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March 20, 2026
WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week's newsletter is all about giving back. Whether it's supporting the Be The One campaign, connecting with members on Capitol Hill, participating in the USA 250 Challenge, or serving in your own community, each effort reflects the core mission of The American Legion.

At its heart, our work remains the same: to serve those who have served, strengthen our nation, and uphold the values that define American democracy.

STAY INFORMED: LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES NOW AVAILABLE

Want to see the issues Legionnaires are discussing with lawmakers? The 119th Congress, 2nd Session Legislative Priorities materials are available now. View and download them on the Legion website [here](#).

CALL TO ACTION

This week legion family we are calling on you because you know, the United States Coast Guard is an integral component of our nation's national security and homeland defense. At a time when the United States faces one of its highest levels of risk in decades due to ongoing global events, it is completely unacceptable for Coast Guard members and their families to face the possibility of missing a paycheck.

We call on the 2.5 million members of The American Legion Family to immediately contact their Members of Congress and demand action. The men and women of our Coast Guard MUST BE PAID NOW.

Now more than ever, Congress needs to feel the power of The American Legion Family's 2.5 million voices. Please send a message TODAY to your two U.S. Senators and House Congressional Representative urging them pay our Coast Guard.

The American Legion appreciates your advocacy efforts. Visit the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress. Remember to report any recent meetings or calls to help showcase the impact of Legion advocacy [here](#).

SHARE YOUR CAPITOL HILL VISIT WITH US

Last week's newsletter focused on the Washington Conference, and this week we've already received some amazing reports from Capitol Hill visits. We'd love to hear about yours as well, so share your Capitol Hill visit with us.

Please email sbrooks@legion.org with the following information:

- The members of your delegation who participated in the visit (please include any current post, district, or department offices they hold).
- The members of Congress or congressional staff your delegation met with.
- Photos from your visit on Capitol Hill.

'FROM POST TO POLICY'

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



COLORADO LEGIONNAIRE SHARES THOUGHTS ON VISIT TO CAPITOL HILL DURING WASHINGTON CONFERENCE; LEGION DEPARTMENTS ENCOURAGED TO DO THE SAME.

During the recent Washington Conference, members of the Department of Colorado American Legion Family were able to discuss veterans issues during their visit to Capitol Hill.

The delegation met with U.S. Reps. Jeff Crank and Jeff Hurd, as well as staff from the offices of Sens. John Hickenlooper and Michael Bennett, and Reps. Joe Neguse, Gabe Evans, Diana DeGette and Brittany Petterson.

The Colorado delegation included:

- Department Senior Vice Commander Sarah Tobin, a member of Post 209 and the National Legislative Council
- Sons of The American Legion National Executive Committeeman Nick Arceo, Commander of SAL Squadron 103
- American Legion Auxiliary Department Vice President Rebekah Arpan, a member of Unit 209
- SAL Detachment Commander Rob Barry, a member of Squadron 209
- SAL Detachment Junior Vice Commander Chris Flores, a member of Squadron 113
- SAL Past National Commander Mike Kirschner, a member of Squadron 2
- Department Junior Vice Commander Tina Kyprios, a member of Post 44
- Post 44 Adjutant Jim Stanko

Kyprios shared the following thoughts after visiting Capitol Hill.

As I return home after The American Legion Washington Conference, I come with a far greater awareness and appreciation of the process that ultimately shapes the policies that help veterans in concrete ways for generations to come.

We all know of the recent passage of the PACT Act in 2022. What you may not know is that long before that was signed into law, it started as a resolution at an American Legion post. In the case of the PACT Act, it was likely several resolutions. You can go on to [The American Legion Digital Archive](#) and search all the resolutions ultimately passed by The American Legion. There you will find that in 2016 there were various resolutions passed that addressed presumptive conditions, including 130 and 139, which originated in Maryland, were passed through the resolution process, and made it to the floor of the national convention where it was passed.

You also may not know that as a grassroots organization, it is the resolutions process that allows The American Legion to speak on any issue. The American Legion's legislative agenda is not developed by 'leaders in Washington' who decide what they think is important; rather, it begins at the post level. The American Legion does not take a formal position on any issue without an explicit resolution on the topic.

For example, right now one of the items on our legislative agenda is The Major Richard Star Act. Again, this is the result of various resolutions, one of which is Res. 187, Department of Veterans Affairs Disability Compensation, which originated from Georgia and was passed at the 2016 National Convention in Ohio. Most recently President Trump signed an executive order which reclassified marijuana from a schedule I to schedule III drug. This enables VA to do research into the medicinal value of marijuana, and it started with a resolution from Louisiana.

When we're engaged in our post meetings it can often seem very abstract or removed from anything that happens in Washington, D.C. And in the best sense, we are often just in conversation, maybe listening to complaints or even "bitch sessions" talking about how broken the process is, or the holes in the system, or the "stupid" hoops we are required to jump through to simply receive the care or compensation we understand we have earned. But it is through these conversations that resolutions are born. Someone says something like "the VA should ..." and that is the seed planted that becomes a resolution.

The American Legion's [Be the One program](#) is focused on veteran suicide, and it is ultimately about looking out for one another, paying attention to our battle buddies and being aware of each other's needs. Through this grassroots effort you can Be The One in your post, and when you see an issue that needs broader attention, write that resolution – it could be the one that goes from post to policy.

VA ANNOUNCES \$112M GRANT OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY-BASED SUICIDE PREVENTION EFFORTS

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

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs today announced a \$112 million grant funding opportunity for organizations that provide suicide prevention services to Veterans across the country.

Grant funding is available to nonprofit organizations, state and local governments, federally recognized tribes and other community-based organizations that have a demonstrated capacity to serve Veterans. These funds are made available through the [Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program](#), and grantees have until June 12, 2026, to apply.

"These grants invest directly in communities that know Veterans best and are often the first to recognize when someone is struggling," said **VA Secretary Doug Collins**. "They have been successful in connecting Veterans, service members, and their families —

especially those not yet engaged with VA — to services that help reduce suicide risk and promote well-being.”

For details about eligibility, priorities and application requirements for this year’s Fox grant awards, visit <https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/361498>. VA also offers technical assistance and application resources, including webinars and guidance materials at MentalHealth.VA.gov/ssgfox-grants.

Background:

In 2025, Fox grants supported more than 17,000 Veterans, service members and family members — a 31% increase from 2024. This includes nearly 9,000 Veterans with an elevated risk for suicide, 91.8% of whom reported a decrease in risk factors after getting help from Fox grant recipients.

Additionally, more than 2,500 Veterans enrolled in VA health care for the first time in 2025 as a result of their interaction with grantees, a 43.7% increase from 2024. Since the launch of Fox grants in 2022, VA has awarded \$210 million to 111 organizations across 46 states, U.S. territories and tribal lands.

Sixty percent of the Veterans who die by suicide were not in VHA care at any point in the two years prior to their death. That’s why VA has taken steps to enroll new Veterans at VA. In 2026 so far, VA has enrolled more than 76,000 Veterans into VA health care.

That’s just one of many [landmark VA achievements during the second Trump Administration](#), including:

1. [Opening 33 new VA health care facilities](#), expanding health care access for Veterans around the country.
2. [Reducing the backlog of Veterans waiting for VA benefits by 63% since Jan. 20, 2025](#), after it increased 24% during the Biden Administration.
3. Completing 82,083,918 direct care appointments in FY2025, up 4.1% from FY2024.
4. Offering Veterans more than 2.2 million appointments outside of normal operating hours, giving Veterans more timely and convenient options for care.
5. [Permanently housing 51,936 homeless Veterans](#) across the country in FY2025, the highest total in seven years.

Download [VA's Safe Messaging Best Practices](#) fact sheet or visit ReportingOnSuicide.org for guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

1 MISSION, 2 DAYS, 1,760 BUDDY CHECKS

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



Utah American Legion Area 2 Commander Ninzel Rasmuson and Post 72 Commander Rodney Gardner talk with Army veteran Leon Alsop during a Buddy Check visit at the Mervyn Sharp Bennion Central Utah Veterans Home. Photo by Briana Scroggins

To celebrate the nation's 250th birthday, Utah Legion Family members conduct hundreds of wellness checks on veterans over a two-day period.

Ninzel Rasmuson led a special initiative as part of The American Legion's [USA 250 Challenge](#) in celebration of the organization's birthday. Rasmuson, the Area 2 commander for the Department of Utah, challenged her districts to complete 250 Buddy Checks on March 16 and 17.

It did not take long to surpass the goal.

By the end of the first day, American Legion Family members completed 450 Buddy Checks by making phone calls, visiting veterans at their homes and in care facilities, and other ways. Overall, dozens of Legionnaires, Sons and Auxiliary members made more than 1,760 Buddy Checks.

"The success of the USA 250 Buddy Check Challenge across Area 2 stands as a powerful testament to what can be accomplished when Legion Family members unite in purpose and service," said Rasmuson, an Air National Guard veteran who served during the Global War on Terrorism, acknowledging the work of Post 72 in Orem and

posts within Districts 4 and 8. "Through coordinated outreach, meaningful conversations, and a shared commitment to the well-being of every veteran, Area 2's posts and districts exemplified the true spirit of Be the One. Their willingness to step forward, make the calls, conduct home visits, and ensure no veteran feels forgotten reflects the very heart of The American Legion's mission."

The USA 250 Challenge is comprised of three components: fitness, wellness and community service. Rasmuson, a member of Post 140 in Riverton, selected Buddy Checks, which would qualify in either the wellness or community service categories.

"I picked Buddy Checks because we have the ability to really get personal and one-on-one with the veteran," she explained. "We talk with them about how it's going, what their needs are, if there's anything that we can do for them, whether it be in their home or out in the community, or maybe at their workplace. We're there to focus on what they need for their life and make sure they're doing OK in conjunction with the [Be the One mission](#) effort for The American Legion."

Bill Johnson, a retired Army master sergeant who served 34 years, played an instrumental role in setting up the event. He coordinated a workspace at a co-working studio, Kiln in Provo, at no cost for the two days.

"I've seen a lot of prior servicemembers in my life who have needed help after they've gotten out," said Johnson, the sergeant-at-arms of Post 72 in Orem. "So I got involved with The American Legion. We do a lot of humanitarian stuff here in our valley. We volunteer to help folks out. We spread the word that veterans are never forgotten. All of us are here to help."

Jack Rhodes, who also is a member of Post 72, recalled a Buddy Check he conducted with a veteran with embolism.

"He was absolutely thrilled to hear somebody's voice," Rhodes said. "I told him we wanted him to know that we're here. If there's something he needs, please remember us and let us know. And he said, 'Just talking to you means a lot.'"

Rhodes, who is 86, found his purpose with The American Legion. After a few hours of doing Buddy Checks, he left to perform honor guard duties at the funeral of a veteran.

"Continuing to serve makes me feel really good; it gives me a purpose of life," he said. "It's a wonderful feeling. It's a way to give back to the veterans. They need to know that they have a brotherhood that supports them."

In addition to directing the event, Rasmuson also did Buddy Checks.

She visited several Vietnam War veterans, including Jim Saxton, at the Central Utah Veterans Home. Saxton, who served in the Navy from 1961 to 1970, remembered

Harvey Douglas, a battle buddy who was killed in Vietnam, just five days before his first child was born. “It was a very tender moment, and I always remember Harvey. He was a good man.”

Saxton, an American Legion past post commander, expressed his gratitude to those who took the time to visit with him.

“I don’t know how to put into words my appreciation,” he said. “It’s like love. They give love. It’s really great.”

And that’s what motivated Rasmuson to orchestrate this initiative.

“Vietnam veterans are near and dear to my heart,” she explained. “They went through a lot during a theater war that was extremely difficult. It’s an honor to be able to interview them, get to know them more, to be a part of their life as buddy to buddy through the Buddy Check process. We really, truly want to know how they’re doing and what we can do through community service to help support them in any way that we can.”

NEF GRANTS AVAILABLE TO POSTS, LEGIONNAIRES IMPACTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS

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

DESPITE GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN DELAYING DISASTER DECLARATIONS, THOSE AFFECTED ARE ENCOURAGED TO PREPARE NEF GRANT APPLICATIONS.

Although the government shutdown means FEMA is not currently designating any natural disasters, American Legion posts and Legionnaires impacted by those events are encouraged to still apply for National Emergency Fund (NEF) grants.

Grants of up to \$3,000 for Legionnaires and \$10,000 for Legion posts are available through the NEF. Individuals must have been displaced from their primary residence due to damage from a declared natural disaster. Post grants must derive from a declared natural disaster causing damage to the post building and restricting use of the facility for programs.

Application forms and further information are available at <https://www.legion.org/get-involved/community-programs/national-emergency-fund/request-assistance>.

NEF does not provide for repairs or replacement of lost or damaged items in the primary home of residence. If the destroyed property is owned by the member, but he/she does not physically live there, that is not covered. Vehicles or outbuildings are not covered. If the home is rented, renters insurance paperwork should be provided, if any.

For American Legion posts, the only things covered are for post programs that might sustain losses pertaining to the intent of the four pillars of The American Legion. Losses from the social quarters and/or restaurant of the post are not covered. A copy of the most recent Consolidated Post Report (CPR) needs to be attached.

The American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) Program is also ready to assist active duty servicemembers and American Legion members with minor children in the home (18 or younger) who need financial help to pay for shelter, food, utilities and medical expenses. For more information, go to <https://www.legion.org/get-involved/community-programs/temporary-financial-assistance>.

LEGION POST STEPPING UP TO ASSIST SERVICEMEMBER SERIOUSLY INJURED IN IRANIAN AIRSTRIKE

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

IOWA POST 73 IS RAISING MONEY TO ASSIST U.S. ARMY MASTER SGT. JOSH STEINBACK, WHO WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED IN A MARCH 1 ATTACK THAT TOOK THE LIVES OF SIX FELLOW SERVICEMEMBERS.

An Iran airstrike on March 1 took the lives of six U.S. servicemembers from the 103rd Sustainment Command of the Army Reserve that were stationed at an operations center in Kuwait. Among those seriously injured in the strike was Master Sgt. Josh Steinback, an Army Reserve soldier from Tama, Iowa, and member of American Legion Post 73 in the same small city.

Steinback, the father of two, was airlifted to Germany initially, where his wife Angie met him. He's since been transferred to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland, where he will be cared for indefinitely.

And for the indefinite future, Post 73 will do what it can to assist Steinback and his family, using past fundraisers and a larger future one to provide financial assistance as the servicemember moves down the road to recovery.

Post 73, who has monthly fish fries from September to April, is donating the money raised from those in both 2025 and this year to Steinback's family to assist with expenses. The post also is coordinating with other area American Legion posts and the Veterans of Foreign Wars for a bigger fundraiser down the road, once Steinback can be in attendance.

"It hit really close to home for us – especially when we found out all of his conditions," Post 73 Commander Jeff Large said. "We knew he was going to need support and help. Right now, they've got a lot of expenses. The wife is staying at Walter Reed, so she's got a lot of expenses there."

Post 73 immediately reached out to Steinback's wife, Angela, and has been in regular contact with her. The post then decided that all the money raised from its fish fries would go to assisting the Steinbacks with expenses that include going back and forth from Iowa to Maryland, as well as regular household expenses.

Large said that when the post publicized that Steinback would be the recipient of its March fish fry donations, it saw a rise in attendance. "It was a big rise. The community really stepped up to help support (Steinback) and his family," he said. "It's a real eye-opener how your community pulls together to support your locals."

But beyond that, Large said Post 73's American Legion Family is working with Reinig-Friedrichs Post 72 in Toledo, Iowa, and Robert Morgan Post 701 in Tama, as well as the VFW, for a larger fundraiser that will take place when Josh can be there to attend.

"All the proceeds from that will go to offset their expenses," Large said. "Right now, we're doing our planning. We're going to have a live auction. We're going to have free-will donations and food. We're going to have a ton of games. We've got some bands that have shown interest in donating their time. We're going to meet once a month until we get a date that works for the family. Once we get that, we'll set our date."

Large said Post 73 has taken on assisting Steinback and his family out of a sense of obligation. "We're not trying to get any recognition out of this. We're just trying to help our veteran," he said. "No. 1, he is a member of our post. No. 2, he's a veteran. And No. 3, the biggest reason, is the expense of the family. Having a family having to worry about expenses ... they need to spend their time worrying about their family member, their loved one. We're trying to help relieve that stress for them."

NEW PSA HIGHLIGHTS USA 250 CHALLENGE

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

AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY LEADERS JOIN FORCES TO CALL ON ALL MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INITIATIVE TO CELEBRATE THE NATION'S 250TH BIRTHDAY.

The leaders of the American Legion Family joined together for [this new PSA video](#) to promote the USA 250 Challenge in time for American Legion Birthday.

In the PSA, American Legion National Commander Dan Wiley leads a phone call where he catches up with SAL Commander Bill Clancy, Auxiliary President Pam Ray and Riders Chairman David Heredia. They share how they are fulfilling their commitments to achieving one or more of the three categories in the challenge.

"I am calling on all American Legion Family members to participate in the challenge," Wiley said in the PSA. "They can pursue the challenge categories. They can help fundraise.

They can donate to support our disabled veterans and military families. We are counting on ALL members of the American Legion Family!”

American Legion Family members are encouraged to share the PSA on social media, via post it in newsletters and distribute it in other ways to engage members.

There is still time to sign up for the American Legion [USA 250 Challenge](#), which concludes July 4. Participants not only improve their own mental wellness and/or physical health, but they also support the Veterans & Children Foundation and their department.

Donations to the USA 250 Challenge go toward the Veterans & Children Foundation, which benefits disabled veterans and military families in need. Participants can also receive special commemorative items by hitting various fundraising tiers. They are:

- Participants who raise at least \$250, receive a USA 250 Challenge hat pin.
- Participants who raise at least \$500, receive a USA 250 Challenge coin and a personalized certificate of appreciation.
- Participants who raise at least \$2,500, receive a personalized plaque signed by National Commander Dan Wiley.

For assistance or questions, please email: [**donorservices@legion.org**](mailto:donorservices@legion.org)

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

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

THIS WEEKS TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS:

Wisconsin	248
Kansas	241
Tennessee	233
New York	213
Florida	88

Register more participants in your Department and help amplify the voice of veterans on Capitol Hill. Maybe your state just might earn a spot-on next week's Letter Board! Register with the link below:

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

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

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>



To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we 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.

Gary Schacher, Department of New York

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

Gary met Chuck Schumer. During the meeting, he discussed the Major Richard Star Act and efforts to identify the remains of unknown sailors who perished in the sinking of the USS Turner (DD-648) in 1944. He also presented Senator Schumer with his Sons of The American Legion (SAL) cover as a new member of Squadron 162 in Lowville, New York, alongside Detachment of New York NEC, Detachment of New York Commander and Squadron 162 Commander as well as Department of New York Adjutant and Legislative Chairman.

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



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 3/20, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, March 24, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services
- Tuesday, March 24, 2:30 PM: Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Cybersecurity
- Wednesday, March 25, 2:15 PM: House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
- Wednesday, March 25, 3:00 PM: House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
- Thursday, March 26, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services

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](#)