



February 7, 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.*

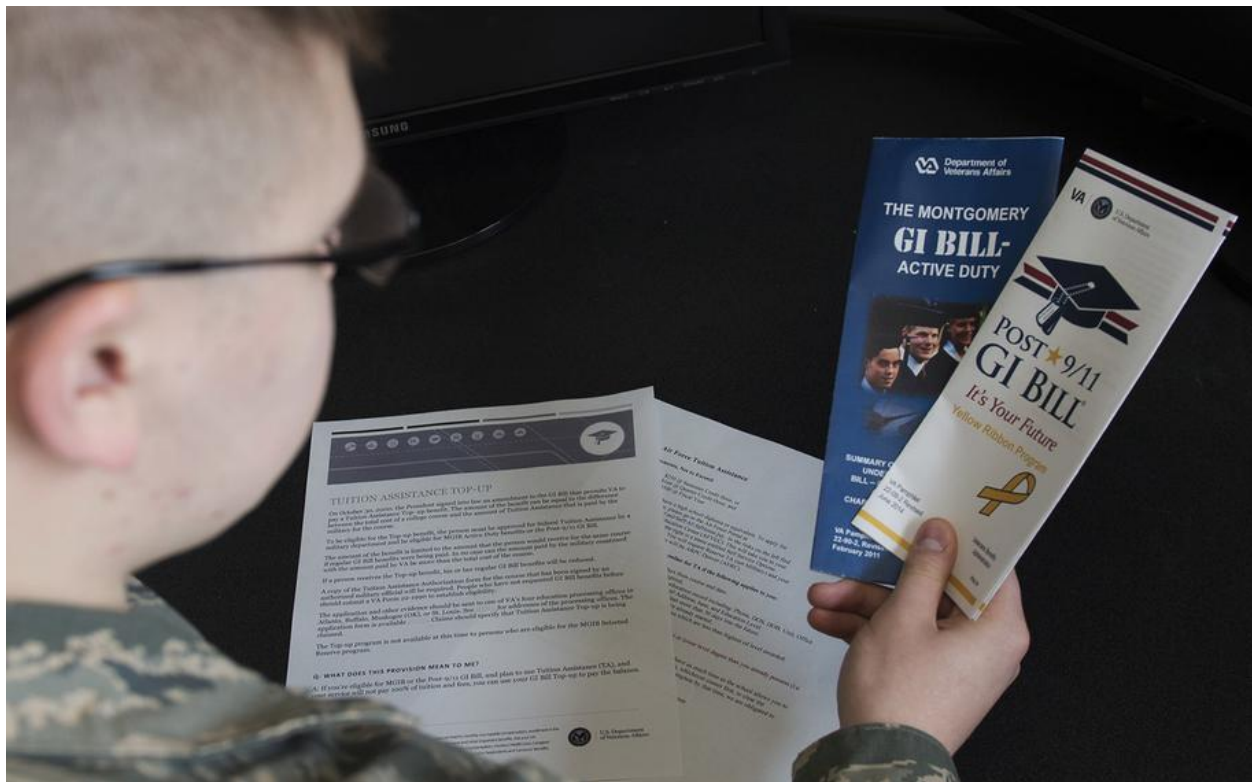
Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

## 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](#).

**KEEP THE IMPROVED 90/10 RULE AND AVOID A \$1.6B PRICE TAG –  
PAID BY TAXPAYERS, COSTING VETERANS**

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



After years of careful negotiation, bipartisan agreement, and strong support from [50 veterans service organizations](#) over nearly a decade of advocacy, Congress finally closed the 90/10 loophole. This long-standing policy flaw allowed subpar “colleges” to be completely dependent on taxpayer dollars and incentivized them to target veterans for their GI Bill. Closing the loophole and upholding the integrity of [the 90/10 Rule](#) was a victory for common sense, accountability and fiscal responsibility.

Washington rarely works as it should, but this was an exception. [Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle](#), led by Republican Sens. Bill Cassidy and James Lankford, came together to protect service members and veterans from being blindsided by low-quality programs. Now, some in Congress are trying to undo this achievement; and, worse yet, they’re attempting to sneak this through via the budget reconciliation process.

The numbers speak for themselves. [According to the House Budget Committee Republican staff](#), repealing the 90/10 Rule would cost taxpayers an estimated \$1.6 billion over the next 10 years. That’s \$1.6 billion that could be used to fix the system, expand job training programs, or go toward deficit reduction. If anything, Congress should strengthen market forces in higher education, ensuring that schools compete based on value and results, not just their ability to soak up federal money.

A real business model relies on private consumers. No successful company relies entirely on government handouts. And, yet, some colleges used to get exactly that — unlimited access to taxpayer dollars, with no accountability for outcomes. That's not capitalism; that's corporate welfare. It's the worst kind of handout, one that subsidizes failing institutions instead of fostering a competitive, high-quality education marketplace.

This problem isn't theoretical. Predatory institutions have repeatedly collapsed under their own financial mismanagement, leaving veterans and taxpayers to foot the bill. Schools such as [ITT Tech](#) and [Corinthian Colleges](#) were entirely dependent on taxpayer dollars, unable to attract private revenue. Simultaneously, they aggressively recruited veterans, collected their hard-earned GI Bill dollars, and eventually shuttered without a trace. Veterans were left with worthless degrees, or, in many cases, no degree at all.

The fight to close this loophole took more than a decade. It was driven by veterans advocates who saw firsthand how bad schools gamed the system. They heard from veterans who had been misled by aggressive recruiters, promised job placement that never materialized or steered into programs that weren't even accredited. In some cases, recruiters even [targeted Gold Star families](#) — those who had lost a loved one in service — during their grief support because their survivors' benefits were guaranteed tuition dollars.

Closing the loophole also garnered [full consensus in a Department of Education](#) rulemaking, even with representatives of for-profit colleges supporting the deal. Today's proposed repeal in the budget reconciliation isn't about improving education; it's about making it easier for subpar schools that cannot attract private revenue to access federal money without oversight. That's it. It's a money grab, plain and simple.

Congress has tough budget choices to make. Members on both sides of the aisle have called for cutting wasteful spending, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used effectively and reducing the deficit. Repealing the 90/10 Rule flies in the face of all that. Instead of bending to special interests lobbying for a handout, Congress should be standing firm in favor of their bipartisan solutions. Veterans deserve a real education for their hard-earned GI Bill benefits — one that prepares them for the workforce, helps them build careers and sets them up for long-term success. If a private company is unable to attract a single dollar of private revenue, that should be a major red flag.

Lawmakers should oppose costly handouts to subpar schools especially in a time when Washington is looking to cut costs. Congress got it right the first time. Congress can save an easy \$1.6 billion and should leave the 90/10 Rule alone.

## **SENATE EASILY CONFIRMS COLLINS AS VA SECRETARY**

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

The Senate voted Tuesday to confirm former Rep. Doug Collins as Veterans Affairs secretary, capping off the former Georgia GOP congressman's smooth journey to become a member of President Donald Trump's Cabinet.

The 77-23 vote came after Collins previously sailed through committee and easily cleared the simple majority threshold needed to invoke cloture on his nomination last week.

Republican senators praised Collins, who has served as an Air Force Reserve chaplain since 2002, on the chamber floor ahead of his confirmation.

Senate Majority Whip John Barrasso, R-Wyo., said Collins would "improve veterans' access to care," while addressing the "alarming" rate of veteran suicide and homelessness.

Meanwhile, Sen. Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, said Collins' time as a lawmaker means he "understands the importance of being accountable" to Congress.

"Rep. Collins, a veteran himself, recognizes the challenges veterans face with the VA," Grassley added. "During his time in the House of Representatives, he was a supporter of giving veterans the choice on where to seek health care. He and I agree that the VA needs to do better by our veterans and taxpayers alike."

Collins is poised to take the helm at VA at a time when the agency is seeing hundreds of thousands of additional veterans sign up for VA health care programs, largely driven by the 2022 law (PL 117-168) known as the PACT Act, which expanded benefits to former servicemembers exposed to toxins while serving overseas.

The burgeoning costs of providing care under the PACT Act is one part of an overarching fiscal debate centering on how to trim excess from the agency's budget without hurting veterans' access to or quality of care. Collins during his confirmation hearing pledged that "we're not going to balance budgets on the back of veterans benefits."

The department is also still struggling to modernize its electronic health care record system, a fraught, multibillion-dollar effort that has drawn concern from lawmakers and

prompted a programmatic reset and a 2023 contract renegotiation that changed the next phase of the agreement from a single five-year term to five one-year terms.

The change, officials said at the time, would allow the VA to annually reassess the deal with contractor Oracle Health. Most recently, the agreement was renewed in June 2024 for an 11-month period.

Collins drew more opponents Tuesday than he had five days prior, when the Senate voted 83-13 to invoke cloture.

Among those who opposed Collins' confirmation Tuesday were Sens. Angela Alsobrooks, D-Md.; Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis.; Lisa Blunt Rochester, D-Del.; Cory Booker, D-N.J.; Maria Cantwell, D-Wash.; Chris Coons, D-Del.; Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill.; Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii; Andy Kim, D-N.J.; Edward J. Markey, D-Mass.; Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.; Christopher S. Murphy, D-Conn.; Patty Murray, D-Wash.; Alex Padilla, D-Calif.; Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I.; Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii; Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y.; Tina Smith, D-Minn.; Chris Van Hollen, D-Md.; Mark Warner, D-Va.; Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass.; Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I.; and Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

Hirono also cast the lone vote against Collins in committee last month. At the time, she cited concerns that Collins would back the overturning of a Biden administration regulation to allow the VA to perform abortions in cases of rape, incest or when giving birth would endanger the life of the woman.

## 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.

### Jay Otken, Texas

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

This week, Jay met with two staffers from Rep. Michael McCaul's office to discuss continuous issues with the USPS that his post, along with other people in the surrounding area, have been experiencing. Post newsletters have been received weeks late, as well as messages from the VA to veterans in the Bryan/College station area. Rep. McCaul's staffers are aware of the issues people are experiencing regarding regional USPS services and told him they have been working with several other Congressmen to try to solve the issue.

*Thank you, Jay, 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.votervoicenet.com/AmericanLegion/Register>***



## UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 9:00 am on Friday, February 7, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, February 11, 10:15 am: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight Hearing – *Bureaucratic Barriers: Making VBA Education Services Work for Veterans and not the Bureaucracy*
- Wednesday, February 12, 2:15 pm: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing – *Roles and Responsibilities: Evaluating VA Community Care*

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](#)