AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

July 11, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for *the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act!* This bill proposes a five-year pilot program for the VA to award grants to nonprofit organizations to provide trained service dogs to eligible veterans, cover the cost of training, and provide life-long veterinary insurance. *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.

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Address

Wisconsin	**477**
Kansas	**473**
Florida	**426**
New York	**362**
Tennessee	**308**

TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS MAY-JUNE

These are the number of e-mail messages these Departments sent to Congress on the VoterVoice campaigns May 13-June 11.

Register more participants in your Department to increase the number of veteran voices advocating on the Hill!

https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The American Legion's 106th National Convention is from August 22-28 in Tampa Bay, Florida. To stay up to date on information, schedules, and more, go to the information page here.

The National Legislative Council will meet Saturday August 23rd in Tampa Bay to hear updates from the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees and discuss best-practices for conducting meetings with your members of Congress.

VA TO REDUCE STAFF BY NEARLY 30K BY END OF FY2025

(Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call)

This article's original publication can be found here

The reduction – achieved through normal attrition, early retirements, deferred resignations and the federal hiring freeze – eliminates need for a large-scale reduction in force

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs today announced it's on pace to reduce total VA staff by nearly 30,000 employees by the end of fiscal year 2025, eliminating the need for a large-scale reduction-in-force.

While VA had been considering a department-wide RIF to reduce staff levels by up to 15%, employee reductions through the federal hiring freeze, deferred resignations, retirements and normal attrition have eliminated the need for that RIF. The numbers break down as follows:

- VA had roughly 484,000 employees on Jan. 1, 2025, and 467,000 employees as of June 1, 2025 — a reduction of nearly 17,000.
- Between now and Sept. 30, the department expects nearly 12,000 additional VA employees to exit through normal attrition, voluntary early retirement authority) or the deferred resignation program.

VA has multiple safeguards in place to ensure these staff reductions do not impact Veteran care or benefits. All VA mission-critical positions are exempt from the DRP and VERA, and more than 350,000 positions are exempt from the federal hiring freeze.

Meanwhile, VA performance continues to improve. Under President Trump and Secretary Collins:

- VA's disability claims backlog is already down nearly 30%, after it increased 24% during the Biden Administration.
- VA is processing record numbers of disability claims, reaching 1 million claims processed for FY25 on Feb. 20 and reaching 2 million claims by June — both achievements were done in record time.
- VA has implemented major reforms to make it easier for survivors to get benefits, after serious problems during the Biden Administration.
- VA is accelerating the deployment of its integrated electronic health record system, after the program was nearly dormant for almost two years under the Biden Administration.
- VA is phasing out treatment for gender dysphoria. Frankly, this commonsense reform should have been done years ago, but only President Trump and Secretary Collins had the courage to do it.
- VA ended DEI at the department, reversing the divisive Biden-era policies and stopping more than $14 million in DEI spending.
- VA has brought more than 60,000 VA employees back to the office, where we can work better as a team to serve Veterans.

"Since March, we've been conducting a holistic review of the department centered on reducing bureaucracy and improving services to Veterans," said **VA Secretary Doug Collins**. "As a result of our efforts, VA is headed in the right direction — both in terms of staff levels and customer service. A department-wide RIF is off the table, but that doesn't mean we're done improving VA. Our review has resulted in a host of new ideas for better serving Veterans that we will continue to pursue."

VA is currently exploring a number of additional reforms to improve operational efficiency and service to Veterans, including:

- Today, the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administration all run duplicative and costly administrative functions that can be centralized or restructured so they can each focus on their core missions of health care, benefits and burial services, respectively.
    - To that end, VA is reviewing the centralization of support functions to streamline operations and improve support to Veterans, including areas such as police, procurement, construction, IT, budgeting and others.

- VA operates 274 separate call centers that are not connected to one another. A centralized call center with modernized systems would lead to quicker and better service for Veterans and could be run with fewer staff members.
- VA has a proven payroll system that processes paychecks for more than 200,000 VA employees, but some 50 VAMCs still process their own payroll. VA is already working to consolidate payroll for all employees under the VA Time and Attendance System, which will save time, money and resources.

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE APPROVES FISCAL 2026 NDAA

July 10, 2025 – 3:47 p.m. By John M. Donnelly, CQ

The Senate Armed Services Committee approved a fiscal 2026 defense authorization bill late Wednesday night, and senators plan to disclose its contents on Friday, according to aides.

Earlier this week, each of the panel's seven subcommittees approved their portions of the massive defense policy bill. Still to be disclosed is the committee's vote tally in approving the bill.

Also still to be divulged is how much spending the bill would authorize — both in total and for the plethora of individual programs under the committee's jurisdiction, most of which are at the Pentagon but also at a few other federal agencies.

These authorizations include pay raises, weapons procurements, troop strength levels, military construction projects, nuclear weapons initiatives and much more. Senators and staff were tight-lipped on Thursday when asked for details about the sweeping national defense authorization, or NDAA, measure.

"We are very focused on the Armed Services Committee: None of us say anything about the bill until the committee releases the bill and a summary," said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va.

The committee, chaired by Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., is a bastion of defense hawks. Last year the panel approved a fiscal 2025 NDAA that was $25.1 billion above the level requested by President Joe Biden. But the fiscal 2025 NDAA that became law (PL118-159) authorized essentially the amount of defense spending that Biden had requested.

Fiscal 2025 defense appropriations bills, which contain the funds themselves, exceeded the Biden request by about $8.4 billion in emergency funds, according to the Congressional Research Service.

House action teed up

The House Armed Services Committee, meanwhile, tentatively plans to hold this year's version of its annual marathon NDAA markup next week. According to a draft version of the so-called chairman's mark of the bill that the House panel will consider, its topline for fiscal 2026 is $882.6 billion, reflecting the amount for defense under the committee's jurisdiction that President Donald Trump requested.

Of that amount, $848.3 billion would go to the Pentagon, according to the draft document. On top of all that proposed authorization of funds in fiscal 2026 is $119.3 billion in appropriations for defense contained in the reconciliation bill (PL 119-21) that was enacted July 4. The $119.3 billion is the fiscal 2026 subset of about $156 billion for defense over 10 years in the reconciliation bill.

When the requested NDAA amounts and the reconciliation figures are added up, national security programs would net more than $1.01 trillion in fiscal 2026, according to the White House. It remains to be seen whether the Senate NDAA would add authorization to spend still more money than that.

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.

Craig Barnes, Arizona

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

Craig met with **Congressman Andy Biggs** at ALA High School in Arizona. They discussed developing a veteran's center that would be located in Queen Creek to help veterans and first responders in the area.

Thank you, Craig, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress? Check out our information papers and Legislative priorities. 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 7/10, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Monday, July 14, 3:00 PM: House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing -- "*VA Office of Information and Technology Organizational Structure and Priorities"*
- Tuesday, July 15, 2:15 PM: House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Helth Oversight Hearing -- "*Right Time, Right Place, Right Treatment with VA Community Care"*
- Wednesday, July 16, 2:30 PM: House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight Hearing -- "*Path of Purpose: Restoring the VA VR&E Program to Effectively Serve Veterans"*
- Wednesday, July 16, 4:00 PM: Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Hearing -- "*Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations"*

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