

## WWP GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATES

## EVENT TRACKER

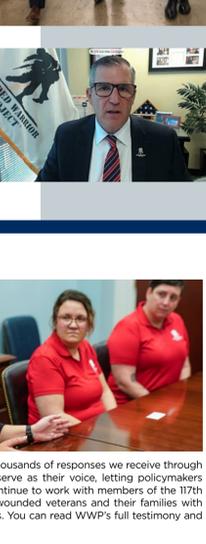
Greetings, and welcome to your Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) quarterly policy update, **Project Advocacy News**. We have an great effort that 2020 was a year like no other that challenged us in unique ways. Through those challenges, and with your help, **WWP's advocacy efforts connected warriors with their elected officials, gave warriors a voice on Capitol Hill, and empowered them to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.**

**Financial Literacy Month - April**  
**Month of the Military Caregiver - May**

The year also provided an opportunity to achieve many legislative successes, positively impacting the lives of all the warriors we proudly serve.

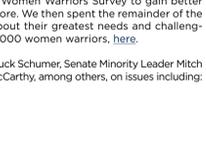
Before the end of the year, WWP's Senior National Service Officer Anita Ritchie testified before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs about the needs of veterans who are ill because of exposure to toxicants. Veterans suffering from toxic exposure face significant challenges when they file for disability compensation with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and we believe it's possible to achieve solutions to these challenges, such as:

- Setting clear guidelines on how VA can use the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) system when processing a VA claim for possible exposure.
- Changing the VA policy for developing legal presumptions for toxic exposure-related illnesses and using the rapidly growing body of research on the issue.
- Establishing a study on the effects of toxicants, including, but not limited to, burn pits.
- Considering the inclusion of Afghanistan service as Gulf War service for the application of the provisions contained in 38 C.F.R. § 3.317.



You can also find Anita's written testimony [here](#).

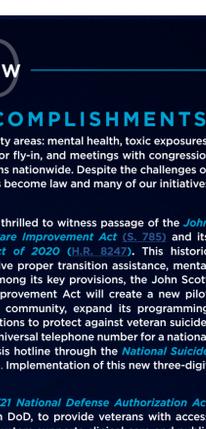
With a new year, and a recent election, we have now entered the first session of the 117th Congress. Over the last several weeks, WWP has been meeting with all the new members and their staff to educate them about our programs and services, discuss our legislative priorities, and identify ways we can work together to serve America's veterans. Most of these discussions have focused on our legislative priorities, which can be viewed [here](#).



On March 4, WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington testified before the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs, highlighting WWP's top legislative priorities, aimed at helping the warriors WWP serves. Those priorities include:

## WWP GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATES (continued from page 1)

- The extension of health care to any veteran who suffered toxic exposure.
- Improved access to care and better environment of care for women veterans, including dramatic improvements needed for women seeking care for military sexual trauma (MST).
- Personal and professional transition assistance for female veterans who face unique challenges after military separation.
- Improvements to mental health care delivery and coordination.



Our priorities are formed through engagements with warriors and by the thousands of responses we receive through the WWP Annual Warrior Survey. Our annual testimony is a chance to serve as their voice, letting policymakers and members of Congress know what their greatest needs are. We will continue to work with members of the 117th Congress to make the necessary reforms and changes that will provide wounded veterans and their families with the resources, care, and treatment they need to thrive in their communities. You can read WWP's full testimony and recommendations for these legislative priority areas [here](#).

We also recently rolled out findings from a year's work of WWP's Women Warriors Initiative – a comprehensive advocacy and fact-finding initiative designed to help us better understand, advocate for, and serve women warriors. We started the initiative in January of 2020 through our first Women Warriors Survey to gain better insights into the mental health, economic security, relationships, and more. We then spent the remainder of the year meeting with women warriors from across the country to learn about their greatest needs and challenges and find solutions. You can read our report, with input from nearly 5,000 women warriors, [here](#).

Additionally, we have sent seven position letters to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, among others, on issues including:

- The Major Richard Star Act
- The ABLE Age Adjustment Act
- The Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act
- The Tele-Mental Health Improvement Act
- DoD Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts
- Home and Community Based Services Funding
- Mental Health Care Services Funding

With 2021 off to a good start for WWP's Government Affairs team, there is a lot more on the horizon. A new Congress and a new president present fresh opportunities for collaboration and we're excited to bring our priorities and agenda before them on behalf of America's wounded veterans, their families, and caregivers.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

### 2020 KEY LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through 2020 WWP focused its advocacy efforts on three priority areas: mental health, toxic exposures, and women veterans. Through our congressional testimony, warrior fly-in, and meetings with congressional members and staff, we advocated on behalf of millions of veterans nationwide, despite the challenges of COVID-19, we were fortunate to see many of our legislative priorities become law and many of our initiatives gain momentum.

In the realm of mental health, WWP was thrilled to witness passage of the *John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act (S. 1105)* and its companion, the *Veterans COMPACT Act of 2020 (H.R. 3287)*. This historic legislation will ensure that veterans receive proper transition assistance, mental health support, and telehealth access. Among its key provisions, the John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act will create a new pilot program to extend VA's reach into the community, expand its programming through nonprofits, and improve interventions to protect against veteran suicide. In addition, 9-8-8 was designated as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline through the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 (H.R. 2681)*. Implementation of this new three-digit number will take effect by July 2021.

Our efforts on toxic exposure resulted in *Section 9105 of the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)* (H.R. 6395). This section requires VA, in consultation with DoD, to provide veterans with access to their own Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER). This system supports clinical care and public health activities by searching for individuals and associating them with known toxic exposure events. Prior to passage, only DoD and VA clinicians, claims adjudicators, and researchers had access to ILER. This information will greatly help inform veterans' health care decisions and assist with disability claims associated with toxic exposures.

A landmark victory for our women veterans advocacy came through *Section 5001 of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (H.R. 7105)*, which significantly reduces barriers to care for women veterans while also improving and expanding programs and services. It provides women veterans better access to health care, housing, and legal services and will ensure better gender-specific services at all VA medical centers. This section also improves the claims process for military sexual trauma survivors at VA and expands childcare for women receiving VA care.

We're also excited about the passage of a few of our other legislative priorities. The *Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019 (H.R. 3504)* increases funding and grant availability to ensure wounded veterans' homes can be adapted as their needs change throughout their lifetimes. This law provides specially adaptive housing benefits to eligible veterans every 10 years and increases the amount of the benefit from approximately \$84K to \$100K. Additionally, *Section 2004 of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (H.R. 7105)* will provide life-changing benefits to veterans by affording veterans with service-connected injuries, who likely would not qualify for affordable life insurance plans because of their medical status, access to low-cost life insurance. This provision increases the maximum amount of available coverage from \$10K to \$40K – by raising the cap will mean veterans will be able to provide more financial assurances to their families.

These priorities marked major wins for veterans during the 116th Congress. In addition to these legislative milestones, WWP kept busy through a host of other projects and initiatives. Here's a recap of some of the highlights from the past year:

## 2020 BY THE NUMBERS

Testified before Congress four times, submitted seven written statements for congressional hearings, and drafted 19 advocacy letters to Congress.

Advocated for passage of signature legislation that will impact over 17 million veterans. This legislation modernizes VA benefits, updates the adaptive housing program for those with disabilities, increases mental health resources for veterans in need, and addresses challenges faced by women warriors.

Initiated the Women Warriors Initiative. Through this initiative, WWP engaged with nearly 5,000 women warriors through our Women Veterans Survey and conducted 13 roundtable discussions with WWP Alumnae to give a voice to women veterans and to better inform policymakers of their needs.

Advocated for adoption of over 40 new mental health provisions into law, including laws to address precision medicine, telehealth, complementary therapy, and community grants for suicide prevention.

Convened over 30 organizations to form the Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) coalition. Worked collectively to collect data, promote research, and introduce this generation's signature toxic exposure legislation to gain health care access for veterans made ill by toxic exposures due to their military service.

## GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM (GWOT) MEMORIAL

By Jose Ramos, Vice President, Government and Community Relations, U.S. Navy Veteran

Every few days, I find the opportunity to go running through the National Mall's beautiful landscape in Washington, D.C. and admire some of the nation's most historic memorials and monuments. I run through the Mall because it is such a picturesque yet solemn experience, as historic memorials, such as the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, surround me.

For many of us who have served or know loved ones who have served – in this generation or generations of the past – we also gravitate toward those memorials honoring our fellow brothers and sisters and all those who have sacrificed in conflict. These memorials are all with-in sight of each other on the Mall.

As I stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and look across the Reflecting Pool, I see the beautiful memorial dedicated to those who served and those we lost during World War II. Nearby, I see a sleek, long black granite wall with the etched names of every fallen or missing service member involved in the Vietnam War. One of my favorites is the memorial directly across from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – a Wall of Remembrance and 19 stainless steel statues commemorating the sacrifices of the millions of Americans and allied partners who fought during the Korean War.

As I run, I reflect on our time in history and the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), which has been waged for nearly 20 years, making it the longest war in American history. I think of all those we have lost, those who have been wounded and injured, and those who continue to enlist, answering the call to duty. How will we honor, heal, empower, and unite them, and how can we do so? We need to foster the sense of patriotism that brought us all together in the wake of 9/11?

Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) was founded in 2003 to support and provide resources for those wounded, ill, or injured coming out of the GWOT. Our mission is to honor and empower wounded warriors – and we see advocating for a memorial in commemoration of those who served during the GWOT as an extension of this.

There is an effort underway to build such a memorial, and WWP is committed to this effort. On Aug. 18, 2017, the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Act (H.R. 873) was signed into law. This act authorizes the establishment of a national war memorial on federal land in Washington, D.C. Still, to build the GWOT Memorial in the Reserve of the National Mall, Congress must first approve it.

During the 116th Congress, Reps. Jason Crow (D-CO-06) and Mike Gallagher (R-WI-08), two combat veterans, introduced the *Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act (H.R. 5046)*, authorizing the placement of the GWOT Memorial near the others in the Reserve of the National Mall. Even with 103 co-sponsors and the full support of the entire For Country Caucus, a bipartisan congressional caucus of post-9/11 veterans, it was not passed. Similar efforts in the Senate (S. 4554) led by Sens. Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH), failed to make it through before the end of the 116th Congress.

On February 18, 2021, Reps. Crow and Gallagher reintroduced this important piece of legislation (H.R. 1115) in the House. Still, to build the GWOT Memorial in the Reserve in the Senate (S. 535) by Sens. Ernst and Hassan.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, we hope to offer a fitting tribute to the service and sacrifice of all GWOT veterans who have made through swift passage of this legislation.

While there is broad support for this memorial and its construction, its location is still being reviewed, and we need your help.

Just like all the other veteran memorials, which veterans of those eras spearheaded, we can do it too. Help us raise awareness by contacting your senator and representative and asking that they support the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act in the 117th Congress.

## WOMEN WARRIORS INITIATIVE LAUNCH

Women are one of the fastest-growing demographics both in military service and the veteran community, but they face unique challenges when transitioning from military to civilian life. There are currently over 25,000 women warriors registered with WWP. To better understand their needs, we formed an initiative focusing on women veterans that will guide our advocacy for meaningful legislative and policy action to improve the lives of all women veterans.

**Women Warriors Initiative Survey and Roundtables**

On March 12, WWP was joined by the chairwoman of the Congressional Women Veterans Task Force – Rep. Julia Brownley – to discuss the findings of our Women Warriors Initiative in a virtual event hosted by our friends at the Brookings Institution. To see the full livestream, click [here](#).

WWP launched the Women Warriors Initiative in order to learn more about the women warriors we serve, their military and civilian experiences, mental health, economic security, relationships, and much more. The results of this survey augment those of our Annual Warrior Survey, painting a clearer picture of the everyday challenges women warriors face. Following the survey, WWP held 13 roundtable discussions with nearly 100 women veterans to learn more on how the challenges identified in the survey and seek input on how to address them. Through the roundtables, women warriors addressed specific concerns on issues like transition, access to care, mental health, isolation, and financial readiness.

## WOMEN WARRIORS INITIATIVE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS



## KEY FINDINGS

- Excluding women on active duty, **34% of women warriors report being employed full-time and 10% part-time.**
- About a quarter of women warriors are disabled and not able to work. (**26%**)
- About 12% are unemployed and looking for work.
- The top three challenges they faced during their military-to-civilian transition were:
  - COPING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES SUCH AS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD), ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, ETC. (61%)**
  - FINANCIAL STRESS (30%)**
  - COPING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES RELATED TO MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST) (25%)**
- ALMOST ALL WOMEN WARRIORS** reported being enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care. (**95%**)
- The top barriers to care were identified as:
  - APPOINTMENT AVAILABILITY DUE TO PROVIDER SCHEDULE (61%)**
  - POOR-QUALITY CARE (43%)**
  - APPOINTMENT AVAILABILITY DUE TO PERSONAL SCHEDULE (26%)**
- NEARLY 1 IN 4 WOMEN WARRIORS** reported that services needed from VA are not offered.
- LESS THAN HALF OF WOMEN WARRIORS** felt respected for their military. (**47%**)

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- IMPROVE THE TRANSITION PROCESS** between the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA
- IMPROVE COORDINATION** between DoD and VA for MST-related care
- EVALUATE THE PHYSICAL LAYOUTS AND UTILIZATION PATTERNS** of Veterans Health Administration facilities to assess safety, convenience, and overall ease of access by women veterans
- INCREASE ACCESS TO WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE** by extending hours of operation and assessing the resources required to support project utilization

## MEET THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Sen. Jon Tester of the Great State of Montana

**CONGRATULATIONS ON ASSUMING THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS. AS THE NEW CHAIRMAN, WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES FOR THE COMMITTEE?**

As the new chairman, I'll be prioritizing initiatives that best support the men and women who have bravely served our country. The first and foremost, I'll spearhead timely consideration of nominees by the Committee to make certain that there is a seamless transition for the incoming leadership at the VA. And I'll be working hard to help ensure an efficient rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine to veterans and VA staff. I'll also continue working with Ranking Member Moran, our committee members, and veterans advocates at WWP to hold the VA accountable, cut red tape, and provide quality care and benefits to veterans and their families. And I'm going to keep pushing VA to Fair Care for the Vietnam Veterans Act, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, the Deborah Sampson Act, and the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans, Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP IN SPONSORING AND LEADING THE CHARGE FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE HISTORIC DEBORAH SAMPSON ACT. WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM THE 117TH CONGRESS TO CONTINUE TO IMPROVE CARE AND SERVICES FOR HIGH VETERANS?**

Improving care and services for women veterans is a top priority and high on our agenda for the 117th Congress. While we've made the great progress and welcome of the Deborah Sampson Act, we have a long way to go in making sure the VA is a safe and welcoming place for all veterans, regardless of their gender, race, or sexual orientation. Women are the fastest-growing population of veterans in the country, and they deserve equitable care and protection. I'll continue to work with both sides of the aisle and VA leadership to mandate sexual harassment training across the Department, improve oversight of sexual harassment/assault investigations for active duty members and veterans, and expand access to reproductive and mental health services for women.

**MENTAL HEALTH REMAINS A TOP PRIORITY FOR WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT. WE WERE THRILLED TO SEE THE COMMANDER JOHN SCOTT HANNON ACT SIGNED INTO LAW LAST YEAR. THIS LEGISLATION WILL PROVIDE NEW TREATMENTS FOR WARRIORS DEALING WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY. WHAT MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES ARE YOU MOST FOCUSED ON IN THE COMING YEAR?**

As the new Chairman John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act last Congress was a historic leap forward in expanding life-saving mental health services to all veterans. I'll continue to focus on implementing the many initiatives outlined under this law to deliver innovative and comprehensive mental health services for veterans, especially those in rural areas. This includes modernizing the state of care at VA to include wellness programs such as animal or art therapy and provide efficient telehealth mental services to all veterans, particularly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, so that all who need help will receive it – without risk of exposure.

One of our biggest priorities for this Congress is also to ensure that Guardians and Reservists receive benefits and care that is more commensurate with their increased service, which means ensuring consistent access to mental health resources, regardless of their deployment status. I'm confident that the committee will continue to work with our veteran partners like WWP to make great strides in providing substantive mental health services for all of our veterans.

**WWP IS WORKING DILIGENTLY TO ENSURE THAT VETERANS SUFFERING FROM DISEASES ASSOCIATED WITH TOXIC EXPOSURES GET THE HEALTH CARE THEY NEED. YOU HAVE ALSO BEEN VERY ACTIVE ON THIS ISSUE. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE SHOULD BE DONE TO ENSURE THAT NO VETERAN WHO HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO BURN PITS OR OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL TOXINS GOES WITHOUT ACCESS TO VA HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS?**

It was an incredible honor to be chosen in providing long-awaited care and benefits to more than 40,000 Vietnam veterans suffering from exposure to Agent Orange through the passage of the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act. Now, Congress needs work alongside the Department of Defense and the VA to find common ground on reforms relating to all potential toxic exposures and the negative health impacts they have on our veterans. Veterans who are victims of toxic exposures should never have to wait decades until they receive adequate health care and disability benefits. This joint effort will not only identify gaps in veterans' health care coverage, but also guarantee that VA is better equipped to deliver the highest quality of care to those who need and deserve it.

**AS YOU HAVE OFTEN MENTIONED, YOUR HOME STATE OF MONTANA IS HOME TO MANY VETERANS LIVING IN HIGHLY RURAL AREAS. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES FOR THOSE VETERANS, AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE PROPERLY CONNECTED TO THE SERVICES THEY NEED?**

Veterans in rural states like Montana face the unique challenge of lack of access to VA facilities and services because of distance, and we've got to do something about it. I'll be working hard to get more doctors and medical professionals to rural and frontier areas, to bolster and improve transportation assistance for more rural veterans, to enhance methods of communication between veterans and the VA regarding their available benefits, and – most importantly – to advance telehealth services so that veterans can get the care they need, regardless of their zip code.

## VA PARTNERSHIP UPDATES + PROFILE

The VA and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation have partnered to offer **FREE assistance to family support members nationwide through the Respite Relief (R&R) for Military and Veteran Caregivers program.**

**If you are a family support member who cares for a military or veteran spouse, child, parent, or friend, we know your days are packed with responsibilities. Would having an extra pair of hands help free you up to invest a little more time in yourself? Could you make it to that doctor's appointment you've been meaning to get to, or sit in a park and read a book, catch up with a loved one, or just take a break? If you answered yes to any of these questions, this program is just right for you.**

**Eligible family support members will receive 24 hours of free help from a CareLinx professional caregiver. Services include housekeeping, meal prep, grocery shopping, transportation, companionship, medication reminders, grooming, and more.**

**To support this program, WWP granted \$1M to the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to provide an additional 35,000 hours of relief.**

**Family support members and military/veteran caregivers can apply for free help today at [www.hiddenheroes.org/respite](http://www.hiddenheroes.org/respite).**

## TAKE ACTION

Current Wounded Warrior Project Legislative Priorities

WWP proudly serves as a voice for our nation's warriors in Washington, D.C., advocating for the issues that matter to them most. Using the data collected from our Annual Warrior Survey and feedback from warriors, and by talking with members of Congress, we push for policies and initiatives that can make a real difference in the lives of millions of warriors, family members, and caregivers.

We directly represent WWP's 185,000 registered post-9/11 warriors and their families, and on broader issues, as many as 20 million of our nation's veterans from all generations.

Learn more about the legislation we're currently pursuing or looking to introduce soon [here](#).

## BILL TRACKER

Legend: PASSED (Green), NOT PASSED (Red)

**Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act - H.R. 955**

INTRODUCED HOUSE: PASSED HOUSE | INTRODUCED SENATE: PASSED SENATE | SIGNED BY POTUS

2/5/2021

**Major Richard Star Act - S. 344/H.R. 1282**

INTRODUCED HOUSE: PASSED HOUSE | INTRODUCED SENATE: PASSED SENATE | SIGNED BY POTUS

2/24/2021 | 2/22/2021

**Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act - S. 927/H.R. 2127**

INTRODUCED HOUSE: NOT PASSED HOUSE | INTRODUCED SENATE: PASSED SENATE | SIGNED BY POTUS

3/23/2021 | 3/23/2021

**Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act - S. 535/H.R. 1115**

INTRODUCED HOUSE: PASSED HOUSE | INTRODUCED SENATE: PASSED SENATE | SIGNED BY POTUS

2/18/2021 | 3/2/2021

## CONTACT US

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Issues: Benefits, toxic exposure, and education

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Issues: Women veterans, assistance programs

**ANNE MARIE MCLEAN** - Government Affairs Specialist  
Issues: Mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy

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Issues: VA benefits, toxic exposure, and education

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## RESOURCES

resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org | 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or 904.405.1213 | Fax: 904.405.1301 | [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org)

**HOURS OF OPERATION**  
Monday - Friday  
9 am - 3 pm EST

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
[www.veterans.senate.gov](http://www.veterans.senate.gov)  
202-224-9126  
Twitter: @VetAffairs

**SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
[www.armed-services.senate.gov](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov)  
202-224-3871  
Twitter: @SASCmajority

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
<https://veterans.house.gov>  
202-225-9756  
Twitter: @VetAffairsDems

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)  
844-698-2311  
Twitter: @DeptVetAffairs

**ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
<https://armedservices.house.gov>  
202-225-4151  
Twitter: @HASCDemocrats

**DEFENSE DEPARTMENT**  
[www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov)  
Twitter: @DeptOfDefense