

OPINION > COMMENTARY

## Commentary: Vital bill supports veterans and service organizations



By **JAY REDDICK** | [jreddick@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:jreddick@orlandosentinel.com) | Orlando Sentinel  
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Service runs deep in my family. Like many veterans here in Central Florida and across the state, I was raised to believe that wearing the uniform wasn't about praise, it was about showing up for others. That belief doesn't end when the uniform comes off. It carries on in our communities, in our neighborhoods, and in the local American Legion Posts that quietly keep serving long after the parades are over.

That's because our oath to the United States, and to our communities, doesn't come with an end date. It isn't something we set aside when our service ends. For veterans, that oath is for life, and it continues in the way we serve our neighbors every day.

That's why House Bill 609 and Senate Bill 1282 matter, and why I'm grateful to Rep. Michael Owen and Sen. Jonathan Marin for standing up for veterans and the hometown organizations that support them.

If you've ever driven past a Legion Post, you know it's more than just a building. It's where veterans gather, where service continues, and where neighbors come together when times get tough. In many small towns and rural communities, the Legion Post remains the heart of the community.

One of the ways Posts keep the doors open and the lights on is through charitable bingo. It's not flashy. It's not about profit. It's a tradition that's been part of Florida communities for decades, bringing folks together while raising money for scholarships, youth programs, and veterans who need a helping hand.

Bingo has been part of Florida law since the 1960s, but the statute itself has grown outdated and stale. This legislation simply brings that archaic language into the modern era by updating the law to reflect how charitable bingo is actually conducted today and aligning it with long-established court decisions. Right now, confusion over what equipment is allowed leaves good-faith, volunteer-run organizations unsure if they're even following the rules. That's not right, and it's not fair to veterans who are just trying to give back.

This legislation fixes that. It doesn't change Florida's gaming landscape. It simply modernizes the statute and provides clear, common-sense guidance so veterans and nonprofits can continue fundraising without fear of accidentally breaking the law.

And those bingo dollars? They go straight back into the community.

They fund Boys State and Girls State programs that teach young Floridians leadership and civic responsibility. They provide scholarships, youth mentorship and support for military families. They help veterans transition back to civilian life and ensure no one is left behind.

For many veterans, charitable bingo is more than fundraising — it's a way to keep that lifelong oath alive. It gives veterans a reason to stay engaged, to serve with purpose, and to strengthen the communities they once defended in uniform.

Owen and Martin understand that honoring veterans isn't just about words, it's about action. By supporting this legislation, we are helping protect a simple, community-based tradition that allows veterans to keep giving back.

Florida's veterans have always been there when their communities needed them. HB 609 and SB 1282 make sure Florida continues to stand with them — today, tomorrow, and for life.

*Stuart Scott is the Legislative Chair of the American Legion, Department of Florida, and a U.S. Air Force combat veteran.*

2026 > January > 13