AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

May 9, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *GI Bill Parity Act!* Currently, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers only earn credit toward their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits when they mobilize and deploy for federal missions. National Guard and Reserve servicemembers activated under state orders do not accrue eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. This legislation aims to count every day spent on weekend drills, annual training, attending military school, participating in an exercise, or responding to a disaster toward GI Bill eligibility. *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.

CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

On May 6, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs reported out 18 bills to be eligible for consideration by the full House of Representatives. The bills are:

- H.R. 1041: The Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act
- H.R. 3132: Certified Help Options in Claims Expertise (CHOICE) for Veterans Act of 2025
- H.R. 1815: The VA Home Loan Program Reform Act
- H.R. 1969: The No Wrong Door for Veterans Act
- H.R. 980: The Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2025
- H.R. 1364: The Automotive Support Services to Improve Safe Transportation Act of 2025
- H.R. 1458: The Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunity Act of 2025
- H.R. 1823: 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. 2201: The Improving VA Training for Military Sexual Trauma Claims Act
- H.R. 647: The Ensuring Veterans' Final Resting Place Act of 2025

- H.R. 1286: The Simplifying Forms for Veterans Claims Act
- H.R. 217: The Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvement Needed (CHIP IN) for Veterans Act
- H.R. 1107: The Protecting Veteran Access to Telemedicine Services Act of 2025
- H.R. 1336: The Veterans National Traumatic Brian Injury Treatment Act
- 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
- H.R. 1860: The Women Veterans Cancer Care Coordination Act
- H.R. 1578: The Veterans Claims Education Act of 2025
- H.R. 2625: The VERY Act of 2025

VETERANS AFFAIRS SECRETARY DEFENDS MASS LAYOFFS IN TESTY EXCHANGE WITH CONGRESS

This article's original publication can be found here.

Doug Collins said the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs set a goal of further cutting 15% of its roughly 470,000 workforce to make the agency more efficient.

The head of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on Tuesday defended the agency's slashing of thousands of jobs and said its goal is to cut an additional 15% of its workforce, as he testified for the first time since taking the helm.

In testy exchanges with multiple members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Secretary Doug Collins said that his agency was looking into potentially cutting another 70,500 nonessential positions in a move that would make the agency more efficient.

"The department's history shows that adding more employees to the system doesn't automatically equal better results," said Collins, a Navy veteran and former U.S. representative, who was sworn in in February.

The VA announced this year that it had fired more than 2,400 employees and planned to end 585 contracts. Many committee members peppered Collins with questions about the consequences of those reductions. When asked to elaborate on which positions and contracts were terminated, he said he would provide them with the information later.

He said the agency would keep front-line health care workers, such as doctors and nurses, but would phase out nonessential roles, like interior designers and those who work in diversity, equity and inclusion.

Collins has said that the personnel changes would not hurt VA health care, benefits or beneficiaries, and that "mission-critical" positions were exempt from the reductions.

The cuts, he said, would increase productivity and eliminate waste.

On Tuesday, Collins said that by getting rid of DEI initiatives, the VA saved $14 million, which he said was redirected to veterans with disabilities who need prosthetics.

In scathing remarks, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., criticized Collins for failing to sufficiently address the dozens of requests for information and letters of inquiry that he and his colleagues sent to the Trump administration.

Blumenthal said accountability "has been totally lacking," as he warned that taking a "chainsaw" to an agency that has about 470,000 employees and serves about 9.1 million people would be disastrous.

"Make no mistake, it is a disaster that is on the horizon, approaching us as surely as a thunderstorm in the nation's capital," he said.

Collins said money and staffing were not always the solution. For example, he said, the VA has been spending $588 million a year to research veteran suicide — its top clinical priority. Yet, he said there has not been a significant decrease in veteran suicide rates since 2008.

There were more than 6,400 veteran suicides in 2022, the latest year with available data, which was slightly more than in 2021, according to the VA's most recent report.

Collins also slammed the VA's human resources department for taking nearly two weeks to provide him with a list of all the agency's employees. He also said some VA doctors and nurses are not seeing patients.

"Year after year, the calls for VA reform come from every corner," he said. "This year, we have finally embarked on a historic effort to reform the VA. We have been emphatic that we will not be cutting benefits and health care, only improving them, and I think the budget shows that."

VA'S ONLINE LEGACY PROJECT ADDS NAMES OF 210,000 VETS LOST OVERSEAS

The article's original publication can be found here.

As the nation celebrates the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, Veterans Affairs officials have added about 210,000 names of veterans killed or lost overseas — including about 93,000 WWII veterans — to the department's expanding online memorial project.

The Veterans Legacy Memorial was launched in 2019 and creates websites recognizing the lives of deceased veterans, allowing relatives to update the online memorials with details for their service, post-military work and family history.

The expansion announced this week includes names from 26 overseas cemeteries and memorials administered by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

ABMC acting Secretary Robert Dalessandro said in a statement that the Veterans Legacy Project update "adds new resources to honor our nation's veterans from all wars and brings their stories to those who aren't able to visit our sites overseas."

President Donald Trump this week issued a proclamation recognizing May 8 as the 80th anniversary of the end of European hostilities in that conflict.
In addition to the approximately 93,000 WWII veterans added to the veterans project, about 94,000 other names added to the list are of Americans missing in action overseas or buried at sea. Those individuals are honored in a series of overseas memorials overseen by the monuments commission.

"The brave Americans resting in ABMC cemeteries and whose names are inscribed on memorials around the world sacrificed their lives to liberate allied countries and to protect our nation's interests," said acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ronald Walters in a statement. "It's our honor to preserve their legacies."

Officials in recent months have also updated the legacy project to allow veterans to provide details of their life and service before they pass away. Information on the "Your Story, Your Legacy" effort is available on the project's website.

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.

Vince Winter, Alaska

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

For 3 years, Vince worked closely with Senator Lisa Murkowski and her team to help officially recognize Louis Minard and join his brothers as a Tlingit Code Talker. In March, Vince organized the ceremony at the Naa Kahidi Tribal community house. This Tribal House is bult on the land where the boarding school that Mr. Minard attended where they tried to force him to forget his language. By choosing to hold the ceremony there, Vince "brought the story full circle, since the language they were trying to erase helped save our nation" during WWII. At the ceremony, Senator Murkowski presented the Congressional Silver Medal of the Tlingit Code Talker to Louis Minard (posthumously). Mr. Minard's granddaughter was also in attendance.

Thank you, Vince, 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 5/8, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, May 13, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services, Full Committee Nomination Hearing -- "*To consider the nominations of: Mr. Richard L. Anderson to be Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; Mr. Adam R. Telle to be Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works; and Dr. Matthew C. Napoli to be Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation National Nuclear Security Administration"*
- Tuesday, May 13, 4:45 PM: Senate Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces -- "*To receive testimony on the Department of Defense missile defense activities in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2026 and the Future Years Defense Program"*
- Wednesday, May 14, 10:15 AM : House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Oversight Hearing -- "*Waste and Delays: Examining VA's Improper Payments in its Compensation and Pension Programs"*
- Thursday, May 15, 12:00 PM: House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Full Committee Oversight Hearing -- "*U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Budget Request for Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027 Advance Appropriations"*
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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