



March 21, 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.

LAWMAKERS TRY AGAIN ON BILL TO GIVE 50,000 MEDICALLY RETIRED VETERANS FULL VA DISABILITY, RETIREMENT PAY

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



Members of Congress are trying again to pass legislation that would give medically retired service members full access to both their military retirement pay and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

A bipartisan group of senators on Monday introduced their chamber's version of the Major Richard Star Act -- legislation that, if passed, would provide roughly 50,000 veterans full retirement pay and disability benefits.

Currently, medically retired service members with fewer than 20 years in uniform and a disability rating of less than 50% have their retirement pay reduced by a dollar for every dollar they receive from the VA.

The bill would eliminate that offset, allowing what is known as "concurrent receipt" for these former service members.

"This measure corrects one of the deepest injustices in our present veterans' disability system," bill cosponsor Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said in a news release. "It is unacceptable that tens of thousands of combat-injured veterans are denied the full military benefits they earned."

Co-sponsor Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., said the proposal ensures that veterans who have made sacrifices have access to their complete benefits.

"This legislation makes a critical change to treat our veterans fairly and support our nation's heroes. I urge my colleagues to support its quick passage," Scott said in a statement.

The last time the bill was introduced in 2023, it garnered 326 supporters in the House and more than 70 in the Senate but failed to be considered for a vote, largely because it did not include recommendations for covering the cost.

The House version, also introduced this week, has 185 bipartisan cosponsors, including Reps. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., and Raul Ruiz, D-Calif., who are leading the initiative. The Senate's version already has 43 sponsors.

Nearly four dozen veterans service organizations have voiced support for the bill, and several have made it one of their top legislative priorities this year.

During a joint hearing March 3 before the House and Senate veterans affairs committees, Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander Al Lipphardt said that combat-injured veterans should not be treated differently than Social Security recipients who no longer are required to offset some types of pensions as a result of the Social Security Fairness Act.

"Retirement pay and disability compensation are separate benefits earned for different reasons. Congress continues to wrongly treat their concurrent receipt as double dipping," Lipphardt said. "It's time to correct this injustice for our military retirees."

AMVETS National Commander Horace Johnson said the bill must be passed out of fairness.

"Far too long, veterans and their families have been told to wait while billions are wasted," Johnson said in a joint House and Senate hearing Feb. 25.

In 2022, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that the average offset, or loss, experienced by these veterans was \$1,900 per month. The CBO also estimated the legislation would cost roughly \$9.75 billion over the next decade.

Army Reserve Maj. Richard Star developed lung cancer as a result of exposure to environmental pollution in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was medically retired after being diagnosed with terminal cancer and quickly learned that his military retirement pay would be offset by his VA disability pay. He began advocating for a change but died in 2021 before seeing serious consideration of legislation to address the issue.

In introducing the House version this week, Bilirakis said he was committed to passing the bill.

"Military retirement pay and service-connected disability compensation are two completely different benefits. One does not diminish the merits of the other," Bilirakis said.

HOUSE BILL OFFERS JOB SECURITY FOR COAST GUARD MEMBERS NEAR RETIREMENT

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

Coast Guard members who are a few years short of eligibility for retirement benefits would have their jobs protected under a new House bill introduced this week.

The legislation aims to ensure retirement parity between the Coast Guard, which operates under the Department of Homeland Security, and the rest of the armed forces, which operate under the Department of Defense.

Unlike other service members, members of the Coast Guard can be forced to leave the service a couple years shy of qualifying for retirement at 20 years of service if their enlistment expires and they are denied reenlistment.

The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Space Force and Air Force will retain enlisted members that have served a minimum of 18 years in such cases to ensure they can retire with full military benefits once they reach a 20-year retirement.

"This is about fairness, recognizing the sacrifices of our Coast Guard and ensuring these service members are not forced out just before reaching retirement eligibility," said Rep. Jen Kiggans, R-Va., who introduced the legislation.

The bill requires the Coast Guard to keep enlisted members whose term of enlistment has expired and who are denied reinstatement if they are within two years of retirement. Kiggans, a Navy veteran, said the proposal would strengthen retention, morale and fairness.

Coast Guard members who are discharged from service for legal reasons would not be eligible for retainment under the legislation.

Several military and veterans organizations have praised the bill as a long overdue step toward correcting inequalities faced by Coast Guard members compared to other service members.

The legislation “aligns their protections with other military branches,” John Vick, the executive director of the nonprofit group Concerned Veterans for America, said in a statement. “It guarantees them the same retirement for the same service.”

Rep. Jill Tokuda, D-Hawaii, a co-sponsor of the bill, said it would allow Coast Guard members to “fairly advocate for themselves, just as their fellow service members in the other service branches.”

“Every day, the Coast Guard stands ready to defend our country and assist mariners in need, and we must never forget to take care of them, too,” she said.

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.

Kathryn Bates, Washington

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

This week, Kathryn met with Representative Emily Randall’s staff to discuss veteran concerns in her district, such as VA health care issues, VA annuities, and military retired pay. She also attended a town hall meeting at Olympic College where the Congresswoman was speaking about veterans’ issues and other legislative topics.

Thank you, Kathryn, 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 3/20, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Monday, March 24, 3:00 PM: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing – *Closing the Data Gap: Improving Interoperability Between VA and Community Providers*

- Tuesday, March 25, 10:15 AM: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight Hearing – *Mission Incomplete: Strengthening the TAP Program to Ensure a Smoother Transition to Civilian Life for Tomorrow’s Veterans*
- Tuesday, March 25, 2:30 PM: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing – *Breaking Down Barriers: Getting Veterans ACCESS to Lifesaving Care*
- Tuesday, March 25, 2:30 PM: Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Seapower – *To Receive Testimony on the State of Conventional Surface Shipbuilding*
- Tuesday, March 25, 3:30 PM: House Armed Services Committee, Joint Subcommittees on Readiness and Seapower & Projection Forces – *Posture and Readiness of the Mobility Enterprise*
- Wednesday, March 26, 10:15 AM: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Legislative Hearing -- *Legislative Hearing on: H.R. 530, ACES Act; H.R. 647, Ensuring Veterans’ Final Resting Place Act of 2025; H.R. 1039, Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act; H.R. 1228, Prioritizing Veterans’ Survivors Act; H.R. 1286, Simplifying Forms for Veterans Claims Act; H.R. 1344, Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act; H.R. 2138, Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2025; H.R. 2137, Review Every Veterans Claim Act of 2025; Discussion Draft, Veteran Appeals Transparency Act of 2025; H.R. 2201, Improving VA Training for Military Sexual Trauma Claims Act; Discussion Draft, Veterans Claims Education Act; Discussion Draft, Survivors Benefits Delivery Improvement Act of 2025; and Discussion Draft, Board of Veterans Appeals’ Attorney Retention and Backlog Reduction Act.*
- Wednesday, March 26, 2:30 PM: Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Personnel – *To Conduct Oversight and Receive Testimony on the Status of the Military Service Academies*
- Wednesday, March 26, 3:30 PM: House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Intelligence & Special Operations Hearing – *US Special Operations Forces and Command: Challenges and Resource Priorities for Fiscal Year 2026*

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](#)