



March 14, 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.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: SHARE HOW CHANGES IN VA IMPACT YOUR BENEFITS

As a valued member of The American Legion, your insights and experiences are crucial to helping us understand the real impact of recent policy changes or reductions in staff at VA. We want to know how these changes and reductions have affected our community of veterans and their families. We remain steadfast in our mission to support and advocate for those who have served, but we need your input to better address these challenges.

We kindly ask you to take a few minutes to complete this brief survey [here](#) if you have not already. Your responses will guide our efforts to push for the resources and support our members deserve.

AMERICAN LEGION KEEPS VETERAN CARE AT FOREFRONT DURING TESTIMONY

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



VA&R director testifies on pending and draft legislation, VA workforce reduction and privatizing VA care.

American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Director Cole Lyle testified March 11 before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs regarding pending and draft legislation. In his testimony, Lyle answered questions from committee members regarding the Veterans' Access Act, reduction in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) workforce and privatizing VA.

"It is vital to acknowledge that this hearing comes at a time of uncertainty and widespread change," Lyle stated. "I want to be clear ... The American Legion has never shied away from the responsibility of being a voice for the veterans, and we will not start now. To veterans listening, the Legion exists for you. The VA exists for you. And we will continue to advocate for an effective VA on your behalf.

A leaked VA memo shared the cutting of more than 80,000 VA jobs by end of Fiscal Year 2025. Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., asked about the Legion's discussion with VA Secretary Doug Collins on this.

"The American Legion has spoken with Secretary Doug Collins about the need for more transparency and methodology of these changes and plans to mitigate potential impacts," Lyle said, adding that that the Legion has been in contact with the secretary's office about the department-wide personnel review by May 9 about the cuts. "We absolutely want to have the Legionnaires' voices heard in that process to ensure that there are no cuts in mission critical capabilities for health care or benefits at the VA."

Lyle shared that The American Legion has released a survey for veterans and their family members to take about the impact of recent or future government actions. [Take the impact survey here](#). "We believe the voice of our membership can provide crucial feedback to ensure no veteran goes without the care they need when they need it," Lyle said.

Blumenthal added that, "It is your voices and faces that will make a difference. At the end of the day, it's our veterans who have to save VA health care, VA benefits, the PACT Act."

One of the 15 pieces of pending and draft legislation that The American Legion submitted testimony on was Veterans' Access Act, which is to improve the provision of care services under the Veterans Community Care Program. Chairman Jerry Moran, R-Kan., thanked The American Legion for its support of the legislation.

“I appreciate your acknowledgement that failure to codify the existing community care standards, as a minimum access standard leaves them vulnerable to changes that make it more difficult for veterans to understand their rights under the MISSION Act,” Moran said.

Under the MISSION Act, the Veterans Health Administration was directed to increase access to community providers when it could not provide care in a reasonable time and/or distance, or if access to an outside provider was in the best medical interest of the veteran. Moran asked Lyle to elaborate how codifying the access standards benefits veterans and makes it easier for VA staff to understand and deliver that care in the community.

“We’ve seen evidence since the MISSION Act passed because it was regulatory and not codified in statute at the VISN and local VAMC level. There is a wide variety of education efforts at those levels to inform veterans of their options,” Lyle said. “Even if they are informed, oftentimes veterans can get denied the referral or shortened on the authorization approved time for community care. And it’s vital to codify these access standards so that the veteran’s decision with their provider is the No. 1 priority and the veteran remains the center of what VA does.”

Lyle reiterated another reason why the Legion supports the Veterans’ Access Act when Blumenthal asked about being in favor of privatizing the VA.

“Community care is VA care. VA pays for it. VA is supposed to coordinate it. It is a vital tool the VA can use to ensure we don’t have another waitlist scandal like we did in 2014 in Phoenix,” Lyle said. “There are certainly improvements to be made, particularly in scheduling. We hear from veterans that they like the care that they receive at VA. They like the care they receive in the community. Oftentimes, they are frustrated by the referral and scheduling process. That’s another reason The American Legion has supported the Veterans’ Access Act because it seeks to improve that capability of the care.”

Read The American Legion’s submitted testimony [here](#).

**WITTMAN, RYAN RELAUNCH HOUSE DEFENSE MODERNIZATION
CAUCUS**

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

Today, Congressman Rob Wittman (R-VA-01) and Congressman Pat Ryan (D-NY-18) relaunched the House Defense Modernization Caucus (HDMC) for the 119th Congress to continue their efforts to advance the national security ecosystem through the integration and adoption of emergent technologies. The relaunch was unveiled at the "Defense Modernization Outlook for the 119th Congress: Priorities and Pathways" event on Capitol Hill, featuring expert discussions with leaders from government, private capital, and the defense industry.

Originally founded by Wittman and Ryan, the bipartisan caucus serves as a driving force behind key policy and funding initiatives aimed at modernizing the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and strengthening national security.

"As warfare continues to evolve with emerging technologies, our national security agencies must prioritize agile and responsive modernization efforts. Ensuring this progress requires dedicated focus and support," **said Congressman Wittman**. "As the founding co-chair of the bipartisan Defense Modernization Caucus, it's been a pleasure to watch our caucus grow, and I'm eager to collaborate with colleagues on both sides of the aisle during the 119th Congress to drive innovation and strengthen America's security through cutting-edge advancements."

"There's no more time for screwing around. We need to deliver and scale capabilities at the speed of combat, not the speed of Congress," **said Congressman Ryan**. "The incredible growth of the HDMC in just the past few months shows the bipartisan appetite for action. Now we need to push – hard. And probably piss some people off along the way. Get on board with a software-centric Pentagon, PPBE reform, and increased partnerships with VC and the private sector, or get out of the way."

"The Silicon Valley Defense Group applauds Representatives Wittman and Ryan and the critically important work of the House Defense Modernization Caucus," **said Jacqueline Tame, executive director, Silicon Valley Defense Group**. "These long-needed efforts to catalyze systemic modernization via digital transformation, comprehensive and lasting acquisition reform, and forging pathways towards emerging technology readiness, require strong, unwavering, bipartisan leadership. We are proud to support your vision and agenda for the 119th Congress."

During the HDMC relaunch event, Tame moderated a panel discussion featuring Wittman and Ryan, exploring key initiatives such as streamlining the DoD's Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process, accelerating defense acquisitions, and leveraging venture and private capital to drive innovation.

A follow-up expert panel examined the Pentagon's efforts to enhance collaboration with private-sector tech firms, scale emerging technology adoption, implement AI at scale, and address ethics and security concerns in AI integration. Panelists included:

- Colin Carroll, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary of Defense
- Liz McNally, Deputy Director, Defense Innovation Unit

- Dan Tadross, Head of Federal, Scale AI
- Michael Brown, General Partner, Battery Ventures

In December, Wittman and Ryan announced several key wins they secured in the *Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act* to bolster the defense innovation ecosystem. Wittman and Ryan led efforts to streamline and accelerate the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)'s Authority to Operate (ATO) process, expand rapid hire authority for DoD innovation engines, and increase access to classified space for startup and scaleup companies.

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.

John Davis, Tennessee

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

John met with staff members from Rep. Scott DesJarlais's office. They discussed respect for the American flag, homeless veterans (including the increase of homeless women veterans) and the Be the One Program. One of the staff members was unaware of the 988 program, so John provided them with materials he received at a Colombia Protocol class he attended. One of the staff members said they were going to try to initiate one of these programs to Middle Tennessee University veterans and veterans in the Murfreesboro area.

Thank you, John, 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 3/14, there are no hearings scheduled. Congress is in recess from 3/15-3/23.

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](#)