

# The American Legion National Legislative Conference of 118<sup>th</sup> Congress

*On February 27 and 28, the American Legion National Legislative Conference of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, National Commander Vincent Troiola addressed Congress with TAL's priorities shown below. We can help by writing letters, making phone calls, and sending emails to our respective Congressional members to support the Legion's efforts to improve the lives of all Veterans.*

*For more information, check out [www.legion.org/washingtonconference](http://www.legion.org/washingtonconference).*

*Linda Hayes  
Department VA&R Chair*

## Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

The leading issue facing the veteran community is suicide.

### *What can Congress do?*

Support the funding, implementation, and expansion of the VA and community-based mental health services through Veterans Centers, whole health innovations and transitional support.

Increase access to alternative therapies by decreasing the barriers to their use.

## VA Healthcare Modernization

The future of VA healthcare is as a hybrid system consisting of Veterans Health Administration-provided inpatient and outpatient care, telehealth and community care. Modernizing electronic health records, veteran-centric access standards, and a transparent online scheduling system for VHA-provided care and community care alike are all essential to ensuring veterans receive the care they deserve.

### *What can Congress do?*

Oversee the implementation of the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2019.

Hold VA accountable to deadlines, contracts and acquisition milestones for various IT system upgrades and installations.

Require VA to maintain a publicly available website on patient wait times, facility performance, and staff vacancy information for each VA Medical Center.

Fully fund VA infrastructure to meet the demands of today's veteran population.

Pass the Build, Utilize, Invest, Learn, and Deliver (BUILD) for Veterans Act.

## PACT Act: Implementation and Oversight

Passage of the SFC Health Robinson PACT Act in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress ensured millions of toxic-exposed veterans will now have access to healthcare and compensation they rightfully deserve. VA estimates that there will be up to 7 million new disability claims filed due to eligibility expansion that the claims backlog will increase to 450,000 by October 2023.

### *What can Congress do?*

Oversee comprehensive implementation of the PACT Act.

Require that VA report to Congress on statistics they have collected on PACT Act related claims, approved and denied claims, benefits exam quality, length of claims applications from start to finish and quality of care.

Fully support VA by providing the funding necessary to counter the potential claims backlog.

## Protect Veterans from Predatory Actors

America's veterans are targeted by predatory actors that seek to profit from an array of benefits that have been rightfully earned by those who have served our nation. From claims companies that charge exorbitant fees (for services provided free by veterans

service organizations) to lawyers vying for billions of dollars set aside for victims of diseases associated with contaminants, veterans and their families are met by promises of large payouts if they agree to surrender substantial portions of their benefits.

### *What can Congress do?*

Oppose legislation that elevates the standing of unaccredited claims companies or legitimizes predatory practices that target veterans

Pass legislation that will restore criminal penalties in the prosecution of companies that target veterans and their dependents.

Pass the Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act.

Impose a cap on fees for legal services provided in association with the Camp Lejeune Justice Act.



## Current Receipt

Currently, 42,000 military retirees with combat-related injuries qualify for DoD retirement pay as well as VA disability compensation. However, for retired veterans with disability ratings less than 50%, the VA compensation is deducted from their retirement pay.

### *What can Congress do?*

Provide total offset relief to veterans who suffered combat injuries or illnesses who were medically retired with less than 20 years of service with VA ratings less than 50%.

Pass the Major Richard Star Act.

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## Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parody

From protecting borders and delivering pandemic aid, our National Guard and Reserve troops have responded to new challenges like never before. Often, they leave both their families and civilian employers for a sizeable amount of time, sometimes taking a significant pay cut with them. Yet despite all we ask of them, too often they are left without access to the GI Bill. According to current law, they only accrue GI Bill entitlement when called to active duty under federal orders, not under state orders.

### *What can Congress do?*

Pass legislation that would expand access to the Post-9/11 GI Bill by counting every day that a service member is activated under Title 32 order towards benefits eligibility.

## GI Bill for Honorable Service

To receive most VA benefits, a veteran's characterization of discharge from service must be "under honorable conditions." However, education assistance benefits within the GI Bill, require that service members receive an "honorable discharge." If the characterization of service is "general under honorable conditions," the GI Bill remains out of reach for these veterans.

### *What can Congress do?*

Pass legislation that allows those service members who received a "general discharge under honorable conditions" access to post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits.

## Pay Our Coast Guard

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out vital national security missions, but they are the only U.S. Military branch that works without pay during government shutdowns, due to their status under the Department of Homeland Security.

### *What can Congress do?*

Pass legislation to provide for pay and allowances for members of the Coast Guard during a government shut down or funding gap.

## Citizenship for Honorable Service

Non-U.S. Citizens have served in our military since the revolutionary war. Today, about 8,000 legal, permanent resident aliens enlist annually. Military service has long provided pathways to American citizenship for more than 760,000 immigrant service members. Over the past few years, various reports from citizenship organizations, National and local news sources, and first hand accounts from members of Congress confirmed deporting of hundreds of thousands of veterans.

### *What can Congress do?*

Introduce legislation reinstating the U.S.C.I.S. Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative. That would once again provide onsite immigration resources and staff to support recruits, thus beginning the naturalization process.

Pass the H.R. 1182, Pass the S. 3212 Veteran Deportation Prevention and Reform.

Require DoD and DHS report to Congress annually the number of non-citizens serving at that time in the U.S. Armed Forces, the numbers of naturalization applications filed by Active-Duty U.S. service members, the results of those application and the number of veterans deported.

## Support our Afghan Allies

In the U.S. military, there is a code: "no one left behind." For two decades, members of the U.S. Armed Forces fought shoulder to shoulder with brave Afghan allies who served with and protected Americans. The United States



must honor its promises and provide genuine, lasting protection for the Afghans who have made it safely to the United States, and for those who were left behind.

### *What can Congress do?*

Reintroduce and pass the Afghan Adjustment Act, bipartisan legislation from the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress that would grant permanent legal status to Afghan refugees and improve the Special Immigrant Visa process for Afghans who served alongside U.S. service members.

## Amend the U.S. Flag Code

Appropriate care and respect for the American flag has been a leading mission of the American Legion since its inception. TAL helped Congress write the U.S. Flag Code into law in 1942. Amended several times in the past decades since its adoption, the Code serves as a guide with no penalties built in for violations. Practices and customs have been modified in the last few years regarding certain display procedures, but the Flag Code has not been updated to reflect current acceptable patriotic practices.

### *What can Congress do?*

Approve changes to the U.S. Flag Code to codify multiple customs and practices pertaining to the display and use of the U.S. flag.