



February 20, 2026
WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

**119TH CONGRESS, 2ND SESSION LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TRIFOLD
AND POINT PAPERS ARE NOW AVAILABLE!**

You can view and download the Legislative Priorities trifold and point papers on the Legion website [here](#).

****There will be hard copies available at Washington Conference to be taken and handed out at your meetings on the Hill****

HIGHLIGHTED CAMPAIGN

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to urge them to pass *the Major Richard Star Act*. This legislation would ensure that combat-injured retirees can receive both their Department of Defense retirement pay and the disability compensation earned through their sacrifices.

The American Legion appreciates all the emails you have sent so far.

Make your voice heard before the National Commander testifies at Washington Conference! Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Address>

TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS

Kansas	173
Tennessee	168
Wisconsin	128
Texas	85
New York	62

Register more participants in your Department to increase the number of veteran voices advocating on the Hill!

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Washington Conference is scheduled for Feb 28-Mar 5 at the Washington Hilton! The full agenda and hotel information can be found on the Legion website [here](#). Some important dates and events to note:

March 2 – Legislative Commission Meeting and Commander’s Call

March 3 – Hill visits

March 4 – National Commander’s Testimony to Joint session of Congress

LEGION APPLAUDS VA FOR HALTING IMMEDIATE ENFORCEMENT OF MEDICATION RULE

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



National commander says reversal underscores the importance and power of the collective voice of Legionnaires.

American Legion National Commander Dan K. Wiley released the following statement today:

"Today, VA Secretary Doug Collins announced the department is halting enforcement of the interim final rule published on February 17. Upon the rule's publication, our staff in the Washington, D.C., office immediately expressed The American Legion's disapproval to administration officials. A short time later, I issued a public statement strongly disagreeing with the policy and legal justification for the rule's immediate effect. This decision by Secretary Collins underscores the importance and power of your collective voice as Legionnaires.

"I applaud the Secretary for making this decision, allowing the litigation to proceed in court and for your voices to be heard prior to the rule taking effect. While the public comment period is still open, Legionnaires are encouraged to make their voice heard in the federal register [here](#). We look forward to continuing our work with the Secretary to ensure veterans receive the health care and benefits they have earned and deserve."

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR VETERANS WORSEN AMID CIVILIAN JOB MARKET GAINS

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

The unemployment rate for all veterans bumped up to 4.5% in January from 3.8% in December, while the post-9/11 generation of [veterans](#) saw their jobless rates balloon over that span to 5.8% from 5.1%, an indication that veterans were having difficulty adjusting to the new “low hire, low fire” jobs market.

The numbers from the monthly [report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) on Wednesday also showed that the [jobless rates for veterans](#) had exceeded those for the general population for the second time since [President Donald Trump](#) took office.

The first BLS jobs report of Trump's second term showed a rise in the unemployment rate for all veterans from 2.8% in December 2024 to 4.2% in January 2025, even as the jobless rate for all Americans ticked down from 4.1% to 4.0%.

In a bright spot, [the BLS report](#), the release of which had been delayed due to bad weather, showed that hiring increased by 130,000 jobs in January. Many analysts predicted a hiring increase in the range of 60,000 to 70,000 jobs.

“Job gains occurred in health care, social assistance, and construction, while federal government and financial activities lost jobs,” BLS reported.

The most startling statistic to come out of the latest BLS report, however, was the massive revision to the statistics from 2025, which now showed almost no job growth for the year.

Preliminary data suggested that about 584,000 jobs had been added to payrolls in 2025, but revised data with more input from the states showed that the labor market had added only 181,000 jobs last year.

In a statement, Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer chose to focus on the BLS report's data on jobs added to the economy last month.

“The January jobs report shows that the U.S. economy is off to an undeniably strong start this year,” Chavez-DeRemer said in a statement.

In a post on Truth Social, President Trump lauded the data as “GREAT JOBS NUMBERS, FAR GREATER THAN EXPECTED!”

“WOW! The Golden Age of America is upon us!!!” he added.

In a post Wednesday, Daniel Zhao, chief economist at the Glassdoor job search platform, said the 130,000 jobs added in January were “well above expectations and an

improvement from the 48,000 jobs added in December 2025. November 2025's job gains were revised from 56,000 to 41,000."

"The updated scoreboard for 2025 shows a job market that was much more sluggish than originally reported," Zhao added. "However, the acceleration in job gains in January starts the year with a tinge of optimism."

Heather Long, chief economist for Navy Federal Credit Union, also noted a loosening up of the jobs market indicated by the BLS report, but perhaps not for veterans in an economy locked into the "low hire, low fire" phase, a term popularized in 2025 by Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell to describe an economy where hiring had slowed while layoffs remained low.

"Almost everything about the [BLS] report is positive, at least for January, but the part [worth] zeroing in on is the wage gains of 3.7%," Long said in a phone interview Wednesday with Military Times. "If the labor market was weakening, you would see wage gains cooling off."

Long noted that companies "are starting to look around, I think, and say the overall economic picture looks pretty good for 2026. ... But there's still a hangover from the decline in federal government employment as well as state government employment," adding that both trends bode poorly for veterans looking to continue government service.

In addition, health care, hospitality and social assistance jobs highlighted in the BLS report are not typically job sectors veterans are drawn to. Massive sums of money spent by tech companies on artificial intelligence must also be taken into account, Long said.

"For 2025, I think it's a minor part of the story" affecting the economy and the labor market, "but it's a growing part of the story for 2026," she said, adding that AI investment, more than AI itself, is taking jobs.

"Today, AI cannot replace many workers," she said. "Companies recognize they can't lay everybody off, but every company is investing heavily in AI. There's only so much money you have as a company every year, and if most of that money is going towards AI investment there simply is not enough money left to pay your workers more, let alone hire a bunch of more people. ... That's the choice being made in most corporate C-suites."

VA RESTORES GUN RIGHTS TO SOME DISABLED VETERANS

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

The Department of Veterans Affairs has ended a practice that prevented veterans who can't manage their finances from owning guns, a change officials say will restore constitutional rights to nearly 200,000 former service members.

The VA announced Tuesday it will immediately stop reporting veterans to the FBI's national background check database if they need a fiduciary to help manage their benefits.

Proponents of the decades-old policy have said it protects veterans with mental impairments by limiting access to a lethal means of suicide. But major veteran advocacy groups and gun rights organizations have long argued the notifications weren't based on thorough mental assessments and actually prevented veterans from seeking help for fear of losing their 2nd Amendment rights.

Since 2017, Republican lawmakers have [introduced legislation to force the VA to stop the practice](#), including as recently as last year, with H.R. 496, the Veterans 2nd Amendment Restoration Act of 2025, sponsored by Rep. Eli Crane, R-Ariz.

But on Tuesday VA officials said that based on a legal review, the agency and the Department of Justice have determined the VA can simply halt the notifications.

According to the VA, the law states that to report a person to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, a determination must be made by a judge or "quasi-judicial body."

The VA and DOJ determined that the decision that a veteran needs a fiduciary "falls short of this legal standard," and veterans were reported without a hearing or "adequate determinations that they posed a sufficient risk of danger to themselves and others."

"Many Americans struggle with managing their finances, and Veterans' Second Amendment rights shouldn't be stripped just because they need help in this area. But for too long, Veterans who needed the services of a VA fiduciary were deprived of their right to bear arms," VA Secretary Doug Collins said in a press release.

The Brady Act allows the Justice Department to collect information from federal agencies of anyone whose ownership or position of a firearm would violate federal law, including those who are a danger to themselves or others; who lack the mental capacity to contract or manage their own affairs; or have been found insane by a court or incompetent to stand trial.

In its review of the practice, the VA determined that it violated another law, the Gun Control Act, as well as the 2nd Amendment.

The VA halted the practice for six months in 2024 under legislation approved by Congress in a consolidated appropriations law, but it only applied to veterans who entered the fiduciary program from that year and was not retroactive.

The new change will affect veterans who have lost their access to a firearm as a result of needing a fiduciary and being reported to the database, which is used by dealers to perform background checks and determine who is eligible to own, possess or buy firearms. According to the announcement, the VA will work with the FBI to remove all past reporting.

The veterans community has been split on their support for the requirement, with organizations such as Blue Star Families, an advocacy group for active-duty military personnel and their dependents, supporting the status quo when it first came under debate in 2017.

Others, such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, have lobbied for the change, saying the policy harmed veterans who need VA health care but were reluctant to seek it for fear of being referred to the database.

In 2023, the most recent year for data on veteran suicide, firearms were used in 73.3% of the 6,398 suicides recorded by the VA. On Tuesday, Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, noted that guns are used in a majority of veteran suicide and called the change “dangerous and reckless.”

Blumenthal refuted the VA’s claim that the referral process has been conducted by persons who lack the legal authority or capacity to make a judgement based on a fiduciary assignment, noting that the determinations were made “through a comprehensive process with robust due process protections.”

“This Administration should be focused on measures that will actually help end veteran suicide and make our communities safer. Eliminating this policy and weakening the NICS background check system altogether is a disastrous decision that will have potentially tragic impacts for years to come,” Blumenthal said.

But Committee Chairman Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, said that in making the change, the VA had corrected a wrong, and he urged colleagues to support legislation to make the decision permanent.

“No veteran should be penalized or stripped of their right to legally purchase and own a firearm without due process simply because they sought assistance from VA regarding their finances or earned benefits,” Moran said.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we will spotlight an individual every week. These individuals demonstrate exceptional grassroots activism by meeting with/contacting their Congressional Representative/Senator to advocate for veterans. Efforts like these truly make a difference and give veterans a voice in Congress.

Steve Fosness, Department of Minnesota

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

This week, Steve met with Congressman Brad Finstad at the Bravo Zulu House in Winnebago, MN. With him, he discussed issues such as veteran suicide, drug/alcohol addiction treatment and PTSD treatment. They discussed expanding the proven program to veteran men, as well as starting a program for veteran women.

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

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress? Check out our [information papers and Legislative priorities](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

10 Tips for a Successful Meeting on Capitol Hill and the *Legislative Meeting Worksheet* are now available for viewing and download on The Legion's website. You can find them and other legislative resources on the [Legislative Advocacy Resources & Toolkit page](#).

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 jfunari@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 2/20, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, February 24, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services Full Committee Hearing -- “To Receive Testimony on Rebuilding American Critical Minerals Supply Chains”
- Tuesday, February 24, 10:00 AM: Joint House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs VSO Hearing -- “Legislative Presentation of Disabled American Veterans & Multi VSOs: Military Officers Association of America, Blue Star Families, Vietnam Veterans of America, National Congress of American Indians, Service Women's Action Network, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., and Black Veterans Project”
- Tuesday, February 24, 2:00 PM: House Committee on Armed Services, Joint Tactical Air & Land Forces and Readiness Subcommittee Hearing -- “Modernization of the Organic Industrial Base”
- Tuesday, March 3, 10:00 AM: Joint House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs VSO Hearing -- “Legislative Presentation of Veterans of Foreign Wars & Multi VSO: Student Veterans of America, Jewish War Veterans, Blinded Veterans Association, Fleet Reserve Association, Minority Veterans of America, National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)”
- **Wednesday, March 4, 10:00 AM: Joint House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs VSO Hearing -- “Legislative Presentation of The American**

Legion & Multi VSOs: Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMVETS, National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs, Wounded Warrior Project, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, National Guard Association of the United States, Mission Roll Call”

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](#)