



January 31, 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 65<sup>th</sup> 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](#).

## **THE LEGION'S AGENDA FOR CONGRESS**

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



The American Legion is revving up its advocacy efforts, highlighted by dozens of crucial topics important to veterans and their families. The Legislative Agenda for the first session of the 119th Congress is now available for [download here](#).

Think of the agenda as a road map for the Legion's advocacy efforts during this session of Congress.

"I am proud of the work that has gone into shaping our key topics on behalf of the nation's veterans, servicemembers and their families," American Legion Executive Director of Government Affairs Mario Marquez said. "Our volunteers, staff and senior leadership have prioritized the key issues that The American Legion is taking the lead on. Our team will use these as guideposts throughout this year while also being nimble enough to support other high priority bills as situations change."

Matthew Shuman has witnessed first-hand progress the Legion has made on Capitol Hill. Shuman, who is the Legion's Legislative Commission chairman, is regularly on the Hill as part of his role as director of Congressional and Military Affairs for Philips.

"There is a general buzz and excitement around the new Congress," he said. "And The American Legion is getting noticed by policymakers. The Legion has been invited to testify more regularly and I would expect even more of that to come. Our lawmakers want to understand how they can best serve our nation's veterans. And The American Legion represents the strongest voice to do that."

Among the top-level issues The American Legion will be working with Congress to enact:

- **Suicide prevention:** In an effort to win “The War Within,” The American Legion urges Congress to fully fund VA’s suicide-prevention outreach budget, mental health treatment services and peer-support programs.
- **Community care:** The American Legion urges Congress to hold the Office of Community Care accountable for the continuity of veteran care, improve communication between VA and community providers, and strengthen transportation services to community care appointments for rural health veterans.
- **Compensation and Pension (C&P) examinations:** Congress must ensure that VA holds its vendors to higher C&P examination standards. The quality review process for VA-contracted medical examiners must be made transparent, and Congress must ensure more effective incentives, stricter oversight mechanisms, mandatory quality reviews and severe penalties for non-compliance.
- **Quality of Life:** The Legion is calling for accelerated implementation and oversight of approved funding for military pay, benefits and quality-of-life infrastructure programs.
- **Border security:** The American Legion implores lawmakers to work together on behalf of Americans and Border Patrol agents to strengthen national security by stopping threats at our borders.
- **Fund State Department and foreign operations:** As DoD prepares for a potential conflict with China, America needs a robust and well-funded foreign service to counter authoritarian influence.
- **End veteran homelessness:** Policies must include comprehensive support for at-risk and homeless veterans, including counseling, assistance in accessing care and benefits, financial and career resources, and business development opportunities.

While the Legion’s legislative team is now actively working with congressional staffs, there is much more to come in the months ahead. That includes The American Legion’s 65th Washington Conference, set for Feb. 22-26 at the Washington Hilton Hotel, 1919 Connecticut Ave.

“Washington is all about relationships,” American Legion Legislative Director Julia Mathis said. “We’re actively engaged on the Hill and with our members in order to continue our longstanding tradition of ushering in legislation that improves the lives of our nation’s veterans.”

## CHAIRMEN BOST, MORAN INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO CARE FOR VETERANS

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

Today, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mike Bost (R-Ill.), and Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), introduced legislation to increase access to care for veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) providers in the community.

The *Veterans' Assuring Critical Care Expansions to Support Servicemembers (ACCESS) Act of 2025* would establish existing community care access standards as the baseline standard of care for veterans seeking care in the community, increase access to life-saving treatment programs for veterans with mental health conditions or addiction and expand the list of criteria VA is required to take into account when determining whether it is in a veteran's best medical interest to refer a veteran to the community to include veteran preference and continuity of care.

"The VA community care program is a promise to veterans to provide local, on-time care – which is why we must ensure that VA facilities across the country are focused squarely on providing care for veterans, regardless of whether its in-house or in their community," **said Chairman Bost**. "But during the Biden-Harris administration, House Republicans uncovered disturbing stories of VA bureaucrats intentionally restricting veterans' healthcare choice in an effort to keep veterans stuck in line in the VA system. That's dead wrong. Chairman Moran and my bill, the *Veterans' ACCESS Act*, would rightfully protect and preserve the intent of the *MISSION Act* and the VA community care program so that no bureaucrat can stand in the way of veterans accessing the healthcare they have earned – whether that is inside or outside the VA. When VA inserts itself as the sole decision maker and plays politics with veterans' health, people get hurt, cancer patients can't get their treatment, and families spend more time arguing with bureaucrats than focusing on their mental health – it's high time we change that."

"No veteran – especially one facing cancer, addiction, chronic pain or a mental health condition – should have to wait weeks or months for the care they need or have to fight to receive the community care referrals they are entitled to by law," said Chairman Moran. "Yet, that is the reality for far too many veterans in the VA health care system today. Veterans deserve prompt, high-quality care and greater flexibility in choosing when, where, and how to use the health care benefits they have earned through their service. This legislation will help make certain that VA delivers on those promises. I thank Rep. Bost for joining me in introducing this legislation, and I look forward to working with him

to see it signed into law. Veterans and their families are counting on it.”

Introduction of the *Veterans’ ACCESS Act* followed recent hearings in both the [House](#) and the [Senate](#) where veterans, family members, and advocates [testified about unacceptably long wait times, restrictions on community care referrals](#) and other bureaucratic barriers that prevent veterans – including those with mental health conditions or addiction that put them at high-risk of suicide – from accessing life-saving care from VA.

**The full text of the legislation can be found [here](#). More information on the *Veterans’ ACCESS Act* can be found [here](#).**

The *Veterans’ ACCESS Act* is supported by the following members in the House: **Health Subcommittee Chairwoman Dr. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-Iowa), Oversight & Investigations Subcommittee Chairwoman Rep. Jen Kiggans (R-Va.), Rep. Jack Bergman (R-Mich.), Rep. Abe Hamadeh (R-Ariz.), Rep. Tom Barrett (R-Mich.), and Rep. Kimberlyn King-Hinds (R-Northern Mariana Islands).**

The *Veterans’ ACCESS Act* is supported by veterans service organizations, advocates and stakeholders including: Wounded Warrior Project, The American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Paralyzed Veterans of America, America’s Warrior Partnership, Vietnam Veterans of America, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, HunterSeven Foundation, Concerned Veterans for America, Americans for Prosperity, the National Defense Committee, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), and Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

## **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.

## Leo Paquin, New Hampshire

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

This week, Leo met with Rep. Chris Pappas after the Congressman asked for input from New Hampshire VSOs. Leo, along with representatives from DAV and VFW, met at American Legion Post 2 (Manchester, New Hampshire) to speak with Rep. Pappas. They discussed things like paying the Coast Guard, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard quality of life for enlisted, dental care, hiring freeze exemption for the VA, and other potential effects on VSO service officers located at VA facilities.

*Thank you, Leo, 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](mailto: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](mailto:grassroots@legion.org) or [ejohnson@legion.org](mailto: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 31, NO hearings are scheduled.

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](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)