



The group also warned of scammers offering “cash payments or other incentives around obtaining a COVID vaccination.”

Thanks to legislation approved last month by Congress, all veterans, their spouses and caregivers are eligible to receive coronavirus vaccines through the Department of Veterans Affairs free of cost. Timing and availability of those shots depends on local supplies.

But officials have emphasized that individuals do not need to pay to receive a dose, and outside groups promising quicker delivery in exchange for cash are taking advantage of confused or frustrated veterans.

“And as May is Military Appreciation Month, it’s a great time for everyone to become informed and spread the word about scams targeting veterans in order to, in some small way, help repay the tremendous debt we all owe those who have served.”

An AARP survey from 2017 found that veterans are twice as likely to be victims of scammers as the general public, with about one in six veterans reporting losing money to a fake offer of benefits or assistance.

Postal service officials warn all veterans not to give out personal information over the phone to strangers, especially bank account numbers, credit card numbers or Social Security numbers.

They also said any veteran with questions about an unsolicited offer or program should check out the deal with a family member, friend, or local Veterans Affairs office. Callers who demand veterans act immediately on such a transaction are like scammers.

More information on scams and protections for veterans is available at the [Postal Inspection Service web site](#)

### **Veterans group shifts focus from military voting to bigger election reforms**

Operation Protect Democracy, which grew out of the [Count Every Hero Campaign](#) founded last year, is calling for veterans to take a key role in election reform across the country and ensuring that all eligible voters have access to ballots in federal, state and local elections.

Organizers said they were inspired to shift the message in part because of widespread misinformation about the 2020 presidential election results, and the attempted insurrection at the Capitol on Jan. 6.

[Leo Shane III](#)



A voter deposits his advance ballot in a dropbox Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020, in Mission, Kan. (Charlie Riedel/AP)

A group of high-profile veterans and defense leaders who last fall lobbied for [military voters' access](#) to the polls is now shifting their campaign to ensuring free and fair elections for all Americans.

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“The fact that veterans participated in that was troubling for us,” said retired Marine Corps Gen. Tony Zinni, chairman of the group. “And of late, legislation seems to be proliferating to try to restrict eligible voters in many ways and make it more difficult to vote.

“These things really prompted us to say let’s keep this nonpartisan group together,” said Zinni, whose final tour of duty was running U.S. Central Command from 1997 to 2000. “We honestly felt the American people would look to us to make sure that we’re sending the right message, and showing that we support and defend the Constitution.”

The group — which includes former Army Secretary Luis Caldera, former Navy Secretary Sean O’Keefe, former Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James and former Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey — is planning public awareness efforts on voting rights, voting opportunities and civic literacy.

They also have pledged to work for “secure elections free of foreign interference” and “transparency and effective oversight of the electoral system” through advocacy and lobbying efforts.

“We proved over nearly 250 years now that our way of government is intended to be self-correcting and self-healing,” said retired Gen. John Jumper, former Chief of Staff of the Air Force. “But that requires confidence and requires participation by a citizenry that is well informed.”

Although group members describe themselves as “cross-partisan,” the group is backing the Democratic-backed For the People Act, currently pending in Congress. The legislation has been hailed by President Joe Biden as needed reforms to the country’s election processes but attacked by Republicans as a partisan “power grab” by their political opponent

Jumper said the goal isn’t to back any one party or plan, but to start a broader conversation on election improvements.

“We are non-partisan,” he said. “We formed [this group] to ensure that the military votes were counted, and in doing so we found that there were obstacles to voting. We all support the kind of legislation that enables access rather than builds obstacles to citizens rights to vote.”

More information on the new campaign is available at the [group’s web site](#)

**Starting May 1, military exchanges open to more than half a million DoD and Coast Guard civilians**



Military exchanges in the U.S. open up to DoD and Coast Guard civilians on May 1. (AAFES)

More than half a million Department of Defense and Coast Guard civilians will be able to [shop in military exchanges in the U.S.](#), beginning May 1. That's earlier than expected.

The venues include Army and Air Force Exchange Service, or AAFES, stores; Navy exchanges; Marine Corps exchanges; and Coast Guard exchanges. The stores offer tax-free purchases at varying discounts.

The new benefit applies to appropriated fund and non-appropriated fund civilian employees, authorizing them to shop at military exchange stores in the United States and the U.S. territories and possessions. Previously, in-store exchange access for DOD and Coast Guard civilian employees was limited to those on service agreements, assigned overseas in foreign countries and the U.S. territories and possessions, and access was limited to overseas exchanges.

The DoD directive authorizing the change was effective April 12, directing that these new patrons be allowed access within 30 days. This access comes two weeks earlier than that deadline.

There are about 575,00 newly eligible DoD civilian customers. There are about 796,000 DoD civilians in the U.S., but about 221,000 of them already have exchange benefits as military retirees or spouses, for example. There are about 7,000 Coast Guard civilians.

The new shopping access doesn't include the purchase of military uniforms, tobacco products or alcohol.

In order to shop at the exchanges, a customer must show a valid civilian Common Access Card at the cash register or at the door, depending on the store. A civilian employee who hasn't been issued a CAC can shop at the military resale activity on the installation where they're employed by showing an official proof of employment document dated within 12 months, and a valid government photo ID. Otherwise, access to the stores is not linked to the employees' work assignments.

In-person exchange shopping won't be available to retired DoD or Coast Guard civilians. However, they will get a benefit later this year: online-only exchange shopping will be available by mid-October for all active and retired DOD and Coast Guard civilian employees with a U.S. mailing address, including territories and possessions and APO and FPO addresses.

Family members of civilians won't be allowed to shop in these on-base discount department stores, or in the online stores, but the authorized shoppers can make purchases for themselves and their dependents.

Exchanges have the capacity and merchandise to handle the expanded shopping base, said AAFES Director and CEO Tom Shull, in an announcement. The new shopping privilege "brings convenience to civilians working on installations. They can stop by the exchange for essentials on breaks or to and from work instead of shopping outside of the gate —and 100 percent of exchange earnings go right back to the military

Every exchange shopper helps improve the military community and the exchange benefit for service members and their families, said Patricia "Patty" Montes Barron, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy, in an announcement. "We welcome our DOD and Coast Guard civilian employees to take advantage of the convenience and familiarity of military exchanges. Shopping at our military exchanges is a quality of life experience that serves the community in ways no other commercial entity does."

The expansion is expected to help boost the military resale system and MWR programs, which have faced a number of obstacles over recent years. Based on projections of buying patterns, DoD officials estimate exchange sales could increase by about \$287 million a year, with a potential increase of \$48 million in profits going back to support the services' MWR programs, according to Berry Patrick, in the DoD Office of Morale, Welfare and Recreation and Nonappropriated Fund Policy, who spoke in October during a virtual conference of the American Logistics Association.

[Karen Jowers](#)



### Verse of the Day

*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:5 KJV

## **YOU TOO CAN BE A MEMBER OF THE VETERANS FOR CHRIST, INC.**

Sign up online to become an associate member. The annual associate membership of \$120.00 which can be used as a tax deduction for supporters. Registration fees can be paid online through our PayPal account. You will get a free VFC T-shirt with your associate membership. Your tax deductible membership fee will support the VFC mission.

All Honorably Discharged Veterans are welcome to come and observe the VFC; feel free to ask questions and learn more. If we don't know the answer we know someone who does. Please browse our web site [www.veteransforchristinc.org](http://www.veteransforchristinc.org). There you'll find information on many subjects of interest to veterans. You'll also find a Newsletter for your branch of service and links to Social Security and many other links with an abundance of information.

Our monthly meetings are on hold until the pandemic is cleared and a vaccine is developed. No meetings are being held at the Wesley Chapel Library at 2861 Wesley Chapel Rd., Decatur, Ga. Our meetings are the fourth Thursday of every month and start at 6:30 (PM) for approximately one hour and a half, unless otherwise advertised. We will be respectful of your time.

Thank you for your interest in the VFC. We look forward to communicating and fellowshiping with you soon. We are looking for a corporate sponsor for our VFC Gerald Prince College Scholarship which is donated each September at our Anniversary Luncheon

"Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong." 1Cor 16:13

Sincerely,

*William A. Harris, Jr.*

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired  
President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.

[www.veteransforchristinc.org](http://www.veteransforchristinc.org)

## **Need to contact VA?**

[Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255](#) and press 1, [Chat](#), or Text 838255

[Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838](#) or [Chat](#)

[White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311](#)

## **Don't know what number to call?**

[1-800-MyVA411 \(800-698-2411\)](#) is never the wrong number