



February 27, 2026
WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

The Washington Conference is scheduled next week, 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

While we look forward to seeing many of you in Washington, D.C. those who cannot attend in person can tune in live to watch the National Commander’s testimony at 10:00 a.m. on March 4th [here](#).

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>

FEBRUARY TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS:

Kansas	862
Tennessee	724
Wisconsin	709
Texas	372
New York	322

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>

LEGIONNAIRE ROYCE WILLIAMS RECEIVES MEDAL OF HONOR

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



Retired Navy Capt. Royce Williams, who is 100, becomes the oldest recipient to ever wear the medal for his heroic aerial feat in 1952.

Retired Navy Capt. Royce Williams, 100, received the Medal of Honor on Feb. 24 for his heroic actions in 1952 when he shot down four Soviet MiGs during a 35-minute dogfight, an aerial feat never achieved previously or since. In November 2017, an American Legion Magazine story first reported Williams' achievement after he was sworn to secrecy for more than a half century.

Williams, a member of American Legion Post 416 in Encinitas, Calif., is the oldest recipient to ever wear the medal. He was a special guest of President Trump during the State of the Union address, sitting next to first lady Melania Trump, who placed the medal around his neck.

"Heroic American aviator, Navy fighter pilot Royce Williams served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, flying more than 220 missions," Trump said. "In 1952, Royce was in the dogfight of a lifetime. His squadron was ambushed by seven Soviet fighter planes. And despite being massively outnumbered and outgunned, Royce led the takedown of four enemy jets and almost destroyed the others. Vanquishing his adversaries while taking 263 bullets to his own plane. His story was secret for over 50 years. He didn't even tell his wife. But tonight, at 100 years old, this brave Navy captain is finally getting the recognition he deserves."

Williams gave a thumbs up to the bipartisan standing ovation that lasted several minutes.

Trump also presented the Medal of Honor to Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eric Slover, a helicopter pilot wounded in the raid that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Trump credited Slover for helping plan the mission and leading the first Chinook helicopter against Maduro's heavily fortified compound.

The president called Williams Feb. 3 to tell him he would receive the medal. During the congratulatory phone call, Williams told Trump, "As you know I am more than 100 years old, all 100-plus is excited. The event that is being celebrated is long ago. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

On Nov. 18, 1952, Williams and three other Navy pilots encountered seven Soviet MiGs. Williams, flying an F9F-5 Panther, shot down four MiG-15s in 35 minutes. When he somehow landed his plane back on the aircraft carrier, it was riddled with more than 260 perforations from the Soviet fighters. The plane was in such poor shape that the crew pushed it overboard to its final resting place.

Upon landing, his superior officers ordered Williams to keep the story a secret. Russia declassified the information a decade ago, paving the way for Williams to talk openly about it.

Because so much time had passed, it took an extraordinary effort to award the medal to Williams. Thanks to efforts by The American Legion, that hurdle was overcome.

The FY 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) cleared the way for the president to award the Medal of Honor to Williams. Specifically, language in the NDAA removed time limits that previously prevented Williams from receiving the honor.

Nearly a decade earlier, The American Legion passed a resolution, calling for Williams to receive the medal. Steve Lewandowski, also a member of Post 416, was among those leading the fight for Williams.

"Today is Royce's day," Lewandowski said. "It's a day when he finally gets the recognition he deserves and should have received decades ago. It's a day that also represents the impact of The American Legion and the dedicated team that worked to make this happen. Everyone with 'Operation Just Reward' put in hundreds of hours and endured countless setbacks over the years. It was our honor to support Royce. We can't wait to see him in person wearing his medal."

VA TO FORMALLY RESCIND CONTROVERSIAL DISABILITY RATINGS RULE

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

A regulation that would have required Veterans Affairs medical examiners to include the effects of medication in assigning disability ratings is expected to be rescinded formally on Feb. 27.

According to an advanced Federal Register notice, the rescission will be effective immediately on publication, expected early Friday morning.

In the notice, VA officials said that while the rule was meant to clarify existing policy, “stakeholders have expressed uncertainty” about its impact on claims and leaving the rule in place during the codification process “could undermine confidence in the benefits system.”

“VA always takes veterans’ concerns seriously and recognizes that many commenters construed the interim final rule as something that could result in adverse consequences,” the notice read.

The rule, published Feb. 17, generated significant backlash from veterans, advocacy groups and lawmakers who said the proposal could have financially penalized veterans who adhere to medical treatment or encourage those seeking a disability rating to forego medications prior to a compensation and pension exam, putting their health at risk.

The VA said the regulation simply formalized a practice that has been in place since 1958. Officials said it was needed because a 2025 court ruling, *Ingram v. Collins*, decided the VA must discount the positive impact of medication when issuing a disability rating.

The rule stated that the methodology dictated by the courts set a standard that was “unquantifiable, hypothetical [and] unwarranted.”

The major veterans groups, including Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion strongly objected to ruling, which they said was crafted without any input from veterans outside the VA.

Nearly 20,000 veterans and advocates have flooded the Federal Register’s comment section on the rule, saying it would hurt veterans.

“As a former Army nurse, it seems this rule change could have unforeseen and harmful downstream effects for veterans, which is why it demands serious public scrutiny and possible legislative clarification from Capitol Hill,” VFW National Commander Carol

Whitmore said in a statement shortly after the rule was published. “While VA has authority to amend the rating schedule, it must do so without adversely affecting veterans.”

Collins announced two days after publication that the rule would not be enforced. But it remained on the books, raising concerns among veterans.

At least one lawsuit was filed against the VA seeking to stop implementation and on Tuesday, 20 Democrat and independent lawmakers from the House and Senate wrote Collins asking the rule be revoked.

They said that leaving the rule on the books was causing veterans to “confront the unnecessary dilemma of continuing life-improving treatment for their conditions.”

“This rule forces veterans into an impossible choice: follow their prescribed treatment plan or risk losing their benefits,” wrote the lawmakers, including the ranking Democrats on the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees, Rep. Mark Takano of California and Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut.

In letter, the lawmakers said enforcement of the rule could have resulted in an estimated \$23 billion in savings and objected to what they said was a “political maneuver aimed at cutting costs.”

The VA has filed an appeal to the Ingram v. Collins ruling, and the rescission does not resolve that court case which continues.

In the notice to be published Friday, officials said the department is “committed to its mission of ensuring that every claimant applying for benefits — especially veterans who have earned disability compensation through their honorable service to the Nation — receives all benefits to which they are entitled under the law as expeditiously as possible.”

VA’S RESCINDING OF INTERIM FINAL RULE ‘A VICTORY FOR OUR NATION’S VETERANS’

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

National Commander Dan K. Wiley applauds U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs decision to rescind Interim Final Rule regarding medication management.

American Legion National Commander Dan K. Wiley issued the following statement after the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced it has rescinded the Interim Final Rule regarding medication management:

“Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs officially announced that they will rescind the Interim Final Rule regarding medication management. While The American Legion applauded Secretary Collins’ initial decision to halt enforcement, we believe that rescinding the Interim Final Rule was always the best choice for veterans.

“Today marks a victory for our nation’s veterans and their families, and serves as another example of the influence the Legion’s voice has in Washington, D.C. As we have done for 107 years, The American Legion will continue working to ensure our veterans have access to the health care and benefits they earned.”

HOME LOAN BORROWERS CAN NOW DEDUCT FUNDING FEES

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

Starting this year, Veterans, service members and their surviving spouses can deduct VA funding fees on their taxes when purchasing a home using the VA-guaranteed home loan.

The VA funding fee is a one-time payment that the Veteran, service member or survivor pays on a VA-backed or VA direct home loan. Generally, the VA home loan program doesn’t require the Veteran to make a down payment, and the program never requires monthly mortgage insurance. VA also grants exemptions of the funding fee to those who receive VA compensation for their service-connected disabilities, Purple Heart recipients still serving on active duty and others.

The funding fee ranges from 0.5%–3.3% depending on the loan type, loan amount, down payment amount and whether the Veteran is a first-time user of the VA home loan program. Veterans pay the funding fee at closing, in one of two ways: It can be generally included in the loan amount or paid at closing.

“VA just recently reached a milestone of granting the 29 millionth VA-guaranteed home loan to Veterans, service members and surviving spouses who served and sacrificed on behalf of our grateful nation,” said Patrick Zondervan, executive director of VA’s Loan Guaranty Service. “We are pleased that eligible new borrowers can now deduct the funding fee and potentially put more money back in their pockets, which is where it belongs.”

This post is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be, and should not be construed as, tax, legal or accounting advice. You should consult your own tax advisor or legal counsel regarding your specific situation before making any decisions.



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.

Rafael Munoz-Cintron, Department of Washington

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

This week, Rafael met with staff from Congressman Adam Smith's and Senator Patty Murray's offices. With them, he discussed the VA's Interim Final Rule that would require veterans to be rated in their medicated state during Compensation & Pension (C&P) exams. They addressed concerns about how this change could impact disability evaluations, legal precedent, and veterans earned benefits.

Thank you, Rafael, 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

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 2/27, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, March 3, 9:30 AM: Senate Armed Services Meeting on the National Defense Strategy
- 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”

- Wednesday, March 4, 2:30PM: Senate Armed Services National Defense Strategy Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support To receive testimony on the current readiness of the Joint Force
- Wednesday, March 4, 2:15PM: House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Oversight Hearing -- “Delivering for Veterans and Caregivers: Year One of the Dole Act”
- Thursday, March 5, 10:15AM: House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing -- “Hidden Wounds: Effectively Supporting Veterans with TBI.”

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](#)