



January 24, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *Major Richard Star Act!* This act aims to allow combat-injured veterans to receive both their earned retirement pay and disability compensation without offset. *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far. Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.*

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

February 22-26, 2025 – The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated [here](#).

**PENTAGON TO SEND 1,500 TROOPS TO BORDER TO START TRUMP-
ORDERED SURGE**

This article's original publication can be found [here](#).



The U.S. military is sending around 1,500 active-duty troops to the country's southern border, the acting secretary of defense said Wednesday.

"This is just the beginning," Acting Secretary of Defense Robert Salesses wrote in a statement.

The troops consist of 1,000 soldiers and 500 Marines, who will work with Customs and Border Protection in El Paso, Texas, and San Diego, California. Their job will be to build temporary barriers, monitor movement across the border and maintain equipment in the area, according to a senior military official, briefing reporters Wednesday on the condition of anonymity.

The deployments include other military equipment, such as drones, 72 helicopters and four aircraft to move personnel. A further set of intelligence analysts will support existing work to monitor the border.

The surge brings the total number of active-duty troops on the country's southern border to around 4,000. More may follow, and their duties may expand, but for now, none of them will be used for law enforcement, the official said.

“This is an initial step, and we are anticipating many further missions,” a separate senior defense official said at the Wednesday briefing.

The first operations will start within 24-48 hours, officials said.

The steps are part of President Donald Trump’s early attempt to tighten America’s immigration system — a mission for which he plans to use the military far more expansively than his predecessors.

Alongside the deployments, the Defense Department will also start conducting deportation flights for 5,000 immigrants already detained in El Paso and San Diego, the officials said. They couldn’t yet say where those flights would land.

On his first day back in office Monday, President Donald Trump declared a state of emergency on the border with Mexico. The designation will make it easier for the White House to shift around money intended to counter drug trafficking and illegal migration, which Trump has claimed amounts to an “invasion.”

The language may also make it easier to use the U.S. military, which is restricted from law enforcement activities on American soil.

In his first term, Trump sent more than 5,000 active-duty troops to the border in response to a migrant caravan traveling north through Mexico.

Earlier this week, Trump ordered Northern Command — in charge of the military for the continental United States — to submit a plan within 10 days to “seal” America’s borders. In a further 30 days, NORTHCOM will also need to update its plans to counter “unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking and other criminal activities,” the order said.

Spokespersons for the Defense Department said NORTHCOM will meet the timelines. Additionally, the White House asked the secretary of defense and head of the Department of Homeland Security to send a report within 90 days on whether the president should invoke the Insurrection Act, a 200-year-old law that would allow the military to deploy on U.S. territory. Trump considered invoking the law during the widespread protests against police violence and racism in the summer of 2020.

The act was last invoked during the 1992 riots in Los Angeles after the police beating of Rodney King.

On Monday, Trump also fired Adm. Linda Fagan, head of the U.S. Coast Guard, reportedly due to her record on enforcing border security. Her removal is the first in what the president has promised to be a series of firings targeted at military officers he considers too focused on social issues, such as diversity.

On Tuesday, the Coast Guard pledged to surge forces across America's maritime borders, including around the southeast, southwest and Pacific.

"Per the President's Executive Orders, I have directed my operational commanders to immediately surge assets — cutters, aircraft, boats and deployable specialized forces — to increase Coast Guard presence and focus," said Adm. Kevin Lunday, the Coast Guard's acting commandant.

NEW TRICARE CONTRACTS BRING HEALTH CARE CHANGES

The article's original publication can be found [here](#).

With the start of new Tricare contracts, beneficiaries can expect some changes to their military health care, including the expansion of some benefits, according to military advocates and officials.

Defense Health Agency officials said the new contracts, which went into effect Jan. 1, will provide more efficient referral transfers between the East and West Tricare regions; greater access to highly specialized medical and surgical care; better access to telehealth appointments; and improved choices for beneficiaries, including tools that will help them quickly identify providers with the best outcomes.

The new generation of Tricare contracts is designed to improve care for the 9.6 million beneficiaries in the military health system, officials said.

"It's my understanding most of the Tricare contract changes will happen behind the scenes," said Karen Ruedisueli, director for health affairs in government relations for Military Officers Association of America, a military advocacy nonprofit. "Once we get past the transition phase, we hope networks will be robust so most military families can maintain continuity of care with their civilian providers."

The new contracts will help streamline the process for military families to access specialty care when they move, a long-standing goal for MOAA, Ruedisueli said. The contracts reportedly allow Tricare to start providing Tricare Prime beneficiaries with referrals for specialty care at the new duty station before they leave their current location during a permanent change of station move.

The new contracts don't affect those with Tricare for Life, the U.S. Family Health Plan or a Tricare health plan overseas.

Also part of the new contracts are a referral transition period and a waiver policy update.

TriWest will accept unexpired referrals and preauthorizations from the previous West Region contractor, Health Net Federal Services, that were issued before Jan. 1. Those will be valid through June 30 or when they expire, whichever comes first.

For those who live in states that have moved to the West Region — Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and Wisconsin — TriWest will also accept valid referrals and preauthorizations from Humana Military. They will be valid until they expire or until June 30, whichever comes first.

As always, Tricare Prime beneficiaries must have referrals from their primary care manager for necessary medical treatment that their primary care manager, or PCM, can't provide. Preauthorizations are more comprehensive reviews before certain services are covered.

The new contracts have also changed the drive-time waiver policy for Tricare Prime beneficiaries in both regions. Those who move to a location that's more than a 30-minute drive — but less than 100 miles — away from their military hospital or clinic can seamlessly continue to receive care from their current primary care manager. No action is required on the part of the beneficiary who wants to continue with the current PCM, unlike previous requirements.

Those beneficiaries will get a letter notifying them that they are outside the 30-minute drive window. Those who don't respond can keep their current PCM, while those who want to change can follow the letter's instructions.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we will spotlight an individual every week. These individuals demonstrate exceptional grassroots activism by meeting with/contacting their Congressional Representative/Senator to advocate for veterans. Efforts like these truly make a difference and give veterans a voice in Congress.

Eric Mayer, Danny Muth, and Burrell Parmer, Texas

Gentlemen, for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities, we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

This week, Fred Brock American Legion Post 828 in San Antonio was joined by Representative Greg Casar. The Representative discussed pending legislation for the year and emphasized the need to protect the Coast Guard. He also discussed the importance of protecting veterans' benefits.

Thank you, members of Post 828, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

If you have made a Grassroots effort and would like to be considered for next week's "Legionnaire of the Week," please fill out the Congressional Contact Report Form [here](#). You can also email us at grassroots@legion.org with the details.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress on ***The Veteran's Role in Supporting the Military?*** Check out our [information papers](#) in the [Legislative Toolkit](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org or ejohnson@legion.org.

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the [key legislation section of VoterVoice](#).

***Register for Action Alerts today at
<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>***



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 9:00 am on Friday, January 17, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, January 28, 9:30 AM: Senate Armed Services Committee – Full Committee to Receive Testimony on Defense Innovation and Acquisition Reform
- Tuesday, January 28, 10:30 AM: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – Protecting Veteran Choice: Examining VA's Community Care Program

HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

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