



March 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.

## YOUR VOICE MATTERS: SHARE HOW CHANGES IN VA IMPACT YOUR BENEFITS

As a valued member of The American Legion, your insights and experiences are crucial to helping us understand the real impact of recent policy changes or reductions in staff at VA. We want to know how these changes and reductions have affected our community of veterans and their families. We remain steadfast in our mission to support and advocate for those who have served, but we need your input to better address these challenges.

We kindly ask you to take a few minutes to complete this brief survey [here](#). Your responses will guide our efforts to push for the resources and support our members deserve.

## KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO THE NATION'S VETERANS: A MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL COMMANDER

**The American Legion advocates to ensure veteran health care and benefits are not negatively impacted by recent policy and personnel actions.**

Last week, I testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees. While this is usually a forum for The American Legion to present legislative priorities, most questions from members of Congress were related to recent policy and personnel actions by the White House and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including firings, contract cancellations, hiring freezes, return to work orders and voluntary resignations.

Billed as an effort to increase government efficiency, there has been growing concern in the veteran community these actions have had, and will continue to have, significant negative impacts on VA's core missions. I understand these concerns and empathize with veterans who are anxious about the speed and justification for these changes. On Tuesday, a leaked internal memo outlined a process by which VA will conduct a department-wide personnel review by May 9 and publish a plan for Reduction-in-Force by the end of Fiscal Year 2025, "as required by [the Office of Management & Budget and the Office of Personnel Management]." This agency review could potentially lead to a further 83,000 job cuts, reducing total VA staff to 2019 levels.

While The American Legion believes VA should be efficient and accountable for the veterans it serves, a 2019 staff posture does not take into consideration the increased demand for health care and benefits after passage of the PACT Act in 2022. With fewer employees, the VA's ability to meet this demand would be called into question, and considering roughly 25% of federal employees are veterans themselves, up to 83,000 job cuts could put up to 20,000+ veterans out of work.

In Washington, D.C., The American Legion is consistently engaged on your behalf. As these cuts have the potential to threaten services our nation's veterans earned and depend on, I promise our 1.6 million members — and all veterans — we are taking action. The American Legion will work to ensure the administration's efforts to make VA more efficient do not result in unintended consequences for veterans. I ask all Legionnaires to be active in your peer support networks and Be the One to assist your fellow veterans and their families in need.

During our 2025 Washington Conference, we met with VA Secretary Doug Collins and senior personnel at VA's internal agencies to communicate our priorities and concerns and ask for increased transparency related to the methodology and potential impacts of agency actions. We are committed to working with VA leadership to ensure your voice is heard. Furthermore, we are actively communicating with members of Congress and will immediately raise the alarm when we see any mission-critical impacts to veterans.

That's where you come in. Our voice in D.C. is only powerful if we hear from Legionnaires and communicate your message to policymakers. So if you or an immediate family member are personally impacted by recent or future government actions, I ask you to contact our Government Relations office and tell your story via The American Legion Impact Survey:

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Surveys/12345/Respond>.

Your voice is crucial to convey the human impact of these policies back to the White House and VA, advocating on your behalf. And in Congress, we will use your story to urge members of both parties to exercise oversight authority when necessary.

Additionally, The American Legion stands ready to assist veterans affected by job loss through job fairs and employment initiatives, emergency financial assistance and free claims processing – in the public or private sector.

Since The American Legion was founded, we have been a powerful voice to ensure our government lives up to Lincoln’s immortal promise to care for those who have borne the battle. We have never shied away from this responsibility. We won’t start now.

For God and Country,

National Commander  
James LaCoursiere Jr.

## **KIGGANS FIGHTS TO GUARANTEE MILITARY PAY IN EVENT OF GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN**

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

Today, Congresswoman Jen Kiggans (VA-02), a former Navy helicopter pilot, reintroduced the *Pay Our Troops Act* to ensure members of the military are paid in the event of a government shutdown. This legislation will protect paychecks for members of the military, including the Coast Guard, as well as certain U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) civilian employees and contractors in the event of a lapse in federal appropriations. Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK) has companion legislation in the Senate.

If Congress fails to pass temporary or full-year appropriations that include funding for the DoD by March 14, 2025, members of the Armed Services will not be paid. Despite this, our servicemembers will be expected to continue performing their duties unpaid, even as their bills come due. This will be disastrous for recruitment, retention, and readiness, threatening America’s national security. As a Navy veteran who represents one of the most military-heavy districts in the country, Congresswoman Kiggans is committed to ensuring financial stability for our brave men and women in uniform.

“Dysfunction in Washington should never force our servicemembers to go without a paycheck,” **said Congresswoman Kiggans.** “These men and women put their lives on the line to protect our country – it is our responsibility to ensure they can provide for their families and put food on their tables. When we take care of our Armed Forces, we also fortify our national security. As Congress works to avoid a government shutdown, my legislation will give our troops the financial certainty they deserve to ensure they remain a lethal fighting force. As a Navy veteran, Navy spouse, and Navy Mom, I will

always be the loudest voice to protect our men and women in uniform and their families.”

The *Pay Our Troops Act* is endorsed by the National Defense Committee, American Legion, Bluestar Families, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).

### **Background:**

This bill directs existing, unappropriated Treasury funds for FY25 for the purpose of paying:

1. Members of the US Armed Forces on both active and reserve duty, as well as the Coast Guard
2. Civilian employees and DoD contractors, that are designated by the Secretary of Defense as supporting the Armed Forces

These funds shall be available until one of the following conditions are met:

1. A Continuing Resolution is passed that includes FY25 funding for DoD
  2. An appropriations bill funding the DoD is passed
  3. Until January 1, 2026
- You can find the full bill text [here](#).
  - You can find a one pager on this bill [here](#).
  - Congresswoman Kiggans originally introduced this legislation in September 2023 ahead of the federal funding deadline and reintroduced it ahead of the deadline in September 2024. Both bills to ensure military members continued to receive paychecks, [H.R.5641](#) and [H.R.9699](#), garnered strong bipartisan cosponsorship.
  - During the 2019 shutdown, roughly 50,000 Coast Guard employees – including approximately 42,000 active duty servicemembers – went without pay for 35 days.
  - According to the DoD, one in four military servicemembers experience “low food security.” The figures do not count the spouses or children of those troops, nor do the numbers include reservists and their families.

## **VA SECRETARY INSISTS MASSIVE STAFF CUTS NEEDED TO REFOCUS DEPARTMENT**

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



Veterans Affairs Secretary Doug Collins on Wednesday confirmed plans to scale back his department's workforce by roughly 80,000 staffers in coming months, saying the moves are needed to properly balance and reform the massive federal bureaucracy.

"If the answer was money and people, then we should have solved our problems at VA a long time ago," Collins said in an interview with Military Times. "The problem is not resources at this point. The question is, are we utilizing that function the best way we possibly can?"

"We're looking at it from the perspective of, 'How do we make the greatest employees in the world — which I think our VA employees are — better, more efficient?' The government is not about employing people, it's about serving people. That's what we're doing here."

The comments came after the leak of an internal memo that outlined plans to scale back the department's workforce to 2019 levels, before significant hiring efforts during President Joe Biden's administration. Government Executive first reported on the document.

That plan would drop staffing levels to fewer than 400,000 workers from the current mark of approximately 480,000. About 2,500 employees have been dismissed from VA in recent weeks through probationary employee layoffs and the elimination of diversity and inclusion posts.

Collins described the staff dismissals difficult and concerning, but he emphasized that he feels the moves are necessary.

“There’s a game being played here, and it has been going on for years,” he said. “Let’s give more money and stuff to the VA, and then let’s beat up on the VA when they’re not doing what we think they should be doing.’

“We’re not gonna do that anymore. We’re gonna work together with the funds and resources we have to make a better ‘product’ with some of the best employees around, who want to take care of veterans.”

The leaked memo instructs top-level staff to prepare for an agency-wide reorganization in August to “resize and tailor the workforce to the mission and revised structure.” It comes on the heels of a department review of spending, which has already led to the cancellation of more than 500 contracts, with a reported savings of around \$900 million. But veterans groups have expressed significant concerns about the long-term effects of those moves, and Democratic lawmakers have accused administration officials of endangering veterans with slipshod and erratic cuts.

On Wednesday, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Mark Takano, D-Calif., called the plans “a deliberate dismantling of VA’s workforce” and “an outright betrayal of veterans.” His Senate counterpart, Connecticut Democrat Richard Blumenthal, said Thursday that such cuts among VA staff would “eviscerate” department operations.

Republican leaders did not endorse or condemn the news. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran, R-Kan., acknowledged the need for reform at VA but said, “current efforts to downsize the department and increase efficiency must be done in a more responsible manner.” He promised continued oversight on the issue.

Collins insisted his staff is reviewing and driving the staff changes, and not just looking for ways to justify cost-cutting efforts by the Department of Government Efficiency.

“Last time I checked, I was one that raised my hand and swore in to be the secretary of VA,” he told Military Times.



“We’re looking at this in the best way we can, coming through my office, coming through this department to look at ourselves, not others. The president himself has made the declaration that we’re going to make government more efficient. We’re going to make it more streamlined, and it’s going to see fewer workers as we go through.”

The VA workforce grew by about 14% during Biden’s presidency, after growing by about 12% during President Donald Trump’s first term. Department medical centers and benefits offices have added more than 100,000 employees in the last decade.

But the department has also seen a steady increase in medical appointments and disability claims over that same period, especially with the expansion of benefits approved by Congress under the 2022 PACT Act.

Federal surveys have also shown a steady increase in veterans’ satisfaction with VA over that time period, too. About 85% of patients surveyed in fiscal 2017 said they trusted the department for their medical needs. By the end of Trump’s first term, that figure was 89%. Last year, it was 92%.

## **VETERANS CUTS SPARK GOP BACKLASH ON CAPITOL HILL**

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



As President Donald Trump and Elon Musk lay waste to scores of federal programs and the careers of thousands of government workers, Republicans on Capitol Hill have mostly kept their objections to themselves — with one big exception.

Military veterans have been disproportionately affected by the administration's early cuts, and GOP lawmakers have unleashed a rare tide of public pushback. That reached a crescendo this week as the Trump administration raises the possibility of large-scale dismissals of Department of Veterans Affairs employees.

Mass firings at the VA began weeks ago, spurring [a flurry of panicked calls](#) from GOP lawmakers to the White House. But a new memo outlines the potential for 80,000 more firings across a roughly 480,000-person department, according to an internal memo obtained by POLITICO.

Senate Veterans' Affairs Chair Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) said in a statement that while the massive department is "in need of reform," efforts to downsize "must be done in a more responsible manner," after the [AP first reported](#) the 80,000 figure Wednesday. Moran, who has been in close contact with VA Secretary Doug Collins and White House staff about personnel issues for weeks, added in an interview Thursday that lawmakers "need information" and that the numbers need to be "justifiable."

Leaving a lunch meeting with Musk Wednesday where the VA cuts came up, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) voiced his irritation to reporters and suggested Trump's veterans chief needed to get a better handle on his department.

"It's political malpractice not to consult Congress if that's what you intend to do," Graham said. "Maybe you've got a good reason to do it. I like Doug Collins — he's a great guy. But we don't need to be reading memos in the paper about 20 percent cut at the VA."

Even before the VA memo became public, there was heartburn about how the cuts undertaken by Musk's Department of Government Efficiency initiative might impact the country's roughly 18 million veterans.

Federal job cuts generally affect veterans more profoundly, since they are given preference in government hiring. The provision of health care and other services is directly threatened by cuts to the VA, and those impacts have been a frequent concern at the [spate of town hall protests](#) GOP lawmakers have encountered in recent weeks.

There are signs the message has gotten through. Senate Majority Leader John Thune said Thursday that senators raised the issue of VA cuts directly with Musk during the lunch meeting at the Capitol on Wednesday.

"I'm hoping there will be some clarification on that issue soon," Thune told a small group of reporters.

Sen. John Barrasso, Thune's No. 2, said that while they didn't get confirmation of the VA cuts, Republicans stressed to Musk that Collins needs to be involved, with "the concern being that we want to make sure that veterans get the care that they need."



Senate Appropriations Chair Susan Collins, who has recently been in contact with Musk, said she's also coordinating with Moran as he tries to get answers.

"We have an obligation to our veterans, and these mass firings undermine that obligation," Collins told reporters.

Democrats, who have been searching for a political foothold as they try to fight back against DOGE, blasted the proposed VA cuts. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called it "a betrayal of our promise to our service members" that will spark "longer wait times, fewer appointments, less health care service for our veterans."

Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal, the top Democrat on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, said the move, if carried out, would put "private sector profits over veterans' care."

Across the Capitol, the more DOGE-friendly House GOP is more willing to give the administration leeway on efforts to slash the size of the federal workforce. But even GOP leaders who are normally quick to praise Musk's slash-and-burn operation are sensitive about the VA and impacts on veterans.

"We're going to talk to the secretary to see what their needs are," said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-La.). "You had, in a lot of these departments, a large increase during COVID, some of which may have been needed but a lot of which wasn't justified.

"So you need to sort through what actually helps the veterans versus what actually takes money away from veterans benefits," Scalise added.

Rep. Michael McCaul said in an interview Thursday he needed to study the VA cuts in more detail. But he had a visceral reaction when informed of the level of workforce cuts in the memo.

"Jeez," McCaul said, his eyes widening.

"I worry because our veterans are hurting after Afghanistan; PTSD has gone way up," McCaul added. "Suicide rates gone way up, and morale has gone way down. So I worry in the sense that I don't want that to be a signal that we don't care about our veterans."

Some House Republicans, including some with a high number of veterans in their districts who get their care from the VA, offered measured support.

"I trust the president," said Rep. Brian Babin (R-Texas), adding "there are a lot of complaints" about the VA. Rep. Austin Scott (R-Ga.) added that he had faith in Collins to make cuts that "create efficiencies and actually improve care" at VA.

But Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) — a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee whose state includes large numbers of federal workers and veterans — warned the job cuts would have real impacts on his constituents.

“I think everybody looks at it and says, ‘Let’s get the federal government to the right size that’s sustainable.’ Companies do that all the time,” Wittman said. “But I also want to be mindful that these employees are really good people. They work hard, and I want to make sure we keep in mind the impact that it has on them.”

## **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.

### **Attendees of Washington Conference!**

American Legion Family, for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities and many meetings on the Hill last week, we are honored to recognize you all as Legionnaires of the Week.

Last week, Legionnaires traveled from all over the country to Washington, DC to have meetings with their Members of Congress and their staff. From the reports we received, Legionnaires were able to personally meet with the following Members of Congress: Rep. Adam Smith, Rep. Barry Loudermilk, Sen. Mark Warner, Rep. Jen Kiggans, Sen. Chuck Grassley, Rep. Bryan Steil, Rep. Eugene Vindman, Rep. Sanford Bishop, Rep. Rich McCormick, Rep. Zach Nunn, Sen. Thom Tillis, Rep. Greg Landsman, Rep. Jack Bergman, Rep. Derrick Van Orden, Rep. Sharice Davids, Sen. Andy Kim, Rep. Maxine Dexter, Rep. Clint Bentz, Sen. Dan Sullivan, Sen. Eric Schmitt, Rep. Chris Pappas, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, Sen. Bernie Sanders, Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Rep. Marilyn Strickland, Rep. Richard Neal, Rep. Lori Trahan, Sen. Marsha Blackburn, Sen. Jacky Rosen, Sen. Catherine Cortez-Masto, Rep. Dina Titus, Rep. Susie Lee, Sen. Jeff Merkley, Sen. Steve Daines, Sen. Tim Sheehy, Rep. Ryan Zinke, Rep. Troy Downing, Rep. Ron Estes, and Sen. John Boozman.

*Thank you* all for your reports 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 3/7, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, March 11, 9:30 am: Senate Armed Services Committee, Full Committee Hearing – *To Receive Testimony on Stabilizing the Military Health System to Prepare for Large-Scale Combat Operations*
- Tuesday, March 11, 10:15 am: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Legislative Hearing -- *“Legislative Hearing on: Discussion Draft, Standardizing Treatment and Referral Times Act; Discussion Draft, No Wrong Door for Veterans Act; Discussion Draft, Providing Veterans Essential Medications Act; Discussion Draft, Veterans Supporting Prosthetics Opportunities and Recreational Therapy Act; Discussion Draft, To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Comptroller General of the United States to report on certain funding shortfalls in the Department of*

*Veterans Affairs; H.R. 217, CHIP IN for Veterans Act (Rep. Bacon); H.R. 1107, Protecting Veteran Access to Telemedicine Services Act of 2025 (Rep. Womack); H.R. 1336, The Veterans National Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act (Rep. Murphy); H.R. 658, To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish qualifications for the appointment of a person as a marriage and family therapist, qualified to provide clinical supervision, in the Veterans Health Administration; Discussion Draft, Copay Fairness for Veterans Act; Discussion Draft, Saving Our Veterans Lives Act; and Discussion Draft, Women Veterans Cancer Care Coordination Act.”*

- Tuesday, March 11, 10:30 am: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – *Hearing to Consider Pending Legislation*
- Tuesday, March 11, 2:15 pm: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health Legislative Hearing -- *“Legislative Hearing on: Discussion Draft, Standardizing Treatment and Referral Times Act; Discussion Draft, No Wrong Door for Veterans Act; Discussion Draft, Providing Veterans Essential Medications Act; Discussion Draft, Veterans Supporting Prosthetics Opportunities and Recreational Therapy Act; Discussion Draft, To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Comptroller General of the United States to report on certain funding shortfalls in the Department of Veterans Affairs; H.R. 217, CHIP IN for Veterans Act (Rep. Bacon); H.R. 1107, Protecting Veteran Access to Telemedicine Services Act of 2025 (Rep. Womack); H.R. 1336, The Veterans National Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act (Rep. Murphy); H.R. 658, To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish qualifications for the appointment of a person as a marriage and family therapist, qualified to provide clinical supervision, in the Veterans Health Administration; Discussion Draft, Copay Fairness for Veterans Act; Discussion Draft, Saving Our Veterans Lives Act; and Discussion Draft, Women Veterans Cancer Care Coordination Act.”*
- Wednesday, March 12, 9:30 am: Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support – *To Receive Testimony on the Current Readiness of the Joint Force*

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](#)