauts are not really jobs at all, he said. They are commitments.

"This is something that is a way of life, and you've got to be all in," he said. "Because if you're not, you're not going to be able to do this job to the level that is required. And that commitment breeds the desire to be prepared. I mean, absolutely 100 percent prepared."

The Navy veteran spoke about the "great responsibility" every service member has, as well as the resiliency required to do their jobs.

"Resiliency is something that is learned," he said. "It is a trait that comes with rigor: blood, sweat and tears. That's where resiliency is born, and it becomes toughness and focus and fairness and all that rolled into fortitude, that term ... that we have to have in our military."

Wilmore added that the biggest

factor affecting resilience is leadership — something he also learned in the Navy.

"Leadership is required; absolute leadership makes or breaks this resiliency that has its foundation as commitment, preparation and responsibility."

He described a successful leader as resilient, morally and ethically sound, meek, humble, timely, adaptable, sacrificial and unselfish.

"And realizes their words have power," he said. "You've got to realize that, and you've got to wield that sword effectively and with compassion and with care. And of course, you've got to be disciplined and determined. You have to be, especially for what you guys are responsible for every single day. I've lived it, I've seen it, I've reaped the benefits of great leaders instilling these characteristics in me, and for that, I am greatly thankful."

Shortly after taking the helm of the Pentagon last year, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth outlined plans to revive the warrior ethos, rebuild the U.S. military and reestablish deterrence with a focus on lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards and readiness.

Wilmore said success, both in the Navy as a pilot and at NASA as an astronaut, depends deeply on those very things the secretary is focused on now.

"They are vital," he said, adding that success in particular is not possible without standards. "I'm so grateful that our military is doing what it's doing right now, because these standards are there for a reason."

Wilmore said performance standards exist for the safety and benefit of the entire military, noting that "most of them are written in blood."

He said his faith is another important element of his own success in both the Navy and NASA.

When the Starliner spacecraft that took Wilmore and Williams into space in 2024 lost several of its thrusters — limiting maneuvering abilities — he knew he and his teammate would be stranded in space for some time. He said it was his faith that kept him pressing on.

He described himself, both in maneuvering the Starliner craft when it lost thrusters, and later when he was stranded on the space station, as being "content." He cited a biblical story featuring the Apostle Paul, who was beaten, stoned and left for dead, as a way to illustrate this.

"What does [Paul] say? He says, 'I am content,'" Wilmore said. "In the moment, this moment [in the spacecraft], and others I've had in the past, if I am trying to be what the Lord would have me be — in line, in step with where he would have me be — if I'm anything other than content, I'm not trusting. Paul was content ... he knows he's right where the Lord would have him be, even amongst the trials he's undergoing. And that's contentment. And that's what I try to line my beliefs up, and my understanding with; and that's where I was. That's why I was content."

Wilmore is a veteran of three space flights and has logged 464 days in space, along with over 31 hours during five spacewalks.



Top 5

- Hegseth asks Army's top general to retire immediately as Iran war rages
- Key Iranian bridge severed by airstrikes
- Pentagon expands firearm access for off-duty military members on base
- Iran fires missiles at Israel and Gulf neighbors as Trump talks of winding down Mideast war
- Golden Dome, ships and missiles top Trump's \$1.5 trillion defense wish list

Navy

- USS Gerald R. Ford returns to see after brief stop in Croatia
 - Some crew evacuated from USS Princeton because of small fires in port last month; ship is back at sea
- ## Marine Corps
- 'Prepare your family': Marine Reserve commander gives warlike safety brief

AIr Force

- 15 Fairchild airmen awarded for refueling roles in combat operations
- B-52s carrying JDAMs over Iran as U.S. bombers play growing role in air war
- Former Air Force NCO pleads guilty in contracts scheme that cost the service \$37 million

Space Force

- Space Force to create futures-like group on HQ Staff
- Space Force using 'integrated test teams' to speed up capability delivery

Defense Industry

- U.S. defense stocks see no Iran war lift after early surge
- Money starts flowing for new GCAP fighter, as Britain sorts out finances
- Swedish arms maker to set up major ammunition plant in Estonia

Firearms

continued from page 1

make those precious short minutes count."

The memo to senior Pentagon leadership, defense agency and War Department field activity directors titled "Non-Official Personal Protection Arming on Department of War Property," states that the new policy is consistent with section 526 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016.

That section of the FY16 NDAA reads that the secretary of [war] "may authorize a member of the armed forces who is assigned

to duty at the installation, center or facility to carry an appropriate firearm on the installation, center, or facility if the commander determines that carrying such a firearm is necessary as a personal, or force protection measure."

The memo goes on to state that the undersecretary of war for intelligence and security will be responsible for updating War Department Manual 5200.08 — the document that lays out physical security measures for DOW, and that will authorize permitting officials to review service member requests to carry personally owned firearms.

The memo also makes clear

that, when considering personal carry applications, permitting officials must apply "a presumption of approval."

"If a request is for some reason denied, the reason for that denial will be in writing and will explain — in detail — the basis for that [decision]," Hegseth said.

"Again, the presumption is service members will be able to have their Second Amendment right on post," he reiterated.

The memo further elaborates on Hegseth's point by stating, "If the rejection of an application is necessary, the rejection shall be in writing and explain the objective,

clearly describable, and individualized basis for such decision. The review shall be a dispassionate and commonsense application of applicable law and standards."

Additionally, the memo addresses the thousands of uniformed personnel who work at the Pentagon, stating that the building's police force — the Pentagon Force Protection Agency — shall also apply a presumption of approval to all personal-carry applications.

However, the memo stops short of allowing personal-carry within the walls of the building.

Rather, it states that the Pen-

tagon Force Protection Agency must allow fair consideration for Pentagon personnel to "store a privately owned firearm in a vehicle on the Pentagon Reservation," pursuant to the Code of Federal Regulations.

Hegseth ended his video message by underscoring the importance of recognizing the Second Amendment rights of men and women in uniform.

"Not all enemies are foreign, nor are they all outside of our borders — some are domestic,"

he said, in reference to the oath all U.S. uniformed service members take upon swearing to serve their country.

"Confirming your God-given right to self-protection is what I am signing into action today, and I'm proud to do so," the secretary concluded, just before signing the memo.

<https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4450527/hegseth-authorizes-off-duty-service-members-to-carry-private-firearms-on-instal/>

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<p>Bayview Church <i>Attract...Assimilate...Activate</i> Terry W. Brooks, Sr. Pastor 6134 Pastor Timothy J. Winters St., San Diego 92114 • (619) 262-8384 Sunday Worship Services 7:30am, 9:15am, 11:15am Studies In Christian Living (formerly Sunday School) Tues & Thurs online only 6pm (contact Church for sign up). In person Saturday 9am & 10am www.bayviewbc.org info@bayviewbc.org</p>	<p>First Baptist Church of Coronado <i>"Reach Up, Reach Out, Reach Our World"</i> Jim W. Baize, Pastor www.fbcoronado.com Sunday Adult Bible Study 8:45am, Sunday Worship Service 10am Meeting in person and online on YouTube or Facebook FB: First Baptist Church of Coronado email: secretary@fbcoronado.com 445 C Ave., Coronado, CA 92118 (619) 435-6588</p>	<p>Southwest Baptist Church <i>"To know Christ and to make Him known"</i> Welcome All Retired Military/Chaplain as Pastors Sunday Bible Study: 9:30am Sunday Worship Service: 11am Wednesday Prayer Service: 7pm 2295 Leon Avenue, San Diego, CA 92154 Phone: (619) 423-2477 Email: pastor@swbcsd.org www.swbcsd.org</p>
<p>Bethany Lutheran Church Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod 2051 Sunset Cliffs Blvd., Ocean Beach 92107 (Parking lot off the Alley - North of the building) Worship 11am Sundays Bible Class, Wednesdays 10am (619)222-7291 Office@BethanyLutheranOB.org</p>	<p>Mesa View Baptist Church Dr. Darrow Perkins, Jr., Th.D. Pastor/Servant CW03, USMC (Ret.) <i>Seeking Sinners; Saving Souls. Strengthening Saints</i> Sunday School at 8:45am • Morning Worship at 10am Wednesday Night Bible Study 7pm 13230 Pomerado Rd., Poway • 858-485-6110 • www.mesaview.org</p>	<p>St. Luke's Lutheran Church 5150 Wilson Ave., La Mesa, CA 91942 Phone: (619) 463-6633 website: www.st-lukes-la-mesa.org Worship: 9am Pastor: Mark Menacher, PhD. <i>We thank you for your service!</i></p>

Place your ad in our 'Places of Worship' directory...as low as \$15 per week!

DOW's annual recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

The Department of War recognizes April as Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month as part of its ongoing efforts to counter sexual assault in the Total Force.

“Sexual assault is unacceptable, period, and has no place in our military. It is contrary to our institutional values, the warrior ethos, and our overall readiness,” said Anthony J. Tata, under secretary of war for personnel and readiness, adding that, “Awareness, prevention, and support are a shared responsibility. We expect every member of the Department of War community to help root out harmful behaviors, maintain standards, and continue to drive necessary change throughout the force.”

Eliminating sexual assault in the military requires unwavering, year-round commitment. The ongoing DoW sexual assault awareness and prevention campaign, “STEP FORWARD: Prevent. Report. Advocate,” calls on the Total Force to confront

and counter harmful behaviors, provide victim assistance, and strengthen command climates.

“The warrior ethos demands integrity, honor, and courage — on and off the battlefield. Sexual assault violates every one of those values,” said Dr. Nate Galbreath, director of the Department's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. “To Step Forward is to live up to those expectations. It means having the integrity to intervene, the courage to seek help, and the honor to create a climate of dignity and respect. Those standards build a lethal force where every warfighter is safe, respected, and ready for the fight.”

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, please reach out to the Safe Helpline at (877) 995-5247 or SafeHelpline.org/live-chat for anonymous, 24/7, one-on-one support.

More information can be found on the SAPRO website at <https://www.sapr.mil/saapm>.

Hegseth announces reforms to Chaplain Corps

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced in late March a pair of reforms to the military's Chaplain Corps.

Speaking to the public via a video post on social media, Hegseth said the War Department will be significantly streamlining the number of faith code affiliations for service members.

Additionally, the secretary announced that the rank insignia military chaplains wear on their work uniforms will be replaced by their religious insignia.

Regarding the reduction in religions identified by the military's faith and belief coding system — which will now be renamed to “religious affiliation codes” — Hegseth said the overhaul was necessary due to the current system having grown too big.

“The previous system had ballooned to well over 200 faith codes. ... It was impractical and unusable, and many codes were never used at all,” Hegseth said, adding that a significant majority of service members — 82 percent of whom identify as being religious — use only six of the codes.

Hegseth said the number of religious affiliation codes will now be reduced to 31, bringing them in line with their original intent.

“This brings the codes in line with its original purpose, giving chaplains clear, usable

information so they can minister to service members in a way that aligns with that service member's faith background and religious practice,” Hegseth said of the change.

Regarding the second reform, directing military chaplains — all of whom are officers — to replace the rank insignia on their uniforms with their religious insignia, Hegseth said it speaks to the “difficult balance of the duality” of being a chaplain in the military.

“A chaplain is first and foremost a chaplain, and an officer second. This change is a visual representation of that fact,” he said.

“Specifically unique to the role of a chaplain, they are first and foremost called and ordained by God. And, while they will retain rank as an officer to those they serve, their rank will not be visible,” he added.

PCS task force becomes Personal Property Activity

by Staff Sgt. David Phaff,
DOW Personal Property Activity

The War Department Personal Property Activity recently marked a significant milestone: moving from a Permanent Change of Station Joint Task Force to becoming a permanent, enduring organization that is dedicated to supporting military personnel, DOW civilians and their families through the complexities of PCS moves.

The transformation builds on the talent within the Defense Property Management Office as it has evolved to better serve the joint force. Announced in January, the new activity reflects a committed, cohesive team that strives to improve the quality of military moves for years to come.

As the activity takes its place as a permanent fixture, it does so on the foundation built by a dedicated group of professionals who have shaped not only its operational success but also its identity and culture. Through collaboration, innovation and a shared sense of purpose, the team has worked tirelessly to streamline processes, enhance

communication and reduce the stress associated with PCS moves.

“Since joining the PPA storage branch, I've been impressed by the seamless collaboration across all departments to support our mission,” said Dawn Mangon, a storage specialist assigned to the activity. “Our team is a dedicated force, continuously balancing the needs of our service members and industry partners while taking great pride in their work and striving for the constant improvement of the program.”

Among its lasting contributions is the creation of the unit's slogan: “Your Move, Our Mission,” which represents the

mission, values and unity of the DOW Personal Property Activity, as well as the organization's unwavering commitment to put people first and ensure every move is handled with precision, care and accountability.

“Creating the identity for the PPA was a huge team effort,”

lift,” as he was responsible for translating the design into usable product files in a very short window of time.

Mangon and Cruz, along with Jayne Arentsen, PPA data and analytics chief, played pivotal roles in defining fundamental elements of the new activity's identity. Their vision and initiative helped transform an idea into a mission-driven organization.

Cruz said, “The success of the Permanent Change of Station Joint Task Force has been a watershed moment. For the first time, we've provided a single, dedicated resource available to every single service member, regardless of rank or branch, as well as our government civilians and their families — breaking down the old barriers to expedite the joint force getting help.”

As the next chapter begins, the personnel assigned to the new activity remain committed to its core mission of supporting their customers with professionalism, care and excellence at every step of the PCS journey.

“The trust we have built through the [joint task force's] direct, hands-on approach is the very foundation upon which the Personal Property Agency is built,” Cruz said.



Jayne Arentsen, data and analytics chief of the Personal Property Activity, receives a certificate of appreciation from Maj. Gen. Lance G. Curtis, Personal Property Activity commanding general, at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., April 1. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. David Phaff



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Ready to apply to be a USO San Diego volunteer?

Visit <https://volunteers.uso.org/>

Once you navigate to the web page, scroll down to and look at the right side of the page to find information about volunteering.

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USO Transitions: <https://www.uso.org/programs/uso-pathfinder-transition-program>

Want to be better prepared for future success before transitioning from the military? Are you a military spouse looking for new opportunities? The USO Pathfinder® Transition Program extends the USO experience to active duty, Reserve, National Guard and military spouses by offering professional development services throughout the duration of military service as well as in preparation for life post-military.

MilSpouse Connect: Monthly events bringing military spouses together to connect and thrive.

Craft & Coffee: USO Camp Pendleton provides creative outlets for adults and children to create fun, whimsical or serious works of art through a variety of mediums. Signs up happen online and are usually advertised through the USO Camp Pendleton Facebook page.

Command Support: USO is here to support! We often help support command events across Camp Pendleton such as Family days and Morale Days. Commands can request support in a number of different ways, from outdoor games, a kids craft, or even our mobile photo booth. We also can help provide small refreshments. To request support, please email our Center Operations and Programs Manager, Crystal Gates at cgates@uso.org. All requests must be submitted within 30 days and although we try our best, not all requests can be granted.

<https://california.uso.org/>



The USS Midway Museum is currently recruiting for docents, air craft restoration, ship restoration and safety volunteers. These assignments are a regular commitment of at least 6 months.

Visit this page of our website to watch fun videos about our different teams and participants: <https://www.midway.org/give-join/volunteers/volunteer-opportunities/>

PARTNERSHIP IN SAN DIEGO: Fleet Readiness Center Southwest & UC San Diego

by Michael A Furlano
Fleet Readiness Center Southwest

Fleet Readiness Center Southwest (FRCSW) and the University of California San Diego's Rady School of Management have launched a new partnership aimed at enhancing leadership development, workforce readiness, and innovation across local defense and academic communities.

The collaboration encourages a deeper engagement between the US military and academia, including annual information exchanges, UC San Diego Rady School student and faculty participation in FRCSW initiatives, and expanded opportunities for Rady School students to contribute to the United States defense industrial base through internships, career events/paths, and capstone projects.

This effort reflects a shared commitment to excellence by both FRCSW, whose mission is to sustain the nation's naval aviation fleet, and the Rady School through its dedication to developing strategic, data-driven, and entrepreneurial leaders who excel in complex environments.

The partnership offers FRC-

SW employees' access to Rady's Executive MBA, FlexEvening MBA, and MicroMBA Certificate programs. A key highlight of this partnership is the significant tuition discount for FRCSW employees interested in the Rady School's Executive and FlexEvening MBA programs as well as the MicroMBA. This makes advanced management education more accessible for those supporting the Navy's operational readiness.

"This partnership is a win for our workforce and a win for the naval aviation enterprise. Investing in our people is essential to sustaining readiness, improving processes, and preparing for the challenges ahead. Providing our team access to world-class education in an affordable manner strengthens not only FRCSW but the entire Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE)," said CDR Jeff Legg, FRCSW MRO Logistics Officer, who helped broker the agreement.

"We are deeply committed to serving both our region and our nation. This collaboration with FRCSW demonstrates how academia and the defense community can work together to cultivate the leadership and analytical expertise required to

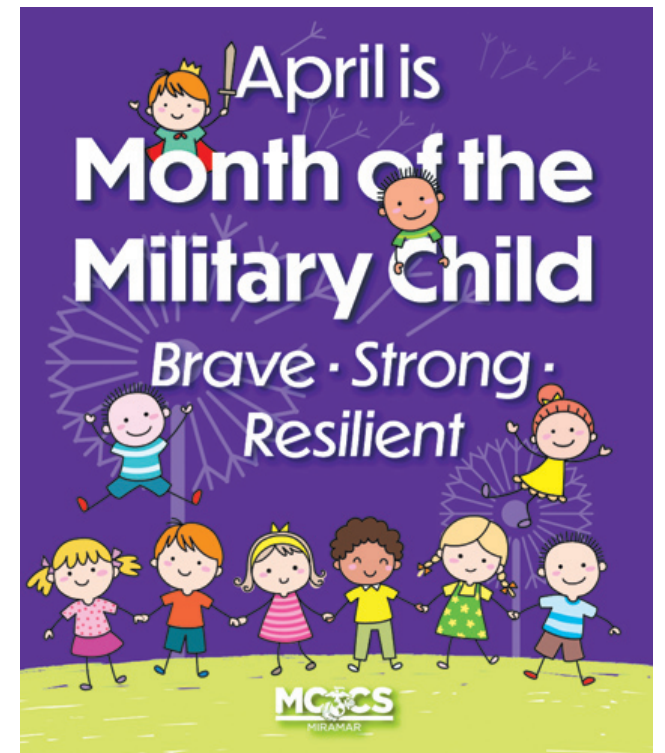


The collaboration encourages a deeper engagement between the US military and academia, including annual information exchanges, UC San Diego Rady School student and faculty participation in FRCSW initiatives, and expanded. Photo by Michael A. Furlano

sustain mission-critical operations. We believe partnerships like this create shared value—for our students, for industry, and for the communities we serve—and we welcome opportunities to collaborate with organizations ready to invest in talent, innovation and long-term impact," said Lisa Ordóñez, Dean of the Rady

School of Management at UC San Diego.

This partnership positions FRCSW and UC San Diego as the Southern California leader in developing the talent needed to drive innovation, readiness, and mission success for the Navy and the Marine Corps.



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For general NASCAR event details, visit NASCARSanDiego.com

6 www.armedforcesdispatch.com APRIL 8, 2026

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VADM Joe Buzzella assumes command of U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area and Defense Force West

ALAMEDA, Calif. – The U.S. Coast Guard held a formal assumption of command ceremony for Vice Adm. Joe Buzzella as he assumed the duties and responsibilities of U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area and Defense Force West Commander here.

Adm. Kevin Lunday, commandant of the Coast Guard, presided over the ceremony. Senior Coast Guard leadership and distinguished guests joined in recognizing Buzzella's commitment to leading the Service.

Buzzella formally assumed the responsibilities of commander, Coast Guard Pacific Area, overseeing all Coast Guard operations across the Pacific theater—an area encompassing more than 74 million square miles.

"It is an honor to assume command of Coast Guard Pacific Area and Defense Force West," said Buzzella. "Across this vast and vital region, Coast Guardsmen stand the watch. Every day, our crews are saving lives, protecting and ensuring we control, secure

and defend our nation's borders. I am humbled by the opportunity to lead this team and remain committed to supporting the readiness, resilience, and mission excellence of the Pacific Area workforce and their families."

As Pacific Area commander, Buzzella will lead Coast Guard operations throughout the Indo-Pacific, the Polar Regions and Western Hemisphere, focusing on enhancing operational readiness, strengthening international partnerships, and advancing strategic priorities.

OCF continued from page 1

OCF began out of necessity. "While there are more than 40 nonprofits that support Navy SEALs in various ways, none are faith-based. OCF exists to meet that specific spiritual need."

OCF provides spiritual resources and support to active-duty Navy SEALs worldwide, helping them navigate deployments, separation from loved ones, and the spiritual challenges that accompany this demanding profession, while also strengthening their families through Scripture-based prayer groups, community, and ongoing spiritual support.

"Central to our work is ensuring that every active-duty SEAL

who requests one receives a custom embossed Trident Bible, personalized with his name and class number, free of charge, reflecting both their elite training and their faith in Christ," she said. "These Bibles are carried into training, deployments, and real-world operations as a tangible source of strength and identity."

Since our initial launch in August 2025, OCF has distributed 113 custom-embossed Trident Bibles to active-duty Navy SEALs.

Operation Christian Fellowship is currently investing time and energy into their \$150,000 fundraising campaign, seeking 150 individuals to give \$1,000. These funds are dedicated exclusively to sourcing, embossing, shipping, and distributing Trident Bibles so

that every active-duty Navy SEAL who requests one can receive one, regardless of location. All donations to OCF are tax-deductible, said Schwarz.

Besides Schwarz and Mullan, Tricia Kirchmeyer is director of prayer programs for the organization.

"I think it's important that you don't have to believe or have a certain type of faith to receive our resources," said Kameryn Rein Schwarz. "We will help whoever requests it. OCF is a non-denominational, apolitical Christian ministry. Our focus is solely on sharing the hope of Jesus Christ and supporting warriors and their families, not promoting any political or denominational agenda. While we believe church community is important, we're more about a nurturing relationship with our creator than we are about religion."

Read more at operationchristianfellowship.org.



Border Patrol receives 15 horses from Army, saving \$105,000

WASHINGTON - U.S. Border Patrol horse patrol units across the Southwest recently received 15 horses from the Army, an interagency transfer that will save the agency an estimated \$105,000.

The horses came from Army posts at Fort Irwin, Calif. and Fort Huachuca, Ariz. Border Patrol Horse Patrol Unit instructors traveled to the posts to evaluate the animals for their suitability in mounted patrol operations. The evaluations included inspections of conformation, groundwork, and riding assessments. Veterinarians also evaluated each horse to ensure its overall health before the transfer.

Following the evaluations, the Border Patrol transported the first 10 horses to the Santa Teresa Station in New Mexico. There, master instructors, and instructor students conducted three weeks of intensive training to condition the horses and prepare them for operational use.

After completing the initial training, the Border Patrol assigned the horses to sectors across the Southwest border, including El Centro, San Diego, Tucson, El Paso, and Rio Grande Valley. The Border Patrol is evaluating and training the remaining five

taxpayer dollars and strengthens the U.S. Border Patrol's Horse Patrol, a unit that has been critical in securing our nation's borders since our agency's inception."

Mounted patrol units provide agents with enhanced mobility and visibility in areas that are difficult to access by vehicle and support the U.S. Border Patrol's mission to secure the nation's borders. For more information on CBP's border security mission, visit <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security>.

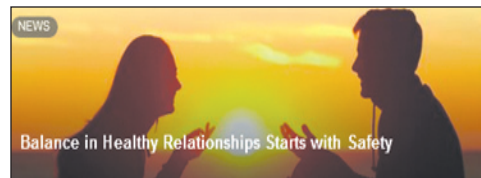
U.S. Customs and Border Protection is America's frontline: the nation's largest law enforcement organization and the world's first unified border management agency. The 67,000+ men and women of CBP protect America on the ground, in the air, and on the seas. They enforce safe, lawful travel and trade and ensure our country's economic prosperity.



A Border Patrol Horse Patrol agent prepares horses for work along the Rio Grande near McAllen, Texas, on Nov. 4, 2025. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Perry Shirzad

horses in the Tucson Sector for future assignment.

"The transfer of these 15 horses from the U.S. Army further demonstrates the partnership between the U.S. Border Patrol and the Department of War," said U.S. Border Patrol Chief Michael Banks. "This cooperation saves



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Navy Capt. (Ret.) Brian Drechsler

Retired Navy SEAL to speak at Navy League in Coronado

A veteran of the Naval Special Warfare community will speak at the Navy League/Military Officers of America dinner meeting April 14 at the Coronado Yacht Club.

Navy Capt. (Ret.) Brian Drechsler, executive director of the newly-opened Navy SEAL Museum and a graduate of the Naval Academy, served over 25 years in Naval Special Warfare as an officer in the the Navy's Sea, Air, and Land teams, or SEALs.

He recently served as commander of the Naval Special Warfare Center, Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, overseeing the training of all new SEALs and combat crewmen, and all advanced training for the SEAL teams, serving as the skipper of SEAL Team Five, Coronado.

As Chief of Staff, he oversaw daily operations for the 10,000 person SEAL enterprise. In addition he served as U.S. Special Operations Command's primary liaison to the U.S. Congress in their Office of Legislative Affairs.

ABOUT THE NAVY LEAGUE/MILITARY OFFICERS OF AMERICA DINNER MEETING: The evening begins at 5:30 p.m., with check-in, cocktails and mingling. The meeting starts at 6:30, and involves dinner prepared by the catering staff of the Coronado Yacht Club. The Yacht Club is at 1631 Strand Way, Coronado, CA 92118. Price for the April 14 dinner event is \$45 by cash or check at the door. To RSVP, e-mail Joan Kanter, Vice-president of the Coronado Council of the Navy League, at jkanter0714@gmail.com.

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Sailors assigned to amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) and NASA engineers prepare to release a crew module test article from the ship's well deck, Jan. 26, 2026. John P. Murtha is underway in the U.S. 3rd Fleet area of operations performing a just-in-time training in support of U.S. Space Command's human space flight recovery mission to retrieve NASA's Artemis II crew and spacecraft following their splashdown in the Pacific Ocean. U.S. 3rd Fleet, an integral part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, leads naval forces in the Indo-Pacific and provides the realistic, relevant training necessary to execute our Navy's role across the full spectrum of military operations—from combat operations to humanitarian assistance and disaster response. U.S. 3rd Fleet works together with allies and partners to advance freedom of navigation, the rule of law, and other principles that underpin security for the Indo-Pacific region. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Jomark A. Almazan

USS John P. Murtha to support NASA's Artemis II mission

by MC1 Jomark Almazan

SAN DIEGO – Amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) is slated to serve as the recovery ship for the Orion spacecraft and its crew upon their return from the historic Artemis II mission.

The ship is named in honor of the late and long-serving Pennsylvania Congressman John P. Murtha.

"It is a fitting tribute to Congressman Murtha, who dedicated his life to serving our nation, that the ship bearing his name will be integral to this historic moment in space exploration," said Capt. Erik Kenny, commanding officer of John P. Murtha. "He was a champion for our military and a visionary. We are honored to carry on his legacy by supporting NASA and the Artemis II mission."

The Artemis II mission is the first crewed flight of NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft, sending four astronauts on an approximately 10-day journey that will take them beyond the Moon. This

mission will mark humanity's first crewed voyage to the vicinity of the Moon in over 50 years.

Upon completion of their mission, the Orion capsule will splash down in the Pacific Ocean, where John P. Murtha and its crew will be prepared to recover the astronauts and the spacecraft.

The U.S. Navy's amphibious transport dock has unique advantages, including a well deck, helicopter pad, onboard medical facilities, and communication capabilities needed to support the mission. The platform gives NASA the ability to recover the Orion space capsule and collect critical data to help ensure it's ready to recover the astronauts and capsule during future Artemis missions.

MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopters from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 23 will provide imagery support for NASA by tracking the Orion space capsule as it travels through Earth's atmosphere. After splashdown, HSC-23 helicopters will recover the astronauts once they exit the capsule and bring them to the ship for assessment and then transport them to shore.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 1 will provide Navy divers to recover and transport the Orion space capsule from the ocean to the ship's well deck. Navy divers are experts in mobile diving, salvage, towing, and open water, small boat operations. In addition to the Navy divers, EODGRU-1 will support the recovery mission with a dive medical team to assess and assist the astronauts following their exit from the capsule.

Artemis II is NASA's first crewed mission in a series of missions around and to the lunar surface where crew can build and test systems needed to prepare for the challenge of future missions to Mars. The mission launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, April 1, with four astronauts onboard.



NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO (March, 30, 2026) Capt. Hiram Andreu, of Puerto Rico, oncoming commanding officer of destroyer USS Michael Monsoor, speaks during a change of command ceremony here. Michael Monsoor is assigned to Carrier Strike Group 1. U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Elyssia Rodriguez



CAMP PENDLETON (March 27, 2026) Marines deploy the M-257 smoke grenade system, during the Bushmaster Competition here. The competition is a multievent challenge that evaluates Marines on tactical proficiency, marksmanship, physical endurance and reconnaissance skills. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Sawyer Carleton

Helping curtail water pollution

by Petty Officer 2nd Class Ulrika Mendiola

Naval Base San Diego

NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO — Naval Base San Diego, in coordination with Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest and in partnership with the City of San Diego, continues sustained operations to remove debris from Chollas Creek, reinforcing a long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship and fleet readiness.

Chollas Creek carries a constant flow of urban runoff, vegetation and debris from surrounding areas through NBSD before entering San Diego Bay. Left unmanaged, this accumulation poses ongoing risks to water quality, marine ecosystems and critical waterfront operations.

"Our partnership with the City of San Diego is essential to protecting our shared waterways and sustaining the health of the harbor," said Capt. Brian Bungay, commanding officer, NBSD. "By working together, we're not only safeguarding the environment, but ensuring our waterfront remains ready to support the Fleet and the Warfighter."

NBSD's Port Operations team actively maintains floating containment booms across key sections of the creek, intercepting debris before it reaches open water. These systems serve as a continuous barrier, capturing materials that would otherwise enter the harbor.

"We deploy containment booms across Chollas Creek to intercept debris carried downstream," said Ron Ellis, NBSD Port Operations Installation Program Director. "This is a routine, ongoing effort that protects marine life and preserves the health of San Diego Bay."

Once contained, NAVFAC SW coordinates removal using heavy equipment, including excavators, to clear accumulated material efficiently while minimizing disruption to base operations.

"Chollas Creek is a major outfall in the San Diego region, and Naval Base San Diego is positioned at its primary discharge point," said Frank Williamson, NAVFAC Southwest Environmental Compliance Branch manager. "Because of that, maintaining the cleanliness of the creek is essential—not only for environmental protection, but for sustaining safe and effective waterfront operations."

Cleanup efforts target a wide range of debris, including plastics, metal, tires and organic material that routinely collect behind containment barriers.

"Protecting the environment is a core Navy responsibility," said Errol G. Cooper, hazardous waste disposal specialist for Commander, Navy Installations Command. "By stopping debris before it reaches the harbor, we reduce risk to marine ecosystems and ensure proper disposal."

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by
Lisa
Smith
Molinari

Running a fingernail along the wrinkled peak of thin, gold foil, I find an edge. I lift the delicate lip, hearing the sheet crinkle as it expands like an accordion. I pause a moment, just long enough to pinch the tiny paper plume that reads, "KISSES," and tug it free from its host.

Satisfied that the foil has been removed intact, I crumple the shiny square into a ball, and discard it. Popping the freed morsel into my mouth, it sits on my tongue for a moment, and as the sugary drop melts, an almond is revealed.

In a sudden movement of tongue and teeth, I swipe the nut between my molars and feel it crack under pressure. As I slowly swallow the melty mixture, my hand reaches for the next of what will be at least twenty Hershey Kisses I will consume in one sitting.

More than I should, I find myself seeking chocolate. The rich texture and undeniably delicious flavor of this classic confection certainly tempts my sweet tooth, but I actually have a different motive.

Like a baby, I crave something soothing and repetitive when I'm stressed, tired or bored. Since Gerber doesn't make pacifiers for 59-year-olds, and my husband isn't

Confectionary comforts

jiggy with rocking me in a rocking chair, I opt for sweet treats.

I'm not talking about gorging on a half gallon of Moose Tracks ice cream or whaling on a pan of gooey fudge brownies. While I've been known to indulge in those delicacies from time to time, I find more comfort in chocolate treats that lend themselves to prolonged, ceremonial enjoyment.

Thanks to the recent Easter festivities with our family, miniature chocolate candies wrapped in pastel foil are all over my house, calling to me, like tiny sirens. "I'm here!" they wail, urging me to bring them to my couch where I can slowly and systematically eat them, one by one, while watching morally bankrupt reality shows. Despite the guilt I feel the next morning, the behavior relaxes me in the moment.

In the past when we were an active duty military family, I turned to chocolate when stressing over the logistics of complicated PCS moves, or when on the brink of insanity during long deployments.

Hershey Kisses with Almonds have always been my therapy treat of choice, because eating them can be broken down into ritualistic steps. When I can't get my hands on Kisses, I ease stress with other chocolatey treats.

For example, regardless of the nutrition label, an entire sleeve of Girl Scout Thin Mints cookies is the proper prescription to calm my nerves. I extract each disk from the stack, and place it on my tongue to steep. The chocolate coating

slowly melts allowing saliva soften the crisp center, dissolving it into a mouthful of minty mush. I chew any remaining crunchy bits and swallow, before lifting another from the sleeve.

I began ritualizing my consumption of treats when I was a child. I never understood a kid who could take a bag of M&Ms, tear open the top, and pour the whole thing into his upturned mouth. What a waste!

I, on the other hand, would maximize my enjoyment, spreading the contents of each bag out, and separating the candies out into their colors. I'd then analyze each pile, eating only the most flawed morsels. Those that were misshapen or had an imperfect "M" were goners. I continued this process until I'd whittled the lot down to one of each color. Those five — the Chosen Ones — would be scooped up together and ceremoniously sacrificed in one final chomp.

This may sound nuts, but in times of stress, everyone turns to something for relief. I figure, three-quarters of a bag of Hershey Kisses with Almonds is measurably better for one's mental and physical health than three packs of Camels and a pint of Jose Quervo.

Feeling stressed? Why not dissect a dozen peanut butter cups, nibble the chocolate off the outside of a Three Musketeers Bar, or methodically pick apart a pair of Little Debbie Swiss Cake Rolls? It tastes good, it feels good, and stress melts away as fast as a chocolate Kiss on your tongue.

Review of "Lost Wolves of Yellowstone" in the giant dome of the Fleet Science Center

The award-winning documentary "Lost Wolves of Yellowstone," in IMAX, is now showing on San Diego's largest IMAX screen, in the giant dome of the Fleet Science Center in San Diego's Balboa Park. As we learn at <https://www.imax.com/lost-wolves-of-yellowstone-learning-resources>, this film tells the heart-warming story of "the daring restoration project led by Mollie H. Beattie and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services to reintroduce grey wolves to Yellowstone National Park after a more than 50-year absence. This long-lost footage captures the early days as the wolves acclimate in enclosures before venturing out to establish a new lineage, the Crystal Creek pack affectionately known as 'Mollie's Pack.' This documentary illustrates the untamed spirit of nature."

"Wolves are omnivores (that) sit at the top of the food chain as an apex predator. With their near extinction in Yellowstone National Park in the 1920s, the area's whole ecosystem was sent into collapse, causing a trophic cascade. Without wolves, the elk population exploded, leading to an overgrazing of key producers like aspen, willow, and cottonwood trees."

"Without these trees, birds lost their habitats and beavers lost essential building materials. Without beavers and trees, the soil and streams also began to erode ... you literally can picture the chaos, can't you? And that was just one branch of what was a once balanced, thriving ecosystem."

"With the reintroduction of wolves in the mid-1990s, another trophic cascade occurred, but this time order was restored to areas like Lamar Valley, increasing biodiversity and

stability in Yellowstone National Park once again."

Ciera MacIsaac, of the California Wolf Center, tells us that "At the California Wolf Center our big mission is education — teaching people about wolves, why they are so important to the ecosystem and, not only that, what you guys can do for wolf conservation."

"California Wolf Center has been in Julian since 1977, educating the public about wolves. We currently have 17 wolves on site. We are open to the public, so you guys can come out, see some wolves, learn lots of different random information about

AutoMatters™ & More



by Jan Wagner

wolves — which is really fun. ... We also have live feed cameras that people can view from the comfort of your own couch, which is really fun."

"They are really incredible animals. They are critically endangered. There are less than 700 total. That's in the wild and in captivity. They were actually extinct out in the wild, so if you guys come to our California Wolf Center you get to see a critically endangered species, which is really amazing.

At the California Wolf Center, we are part of the Mexican Gray Wolf recovery program. They are a subspecies of California Gray Wolf. ... With that program, these animals are

kept as wild as possible, so we're not a facility that has socialized wolves. Our wolves were not hand-raised by people. They don't like us. ... They're very afraid of people so ... this is probably the least dangerous animal I've ever worked with. With wolves, they have this innate fear. That's probably the biggest myth that people have about wolves is that they're going to chase you down, they're going to hunt you and hunt your cattle and they're pretty scary animals. That's why they were completely eradicated."

Ciera told me that "there are so many things that wolves are great for. They are an apex predator, so nobody is hunting them for food. They are helping control the prey population. Specifically with Yellowstone, there was the elk populations that were out of control, because they didn't have a predator. The wolves come on in, hunting those sick, those weak elk so that they weren't overgrazing. ... On the East Coast there are a lot of deer problems — there are a lot of sick deer, and so having that apex predator definitely helps those populations become healthier, become stronger, not overgrazing."

For more information, and for ticket information and showtimes, visit: <https://www.fleetscience.org/films/lost-wolves-yellowstone>.

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Veterans News

Veterans' trust in VA hits record high: A promising trend for heroes

Overall trust in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reached an all-time high. In the first quarter of fiscal year 2026, 82 percent of veterans who used VA services - including health care, benefits, burials and memorials - reported that they trust VA to fulfill the nation's commitment to them.

Additionally, trust in VA outpatient health care is also rising, with 93.6 percent of veterans reporting they trust VA for their health care needs.

"Veterans First isn't a slogan, it's a promise - and it starts with listening," said VA Secretary Doug Collins. This sentiment reflects VA's ongoing efforts to engage directly with veterans about their experiences by gathering their feedback to improve services.

What veterans are saying about their experience

The quarterly VA Trust survey measures the overall ease, effectiveness and emotional reso-



nance experienced by veterans. This quarter hit record highs:

* 77.3 percent of veterans said it was easy to get the care or services they needed.

* 81.4 percent said they got the care or services they needed.

* 79.5 percent said they felt like a valued customer when interacting with VA.

Veterans' feedback is essential for improving services across VA. Since May 2016, VA has sent nearly 124 million digital surveys and received more than 17.8 million responses - including over 6.1 million free-text comments where veterans describe their experiences in their

own words. These comments provide valuable insights into veterans' experiences, helping VA understand what is working well and what needs more attention.

How VA served Veterans this quarter

The numbers reveal a significant impact:

* Over 4.8 million veterans received VA health care, totaling more than 29 million clinical encounters including 19.2 million in-person appointments and 7.4 million telehealth or telephone appointments.

* 14.5 million calls were answered across VA contact centers. The Veterans Crisis

Partial Claim: VA home loan

FLEET RESERVE ASSOCIATION - In a critical oversight hearing before the House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee on March 27, VA Executive Director Patrick Zanderevan confirmed a timeline that puts thousands of sea service families at risk.

The new VA Partial Claims program (H.R. 1815) will not be operational until June 2026. This follows the May 2025 termination of the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase program, leaving a year long dead zone where struggling borrowers have no viable safety net.

FRA is particularly alarmed by VA waterfall rules that may

Line received over 292,000 calls (Dial 988, then press 1) and 45,500 calls were made to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans.

* Nearly 750,000 disability and pension claims, over 1 million education and supplemental claims, and about 170,900 home loan guarantees were processed.

Need support or want to ex-

force delinquent shipmates into a 15 percent monthly payment increase (\$150 to \$200 average) before they can even access assistance.

The operational hurdles for homebuyers extend beyond foreclosure risks. Subcommittee Chairman Derrick Van Orden (R-Wis.) highlighted how cosmetic appraisal red tape, such as chipped paint or missing handrails, continues to kill VA loan deals in competitive markets. Furthermore, VA seller concessions remain capped at 4 percent, while FHA and USDA loans allow up to 6 percent. This 2 percent disparity is a readiness killer in high speed markets like San Diego, Norfolk,

and Jacksonville, where Navy and Marine Corps families are routinely outbid by buyers using non-VA products simply because the math of the VA loan is less attractive to sellers.

Perhaps most damaging is the impact on the VA's specialized workforce. The hearing revealed that VA's rigid 5 year experience requirement for appraisers has created a shortage of qualified inspectors, delaying closings for members transitioning between duty stations.

The VA signaled a potential shift to a 1.5 to 2 year requirement to align with FHA standards, a move FRA supports to speed up the Home Port transition for our members. However, without immediate intervention, the VA estimates a recovery timeline that could see the backlog of delinquent loans persist well into the next fiscal year.

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FRA views this testimony as a clarion call for immediate legislative and administrative action.

https://www.fra.org/fra/Web/News_Publications/News_Bytes/

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SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

I'm on SS disability; Should I switch to regular Social Security?

Dear Rusty: Should I take my Social Security now at age 62, or wait till I am 65? I've been collecting SS disability due to health issues and was curious if I should wait or claim my regular Social Security retirement benefits now. Signed: Disabled but Wondering

Dear Disabled but Wondering: If you are now collecting Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits and you are still disabled, it would be a disadvantage to claim your SS retirement benefits at this time (age 62), or even at age 65. That's because your SSDI benefit is the same as your full retirement age (FRA) amount, as calculated for you at the point you became disabled. Born after 1959, your FRA is age 67, but you are already receiving your FRA benefit while on SS disability even though you have not yet reached your full retirement age. That full SSDI benefit will automatically convert to become your SS retirement benefit when you reach your full retirement age.

If you were to claim your normal SS retirement benefit any earlier than your SS full retirement age of 67, the amount you get would be reduced for claiming early. At your current age, you would likely get between 75% and 80% of what you are now receiving on SSDI (depending on your exact age in the month you claim), and at age 65 you would get about 87% of what you are now receiving on Social Security disability.

In other words, as long as your disability continues and you remain eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits, you should not switch to your normal SS retirement benefit, because you would get less money. And the resulting benefit reduction would be permanent.

Why won't Social Security give me my benefits?

Dear Rusty: I called the Social Security office, as well as went with my husband when he went to collect his Social Security. Because I work full-time (at about \$800/week), they said I could not file for my Social Security. Yet I seem to read articles all the time about people doing so.

My husband just filed for his benefits and is now collecting them. Out of the two of us, his Social Security will be larger. Please advise me. Signed: Wanting my Benefits

Dear Wanting my Benefits: If you have not yet reached your SS full retirement age (FRA) and you are working full time, you are likely being affected by Social Security's Annual Earnings Test, which limits how much you can earn while collecting Social Security prior to your FRA. Your FRA is somewhere between 66 and 67, depending on when you were born. The annual earnings limit for those collecting SS benefits prior to FRA in 2025 is \$23,400 (changes yearly) and, if that is exceeded, Social Security will take away benefits equal to \$1 for every \$2 you are over the limit. If you applied for your benefits and are still working, and were denied, it's likely because Social Security determined that your current annual earnings considerably exceed the earnings limit and, thus, you cannot collect benefits. That's because the penalty for exceeding the limit would be more than your benefit amount. FYI, the earnings limit will go away when you reach your full retirement age so, after FRA, you can claim your benefits even if you are still working. Or if you stop working before your FRA you can collect your SS benefits at that time.

None of this means you are losing money, because your monthly SS payment will continue to grow until you later claim (e.g., after you stop working, or only work part-time), or until you reach 70 years of age. When you later claim, your monthly benefit will be higher and, depending on your longevity, you may recover what you didn't get now because you are working. And that includes both your own SS retirement benefit and any spousal boost you may be entitled to from your husband.

So, my suggestion is this: as long as you are working full time and exceeding Social Security's annual earnings limit, continue to wait to claim your Social Security. Then, when you reach your full retirement age (again, between 66 and 67, depending on the year you were born), or if you stop working before that, go ahead and apply for Social Security again. At that time, your application will be approved, and you will be awarded your own earned SS retirement amount plus any additional amount you may be due as your husband's spouse. To be entitled to a spousal boost from your husband, your own FRA entitlement must be less than 50% of your husband's FRA entitlement. But the amount you get will be reduced if you claim before your full retirement age..

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Fueling the force: Nutrition's role in readiness

By Bernard Little,
WRNMMC Hospital
Communications

Bethesda, Md. — Fueling the body properly is essential to maintaining strength, endurance, and resilience across the force. According to experts at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and the Consortium for Health and Military Performance, or CHAMP, at the Uniformed Services University (USU), “nutrition is a mission-critical component of warrior readiness driving physical performance, cognitive function and mental resilience.”

Proper nutrition helps service members “sustain energy, reduce injury risk, accelerate recovery from intense activity, enhance overall combat effectiveness, and prepare them for duty in challenging environments.”

according to Robert Goldberg, a registered dietitian and certified diabetes care and education specialist in Outpatient Nutrition Services at Walter Reed, and officials at CHAMP.

March is observed annually as National Nutrition Month, and this year's theme, “Discover the Power of Nutrition,” encourages people to consider the role protein plays in their diet.

“The role protein plays in a person's diet is a hot topic these days and goes hand in hand with power and strength. People typically think they need more protein than they actually do,” said Goldberg.

New dietary guidelines from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prioritizes whole, nutritious foods, in-



cluding “high-quality, nutrient-dense protein from both animal and plant sources, paired with healthy fats from whole foods such as eggs, seafood, meats,

full-fat dairy, nuts, seeds, olives, and avocados.”

Goldberg noted that many food companies promote high-protein labels to make people

believe that they need more to be healthy.

The USDA's 2026 Real Food recommendations feature an updated and inverted pyramid guide emphasizing whole, nutrient-dense, and minimally processed foods. The model prioritizes daily intake of “whole, colorful, nutrient-dense” vegetables and fruits in their original “fresh form,” along with whole grains, healthy fats and proteins, while encouraging a reduction in added sugars and highly processed foods.

“Highly processed food has hollowed out our health, driving obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and early death. The truth is simple: real food restores health,” state USDA officials.

With increased attention on protein intake, Goldberg cautioned against overconsumption and stressed the importance of balance and hydration.

Some service members, many who train like athletes, believe they need massive amounts of protein and carbohydrates to build strength and endurance. However, consuming too much protein can increase saturated fat intake and raise the risk of heart disease, while also contributing

to digestive issues, dehydration, and cancer risk.

“Eating in an unhealthy manner can increase the risk for obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease,” said Goldberg.

“I'd recommend visualizing your mealtime plates as half of your plate being non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, salad, cucumber, etc., along with fresh fruit; roughly ¼ of the plate with high fiber starch such as brown rice, whole grain bread, oatmeal, etc.; roughly another ¼ of the plate with lean protein; and an additional serving of low-fat dairy on the side.”

He added that drinking water throughout the day helps maintain hydration and supports both injury prevention and weight management.

A healthy diet rich in vitamins and nutrients directly impacts mental clarity, alertness, and the ability to manage stress, according to CHAMP. “Proper, sustained nutrition helps prevent burnout and supports immune function, important for maintaining long-term physical health and avoiding illness.” This contributes to force and warrior readiness.

Navy psychologist earns CDR Erin Simmons Award for advancing warfighter readiness

Christopher Jones - Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms

TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif. — Lt. Andrew Crane, Psy.D., a Navy clinical psychologist formerly assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Twentynine Palms, received the Navy Psychology CDR Erin Simmons Award on Dec. 22, 2025, for leading impactful process improvements that expanded access to mental health care and strengthened operational readiness for Marines.

A native of Virginia Beach, Virginia, Crane detached from NMRTC Twentynine Palms in October 2025 and is now stationed at Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay with 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment. As the regimental OSCAR psychologist, he provides mental health support to three battalions and the regiment in direct support of the Marine Corps mission.

The CDR Erin Simmons Award honors the late Cmdr. Erin Simmons, an active-duty Navy psychologist renowned for her commitment to mental health, and recognizes Navy psychologists who design and implement meaningful programs while exemplifying leadership through teaching, mentoring and service. “This award was focused on process improvement and clinical program development as well as leadership implementation,” Crane said.

During his time at NMRTC Twentynine Palms, which supports Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms and its branch clinics in China Lake and Bridgeport, Crane led efforts to optimize personnel utilization within the mental health clinic by developing new standard operating procedures and expanding the role of behavioral health technicians. Those changes reduced patient wait times by 50%, increasing timely access to care for service members. He also leveraged virtual



Capt. Janiese Cleckley (left), commanding officer of Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Twentynine Palms, presents a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal to Lt. Andrew Crane during a command award ceremony at Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital, Oct. 3, 2025. Crane was later recognized with the Navy Psychology-sponsored CDR Erin Simmons Award for his efforts to expand access to mental health care

health resources to broaden availability, increasing access to care by 780 appointments annually. In addition, Crane strengthened collaboration between medical staff and Marine Corps commands with a focus on medical readiness, helping eliminate barriers to care and better align mental health services with operational demands.

Crane's efforts centered on creating multiple pathways for Marines and Sailors to seek support. These included psychoeducation sessions led by behavioral health technicians, greater awareness of chaplain resources and connecting service members with virtual providers when appropriate.

“Ideally, this standard for mental health technician utilization will expand to other clinics increasing access to care and reducing wait times,” Crane said.

The impact of Crane's work at NMRTC Twentynine Palms extended beyond internal clinic metrics. By reducing wait times and expanding appointment availability,

his initiatives directly supported the readiness of Marines aboard Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, the Marine Corps' largest live-fire training installation. Faster access to care and diversified treatment pathways ensured service members could address mental health concerns while maintaining focus on mission requirements.

“I would encourage leaders to consider innovative strategies when assessing problems or barriers to success,” he said. “Additionally, I would encourage Navy officers to invest in their corpsman, all the accomplishments in the mental health clinic were significantly supported by our corpsman. Their willingness to learn, implement, and sustain programs was a key to our success.”

Crane's recognition with the CDR Erin Simmons Award highlights the vital role Navy psychologists play in supporting the warfighter and advancing the Navy Medicine mission. As he continues his service

in Hawaii, he carries forward the model he helped build at Twentynine Palms—one focused on efficiency, access, and readiness—reinforcing the enduring connection between psychological health and mission success.



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Sat., May 23, 7pm	NAZ Wranglers at San Diego Strike Force*
Fri., June 19, 7pm	Vegas Knight Hawks at San Diego Strike Force*
Mon., July 6, 6pm	Arizona Rattlers at San Diego Strike Force*
Sat., July 18, 8pm	New Mexico Chupacabras at San Diego Strike Force*
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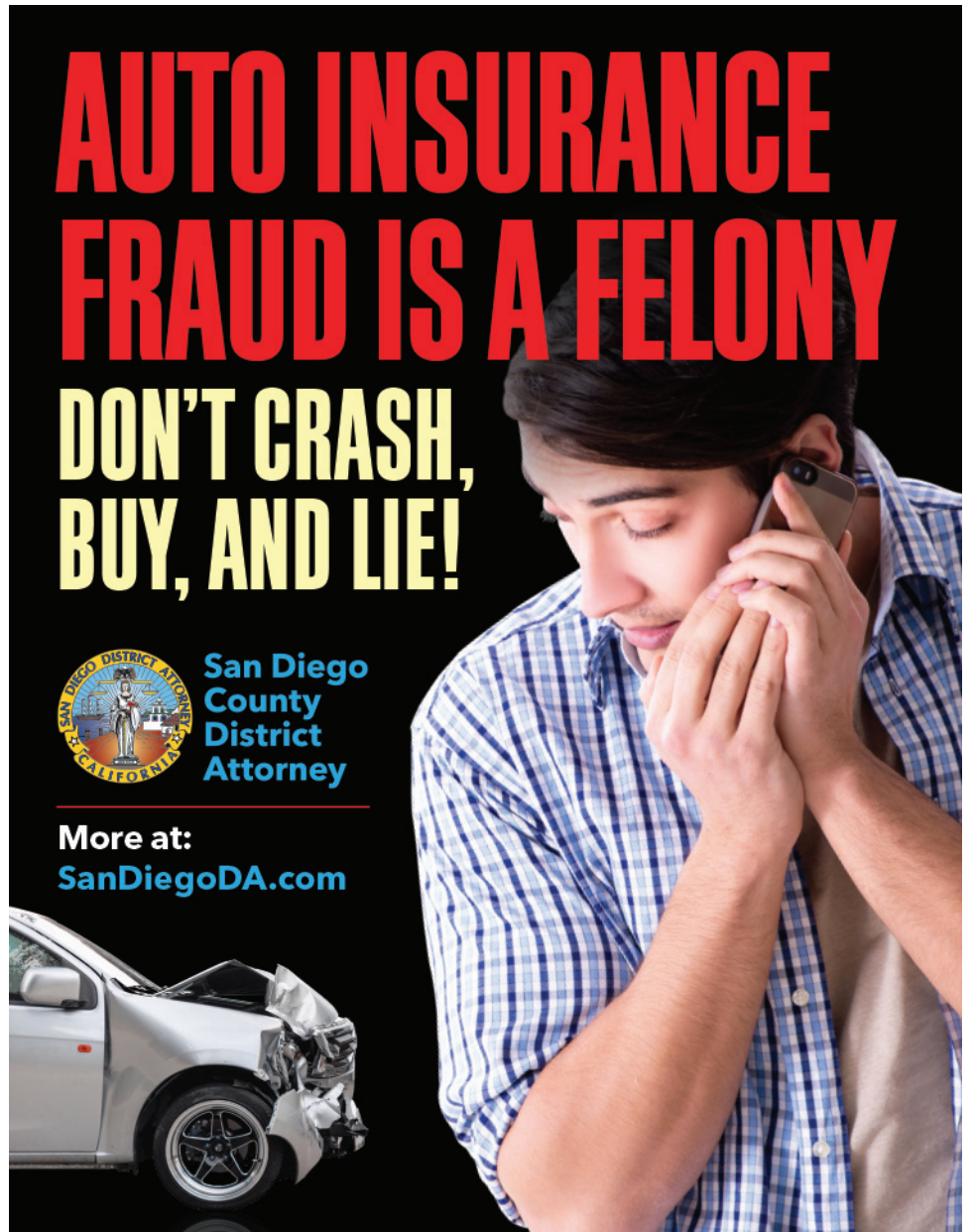
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