

MORE THAN 100 WWP WARRIORS JOINED TOGETHER TO ADVOCATE FOR VETERANS ISSUES DURING THIS YEAR'S OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN.



NEWSLETTER | APRIL 2025



OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the April 2025 issue of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Advocacy News. WWP's advocacy efforts connect you and your fellow warriors with your elected officials, providing you a voice in our nation's capital and empowering you to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.



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LETTER FROM OUR VP

Navigating Change: Ensuring Veterans' Benefits Stay Strong

While often challenging, change is not inherently negative — it's a vital part of growth and progress. Much like transitioning from military service to civilian life, change can initially feel overwhelming. After being medically retired due to injuries sustained in Iraq, my journey faced numerous challenges and uncertainty. But those same challenges also paved the way for new opportunities and personal growth.

Just as veterans adapt to new environments and build successful civilian lives, changes in policies and systems can lead to improvements that benefit us all in the long run. However, this process requires that we stay engaged, helping new leaders understand what needs to be improved and what must be preserved for those who rely on these systems the most. With control of both Congress and the White House shifting parties, we knew the start of 2025 would be marked by significant change. The pace of activity has surprised even the most seasoned Washington insiders, but Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) was prepared.

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LETTER FROM OUR VP (CONT.)

Since the beginning of the 119th Congress, we've been in active conversations with Congressional leaders, including the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committees. We launched our new member outreach campaign, meeting with freshman Senators and Representatives — focusing especially on those who are veterans. Meanwhile, we've worked to ensure that key legislative priorities such as improving mental health care access, advancing research on traumatic brain injuries (TBI), and supporting the *Major Richard Star Act*, are being introduced and moving toward passage.

In March, we hosted the Operation Advocacy Fly-In, where 100 WWP warriors visited Capitol Hill, holding over 150 meetings with members of Congress and their staff to advance our legislative priorities.

We are optimistic that this coordinated legislative strategy will lead to important victories later this year — especially with your support during our grassroots call-to-action campaigns.

However, let's be honest, that's not where everyone's attention is right now.

Each new administration reviews current policies, strategies, and systems. WWP welcomes any review that aims to make the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) more effective and efficient. That being said, we also recognize that, sometimes, such changes can have unintended consequences, especially for those who rely on the care and benefits earned through service.

In all our meetings with senior leaders and key stakeholders, one thing is clear: While philosophies may differ, everyone we've met with shares a commitment to taking care of veterans.

We met with VA Secretary Douglas A. Collins and

“We are working closely with Congress, VA, and the White House to ensure that veterans' access to care and benefits is safeguarded.”



leaders of the Veterans' Affairs Committees to understand their vision and share the concerns we are hearing from warriors. Both Sec. Collins and Congressional leaders are committed to looking into any issue that may negatively impact veterans to ensure it is quickly addressed.

Again, while there may be differing philosophies, every single person we've engaged with has expressed a unified commitment to veterans' well-being, and ensuring that veterans have access to the best VA care — both directly and through the community.

Your voice is vital in these discussions, and what you share with us directly influences what leaders hear. We encourage you to keep us informed if there are any impacts — positive or negative — to your care or benefits so that we can continue to advocate effectively on your behalf.



JOSE RAMOS
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
VP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS



THE 119TH CONGRESS

Veterans in the 119th Congress: A Powerful Voice for Those Who Served

In the November elections, 190 veterans ran for Congress, with 87 of them winning election. Add the 13 Senators who are veterans and didn't have to run this year, and that makes an even 100 veterans who are now part of the 119th Congress — the most in eight years.

We congratulate the new and returning members of Congress who have served our nation in uniform, and we look forward to working together to advance legislation that honors their continued commitment to service. Having veterans in Congress is essential to ensuring that the voices of those who served our nation are heard and represented at the highest levels of government. Their firsthand experiences provide unique insight into the challenges faced by the veteran community, allowing them to advocate effectively for meaningful legislative solutions.

Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL-12) will continue his role as Chair of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs with Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA-41) as the Ranking Member. There are leadership changes in the Senate, with Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) serving as the new Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) as the Ranking Member. Each of these leaders has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting veterans and their families, and their leadership will be instrumental in shaping policies that impact the veteran community.

THE 119TH CONGRESS (CONTINUED)

★ HOUSE MEMBERS ★

NAME	STATE	BRANCH
Barry Moore - R	AL-01	Army
Rick Crawford - R	AR-01	Army
Steve Womack - R	AR-03	Army
Eli Crane - R	AZ-02	Navy
Abraham Hamadeh*† - R	AZ-08	Army
Salud Carbajal - D	CA-24	Marine Corps
Gil Cisneros* - D	CA-31	Navy
Darrell Issa - R	CA-48	Army
Ted Lieu - D	CA-36	Air Force
Jimmy Panetta - D	CA-19	Navy
Mike Thompson - D	CA-04	Army
Derek Tran* - D	CA-45	Army
Jason Crow - D	CO-06	Army
Gabe Evans* - R	CO-08	Army
Vern Buchanan - R	FL-16	Air Force
Neal Dunn - R	FL-02	Army
Scott Franklin - R	FL-18	Navy
Anna Paulina Luna - R	FL-13	Air Force
Brian Mast - R	FL-21	Army
Cory Mills - R	FL-07	Army
Greg Steube - R	FL-17	Army
Sanford Bishop Jr. - D	GA-02	Army
Andrew Clyde - R	GA-09	Navy
Barry Loudermilk - R	GA-11	Air Force
Rich McCormick - R	GA-07	Marine Corps
Mike Bost† - R	IL-12	Marine Corps
Jim Baird - R	IN-04	Army
Mariannette Miller-Meeks† - R	IA-01	Army
Zach Nunn - R	IA-03	Air Force
Brett Guthrie - R	KY-02	Army
Hal Rogers - R	KY-05	Army
Clay Higgins - R	LA-03	Army
Jared Golden - D	ME-02	Marine Corps
Andrew Harris - R	MD-01	Navy
Jake Auchincloss - D	MA-04	Marine Corps
Seth Moulton - D	MA-06	Marine Corps
Tom Barrett*† - R	MI-07	Army
Jack Bergman† - R	MI-01	Marine Corps
John James - R	MI-10	Army
Trent Kelly - R	MS-01	Army

NAME	STATE	BRANCH
Troy Downing* - R	MT-02	Air Force
Ryan Zinke - R	MT-01	Navy
Mark Amodei - R	NV-02	Army
Don Bacon - R	NE-02	Air Force
Maggie Goodlander* - D	NH-02	Navy
Herbert C. Conaway Jr.*† - D	NJ-03	Air Force
Mikie Sherrill - D	NJ-11	Navy
Nicholas LaLota - R	NY-01	Navy
Pat Ryan - D	NY-18	Army
Donald Davis - D	NC-01	Air Force
Pat Harrigan* - R	NC-10	Army
Mike Carey - R	OH-15	Army
Warren Davidson - R	OH-08	Army
Max Miller - R	OH-07	Marine Corps
Chris Deluzio - D	PA-17	Navy
Chrissy Houlahan - D	PA-06	Air Force
Scott Perry - R	PA-10	Army
Guy Reschenthaler - R	PA-14	Navy
Sheri Biggs* - R	SC-03	Air Force
William Timmons - R	SC-04	Army
Joe Wilson - R	SC-02	Army
Mark Green - R	TN-07	Army
Brian Babin - R	TX-36	Air Force
Daniel Crenshaw - R	TX-02	Navy
Jake Ellzey - R	TX-06	Navy
Pat Fallon - R	TX-04	Air Force
Tony Gonzales - R	TX-23	Navy
Wesley Hunt - R	TX-38	Army
Ronny Jackson - R	TX-13	Navy
Morgan Luttrell† - R	TX-08	Navy
Troy Nehls - R	TX-22	Army
August Pfluger - R	TX-11	Air Force
Keith Self - R	TX-03	Army
Jennifer Kiggans - R	VA-02	Navy
John McGuire* - R	VA-05	Navy
Bobby Scott - D	VA-03	Army
Eugene Vindman* - D	VA-07	Army
Scott Fitzgerald - R	WI-05	Army
Derrick Van Orden† - R	WI-03	Navy

* Indicates new member of Congress

† Indicates member of House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

‡ Indicates member of Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

THE 119TH CONGRESS (CONTINUED)



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP WARRIORS
JOHN MIKELSON, KEARA TORKELSON, BRENT WHITTEN,
JESSICA SANDERS, AND FRED BOYER.

WWP is committed to working alongside these dedicated veteran leaders to ensure meaningful progress for all who have served.

If one or more of your members of Congress is listed, we encourage you to reach out to their offices and set up a meeting to talk about your concerns and issues.

The WWP grassroots team can provide you with resources to help you talk about our key issues and priority legislation during your meeting.

Email advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org for more information.

★ SENATE MEMBERS ★

NAME	STATE	BRANCH
Dan Sullivan† - R	AK	Marine Corps
Tom Cotton - R	AR	Army
Ruben Gallego*† - D	AZ	Marine Corps
Mark Kelly - D	AZ	Navy
Richard Blumenthal† - D	CT	Marine Corps
Rick Scott - R	FL	Navy
Tammy Duckworth† - D	IL	Army
Jim Banks*† - R	IN	Navy
Todd Young - R	IN	USMC
Joni Ernst - R	IA	Army
Roger Marshall - R	KS	Army
Mitch McConnell - R	KY	Army
Ed Markey - D	MA	Army
Gary Peters - D	MI	Navy
Roger Wicker - R	MS	Air Force
Tim Sheehy*† - R	MT	Navy
David McCormick* - R	PA	Army
Jack Reed - D	RI	Army
Lindsey Graham - R	SC	Air Force

* Indicates new member of Congress

† Indicates member of House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

‡ Indicates member of Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Legislative Updates

A new Congress means that a series of important veterans' bills have been introduced, with more to come. Here are some of WWP's top priority bills so far this year.

Veterans' Assuring Critical Care Expansions to Support Servicemembers (ACCESS) Act (S.275, H.R. 740)

The *Veterans' ACCESS Act*, introduced by U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL-12) and U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS), aims to improve veterans' access to VA's Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs (RRTPs) and mandates improvements in their operations, coordination, and oversight.

VA has set access standards into law for most of its health care programs, but these standards do not extend to RRTPs! This exclusion means that veterans with chronic problems related to post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or both, can't always get timely access to the critical care they need.

Most importantly, the *Veterans' ACCESS Act* will require VA to establish a standardized screening process to determine if a veteran meets the criteria for priority or routine admission to a mental health RRTP. VA would have to screen patients within 48 hours and, if eligible and appropriate, admit that veteran to an RRTP program within 48 hours of the decision.

Take Action Today

WWP has already crafted a call to action around the *Veterans' ACCESS Act*, and we encourage all warriors to send an email to their members of Congress encouraging support of the legislation. It only takes a minute!

— [click here to send our pre-written letter.](#)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES (CONTINUED)

Precision Brain Health Research Act (S. 800)

U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) and committee member Sen. Angus King (I-ME) have introduced legislation to enhance VA's efforts to comprehensively study the impacts of repetitive low-level blast injuries on veterans' mental health.

The legislation would direct VA to work with the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine to create a 10-year research plan to establish the effects of repetitive low-level blast injuries. This legislation builds on momentum from the recently established Warfighter Brain Health Initiative, DoD's effort to bring together the operational and medical communities in a more unified approach toward optimizing Service member brain health and countering TBIs.

Major Richard Star Act (S. 1032, HR. 2102)

One of WWP's key priorities, the *Major Richard Star Act* has been reintroduced in the Senate and the House by Sens. Mike Crapo (R-ID), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Rick Scott (R-FL), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Reps. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12) and Raul Ruiz (D-CA-25), respectively.

When veterans retire from the military, they may be eligible for retirement pay from the Department of Defense (DoD), and disability pay from VA. However, only veterans with at least 20 years of service and a disability rating of at least 50 percent can receive both benefits simultaneously. Other veterans' DoD retirement benefits are reduced dollar-for-dollar by the amount of their VA disability payments.

The *Major Richard Star Act* would end dollar-for-dollar reduction for veterans who were medically retired, sustained combat or combat-related injuries and eligible for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC)—giving them the full benefits they've earned.

WWP is planning to send out a call to action to warriors in May to support the bill that will coincide with a big legislative push on Capitol Hill, including a major press conference involving members of Congress, veterans service organizations (VSO), and wounded veterans. More information will be coming soon.

Improving Menopause Care for Veterans Act (H.R. 219)

The *Improving Menopause Care for Veterans Act*, introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA-26), a member of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study

and report on the medical services furnished by the VA for veterans experiencing perimenopause, genitourinary syndrome of menopause, and menopause stages. The VA must also report to Congress on a strategic plan to (1) implement any recommendations GAO makes in its report, (2) improve the quality of menopause care, and (3) improve the access of veterans to menopause care.

Supporting the unique health care needs of female veterans is a WWP legislative priority.

Aviator Cancer Examination Study (ACES) Act (S. 201, H.R. 530)

The *ACES Act*, introduced by Rep. August Pfluger (R-TX-11) and Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-19) in the House, and Sens. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Tom Cotton (R-AK) in the Senate, would require VA to study cancer incidences and mortality rates among aviators and aircrew who served in the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

Pilots and aircrew have been found to have a higher risk of developing prostate cancer and melanoma, with possible links to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and testicular cancer. The *ACES Act* will help advance research on any correlation between aviator service and cancer rates to better assist veterans and active Service members.

Veterans Supporting Prosthetics Opportunities and Recreational Therapy (SPORT) Act (H.R. 1971)

The *Veterans SPORT Act* was introduced by Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeke, the chairwoman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health.

H.R. 1971 would change VA's current definition of "medical services," which currently includes "wheelchairs, artificial limbs, trusses, and similar appliances," but does not include adaptive prostheses or terminal devices.

VA clinicians help veterans find recreational activities and adaptive equipment for rehabilitation, but VA won't provide equipment solely for personal enjoyment. Current regulations focus on the clinical need for adaptive prosthetics, but they disregard their potential to improve veterans' quality of life.

The *Veterans SPORT Act* would amend the current law to add adaptive prostheses and terminal devices for sports and other recreational activities to VA's definition of "medical services." VA should be able to authorize adaptive equipment for amputees without requiring that they be enrolled in a VA rehabilitative program, so they can enjoy the benefits provided by sports and other recreational activities.

VA UPDATES



2025 VETERANS BENEFITS GUIDE

Earlier this year, VA released the [2025 Federal Benefits Guide for Veterans, Dependents, Survivors, and Caregivers](#). The handbook includes a detailed list of VA programs, including contact information and websites for easy reference.

If you haven't applied for VA benefits, care, or services, this guide offers a comprehensive overview to help you access everything you've earned.

The handbook allows you to easily reference a full listing of VA programs, along with contact phone numbers and websites for each. Below is some of the information included in the benefits guide:

- ★ Compensation
- ★ Life insurance
- ★ Pension and fiduciary services
- ★ Education benefits
- ★ Economic development and employment
- ★ Home loan guaranty programs and housing assistance
- ★ Mental health resources

The benefits guide is available in both print and digital formats. You can instantly access the guide on [VA's website](#).

Please note that VA validated the information in the guide as of Oct. 10, 2024. For the most up-to-date information, visit [VA's website](#) or use the specific links provided in the guide.



GI BILL BENEFITS EXPANDED

VA has expanded GI Bill benefits for eligible veterans. Veterans who served multiple periods of military service may be eligible for additional benefits for themselves or their beneficiaries.

Previously, veterans who served at least two periods of service had to choose between the [Montgomery GI Bill](#) and the [Post-9/11 GI Bill](#), receiving a maximum of 36 months of GI Bill benefits. Under the new guidelines, veterans no longer have to choose when applying for the benefits, meaning they can qualify for up to 48 months of GI Bill benefits.

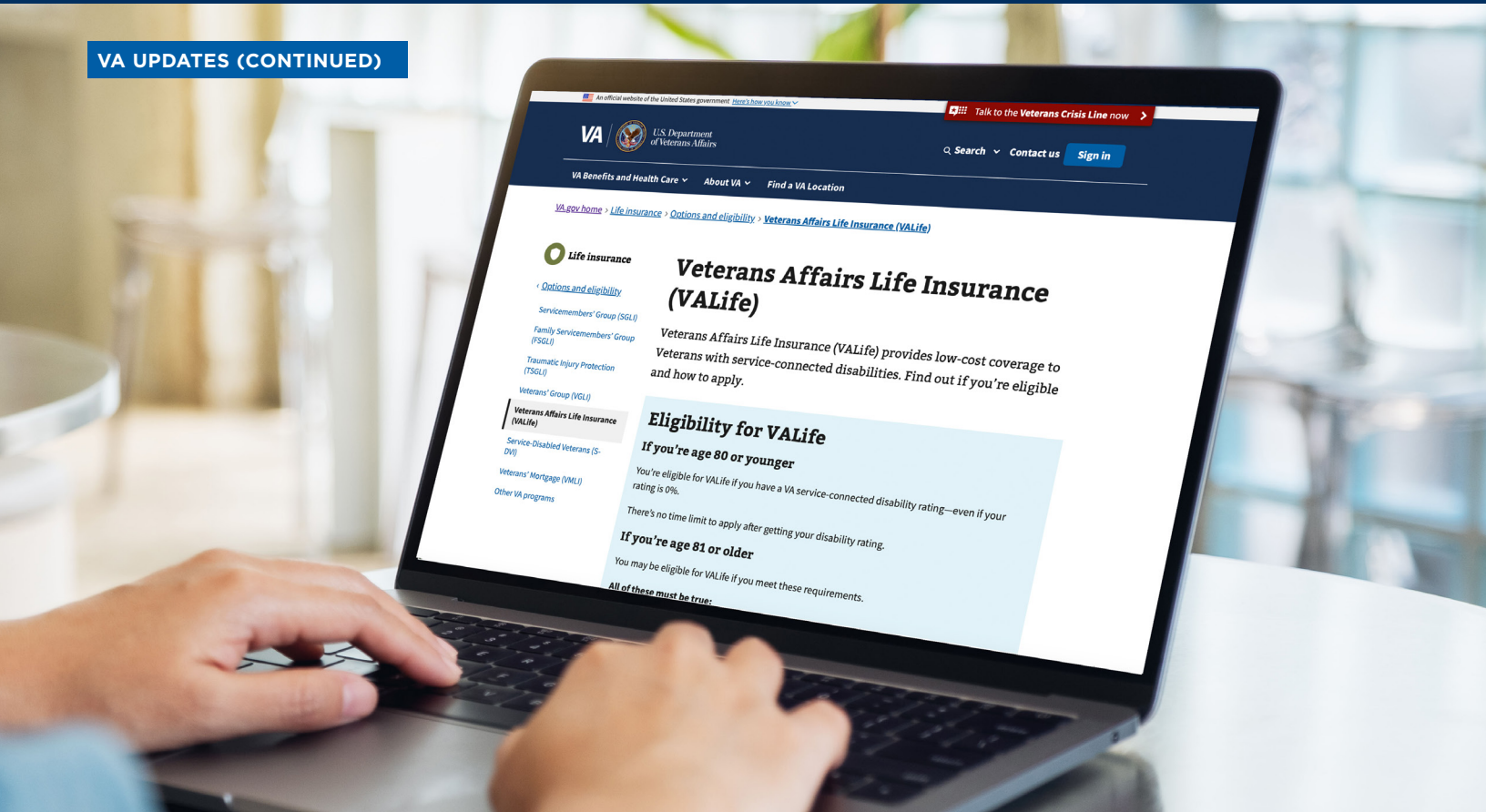
Retroactive benefits are now available for many veterans. If you served at least two periods of service — one that qualified you for the Montgomery GI Bill and a second that qualified you for the Post-9/11 GI Bill — you may be eligible to receive another 12 months of additional GI Bill benefits.

VA will notify those beneficiaries who are potentially eligible to receive these expanded benefits. If you're found to be eligible, and your GI Bill benefits have expired, you can receive an expiration date extension, as long as you have submitted your application by Oct. 1, 2030.

For more information:

Visit the [VA website](#) for more information on the changes to this benefit, including the steps to apply.

VA UPDATES (CONTINUED)



VETERANS AFFAIRS LIFE INSURANCE

Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife) is the newest life insurance program offered by VA. This insurance plan offers full life insurance coverage that begins two years after enrollment, provided premiums are paid during the first two years. If you pass away during the two-year waiting period, VA will pay your beneficiaries the total amount you paid in premiums, plus interest.

VALife removes time limits, giving more veterans access to coverage. If you are 80 years old or younger, and have any level of service-connected disability, you are guaranteed acceptance for whole-life insurance. Veterans 81 years or older may qualify if they meet certain eligibility criteria and apply within a certain timeframe.

Key Features of VALife

- ★ Coverage up to \$40,000, available in \$10,000 increments
- ★ No health questions or medical exam required
- ★ No deadline to apply if you are 80 years old or younger
- ★ Online enrollment
- ★ Cash that builds over the life of the policy, after the first two years of enrollment

VALife premium rates are the same for men and women, not based on medical conditions, and will not increase over time. Premiums are based on age at the time of enrollment and the amount of coverage selected.

For more information on rates, to apply, or to manage your policy, visit [VALife's website](#).

2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

WWP Key Legislative Priorities

At the beginning of every Congress, WWP analyzes the Congressional landscape, compiles various input and comments from WWP warriors, and develops its legislative priorities — the key issues and bills that we will be pushing for in the next two years.

The legislative priorities for the 119th Congressional session are based on our commitment to enacting policies that enhance the lives of veterans, Service members, and their families while building on our significant wins achieved in the previous session. The seven priorities will form the foundation of our legislative and advocacy work during 2025 and 2026. Nearly all the legislation that we will advocate for will fall into one of these seven priorities.

Below is an overview of the legislative priorities for the 119th Congress. [Download a PDF](#) of this information to keep for future reference.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Community coordination and training: Advocate for funding and alignment of new and ongoing efforts like the VA's Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, the Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide, and Mission Daybreak, to ensure a robust public health approach.

Access to care and workforce improvements: Pursue policies that help place veterans into high-quality care with minimal wait times and optimal continuity between providers and health systems.

Substance use disorder, chronic pain, and emerging treatments: Highlight key intersections in health care and innovation that offer opportunities to deliver effective mental health care interventions.

BRAIN HEALTH AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Prevention, tracking, and treatment:

Promote policies across the lifespan of military service to ensure brain health and safety among the Active duty and veteran populations.

Research: Commit to research that explores the course of neurological and cognitive functioning after traumatic brain injury (TBI), and build evidence to help expand access to effective treatments and community-based supports.

Long-term care: Support policies to promote the utilization and success of VA's long-term care programs for younger veterans, including those who have suffered TBIs in service.

WOMEN VETERANS

Gender-specific care: Pass legislation that would expand access to gender-specific services at VA and through Community Care Network providers, as well as empower women veterans in decision-making processes related to health care.

Financial wellness: Promote policies to assist with employment, financial obligations, food security, housing stability, and child care.

Cancer: Improve screening, eligibility, care, and outreach, with specific effort on mammography, as well as surveillance services for breast, cervical, ovarian, endometrial/uterine, or other gynecological cancers.

2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES (CONTINUED)

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Major Richard Star Act: In 2004, Congress passed a law allowing military retirees with at least 20 years of service, who are rated at least 50 percent disabled, to collect their full Department of Defense (DoD) retired pay and their full VA disability compensation benefits with no offset. The Major Richard Star Act would allow veterans who were retired for combat-related injuries with under 20 years of service to do the same.

Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E):

Pass legislation that would allow VR&E to operate at its highest potential and expand access to more disabled veterans. These improvements should include veteran-friendly policies for when the program can be used, transparency about eligibility determinations, and more consistent training for VR&E counselors.

Employment: Create opportunities throughout the federal government to help place veterans in positions that leverage skills and experience developed in the military.

TRANSITION SUPPORT

Promote healthy transitions: Advance policies to support warriors while they are still in the military and at or near their transition point to prepare them for the changes they will face when trying to adjust to civilian life. Help coordinate efforts across VA, DoD, and the community to ensure that the process is seamless across all critical areas related to health care, benefits, and career readiness.

TOXIC EXPOSURE

Cancer: Promote policies that enhance the DoD's capacity to track and monitor the exposure of Service members in high-risk communities, while ensuring that VA is sufficiently staffed and resourced to deliver the highest standard of cancer care to every exposed veteran, including early detection through exposure-informed screening, treatment, and coordinated care.

Access to care: Many military exposures are recorded in DoD's Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) system, which helps qualify veterans for care under the PACT Act. However, some exposures are not tracked, or the information is not transmitted to VA, leaving Service members and veterans without access to necessary care. Efforts focused on missileers, aviators, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have the potential to close gaps that remain.

Presumptive decision-making process: Continue to work with VA and Congress to ensure that VA's presumptive decision-making process established by the PACT Act has the capacity and resources to reach timely decisions on conditions that may be exposure-related. Continue to encourage VA to consider burn-pit-related conditions outside of cancers and respiratory conditions, as well as conditions that may be related to exposures not explicitly covered by the PACT Act, both known and emerging.

SEVERELY WOUNDED SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS

Complex case management: While the number of Service members catastrophically injured in service has decreased in recent years, the needs of severely injured Service members and veterans — including those challenged by comorbid disabilities — have not diminished over time, and will, in many cases, grow. Support policies to help these individuals navigate the health system and promote a broad community effort to address overlapping resources and nonuniform availability of federal, state, and local resources.

Prosthetics and adaptive devices: Ensure that veterans receive timely access to prosthetics and adaptive equipment, invest in cutting-edge prosthetics and assistive technologies for amputees, and foster continuous improvements to enhance VA prosthetic care to help veterans regain functionality, reintegrate into their communities more efficiently, and ultimately improve their quality of life.

Caregivers: Advocate for caregivers providing assistance to those with the highest needs, including support for efforts related to the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and planning for retirement or life after caregiving.



OPERATION ADVOCACY

2025 Operation Advocacy Fly-In

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP WARRIORS LISA MAYFIELD, MARCO SOLT, WAL JASON HALVERSON, AND JASON HETLAND DISCUSS CRITICAL BILLS DURING THE FLY-IN WITH CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS.

During the week of March 3, nearly 100 WWP warriors from across the country gathered in Washington, DC, to participate in the 2025 Operation Advocacy Fly-In. This annual grassroots initiative connects warriors with their elected officials, allowing them to advocate for legislation that improves the quality of life for all veterans.

Over two days, warriors met with more than 150 congressional offices to discuss WWP's top legislative priorities focusing on economic empowerment, expanded mental health access, and increased research and care for brain health and TBI.

Congressional Meetings and Training

The fly-in provides warriors with a powerful platform to share their personal stories and highlight the real-life impact of the legislation they advocate for. Prior to meeting with members of Congress, the warriors participated in advocacy training to prepare them for their visits.

Each warrior group was assigned based on geography and led by one or more of WWP's Warrior Advocate Leaders (WALs), volunteers who lead our legislative advocacy efforts at the local level. WALs not only engage with members of Congress, their staffs, and other government officials to support legislation, but they also work with WWP's grassroots team to recruit, train, mobilize, and lead other volunteer advocates in their local communities.

A key part of the training was teaching warriors to talk about their personal journeys and challenges, and connect their stories to the legislation they were going to advocate for with members of Congress.

"In advocacy, people remember stories," said WAL Amy Fiene from Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. "Meetings become memorable, and members and staff listen closer when we share something vulnerable that directly connects WWP's mission and our stories with the work of those Congressional offices."

For many warriors in attendance, it was their first time experiencing the fly-in. "I am grateful to be chosen for the opportunity," said warrior Robert Weatherspoon from Muskegon, Michigan. "Honestly, it was unexpected how engaged congressional members and staff were listening to our stories."

Networking and Community

In addition to meeting with members of Congress, the fly-in was an opportunity to network and develop new connections within the warrior community.

During the event, warriors heard from U.S. Army Lieutenant General Brian Eifler, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel of the United States Army, and Major General Trevor J. Bredenkamp, Commanding General of the Joint Task Force-National Capital Region and the U.S. Army Military District of Washington, who both discussed the importance of advocacy and telling your personal story.

OPERATION ADVOCACY (CONTINUED)



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: LT. GEN. BRIAN S. EIFLER, WWP WARRIOR TYSHAWN JENKINS, AND WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT DURING CAPT. TYSHAWN JENKINS PROMOTION CEREMONY AT THE OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN.

In a surprise highlight, warriors also witnessed the promotion ceremony of fellow warrior and U.S. Air Force Captain Tyshawn Jenkins (Jackson, New Jersey) conducted by WWP CEO Lieutenant General (Ret.) Walt Piatt and LTG Eifler.

Service Doesn't Stop

Warriors understand that grassroots advocacy work does not stop when they return home. "I am active in my local community," said WAL John Mikelson from Columbus Junction, Ohio. I remain in regular communication with my fellow Midwestern warriors who are also working to push forward important legislation. We use one collective voice to impact positive change at the local and national levels.

WALs will follow up on their Capitol Hill meetings with thank-you messages reminding members of Congress about WWP's key legislative priorities.

"We held a record number of meetings this year, and it's very exciting to see how our WALs are taking the lead during congressional meetings," said WWP Vice President of Government and Community Relations Jose Ramos. "When we first started the fly-ins, WWP staff would lead the meetings. Now, WALs and warriors are driving the meetings, and that's leading to some very powerful and authentic moments that resonate with members of Congress. Advocacy is an important part of WWP's mission, and we have a lot of influence with Congress when warriors participate in events like the Operation Advocacy Fly-In."

OPERATION ADVOCACY (CONTINUED)



Thank You to the Warriors Who Participated in the 2025 Operation Advocacy Fly-In:



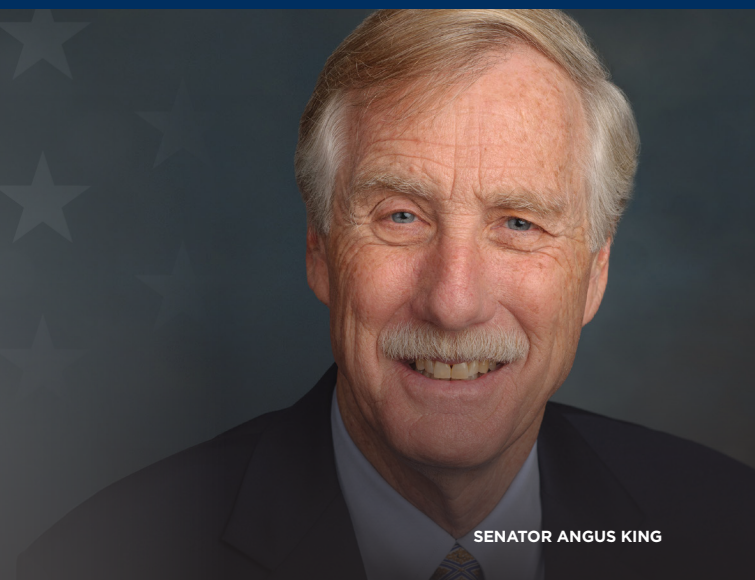
Adam Long, Sioux Falls, SD
Allison Adams-Jones, Fairfield, OH
Aaron Brooks, Columbia, MD
Aaron Locker, Columbus, OH
Aaron Tilley, American Fork, UT
Adonica Heard, Montgomery, AL
Amy Fiene, Menomonee Falls, WI
Angel Jimenez, San Diego, CA
Anh Taylor-Garcia, San Antonio, TX
Antonio Massie, Rochester, NY
Brient Reifer, Moseley, VA
Brent Whitten, Topeka, KS
Brooke Weinmann, Laramie, NY
Carol Fylnn, San Diego, CA
Caroline Fermin, Beaufort, SC
Cassandra Johnson, El Mirage, AZ
Christopher McGrath, Simi Valley, CA
Clark Sabo, Cincinnati, OH
Creighton Scott, Conroe, TX
Dale Stafford, Mackinaw, IL
Darel Maxfield, Spokane, WA
Darryl Jackson, Pittsburgh, PA
David Buzzard, Wilmington, NC
David Juardo, Simpsonville, SC
David Sella, Oxford, NC
David Staffa, Clermont, FL
David Veros, Jacksonville, FL
Dexter Thames, Gulfport, MS
Donald Jones, Prattville, AL
Douglas Stelmach, Orchard Park, NY
Eddie Jimenez, El Paso, TX
Edward Carrillo, Mira Loma, CA

Elizabeth Dykstra, Oswego, IL
Erik Jackson, Tucson, AZ
Forrest Pryde, Farmington, MN
Geoffrey Brando Reyes, Chesapeake, VA
German Rivera, Morovis, PR
Gina Allen, Cabot, AR
Grover Henry, Dacula, GA
James Richard, Stafford Springs, CT
Jamie Springston, Huntington, WV
Janet Kemp, Gardners, PA
Jason Halverson, Zimmerman, MN
Jason Hetland, Shakopee, MN
Jeffrey Ferguson, Billings, MT
Jeremy Bishop, Clarksville, TN
Jeremy Davis, Colorado Springs, CO
Jerome Mitchell, Maumelle, AR
Jesse Cheadle, North Augusta, SC
Jessica Covitz, Millis, MA
Jesus Archuleta, Visailia, CA
John Mikelson, Columbus Junction, OH
Joseph Connelly, Santa Rita, GU
Joel Grace, Montgomery, AL
Jon Aasted, San Diego, CA
Joshua Ryan, Glendale, AZ
Julio Sandoval, Riverside, CA
Justin Cook, Norman, OK
Kennery Foster, Carencro, LA
Kevin Stuart, Fort Johnson, LA
Kimberly Washington, Edgewater Park, NJ
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Tyshawn Jenkins, Jackson, NJ
Vernon Vanderhoef, Coeur d'Alene, ID
Willie Johnson, New Orleans, LA

WWP INTERVIEW

Senator Angus King, WWP Legislator of the Year



SENATOR ANGUS KING

Sen. Angus King (I-ME) serves on the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, advocating for veterans' physical and mental health, access to benefits, and support for their families and caregivers. He also serves on the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services where he supports the needs of active Service men and women.

The Senator was kind enough to take time to talk with WWP about his commitment to veterans, legislation he's proud to have supported, and other key proposals he is focused on as he continues to advocate on behalf of veterans.

Q

Why are you so committed to veterans' issues?

In Maine, we are fortunate to be home to one of the highest populations of veterans per capita in the country. In my opinion, every member of Congress owes it to our veterans to put partisanship aside and deliver the support they have earned and deserve. Serving on the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has allowed me to really focus on our shared mission: serving those who served. From passing the *PACT Act* to working to prevent veteran suicide to addressing unseen wounds like those associated with brain injuries, we have made many strides. However, there is still much work to do, and I am eager to continue working with my colleagues to deliver results for our veterans in the 119th Congress.

Q

What veterans' legislation or issue are you most concerned about and/or focused on right now?

One of my biggest priorities has been — and will continue to be — the transition from military life to civilian life. We should be putting as much effort and resources into ensuring our veterans have as smooth a transition out of the military as they did when they entered into the military. I've been working alongside my colleagues to ensure our Service members are supported on day one as veterans.

The *TAP Promotion Act* will allow accredited veteran service organizations to attend Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes, which is important because that will allow transitioning Service members to get a jumpstart on filing their benefits paperwork before they even leave the military. The *Welcome Home Veterans Act* will allow transitioning Service members' information to automatically be sent to state veterans' affairs agencies, unless they opt out so that the state can connect with the transitioning Service member and welcome them.

WWP INTERVIEW (CONTINUED)

during their transition to civilian life, as well as connect them with any state or local veterans benefits that might be available. Both bills will help ease the transition from Active duty to veteran status, and I am grateful to my colleagues for their continued support and work on behalf of all our veterans.

Another important issue, especially in Maine, given our aging veteran population, is adequate long-term care. I was pleased that the VA recently finalized the domiciliary care rule that will provide back payment to state veterans' homes — including those in Maine — for care provided to veterans. These payments will ensure state veterans' homes can continue to operate and serve veterans across our state, which will become even more important as our population continues to age and faces more complex health care needs.



Beyond the PACT Act, what veterans' legislation or issue are you most proud to have worked on and seen passed or enacted into law?

This year, we successfully secured many provisions of my bipartisan *Blast Overpressure Safety Act* in the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to protect Service members and veterans from blast exposure and prevent brain injuries experienced during training and service. These “invisible wounds” are a common, yet misunderstood and often undetectable, injury that can severely impact health and quality of life.

The *Blast Overpressure Safety Act* is a bipartisan bill that would expand research into brain injuries and make critical care more accessible. Last year, in just three months, the DoD provided TBI treatment nearly 50,000 times, and the injury is now considered the “signature wound” of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This commonsense bill is long overdue, and we cannot wait any longer to address this important issue. We owe it not only to those who serve, but also to their families and communities, to take the necessary steps to curb this preventable injury.

We know that large blasts can have a significant impact on mental and physical health, but we also need to make sure we're focusing on the harmful effects of smaller blasts that can accumulate over time. Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS), who also serves on the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and I teamed up to introduce the bipartisan *Precision Brain*

Health Research Act. This bill would direct VA to create a 10-year research plan to establish the effects of repetitive low-level blast injuries. That data will then be used to develop care and treatment plans, and, in Congress, we will use that information to create new legislation to help veterans who suffer from the effects of repetitive blast exposures.



What does receiving the Legislator of the Year award from WWP mean to you?

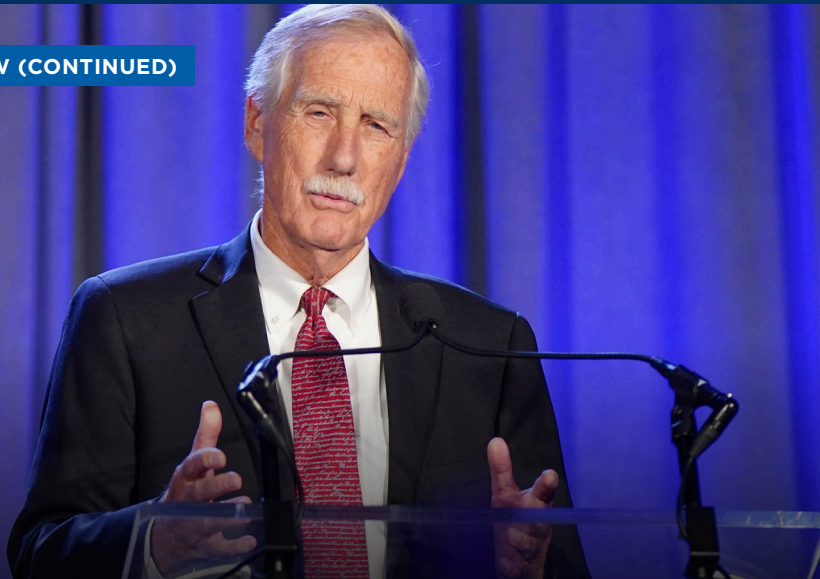
We really don't think about it, but when our veterans signed up for the military, they were putting their lives on the line for us and this country. Their service is inspiring, and these brave men and women deserve the very best treatment long after they hang up their uniforms. It has been a privilege to serve on the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and I am deeply humbled to have been named WWP Legislator of the Year — it is one of the greatest honors of my public life. I know the work does not stop here, and I will work with anyone in Congress on behalf of our veterans.



What message do you have for veterans across the country about Congress and getting involved in grassroots advocacy?

I am proud to serve on the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs because it is one of the most bipartisan committees in Congress. If you were to attend a hearing and you didn't know who served in which party, you would have a hard time distinguishing the Democratic members from the Republican members. That is a good thing — serving our veterans should never be a partisan issue. I enjoy working with my colleagues on the committee, who are all driven by the same mission: to serve the veteran community. I also want to encourage veterans to reach out to their elected officials and be engaged with the democratic process. If we don't know about a problem, then we can't work at solving it. My staff and I are always happy to speak with veterans and help ensure they have full access to the support and care they deserve — or to simply learn about the issues that matter most to them.

WWP INTERVIEW (CONTINUED)



SEN. KING ACCEPTS HIS RECENT AWARD FOR LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AT THE WWP COURAGE AWARDS & BENEFIT DINNER.

Q

You've focused a lot on transition and how it's such a critical time for veterans. What are some of your other key proposals that would help veterans during this time?

Unfortunately, veterans are most vulnerable to increased suicide risks during the first few months of their transition out of the military. To help mitigate this, I have introduced the *Lethal Means Safe Storage for Veteran Suicide Prevention Act*, which would require additional training for VA and community care providers so that these providers are comfortable having conversations with their patients about access to lethal means — including firearms and medication — and how to keep themselves safe. The bill would also establish a grant program to provide free gun safes or firearm lock boxes to any veteran who wants one — putting valuable space and time between lethal means and potential thoughts of self-harm. The bill prohibits the collection of any veteran's personal information when they get this free gun storage, and the veteran won't be asked about their gun ownership status — they only need to confirm their veteran status.

I am also continuing to work on the *Combat Veteran Pre-Enrollment Act*, which would automatically enroll certain combat veterans in VA health care, smoothing the process for them to access VA care after they transition out of the service. This would ensure that gaining access to earned health care benefits is available to Service members from day one as a veteran, instead of having to wait months for paperwork and red tape to be cleared.

“I am proud to serve on the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs because it is one of the most bipartisan committees in Congress. If you were to attend a hearing and you didn’t know who served in which party, you would have a hard time distinguishing the Democratic members from the Republican members. That is a good thing — serving our veterans should never be a partisan issue.”

— SENATOR ANGUS KING



CONGRESSIONAL RECEPTION

WWP Honors Congressional Staff and Administration

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT, CARLOS FUENTES, AND WWP VICE PRESIDENT GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS

The work WWP does on behalf of warriors could not happen without the support of our friends and allies in Congress. Each year, we are fortunate to work with dedicated public servants focused on advancing policies and legislation that improve the lives of veterans, their families, and caregivers.

At its annual holiday reception, WWP came together with friends from across the veteran community to recognize and thank congressional staff and Administration officials for their selfless service and work throughout the year. While many individuals deserve recognition for their contributions, this year WWP was proud to honor the following outstanding recipients:

Jen Burch: As a professional staff member for the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and a retired U.S. Air Force veteran, Jen played a crucial role in supporting the Health Subcommittee's efforts. Her dedication to legislation across all aspects of VA health care reflects her commitment to serving veterans and deepening her understanding of the challenges faced by the 7.3 million

veterans relying on VA care. During the 118th Congress, she coordinated several key hearings on care coordination, prosthetics, and caregivers — issues critical to our mission. Jen has since moved on to become the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Kristen Meyer: As a U.S. Air Force Congressional Defense Fellow for Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA-06), Kristen made a tremendous impact during her year on Capitol Hill. As an aide to Rep. Houlahan, she facilitated caucus and community stakeholder discussions to better understand and address the needs of Service members. She also played a key role in turning ideas into action by supporting the introduction of *the Servicewomen and Veterans Menopause Research Act*.

CONGRESSIONAL RECEPTION (CONTINUED)

David Sherman: As the Minority Staff Director for the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, David played a pivotal role in advancing important initiatives aimed at improving the care and services provided to veterans. He helped coordinate Sen. Jerry Moran's (R-KS) sponsorship of key legislation, such as the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act ("Dole Act") of 2024 (Pub. L. 118-21)*, and *Coordinating Care for Senior Veterans and Wounded Warriors Act*, both of which were top WWP priorities and focus on improving access and quality of care for veterans and their families. His passion for improving the quality of care for veterans is greatly appreciated.

Carlos Fuentes: As the Senior Policy Advisor for the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Carlos demonstrated his commitment to veterans through his tireless efforts of championing the causes that were most closely related to the post-9/11 veteran community. As the primary staffer supporting Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT), he worked across the aisle to garner support for important legislation such as the *Major Richard Star Act and Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act) of 2022 (Pub. L. 117-168)*, and other veteran-focused legislative priorities.

David Nokes: As a Public Affairs Specialist for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, David exemplified the qualities of a dedicated civil servant. His strong work ethic, leadership, and integrity earned him the trust of peers, leaders, and the veteran community. He utilized a collaborative approach to his work, always fostering an environment of teamwork and respect while keeping those we serve and the mission front of mind.

WWP was also proud to award former Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Jon Tester with the Congressional Lifetime Achievement Award. We recognized Sen. Tester for all the work he has done to champion the rights and needs of veterans. We appreciate his efforts and commitment, and for being a trusted ally during his time in Congress.

WWP congratulates all of our honorees and thanks them for the work they have done to support warriors and the veteran community.

Pictured right, WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Piatt (left) and WWP Vice President Government and Community Relations Jose Ramos (right) present recipients with their awards.



DAVID NOKES (MIDDLE)



JEN BURCH (MIDDLE)

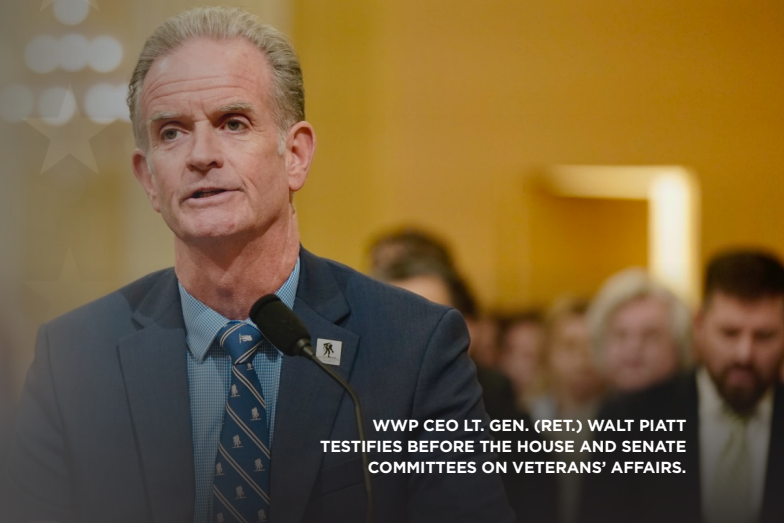


DAVID SHEARMAN (MIDDLE)



KRISTEN MEYER (MIDDLE)

Warrior Survey Results Released



WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT
TESTIFIES BEFORE THE HOUSE AND SENATE
COMMITTEES ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS.

On February 26, WWP released the latest results of the Warrior Survey, representing the more than 185,000 registered warriors we serve.

The data provides a 360-degree view of WWP warriors and highlights the challenges they face, including sleep quality, financial instability, PTSD, and loneliness. Significant findings from this year's survey report include:

83% of warriors reported sleep problems, continuing to be the highest reported health issue among warriors.

37% of warriors reported not making enough money relative to their skill level, noting difficulty translating military skills to the civilian workforce.

52% of warriors have moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD, which directly impacts a warrior's daily functioning and quality of life.

79% of warriors reported feeling isolated sometimes or often.

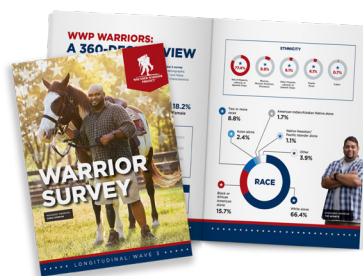
WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Piatt discussed the survey findings and the state of veterans across the U.S. and provided insight into WWP's legislative priorities during his testimony to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs on February 26.

As the largest survey of wounded, ill, and injured post-9/11 veterans, the findings call on leaders with the power to create change — such as Congress, VA, and other veteran service organizations—to push forward our recommendations.

We share these recommendations to advocate for wounded warriors and ensure their voices are heard, enhancing their overall quality of life.

- ✓ Advance policies to improve access to mental health resources and reduce barriers to care.
- ✓ Enhance care and treatment for co-occurring conditions.
- ✓ Enhance and expand suicide prevention training for both the veteran community and the broader public.
- ✓ Expand opportunities for veterans to connect within the veteran community and with the broader public.
- ✓ Enhance financial wellness and employment opportunities for veterans.

“Our commitment to helping warriors rebuild their lives following war and military service remains as strong as ever,” said Piatt. “But too many veterans continue to struggle. Together, we can find innovative and impactful solutions to keep the promise we made — to be there no matter what and bring them back to a life of hope and purpose.”



View and download
the complete survey
and findings.

[View and download](#)

CONTACT US

advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org

RESOURCES

OUR TEAM

- ★ Jose Ramos, Government and Community Relations Vice President
- ★ Michael Nilsen, Government and Community Relations Communications Director
- ★ Shannon Walker, Administrative Assistant
- ★ Betteenia Turman, Communications Specialist

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

- ★ Brian Dempsey, Government Affairs Director
- ★ Kirsten Laha-Walsh, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ Teneka Nieves, Government Affairs Associate.
- ★ Anne Marie McLean, Policy and Legislative Analysis Manager
- ★ Kimberly Powell, Policy and Legislative Analyst
- ★ Aaron Locker, Policy and Legislative Analyst

GRASSROOTS AND CONSTITUENT AFFAIRS

- ★ Coleman Brooks, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ Aleks Morosky, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ Ben Watkins, Senior Constituent Affairs Specialist
- ★ Juan Valdez, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Coordinator

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

veterans.senate.gov

202.224.9126

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS va.gov

844.698.2311

✕: [@DeptVetAffairs](#)

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**WWP
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resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org

888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or 904.405.1213

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