

# CONTROLLER JOHN CHIANG

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## Chiang Presents Lost Medal of Honor to Family of Pearl Harbor Hero

*Unclaimed Property Law Reforms Allow Controller to Locate Surviving Family*

**SAN DIEGO** – State Controller John Chiang today presented a lost Congressional Medal of Honor and Navy Cross to the family of the late Lieutenant Commander Jackson Charles Pharris. Pharris received the Medal of Honor, the country’s highest military award for valor, from President Harry Truman for acts of bravery during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Both medals were presented to the family at a ceremony hosted by Vice Admiral Terry Etnyre at the Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado.

The return of the medals was the direct result of reforms to the state’s Unclaimed Property Program that were sponsored by Chiang and signed into law in August. The new law (SB 86) lifts restrictions that have prevented the State Controller’s Office from notifying what is effectively 80% of the owners of lost or forgotten cash, securities and other items in the state’s care.

“For the past 20 years, a series of misguided statutory changes have prevented this office from notifying individuals whose lost or abandoned property was sent to the State for safe-keeping,” Chiang said. “Recently-enacted reforms are restoring my office’s ability to aggressively find and notify Californians that we may be holding their cash, securities, jewelry or other valuables.”

A safe deposit box owned by Pharris’ late daughter was turned over to the State in 2006. After the reform legislation was signed into law, the Controller was authorized to find Lt. Cmdr. Pharris’ family and arrange for the return of the medals.

“Today we returned something truly priceless,” Chiang said. “These tokens of a nation’s gratitude are not the state’s property – they are part of this family’s heritage – and to that family they belong.”

Enacted in 1959, California’s Unclaimed Property Law requires financial institutions, utility companies and other businesses to turn over abandoned property for safekeeping, rather than have it lost during mergers or bankruptcies, drawn down by “service” or “storage” fees, or simply used by private interests for personal gain.

Although the Controller, under the new law, now is able to send individual notices to an estimated 650,000 more people a year, he continues to encourage Californians to visit his web site at [www.sco.ca.gov](http://www.sco.ca.gov), where individuals can search for their property. The website is visited over 2 million times each year.

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