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July 25, 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

TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS

Table with 2 columns: Department Name and Count. Rows include Kansas (131), New York (86), Wisconsin (71), Indiana (64), and Tennessee (42).

These are the number of e-mail messages these Departments sent to Congress on the VoterVoice campaigns this past week.

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 Legislative Commission 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.

BILLS THAT PASSED THE HOUSE

The following bills passed in the House this week:

- S. 423: PRO Veterans Act of 2025
- S. 201: ACES Act of 2025
- H.R. 2625: VERY Act of 2025
- H.R. 2170: To name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Toms River, New Jersey, the Leonard G. 'Bud' Lomell, VA Clinic, and for other purposes.
- H.R. 4275: Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025

PROPOSAL TO EXPAND PRIVATE HEALTH CARE FOR VETERANS ADVANCED BY HOUSE PANEL

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



House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman, Mike Bost, questions Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough, during a hearing on whether the Veterans Affairs ignore and perpetrate sexual harassment, on Capitol Hill, Feb. 14, 2024, in Washington. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

A bill aimed at giving veterans easier access to private doctors using [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) funding has advanced out of a key House panel after stark partisan debate.

Cost issues scuttled a couple of controversial provisions from the GOP-led bill advanced Wednesday compared to the version of the bill that was introduced earlier this year. But the legislation still stoked strong opposition from Democrats accusing Republicans of trying to privatize the VA as Republicans insisted they are trying to give veterans more options in their care.

"Veterans don't need their hands held," said House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost, R-Ill., who sponsored the bill. "It's their health care."

The bill, which Bost introduced in January with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran, R-Kan., would solidify the VA's existing standards to qualify for community care, the name of the program that allows veterans to seek VA-funded care from private health care providers.

It would also make it easier for veterans to qualify for private care by saying that the availability of telehealth cannot be a factor in calculating wait times and by stipulating wait times cannot reset if the VA cancels an appointment or veterans do not show up to their appointment. And it would create a pilot program for veterans to get private outpatient care for mental health and substance abuse issues whenever they want.

The measure builds on a legislative achievement President Donald Trump frequently touts about his first term: the Mission Act, which overhauled how the department offers private-sector care to veterans.

While the Mission Act was bipartisan when it passed in 2018, it has since become a partisan lightning rod. Republicans accused the Biden administration of undermining the law and blocking eligible veterans from being able to access community care, while Democrats maintained that private care costs are growing unsustainably.

The community care budget has grown exponentially since the passage of the Mission Act and a predecessor law from 2014 called the Choice Act. In 2014, the Veterans Health Administration spent about \$7.9 billion, or about 12% of its overall budget, on private care, compared to about \$17.6 billion, or about 20% of the budget, in 2021, according to a [Congressional Budget Office report from 2021](#). For 2026, congressional Republicans [are on track to approve](#) \$34 billion for community care.

Under regulations issued after the Mission Act, veterans can go to private doctors if they face a wait time for VA doctors of more than 20 days for a primary or mental health care appointment or face a drive of 30 minutes or longer. For specialty care, the standards are a 60-minute drive or 28-day wait.

Those exact standards aren't a legal requirement. So Bost and Moran's bill, dubbed the Veterans' Assuring Critical Care Expansions to Support Servicemembers Act, or the ACCESS Act, would enshrine that criteria into law.

When it was first introduced in January, the ACCESS Act also included a requirement for the VA to take into account a veteran's preference for where they get treatment when making a referral to private health care. And it would have expanded eligibility for veterans to seek care at private residential mental health and substance abuse treatment facilities.

Both of those elements were taken out of the bill advanced by the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Wednesday. Republicans still support the ideas, but haven't found a way to pay for them yet, Bost said.

While Democrats on Wednesday recognized the removal of what they described as "harmful" sections of the bill, they took issue with other provisions they argued advance a GOP goal of privatizing the VA.

Specifically, Democrats targeted the language to disregard the availability of telehealth from eligibility for community care and the pilot program to expand access to private mental health care.

The three-year pilot program would allow veterans to get private outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment without a referral or pre-authorization. The pilot would be available in at least five locations.

"Leaving veterans untethered in the community with no way for VA providers to know how a veteran is doing and whether they are continuing care or treatment is harmful to the veteran. Requiring referrals keeps that connection, that relationship, in place, and it can be live-saving," said Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., the ranking member of the committee. "This provision will also lead to a dramatic increase in spending on private-sector care, diminishing the availability of resources for investments in VA's direct care system."

At Wednesday's committee meeting, Republicans voted down several Democratic amendments, including ones to strike the pilot program and the language on telehealth.

The bill as a whole was approved by the committee in a 12-11 party line vote. The vote advanced the bill for consideration by the full House, which is leaving for a five-week summer break after Wednesday.

**BLUMENTHAL, CRAPO & WARREN FILE MAJOR RICHARD STAR
ACT AS AMENDMENT TO MUST-PASS DEFENSE BILL**

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

Bipartisan amendment to the NDAA would deliver combat-injured veterans their full earned disability compensation and retirement pay.

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), and U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) today announced they are filing the ***Major Richard Star Act*** as an **amendment** to the annual must-pass defense bill, the *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)*. The Senate is expected to begin consideration of the NDAA next week.

Currently, only veterans with disability ratings above 50 percent and more than 20 years of service are eligible to receive the full amount of their Department of Defense (DOD) retirement and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability payments—leaving behind more than 50,000 combat-injured military retirees. If adopted, the Senators' Major Richard Star Act will fix this unjust policy for medical retirees with a combat-related disability—providing them their full VA disability and DOD retirement payments.

“The Major Richard Star Act would correct one of the deepest injustices in our present veterans' disability system. As an amendment to the NDAA, it would enable tens of thousands of combat-injured veterans to collect the full benefits they've earned,” said Ranking Member Blumenthal. “Right now they're denied fair, complete compensation because they are subject to a dollar-for-dollar offset of their VA disability and military retirement benefits. It's unacceptable—and I'm joining my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to right this wrong by seeking to attach our legislation to this year's NDAA. With more than 31 cosponsors, adopting our amendment is a commonsense next step to finally provide these military retirees who already sacrificed so much the benefits they need and earned.”

“The Major Richard Star Act corrects a severe injustice for combat-wounded veterans,” said Senator Crapo. “The support for this correction is clear. Though the namesake of our legislation is no longer with us, we must pass this fix on behalf of the more than 50,000 veterans, including hundreds in Idaho, who stand to benefit.”

“Our veterans put their lives on the line for this country and it's time our government gives them the full benefits they've earned,” said Senator Warren. “Including this bill in the NDAA will ensure the federal government keeps its promise to our veterans.”

This bipartisan legislation is named in honor of Major Richard A. Star, a decorated war veteran who was forced to medically retire due to his combat-related injuries. Major Star sadly lost his battle with cancer on February 13, 2021.

The Senators' legislation has 76 bipartisan cosponsors, and is supported by the following military, veterans, and survivor organizations: Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), Air & Space Forces Association (AFA), American GI Forum, **The American Legion**, American Logistics Association, American Military Society, American Veterans (AMVETS), America's Warrior Partnership, American WWII Orphans Network, Armed Forces Retiree Association, Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA), Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS), Association of the United States Army (AUSA), Association of the United States Navy (AUSN), Blinded Veterans Association (BVA), Blue Star Families, Burn Pits 360, Catholic War Veterans of the USA & Auxiliary, Chief Warrant Officers Association of the US Coast Guard (CWOA), Code of Support Foundation, Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, Fleet Reserve Association (FRA), Gold Star Spouses of America, Grunt Style Foundation, Gold Star Wives of America (GSW), Healing Household, Heroes Athletic Association, Hire Heroes USA, HunterSeven Foundation, Japanese American Veterans Association, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV), K9s for Warriors, Marine Corps League (MCL), Marine Corps Reserve Association (MCRA), Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America (MCA), Military Family Advisory Network, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Military Order of the World Wars, Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), Mission Roll Call, National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA), National Defense Committee, National Guard Association of the United States, National Military Family Association (NMFA), Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA), Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA), Operation First Response, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Project Sanctuary, The Ranger Leadership and Policy Center, Quality of Life Foundation, Reserve Organization of America (ROA), Sea Service Family Foundation, Stronghold Freedom Foundation, Student Veterans of America, TBI Warrior Foundation, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), The Independence Fund (TIF), United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA), USCG Chief Petty Officers Association (CPOA), United Through Reading, VetsFirst/United Spinal Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), Wounded Paw Project, Wounded Warrior Project (WWP).

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.

Rafael Munoz-Citron, Washington

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

Over the past few months, Rafael has been corresponding with Representative Adam Smith's office and Legislative Assistants. After numerous meetings and follow-up messages, Congressman Smith agreed to become a co-sponsor for H.R. 2605: SAVES Act! Since he is Ranking Member of the House Committee on Armed Services, his co-sponsorship should encourage others to not only co-sponsor the legislation but also to facilitate securing its passage.

Thank you, Rafael, 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 7/24, there are no hearings scheduled. Congress will be in recess until September 2.

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](#)