AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

February 7, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

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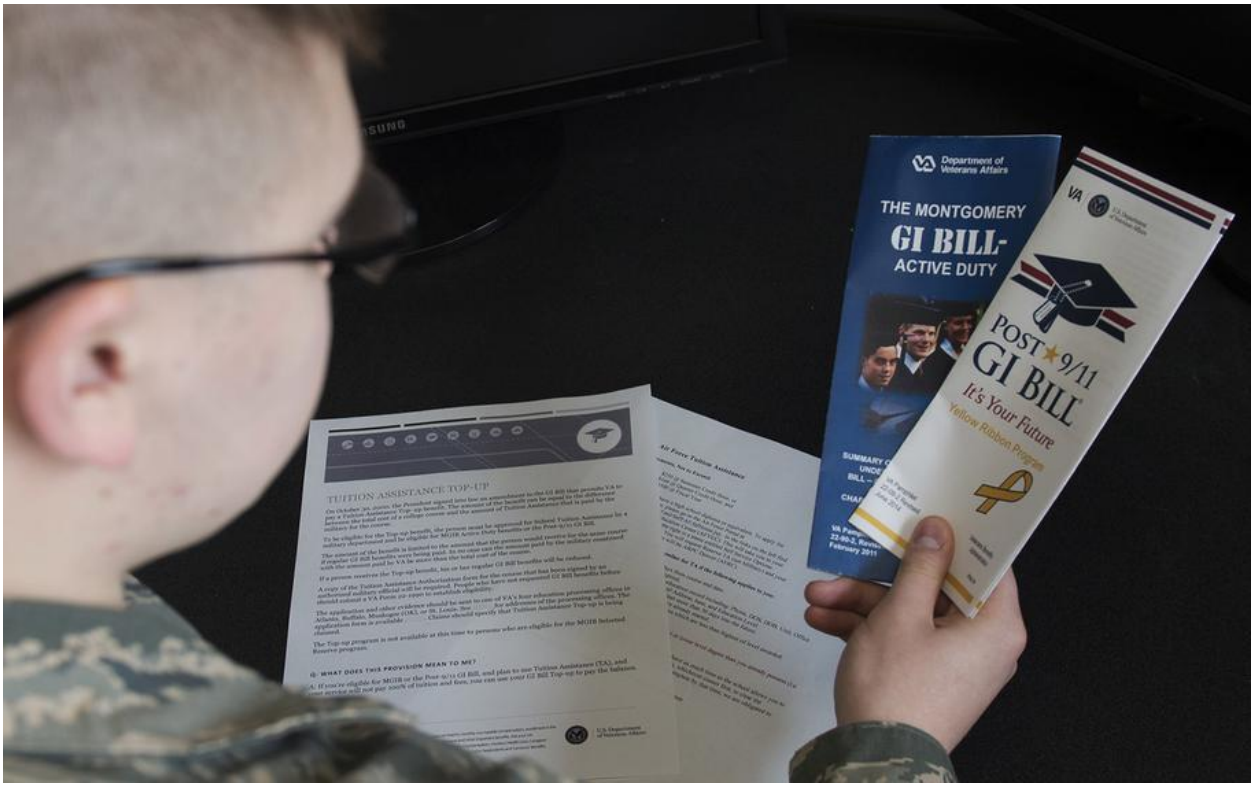
KEEP THE IMPROVED 90/10 RULE AND AVOID A $1.6B PRICE TAG – PAID BY TAXPAYERS, COSTING VETERANS

This article's original publication can be found here.



After years of careful negotiation, bipartisan agreement, and strong support from 50 veterans service organizations over nearly a decade of advocacy, Congress finally closed the 90/10 loophole. This long-standing policy flaw allowed subpar "colleges" to be completely dependent on taxpayer dollars and incentivized them to target veterans for their GI Bill. Closing the loophole and upholding the integrity of the 90/10 Rule was a victory for common sense, accountability and fiscal responsibility.

Washington rarely works as it should, but this was an exception. Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle, led by Republican Sens. Bill Cassidy and James Lankford, came together to protect service members and veterans from being blindsided by low-quality programs. Now, some in Congress are trying to undo this achievement; and, worse yet, they're attempting to sneak this through via the budget reconciliation process.

The numbers speak for themselves. According to the House Budget Committee Republican staff, repealing the 90/10 Rule would cost taxpayers an estimated $1.6 billion over the next 10 years. That's $1.6 billion that could be used to fix the system, expand job training programs, or go toward deficit reduction. If anything, Congress should strengthen market forces in higher education, ensuring that schools compete based on value and results, not just their ability to soak up federal money.

A real business model relies on private consumers. No successful company relies entirely on government handouts. And, yet, some colleges used to get exactly that — unlimited access to taxpayer dollars, with no accountability for outcomes. That's not capitalism; that's corporate welfare. It's the worst kind of handout, one that subsidizes failing institutions instead of fostering a competitive, high-quality education marketplace.

This problem isn't theoretical. Predatory institutions have repeatedly collapsed under their own financial mismanagement, leaving veterans and taxpayers to foot the bill. Schools such as ITT Tech and Corinthian Colleges were entirely dependent on taxpayer dollars, unable to attract private revenue. Simultaneously, they aggressively recruited veterans, collected their hard-earned GI Bill dollars, and eventually shuttered without a trace. Veterans were left with worthless degrees, or, in many cases, no degree at all.

The fight to close this loophole took more than a decade. It was driven by veterans advocates who saw firsthand how bad schools gamed the system. They heard from veterans who had been misled by aggressive recruiters, promised job placement that never materialized or steered into programs that weren't even accredited. In some cases, recruiters even targeted Gold Star families — those who had lost a loved one in service — during their grief support because their survivors' benefits were guaranteed tuition dollars.

Closing the loophole also garnered full consensus in a Department of Education rulemaking, even with representatives of for-profit colleges supporting the deal. Today's proposed repeal in the budget reconciliation isn't about improving education; it's about making it easier for subpar schools that cannot attract private revenue to access federal money without oversight. That's it. It's a money grab, plain and simple.

Congress has tough budget choices to make. Members on both sides of the aisle have called for cutting wasteful spending, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used effectively and reducing the deficit. Repealing the 90/10 Rule flies in the face of all that. Instead of bending to special interests lobbying for a handout, Congress should be standing firm in favor of their bipartisan solutions. Veterans deserve a real education for their hard-earned GI Bill benefits — one that prepares them for the workforce, helps them build careers and sets them up for long-term success. If a private company is unable to attract a single dollar of private revenue, that should be a major red flag.

Lawmakers should oppose costly handouts to subpar schools especially in a time when Washington is looking to cut costs. Congress got it right the first time. Congress can save an easy $1.6 billion and should leave the 90/10 Rule alone.

SENATE EASILY CONFIRMS COLLINS AS VA SECRETARY

The article's original publication can be found here.

The Senate voted Tuesday to confirm former Rep. Doug Collins as Veterans Affairs secretary, capping off the former Georgia GOP congressman's smooth journey to become a member of President Donald Trump's Cabinet.

The 77-23 vote came after Collins previously sailed through committee and easily cleared the simple majority threshold needed to invoke cloture on his nomination last week.

Republican senators praised Collins, who has served as an Air Force Reserve chaplain since 2002, on the chamber floor ahead of his confirmation.

Senate Majority Whip John Barrasso, R-Wyo., said Collins would "improve veterans' access to care," while addressing the "alarming" rate of veteran suicide and homelessness.

Meanwhile, Sen. Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, said Collins' time as a lawmaker means he "understands the importance of being accountable" to Congress.

"Rep. Collins, a veteran himself, recognizes the challenges veterans face with the VA," Grassley added. "During his time in the House of Representatives, he was a supporter of giving veterans the choice on where to seek health care. He and I agree that the VA needs to do better by our veterans and taxpayers alike."

Collins is poised to take the helm at VA at a time when the agency is seeing hundreds of thousands of additional veterans sign up for VA health care programs, largely driven by the 2022 law (PL 117-168) known as the PACT Act, which expanded benefits to former servicemembers exposed to toxins while serving overseas.

The burgeoning costs of providing care under the PACT Act is one part of an overarching fiscal debate centering on how to trim excess from the agency's budget without hurting veterans' access to or quality of care. Collins during his confirmation hearing pledged that "we're not going to balance budgets on the back of veterans benefits."

The department is also still struggling to modernize its electronic health care record system, a fraught, multibillion-dollar effort that has drawn concern from lawmakers and

prompted a programmatic reset and a 2023 contract renegotiation that changed the next phase of the agreement from a single five-year term to five one-year terms.

The change, officials said at the time, would allow the VA to annually reassess the deal with contractor Oracle Health. Most recently, the agreement was renewed in June 2024 for an 11-month period.

Collins drew more opponents Tuesday than he had five days prior, when the Senate voted 83-13 to invoke cloture.

Among those who opposed Collins' confirmation Tuesday were Sens. Angela Alsobrooks, D-Md.; Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., Lisa Blunt Rochester, D-Del.; Cory Booker, D-N.J.; Maria Cantwell, D-Wash.; Chris Coons, D-Del.; Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill.; Mazie K. Hirono, D-Hawaii; Andy Kim, D-N.J.; Edward J. Markey, D-Mass.; Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.; Christopher S. Murphy, D-Conn.; Patty Murray, D-Wash.; Alex Padilla, D-Calif.; Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I.; Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii; Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., Tina Smith, D-Minn.; Chris Van Hollen, D-Md.; Mark Warner, D-Va., Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass; Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I.; and Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

Hirono also cast the lone vote against Collins in committee last month. At the time, she cited concerns that Collins would back the overturning of a Biden administration regulation to allow the VA to perform abortions in cases of rape, incest or when giving birth would endanger the life of the woman.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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Jay Otken, Texas

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

This week, Jay met with two staffers from Rep. Michael McCaul's office to discuss continuous issues with the USPS that his post, along with other people in the surrounding area, have been experiencing. Post newsletters have been received weeks late, as well as messages from the VA to veterans in the Bryan/College station area. Rep. McCaul's staffers are aware of the issues people are experiencing regarding regional USPS services and told him they have been working with several other Congressmen to try to solve the issue.

Thank you, Jay, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 9:00 am on Friday, February 7, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, February 11, 10:15 am: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight Hearing – *Bureaucratic Barriers: Making VBA Education Services Work for Veterans and not the Bureaucracy*
- Wednesday, February 12, 2:15 pm: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing – *Roles and Responsibilities: Evaluating VA Community Care*

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

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HOUSE MILITARY PERSONNEL PANEL EYES REFORMS TO RECRUITING EFFORTS

This article's original publication can be found here.

Last year, House Armed Services Committee members focused on getting better pay and benefits for troops in their personnel policy discussions. This year, the goal is to help bring more troops into the ranks to enjoy those quality-of-life boosts.

“When it’s year over year and you’re not hitting your recruiting goals, that becomes a crisis,” Rep. Pat Fallon, R-Texas, the new chairman of the committee’s military personnel panel, said in an interview with Military Times. “Our greatest resource in the military is our personnel flat out, so we need to make sure we have great folks coming in.”

Fallon, an Air Force veteran in his third term in Congress, takes over the Armed Services’ personnel subcommittee after one of the most significant legislative years for troops and their families in decades.

Lawmakers in 2024 approved a massive pay raise for junior enlisted troops — set to go into effect this April — along with boosts to medical care access, day care opportunities and military spouse assistance programs, all in an effort to help boost recruiting and retention.

The effort seems to be paying off already, with Army recruiting reporting strong numbers in the final months of 2024 and retention across the services continuing to remain strong.

But Fallon said his subcommittee already has plans for several more hearings on the topic, to see what other improvements can be made. That will include ways to improve outreach to young Americans to encourage them to enlist.

“That’s what we want to focus on,” he said. “We need access in the high schools. We need ROTC units to be allowed at all colleges. … If you get access to young people and they realize what the military can do for them, you’re going to get more people to consider it.”

Fallon said he is also working on a legislative proposal guaranteeing citizenship for immigrants who honorably serve in the military for six years. In the past, such military service has made the naturalization process easier, but not an ironclad promise.

He expects work on the annual defense authorization bill to start at the end of this month, with numerous hearings to follow. Fallon said he will push for several new recruiting and retention incentives in the annual measure, along with a variety of quality-of-life issues benefitting currently serving families.

“I think the recommendations from last year were wonderful, but I don’t think our work is done there yet,” he said, referencing improvements to military housing stipends that were not included in legislation in 2024.

The annual defense authorization bill typically takes 8 to 11 months to navigate through Congress, with the House Armed Services Committee unveiling its initial priorities typically in mid-May. Fallon said his panel will be closely monitoring policy priorities outlined by the White House to see how they can be included in the next bill.

LAWMAKERS SLAM VA FOR 'RINSE-AND-REPEAT CYCLE' OF DELAYS IN FIXING PROBLEMS ADMINISTERING THE GI BILL

The article's original publication can be found here.

Republican lawmakers blasted Department of Veterans Affairs officials for mistakes in administering the GI Bill that led to delays in rolling out its digital platform and delivering direct deposits to veterans to help pay for books and student housing.

Problems in managing operations at the VA's educational services are the result of the agency prioritizing its large bureaucracy over veterans, Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., said at a hearing of a House Veterans' Affairs Committee's subpanel on economic opportunity.

"We on this committee are going to make sure that every dollar allocated by this Congress goes to help a veteran and not a bureaucrat," Van Orden said Tuesday, as lawmakers examined "bureaucratic barriers" to administering the GI Bill during a 90-minute hearing.

Established in 1944, the GI Bill helps veterans and their families cover bills for higher education and training that lead to new jobs and careers.

Van Orden said the work by former VA Secretary Denis McDonough, who left office in January, to improve educational services and other programs for veterans was undermined by "a lot of career officials at the VA." The agency employs nearly 475,000 people.

“This is going to stop. I am excited to have a new veterans affairs secretary,” Van Orden said, referring to Doug Collins, an attorney, pastor and Air Force Reserve chaplain confirmed by the Senate last week.

The VA is in the process of implementing a modernized GI Bill digital platform to make it easier for veterans to apply for and receive their benefits. A 2024 report by the VA Office of Inspector General found a lack of planning had led to delays and higher costs for the platform.

Van Orden and other lawmakers also rebuked the VA for intimidating colleges and job training programs through so-called risk-based surveys conducted to ensure their compliance with federal regulations when participating in the GI Bill benefits. Some schools withdraw rather than go through the reviews, Van Orden said.

Ken Smith, acting executive director for VA’s education service, said the department does not try to target specific schools for the risk-based surveys but strives to ensure veterans are receiving appropriate education and training.

“It is not our goal to drive schools out of the market,” he said.

The Defense Credit Union Council in written testimony urged the VA to modernize its electronic payment processing system and improve communications with financial institutions when there are direct deposit errors in the system.

The council, which represents not-for-profit, member-owned financial cooperatives that provide financial counseling, direct deposit services, loan programs and educational workshops, said the VA needs to speed up the transmission of payments for tuition assistance, books and housing.

Jason Stverak, chief advocacy officer for Defense Credit Union Council, described the role of defense credit unions as helping veterans manage their benefits, including for tuition assistance, VA home loans and disability compensation.

Veterans are experiencing delays in receiving disability and GI Bill benefits when using VA direct deposit, which should make the delivery of payments go faster, he said.

Smith said the VA is focused on completing the digital platform for administering benefits through the GI Bill.

About half of original claims are now submitted electronically, the VA said. Nearly 75% of supplemental claims are completed online.

The VA processed nearly 2 million claims in fiscal 2023, according to the VA.

Van Orden also referred to a closed-door session of a House VA subcommittee hearing Monday that identified “billions of dollars in waste that VA is responsible for because of inadequate planning or no planning at all.”

Though Van Orden did not identify the subcommittee or topic, he said the subcommittee chairman is Rep. Tom Barrett, a freshman Republican lawmaker from Michigan. Barrett is the new chairman of the House VA Committee's subpanel on technology modernization.

Barrett criticized the VA for "IT systems that go exponentially over budget and fail to deliver. We ask questions and don't get specific answers."

He described a "rinse-and-repeat cycle" that VA leaders goes through after every election with new House VA Committee members who raise the same concerns.

"The institutional members of VA wait us out," said Barrett, a 22-year Army veteran.

But Smith emphasized gains the VA has made in improving educational services.

"I commit to you I will work to get it right," he said, adding he has been in his position for just one week.

Smith said the VA is focused on making continuous improvements and leveraging technology to ensure veterans have "customer experience excellence."

Digital modernization efforts launched in August 2022 enabled education claims to be submitted electronically for the first time, he said.

Rep. Juan Ciscomani, R-Ariz., asked about the VA's progress in advancing financial assistance for veterans pursuing their commercial trucking licenses and for taking information technology courses, also known as VET-TEC, that will lead to jobs in high-demand fields.

"Transition from the military looks different for every person out there," Ciscomani said. He called on the VA to bring a sense of urgency to implementing these programs.

Smith acknowledged the VA's education service needs better processes and procedures.

"We can look at technology as an enabler," he said. "We are not there right now. We need to look at things within our control, provide reinforcement and improve our learning curve."

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Rachael Henske, Maryland

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

This week, Rachael met with Rep. Jamie Raskin (MD) to discuss how to promote veteran access to mental health care benefits. They also discussed the MISSION act and the PACT Act.

Thank you, Rachael, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

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- Wednesday, February 19, 9:30 AM: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations

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
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There will be no Grassroots Newsletter next week (Friday, February 28) due to Washington Conference. Newsletters will resume on Friday, March 7

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE IS NEXT WEEK!

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If you have planned a meeting with a Congressmember on the Hill during Washington Conference, please send your meeting time, location, and subject matter to grassroots@legion.org.

CHAIRMEN MORAN, BOST LEAD COLLEAGUES IN INTRODUCING LEGISLATION TO RESTORE ACCOUNTABILITY AT VA

This article's original publication can be found here.

U.S. Senator Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) – chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs – and Rep. Mike Bost (R-Ill.) – chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs – introduced legislation to strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs' authority to hold poor-performing employees accountable.

In 2017, Congress passed the *VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act* with overwhelming bipartisan support in response to the nationwide VA access crisis that exposed a toxic workforce culture at VA that negatively impacted veterans' care. Passage of this legislation gave VA leaders the ability to break through bureaucratic obstacles to discipline or fire poor-performing employees, providing VA employees a healthier workplace and increasing veterans' trust in VA. The *Restore VA Accountability Act* addresses questionable decisions from the Federal Circuit, the Federal Labor Relations Authority and the Merit Systems Protection Board that rendered the authority in the *VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act* unusable for most of the VA workforce.

"While VA employs some of the finest men and women, it only takes a few bad employees to disrupt the culture and service at the VA," **said Sen. Moran**. "Veterans are best served when VA leaders have the ability to act swiftly to remove bad employees from the VA workforce. This bill would restore the intent of Congress and help make certain that veterans receive the high-quality care and benefits they've earned and VA staff have the healthy workplace they deserve."

“Over the past two years, we uncovered scandal after scandal of bad middle managers or employees at VA committing wrongdoing. But time and time again, we saw these bad VA employees who don’t have veterans’ best interests at heart, just reshuffled to another part of the agency. That has a direct impact on not only veterans, but the mission of VA and the employees who are trying to do their jobs well,” **said Rep. Bost**. “The intent of Chairman Moran and I’s bill, the *Restore VA Accountability Act*, is to hold that 1% of bad VA employees accountable. President Trump made this message clear during his first administration, but the Biden-Harris administration and liberal courts refused to act and swept accountability under the rug. We’re going to restore the intent of Congress – and President Trump – by bringing accountability back for good, because America’s veterans deserve to know that the employees who are providing them with the care and services they have earned, are the best and the brightest.”

The legislation is cosponsored by Sens. Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), Jim Banks (R-Ind.), John Boozman (R-Ark.), Tim Sheehy (R-Mont.), Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), Rick Scott (R-Fla.), James Risch (R-Idaho) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.).

“Taking care of our veterans is a sacred duty,” **said Sen. Tuberville**. “Veterans should have the best medical care in this country, but at times they have had some of the worst. Veterans shouldn’t be waiting in excruciatingly long lines because the VA’s priorities are misplaced. This legislation restores the VA Accountability Act to its full strength by cutting bureaucratic red tape to allow VA leaders to discipline employees who aren’t doing their jobs.”

“Our veterans answered the call to service,” **said Sen. Cassidy**. “I expect employees at the VA to at least answer the phone. We hear too many stories of veterans being failed by the VA. It’s time we hold the VA accountable.”

“Our veterans deserve a Department of Veterans Affairs that works tirelessly on their behalf,” **said Sen. Blackburn**. “The Restore VA Accountability Act ensures that the VA has the authority it needs to hold employees accountable for misconduct or poor performance, reinforcing the trust our veterans place in this agency.”

“This legislation will bring accountability back to the VA by empowering the Secretary to take swift action against underperforming employees,” **said Sen. Banks**. “A clear message will be sent that excellent veteran care will always be a top priority for President Trump. That’s what the men and women who served our country have earned, and that’s what we’re going to deliver.”

“When bad actors within the VA avoid accountability, veterans and their loved ones suffer,” **said Sen. Boozman**. “That is unacceptable and clearly contrary to Congress’ intent to ensure a culture that delivers the highest standards of care. This legislation reasserts our commitment to zero tolerance for poor performance or misconduct among those serving our former servicemembers.”

“As a combat veteran, who is married to a combat veteran, I know how critical it is to reform the VA and honor our commitment to those who have put their lives on the line for our nation,” **said Sen. Sheehy**. “Our government has a solemn responsibility to have our warfighters’ backs both while they are overseas and once they return home, and I am proud to join my colleagues on this important legislation to ensure the VA is actually accountable to America’s veterans.”

“Our nation’s veterans deserve a Department of Veterans Affairs that delivers quality, efficient care, benefits, and services,” **said Sen. Cramer**. “The bureaucracy often stands in the way of its own mission. I joined Senator Moran in introducing the Restore VA Accountability Act to reinstate the tools to hold the bureaucracy and bad actors accountable.”

“Our veterans have put everything on the line and deserve the best care possible,” **said Sen. Rick Scott.** “I am proud to join my colleagues on the Restore VA Accountability Act to make the VA more efficient and accountable, and raise the standard of life-saving, health care. As a Navy veteran myself and the son of a WWII veteran, it is my priority to ensure all veterans are taken care of and I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation.”

The *Restore VA Accountability Act* strengthens accountability by unlocking expedited disciplinary processes for VA employees, ensuring that decisions backed by substantial evidence are upheld on appeal, removing the need for a performance improvement plan before disciplinary action, and aligning accountability processes for poor-performing managers with that of senior executives.

The full text of the legislation can be found here. A one-pager explanation of the bill can be found here.

House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Chairman Mike Bost (R-Ill.) introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives that was cosponsored by 25 members.

Quotes of Support:

“The VFW supports the Restore VA Accountability Act to improve VA's ability to hold employees to the high standards our veterans deserve,” **said Pat Murray, Legislative Director, The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW)**. “We appreciate the efforts by our supporters in Congress to provide the Secretary the authorities needed to ensure accountability remains paramount at VA.”

“The mission of the VA to serve veterans requires an essential bond of trust. And for veterans to trust in the VA, employees and officials need to be held accountable for their actions,” **said Jim Lorraine, President & CEO, America’s Warrior Partnership (AWP)**. “The vast majority of VA employees are tarnished by the small number of

problematic employees that hurt morale and reputation. Congress has been very forward about this issue in a bipartisan manner for many years, and we are thankful for Chairman Moran and Chairman Bost for reintroducing this essential piece of legislation to restore trust in the VA."

"Amidst a veterans' mental health and suicide epidemic, the outgoing Biden administration's leadership at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs failed our nation's heroes," **said John Byrnes, Strategic Director, Concerned Veterans for America (CVA).** "They refused to follow the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act which mandates firing corrupt and incompetent VA employees. Additionally, this VA has intentionally acted as a barrier to veterans trying to access timely and quality health care. Passing the Restore VA Accountability Act of 2025 is a crucial step to ensure VA and its employees are held accountable to the law. On behalf of every veteran who deserves the care they've earned, CVA urges Congress to act swiftly and support this accountability legislation; it is a matter of saving veterans' lives."

"The American Legion stands behind the efforts of Chairman Bost and Chairman Moran in their multi-session effort to pass the Restore VA Accountability Act," **said Mario Marquez, Executive Director of Government Affairs, The American Legion.** "This legislation reflects a commitment to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) upholds the highest standards of accountability and care for our nation's heroes by providing the Secretary the necessary tools to address poor performance. Our veterans and their families have earned nothing less than exceptional service from the VA. Strengthening disciplinary authority at the VA is paramount to ensuring a VA that serves all veterans with the highest standards. The American Legion remains committed to working with Congress to ensure veterans receive the first-class care that they deserve."

"SVA strongly supports the Restore VA Accountability Act, which is a critical step forward in ensuring veterans and their families are served with integrity by the Department of Veterans Affairs," **said Jared Lyon, National President & CEO, Student Veterans of America (SVA)**. "By providing clear procedures for addressing poor performance or misconduct while also protecting whistleblowers and due process rights, the bill strikes a necessary balance to uphold the highest standards of service for our nation's veterans. SVA stands firmly in support of these efforts that promote transparency and accountability, and improve the overall effectiveness of the VA."

"The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is grateful to Chairman Moran and Chairman Bost for introducing the Restore VA Accountability Act of 2025 to ensure that VA has the needed authority to create and sustain a workforce environment that best serves our veteran community" **said Bonnie Carroll, TAPS President and Founder**. "On behalf of a grateful nation, we owe our Veterans, their Families, Caregivers and Survivors nothing less."

"We owe an incredible debt to those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom. We must absolutely ensure the VA system is accountable and effective," **said Major**

General (ret.) Frank McGinn, President, National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS). “We must right wrongs and dismiss bad actors when they are identified. This bill is a positive step in restoring VA accountability and improving services. We are grateful to Chairman Moran and Chairman Bost for continually stepping up to support our nation’s veterans and thank them for these efforts.

CRANE REINTRODUCES BIPARTISAN ‘HIRE VETERANS ACT’ TO FILL CRITICAL LAND MANAGEMENT VACANCIES

The article’s original publication can be found here.

Last week, Rep. Eli Crane (R-AZ) and Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) reintroduced the Hire Veterans Act to employ American veterans while strengthening the federal skilled labor force, specifically at the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

Over the past decade, federal land management agencies have routinely faced staffing shortages, impacting their operational effectiveness. Notably, the U.S. Forest service has struggled to attract and retain staff, compounded by a noticeable gap in the experience and skill sets of candidates, affecting their capacity to address increasing wildfire threats.

The Hire Veterans Act comprehensively strengthens the federal skilled labor pipeline for veterans, streamlining the hiring process for those seeking to protect our natural resources.

Specifically, the bill establishes a five-year pilot program to direct federal land management agencies to conditionally appoint a veteran who has demonstrated the necessary skills and abilities for specific vacant positions at federal land management agencies.

The bill also directs the Office of Personnel Management, in consultation with the Department of Veterans Affairs and federal land management agencies, to submit an annual report to Congress until the termination of the pilot program, on the effectiveness of the program.

Following the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles and dry conditions in Arizona, it's critical that we proactively boost fire mitigation efforts. This common sense approach to expand our workforce directly addresses vulnerabilities in this area.

"As a 13-year veteran of the U.S. Navy, I'm all too familiar with the obstacles servicemen and women face when transitioning to civilian life. I'm also well-aware of the challenges our federal land management agencies currently face, particularly in filling vacancies for firefighters, park rangers, and foresters," said Rep. Crane. "With this bill, Congress has the opportunity to both streamline the employment process for veterans AND better ensure that our natural resources are protected for future generations. I'm grateful to be able to introduce this legislation that serves our veterans while furthering the responsible stewardship of U.S. land."

"Our veterans sacrifice so much for our nation. We have an obligation to ensure that veterans returning to civilian life can get jobs and support their families," said Rep. Levin. "I'm glad to be partnering with Rep. Crane on our bipartisan bill to expand opportunities for veterans and help connect them to jobs in federal land management agencies. I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance this important legislation."

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.

Robert Dionne Sr., New Hampshire

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

This week, there was a Veteran's Town Hall at Legion Post 2 in Manchester, N.H. that hosted Representative Chris Pappas. They discussed local issues as well as those in the 119th Congress Legislative Agenda. There were 8 Legionnaires, 5 other veterans, and 1 nonveteran in attendance for the nearly hour-long discussion.

Thank you, Robert, 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 2/21, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, February 25, 9:30 am: Senate Armed Services Nomination Hearing -- *"To Consider the Nomination of Mr. Stephen A. Feinberg to be Deputy Secretary of Defense"*
- Tuesday, February 25, 10:00 am: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing -- *"Legislative Presentation of Disabled American Veterans & Multi VSOs: AMVETS, Vietman Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Blinded Veterans Association, Veterans Education Success, Gold Star Wives of America Inc., and Reserve Organization of America"*
- Wednesday, February 26, 10:00 am: Joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing -- *"Legislative Presentation of The American Legion & Multi VSOs"*
- Tuesday, March 4, 10:00 am: Joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee VSO Hearing -- *"Legislative Hearing Presentation of the Veterans of Foreign Affairs Wars of the U.S. & Multi VSOs: PVA, IAVA, SVA, TAPS, EDF, NCHV"*

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