



# The American Legion's 2025 Legislative Priorities

---

For the 119th Congress,  
1st Session

**FOR GOD AND COUNTRY  
WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES TOGETHER  
FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:**

- To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America;
- To maintain law and order;
- To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism;
- To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars;
- To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation;
- To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;
- To make right the master of might;
- To promote peace and goodwill on earth;
- To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy;
- To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness

**VETERANS – DEFENSE – AMERICANISM – YOUTH**

# The American Legion Legislative Priorities

The American Legion, largest organization of U.S. military veterans, operates out of more than 12,000 local posts worldwide. Combined with the Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary, the American Legion Family consists of more than 3 million dedicated volunteers and advocates for those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Since its inception in 1919, The American Legion has achieved multiple legislative accomplishments, working closely with Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Pentagon and other arms of government at the federal, state and local levels.

Grassroots American Legion advocacy has strengthened the United States through such achievements as the GI Bill, accountability to military veterans exposed to toxic contamination, diagnostic recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder, the U.S. Flag Code and more.

This publication provides a synopsis of priorities the organization has identified for the 119th Congress. It is divided into four parts:

- **Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation**
- **National Security**
- **Veterans Employment & Education**
- **Americanism**

In addition to priorities expressed here, The American Legion stands ready to respond to new and evolving issues, as well as others that comply with resolutions passed by the all-volunteer veteran membership.

## Grassroots Action Center



The American Legion's Grassroots Action Center provides updates and alerts on legislation of interest to the organization. Scan this QR code or visit [legion.org/legislative](https://legion.org/legislative) to visit the center, learn about bills and contact congressional delegations.



## Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission oversees a portfolio of vital interests that include high-quality healthcare for those who have served, fair and timely disability benefits and compassion for family members and caregivers who face challenges of supporting veteran loved ones in need.

Atop The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation priorities for the 119th Congress are:

### The war within

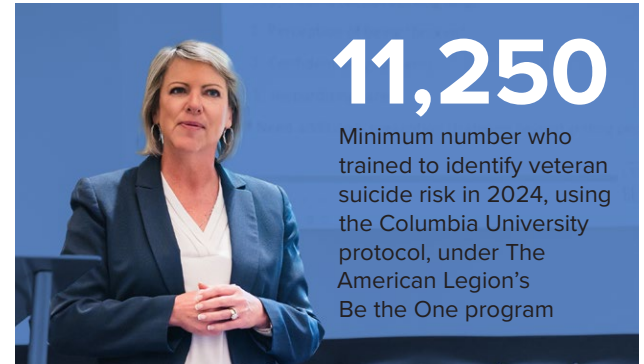
The suicide rate among veterans is nearly double that of their civilian counterparts.

Essential to reducing the rate are:

- Destigmatizing the pursuit of mental health assistance by veterans
- Increasing access to mental healthcare and paving the way for alternative therapies

The American Legion urges Congress to amply fund VA's suicide-prevention outreach budget, mental health treatment services and peer-support programs. Moreover, Congress must take steps to ensure VA's timeliness, efficacy and standardization of data regarding veteran suicide. This is critical to understand the scope of the issue and ensuring resources are allocated where they will be most effective.

To further address this top national priority of The American Legion, the organization has established the Be the One mission. Thousands of American Legion members have been trained to identify risk and "be the one" to help just one veteran, or more, who may be wrestling with thoughts of suicide.



### VA benefits protection, enhancement

Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability (TDIU) is vital for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities that prevent them from obtaining full-time employment. The Congressional Budget Office has proposed to phase out this benefit within the next five years for veterans 67 or older. TDIU should be based solely on a veteran's ability to secure gainful employment and should not be based on age or any other factors. Losing TDIU benefits could cause severe financial burdens to veterans who have become dependent on them as a source of income.

The amount of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for eligible surviving spouses is substantially lower than benefits received by survivors of federal civil service retirees or employees. DIC benefits need to be increased to an amount comparable to civil service benefits. DIC recipients also face unfair risks of losing their benefits if they remarry before the age of 55. Congress must end this disparity to ensure the families of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our nation receive adequate financial support.

Predatory claims companies continue to target veterans, collecting billions of dollars annually from exorbitant fees charged for questionable services. VA currently lacks the enforcement tools necessary to take

meaningful action against these companies. Congress must enact legislation with stiff penalties for predatory claims companies and other bad actors who continue to exploit veterans.

# 1.2 million

Approximate number of veterans who were represented free of charge by The American Legion in 2024 with their VA claims.



## Community care balance

Access to community care is essential for veterans, particularly those living in rural areas. An estimated 5 million veterans reside in rural communities, and approximately 58% of VA-enrolled veterans live in these areas, underscoring the need for accessible healthcare options. The American Legion firmly believes that VA should remain the cornerstone of veteran care.

The 2024 VA budget shortfall highlights a significant concern: over \$150 billion has been spent on community care providers since 2015. While The American Legion supports access to community care, issues with current wait-time and drive-distance rules often result in veterans waiting longer or traveling farther for care than they would otherwise receive within the VA system. This challenge is especially pronounced in rural areas, as observed during American Legion System Worth Saving site visits. The American Legion urges Congress to hold the Office of Community Care accountable for the continuity of veteran care, improve communication between VA and community providers and strengthen transportation services to community care appointments for rural health veterans.



## Electronic Health Record Modernization

The Electronic Health Record Modernization project, which would provide a seamless electronic health record from the beginning of military service throughout a veteran's life, remains a work in progress for VA. While new rollouts of the system have been delayed until fiscal 2025, The American Legion urges Congress to continue providing oversight for the project to ensure a smooth resumption. This includes continuing to improve infrastructure and staff training. The American Legion also urges Congress to work to expand telehealth access by increasing public-private partnerships with healthcare providers, offering grants to increase rural broadband access and improving infrastructure of VA facilities to support modernization efforts. National standards of care should also be established for consistency in veteran healthcare, ensuring a seamless experience.

# 826

Major performance incidents reported with the electronic health record system rolled out between October 2020 and March 2024, according to the VA Inspector General's Office

## Quality of Compensation & Pension examinations

American Legion service officers across the country are concerned with the poor quality of VA-contracted Compensation & Pension (C&P) exams. These exams conducted by inadequately trained providers have led to significant delays in the claims process and unfair denials of veterans' disability benefits. Incentives and penalties currently written into contracts with VA vendors do not appear to be effective.

Congress must ensure that VA holds its vendors to higher C&P examination standards. The quality review process for VA-contracted medical examiners must be made transparent, and Congress must ensure more effective incentives, stricter oversight mechanisms, mandatory quality reviews and severe penalties for non-compliance.

## Claims and appeals

VA often delays the processing of benefits claims simply because veterans filed their claims on incorrect forms (i.e., not the most current versions). Instead of delaying the claims process and depriving veterans of potential disability benefits, VA should move forward and ask for any additional information with notification letters.

One important issue that needs to be addressed in the appeals process is an “evidence gap.” Any evidence submitted from the date of a claim’s denial to the date when a Notice of Disagreement is filed cannot be considered by decision-review officers or veterans law judges. This gap needs to be eliminated so that evidence submitted any time before an appeal decision can be considered.

VA needs to adopt more veteran-friendly policies to ensure there are no wrong doors when claimants file for benefits they have earned. Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability benefits must be protected, VA should accept any standard form regardless of currency, and Congress must act decisively to hold predatory claims companies accountable for their unconscionable actions against veterans.



## Alternative therapies

Traumatic brain injury is associated with increased risk of mental health issues, including substance-use disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. Alternatives to opioids and easier access to complementary and alternative therapies must be improved to assist veterans.



## Toxic exposure

The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act) has successfully helped more than 1 million veterans receive care and disability benefits after exposure to toxic contamination while in service. Congress must continue to closely monitor and require VA to provide data to ensure full implementation of this historic legislation.

## Support for survivors

Survivors, spouses and children of military personnel who die on active duty or due to a service-connected illness or injury continue to face challenges. Two priorities of The American Legion are:

- To allow the spouses of the fallen to keep their benefits when they remarry; and
- To raise military survivor benefits to align with those offered by other federal programs, addressing disparities, and ensuring equitable support.

## CAVC judgeship expansion

The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) has exclusive jurisdiction to conduct judicial reviews of decisions made by the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. Currently, the CAVC has seven permanent judges and two temporary judges whose appointments expire at the end of 2025. Congress should pass legislation to make the two temporary judgeships permanent to prevent case backlog.

## Federal employees as veteran advocates

Many members of The American Legion and other service organizations are federal employees who are prohibited by law from volunteering as accredited representatives for veterans. Congress should eliminate this restriction and allow federal employees to serve in a pro-bono capacity as veterans service officers while in full compliance with ethical standards.



## National Security

As veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, members of The American Legion are keenly aware of the opportunities and challenges faced by those who serve in the active-duty, National Guard and Reserve branches. The Legion works with the Pentagon and installation commands to understand the needs of our nation's defenders. Moreover, The American Legion listens closely to the men and women in uniform to help craft policy and advocacy for them to achieve success.

Among the top legislative priorities of The American Legion National Security Commission for the 119th Congress are:



## Military quality of life

The American Legion believes that Congress and the DoD must continue to improve quality-of-life conditions for servicemembers and military families. Inflationary pressures resulting from the pandemic, supply-chain disruptions, rising energy costs, monetary policies and

government spending, and support for multiple wars overseas have led to significant increases in the cost of living for Americans. Funding for military pay, benefits and quality-of-life programs must continue to be adjusted accordingly. Moreover, barriers to quality-of-life services offered to servicemembers and their families have negatively impacted retention and recruitment numbers in the U.S. Armed Forces. DoD must continue to make difficult decisions, balancing spending for modernization of the military while funding long-neglected quality-of-life requirements.

# \$400

Approximate difference between Base Housing Allowance stipends for Shaw Air Force Base personnel and area monthly off-base housing costs

## Border security

Transnational Criminal Organizations operate across borders to illegally facilitate capital gains or influence. These crimes include drug smuggling, arms dealing, human trafficking, money laundering and cybercrime. In 2022, the State Department identified 11,676 trafficking victims in the Americas and Caribbean. More than 107,543 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2023, even though U.S. Border Patrol agents seized more than 27,000 pounds of fentanyl. Moreover, nearly one-third of Border Patrol agents are veterans. Unfortunately, U.S. Border Patrol retention and recruiting rates are dropping, and suicide rates among Border Patrol agents have risen rapidly. The politicizing of the border is preventing congressional collaboration, a problem that needs to be resolved. The American Legion implores lawmakers to work together on behalf of Americans and Border Patrol agents to improve national security.

# 850,000

Approximate number of immigrants living in the United States on expired visas



## Lethality of the U.S. Armed Forces

Continued modernization of the U.S. Armed Forces is essential for maintaining military superiority and ensuring national security in an increasingly complex and dynamic global environment. As adversaries adopt new technologies and strategies, the United States must stay ahead by embracing cutting-edge solutions and modernizing its defense capabilities. This includes investing in next-generation weaponry, cybersecurity measures and artificial intelligence; all are critical to maintaining strategic advantage. America no longer has the world's largest navy, and China's shipbuilding capacity is 232 times greater than that of the United States. The modernization process also involves updating military infrastructure, improving logistics and enhancing the training and operational readiness of personnel to address evolving threats. Congress must increase funding defense-related research initiatives to accelerate fielding capabilities in all domains of conflict while prioritizing joint warfighting capabilities.

## Funding the State Department and foreign operations

Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis said, "To those who would threaten America's experiment in democracy, they must know: If you challenge us, it will be your longest and your worst day. Work with our diplomats; you don't want to fight the Department of Defense." America's diplomats are the first line of de-escalation. Without them, U.S. servicemembers are put into unnecessary conflicts. The House of Representatives Fiscal Year 2025 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs bill proposed an 11% cut to overall funding levels, which were already

cut 6% last year. As the nation faces mounting tensions around the globe, Congress must reverse this trend. China has also surpassed the United States with 173 embassies worldwide. While DoD prepares for potential conflict with China, America needs a robust and well-funded foreign service to counter authoritarian influence.

## Protect Coast Guard pay and entitlements

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out missions vital to America's national security. Still, the Coast Guard is the only branch of service forced to work without pay during government shutdowns. The repeated threat of shutdowns brings unnecessary hardship on these servicemembers and their families and significant degradation in readiness. During the 2019 government shutdown, The American Legion stepped up and issued more than \$1 million in expedited Temporary Financial Assistance grants to Coast Guard personnel and their families. The American Legion urges Congress to introduce legislation that guarantees Coast Guard personnel are paid without delay like their military counterparts at the Department of Defense in the event of a government shutdown.



## Full accountability of POW/MIAs

Today, more than 81,000 U.S. servicemembers are recorded as "Missing in Action" since the end of World War II. Now, more than 80 years later, surviving family members are still left waiting to learn the fates of their loved ones. It is imperative that the U.S. military keeps its commitment to its ethos of "no one left behind" and provide the fullest possible accounting of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice on the battlefield.



## Veterans Employment & Education

The American Legion's Veterans & Employment Commission oversees efforts to ensure that those who have served the United States in uniform are provided the best possible opportunities to succeed after discharge. Resolution-driven policies and initiatives under the commission revolve around career opportunities for veterans and their spouses; education and training; home ownership; and veteran homelessness prevention.

Among the top priorities under The American Legion's Veterans Employment & Education umbrella for the 119th Congress are:

### End veteran homelessness

Prevention of veteran homelessness requires greater attention to underlying causes for veterans and their families. Factors such as substance abuse, mental health, unemployment and legal challenges contribute to the complexity of the issue. The Department of Housing and Urban Development's Point-In-Time count estimates that 35,574 veterans are currently homeless, making up 5% of the total adult homeless population in the United States, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Despite veteran homelessness decreasing by 49% since 2009, more work must be done. To effectively address veteran homelessness, policies must include comprehensive support for at-risk and homeless veterans, including counseling, assistance in

accessing care and benefits, financial and career resources, and business development opportunities.

### Modernize the Transition Assistance Program

The American Legion supports modernizing the DoD Transition Assistance Program by developing a mobile application that utilizes artificial intelligence to tailor resources and information to the individual. This app would provide servicemembers with on-demand access to critical transition resources, offering a tailored toolkit that allows users to individualize their career and transition plans, providing easy access to resources anytime and anywhere. Through AI, the app could offer personalized guidance, helping users make informed decisions and navigate the challenges of civilian life. The application would also provide offline functionality, ensuring that military personnel deployed in low-connectivity areas can access vital information. The American Legion emphasizes that the app must be developed thoughtfully, with input from interagency partners, the private sector and veterans service organizations, to ensure effectiveness and operability.



### Veterans in federal contracting

Veteran-owned small businesses (VOSBs) can play a major role in supporting the Defense Industrial Base (DIB), due to their agility, innovation, specialized capabilities and competitive pricing. Despite this, many federal agencies fail to meet their procurement goals for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs). An analysis



by The American Legion revealed that only four of the 24 largest federal agencies met their SDVOSB prime and subcontracting goals in 2024. The American Legion encourages expanding opportunities in federal contracting for SDVOSBs. Specifically, The American Legion encourages the Department of Defense to adopt the Vets First Program to ensure continued SDVOSB participation in federal contracting opportunities. Strengthening the Vets First program, enforcing procurement goals, enhancing subcontracting access, and fostering innovation will better integrate SDVOSBs into the defense supply chain. Prioritizing SDVOSBs is essential for the long-term resilience and competitiveness of the DIB.



## VA Home Loan transferability

Approximately 60% of millennials cite saving for a down payment as the primary barrier to homeownership. Introducing transferability into the VA Home Loan Guaranty Program could address this issue for veterans and military families by enabling access to the no-down-payment feature, thereby expanding homeownership opportunities. Improving the VA Home Loan benefit to



include transferability would promote financial stability and support the well-being of veterans and their families. The Department of Veterans Affairs can, and should, ensure that veterans and their dependents have equal access to economic advancement and homeownership opportunities. Granting family members access to the VA Home Loan benefit would demonstrate gratitude for military sacrifices and commitment.



## National Guard and Reserve GI Bill parity

National Guard and Reserve servicemembers play a critical role in national defense, responding to public health crises and global threats alike, and supporting law enforcement. However, they often face unique challenges, including prolonged absences from their families and civilian jobs, often incurring significant financial loss. Despite their contributions, many are denied a fundamental benefit: the GI Bill. Under current law, National Guard and Reserve members only accrue GI Bill entitlements when activated under federal orders. Those activated under state orders do not qualify, creating a significant disparity. The distinction between federal and state orders in determining GI Bill eligibility is unjust. The American Legion believes that “every day in uniform counts” and that National Guard and Reserve members, who serve alongside their active-duty counterparts at home and around the world, should receive the same benefits. Congress should extend GI Bill eligibility to all National Guard and Reserve servicemembers, regardless of activation status.



## Americanism

The American Legion's Americanism Commission oversees programs and services that elevate pride, education and awareness of the United States and its identity. Included are Boys State/Boys Nation, which mentor young people to learn and serve in the American democracy; Oratorical Contests that offer scholarships at the local, state and national levels for students who learn to speak fluently on the U.S. Constitution; and, emphatically, respect for the U.S. flag under which U.S. military men and women have served and sacrificed since the founding of the nation.

Top priorities for the 119th Congress, in support of The American Legion's Americanism pillar value include:

### Protection of the U.S. flag

Since a 1989 5-4 Supreme Court decision defined deliberate acts of U.S. flag desecration as free speech protected under the First Amendment, The American Legion has led efforts to return to the states their ability to legally prohibit such acts. The American Legion has come within one Senate vote in previous efforts to obtain the needed supermajority for a constitutional amendment that would restore the ability for states to enact and enforce laws that prohibit deliberate acts of desecration against the flag. The American Legion renews its vow to continue fighting to give Congress "power to prohibit physical desecration of the flag of the United States."



### Modernize U.S. Flag Code

The American Legion led national conferences in 1923 and 1924 that established the first rules of U.S. flag respect for the nation. Those guidelines laid the groundwork for what would be passed as U.S. Flag Code in 1942. Modern practices at massive public events, such as professional sports contests, frequently run counter to the code, and The American Legion calls for an amendment to modernize the guidelines that would make exceptions for common patriotic expressions of that magnitude that may include, for instance, displaying the flag in a horizontal position.



# American Legion National Contacts

## Mario Marquez

### Executive Director, Government Affairs

The American Legion Washington Office  
1608 K St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006  
Telephone: (202) 861-2700

## Julia Mathis

### Director, Legislative Division

legislative@legion.org

## Cole Lyle

### Director, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

va&r@legion.org

## Ariel De Jesus

### Deputy Director, National Security Division

ns@legion.org

## Joseph Sharpe

### Director, Veterans Employment & Education Division

ve&e@legion.org

## Ron Neff

### Director, Americanism Division

americanism@legion.org

*In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of the Treasury policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write to the Director, Office of Civil Rights and Diversity, 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington DC, 20220. The Department of the Treasury is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*



# The American Legion's Grassroots Advocacy

## 148,517

Actions taken through The American Legion's online  
Grassroots Action Center on legislative topics in 2024

## 786,654

American Legion Grassroots  
Action Center  
participants as of  
Jan. 1, 2025



## 585

Members of The  
American Legion  
National Legislative  
Council, who work  
with lawmakers in  
their home districts



## 24,936

Messages sent through The American Legion's  
Grassroots Action Center online platform to Congress,  
seeking passage of the Sen. Elizabeth Dole 21st  
Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement  
Act, which was signed into law Jan. 2, 2025

 AMERICAN  
LEGION

P.O. Box 1055  
Indianapolis, IN 46206  
(317) 630-1200

[legion.org](http://legion.org)



Connect with The American Legion