



March 21, 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.

WATCHDOG BLASTS VA LEADERS FOR EXAGGERATING BUDGET SHORTFALL LAST YEAR

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



A federal watchdog on Thursday criticized Veterans Affairs leaders for accounting mistakes and procedural errors last year which led to fears of a possible department budget shortfall despite sufficient funding available to cover benefits and medical care.

The report from the VA Inspector General's Office comes after months of criticism from Republican lawmakers about how previous department leadership — under President Joe Biden — handled budgetary issues and public messaging surrounding veterans benefits in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election.

“The Inspector General confirmed today what we always feared, that it appears that senior Biden VA officials repeatedly misled Congress on the reality of the situation [last year],” said Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

“This is incredibly concerning given that President Biden urged Congress to provide billions of additional taxpayer dollars to account for something that never even existed.”

Last September, Republican and Democratic lawmakers approved a nearly \$3 billion stopgap spending bill for the VA after department officials had publicly warned benefit checks could be delayed or halted on Oct. 1 — the start of the new fiscal year — if additional cash reserves were not made available to the department.

VA leaders, including then-Secretary Denis McDonough and then-Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs, said through much of the summer that increased usage of department services had dipped cash balances in VA accounts below acceptable levels,

and that the infusion of \$3 billion more was needed to keep operations running without interruption.

But in late October, VA budget planners announced they had carried over roughly \$5 billion in unspent funds related to benefits accounts from fiscal 2024 to fiscal 2025. Even without the emergency budget bill, the department would have held more than \$2 billion in cash reserves, more than enough to cover demand.

Last fall, Bost and House Appropriations Committee's veterans panel Chairman John Carter, R-Texas, accused department leaders of "misinforming Congress" and "inciting a panic among veterans about their benefits being delayed or cut."

The inspector general's review found that reports of benefits usage above budgetary projections were not accurate, and that department accountants failed to include some cash reserves in their predictions of a shortfall.

"From March through September 2024, the Veterans Benefits Administration continued to emphasize the risk to veterans in its communications to Congress, even though the data increasingly suggested there might actually be less need for supplemental funding as time went on," the report stated.

"VBA officials ultimately justified the supplemental funding request as a precautionary measure to avoid potential payment delays to veterans ...va the inspector general found that improvements in financial oversight, reporting accuracy, and communication processes would have provided greater clarity and may have obviated the need for the supplemental funding request."

The report comes as the new leadership at VA under President Donald Trump have emphasized the need for efficiency and accountability in department spending, with a goal of cutting workers and contracts without compromising services.

Recommendations in the report point to stronger monthly fiscal reviews to better analyze and identify available funds, to avoid similar false predictions in the future.

In response to the watchdog findings, current VA leadership — which was not involved in the budgetary issues last year — said they are looking at reforms in the accounting process. Bost said his committee will continue to look into the reasons for the budgeting problems and "ensure that those who may have misled Congress are held accountable for their actions."

TRUMP PICKS BOEING TO BUILD NEW F-47 SIXTH-GENERATION FIGHTER

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

Boeing Co. was awarded a coveted Air Force contract to develop a secretive new sixth generation fighter jet that will be capable of fighting alongside drones in future combat zones, President Donald Trump said Friday.

Trump, flanked by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin in the Oval Office, said he could not disclose the price of the new stealth fighter jet, which will be called the F-47, without giving away classified details.

“The F-47 will be the most advanced, most capable, most lethal aircraft ever built. An experimental version of the plane has secretly been flying for almost five years, and we're confident that it massively overpowers the capabilities of any other nation,” Trump said.

The aircraft has been described as the crown jewel of the service's Next Generation Air Dominance program, an initiative that aims to field a "family of systems," some autonomous, that will fly alongside the F-47. The NGAD program will replace Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F-22 Raptor, which first entered military service in 2005. Lockheed, which is the primary defense contractor on the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, was the other competitor for the F-47 contract.

Friday's announcement follows a summer 2024 pause of the NGAD program by senior Air Force officials, who cited cost concerns, but ultimately left the fate of the program up to the second Trump administration.

According to a January 2025 report from the Congressional Research Service, Congress appropriated a total of \$5.1 billion for NGAD fighter technologies between fiscal 2022 and fiscal 2024.

Following the announcement, some defense-minded lawmakers and industry advocates were quick to celebrate.

Senate Armed Services Chairman Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said in a statement it was "a great day for American air power, and an even better day for American prosperity."

"I now look forward to working with President Trump on a massive scale-up of Collaborative Combat Aircraft, supercharging B-21 bomber production, and a broad revitalization of the defense industrial base," Wicker said.

And Senate Armed Services Airland Subcommittee ranking member Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., called the decision to move forward with the NGAD "the right decision to avoid costly delays and move forward with our next generation fighter."

In a statement, Aerospace Industries Association President and CEO Eric Fanning thanked the Trump administration for backing the NGAD program, calling it "a cornerstone of America's aerospace innovation and security" and an investment that would bolster the industrial base.

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.

Greg Eirich, Wisconsin

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

This week, Greg met with Representative Glen Grothman (WI-06) at his home office in Wisconsin. They discussed legislative priorities of the American Legion in the 119th Congress.

Thank you, Greg, 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 3/28, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, April 1, 10:00 am: House Armed Services Committee, Full Committee Hearing -- *“U.S. Military Posture and National Security Challenges in North and South America”*

- Tuesday, April 1, 10:15 am: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Full Committee Hearing -- "*Harnessing Biomedical Innovation: Modernizing VA Healthcare for the Future*"
- Tuesday, April 1, 10:30 am: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations
- Wednesday, April 2, 2:00 pm: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations -- "*Answering the Call: Examining VA's Mental Health Policies*"
- Wednesday, April 2, 3:30 pm: House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces -- "*Small UAS and Counter-Small UAS: Gaps, Requirements, and Projected Capabilities*"

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](#)