



WOUNDED WARRIOR  
PROJECT®



PICTURED: WARRIORS GATHERED IN DC TO CALL ON CONGRESS TO ADVANCE THE MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT AND ENSURE OUR COUNTRY'S COMBAT-INJURED VETERANS RECEIVE THE BENEFITS THEY'VE EARNED.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ NEWSLETTER | MARCH 2026 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the March 2026 issue of the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Operation Advocacy newsletter. 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

# Progress Through Persistence: Advancing the Major Richard Star Act

**WWP’s Jose Ramos highlights how persistence is turning pressure into progress for the Major Richard Star Act. Your voice is making the difference — see how you’re moving this mission forward.**

I still remember the day I received my first prosthetic arm. I sat in my room staring at it, knowing it was meant to restore function but feeling overwhelmed by how foreign it seemed. The first time I tried to pick up a pen, I dropped it. Buttoning a shirt felt like an impossible task. I spent countless hours practicing the most basic movements, opening and closing my new hand — *for hours and hours* — feeling frustrated and exhausted. There were moments when progress felt so far away that I questioned whether I would ever use my prosthetic hand as naturally as my biological one. I wanted progress overnight, and instead, I experienced setbacks. But every day, I knew something mattered more than perfection: persistence.

What I learned during that period of my life was simple but powerful: Mastery doesn’t happen overnight. What feels distant and unattainable at first becomes possible through persistence, discipline, and belief in the goal - every repetition, every small improvement, built toward something bigger.

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warriors every day.

**LETTER FROM OUR VP (CONT.)**

That lesson has stayed with me, and it guides the work we are doing together. For example, the Major Richard Star Act would ensure that medically retired combat-injured veterans receive the full benefits they have earned. This legislation is about fairness and restoring equity for warriors who were forced to retire due to combat-related injuries. They should not have to choose between retirement pay and disability compensation.

At times, the path forward can feel long, daunting, and frustrating. National legislation requires sustained momentum, coalition-building, and engagement at every level of government, and, just as with mastering a prosthetic, meaningful progress only comes through consistency and commitment.

We have to use every resource we have and not be afraid to adjust our strategies. Our state resolution campaign, which aims to introduce resolutions across the country in support of the Major Richard Star Act, reflects this strategy. When state legislatures pass resolutions urging Congress to act, they amplify and reinforce our message that this issue matters far beyond Washington, DC. They demonstrate that communities across America stand behind their combat-wounded veterans.

And we are not advocating alone.

This effort is being led by warrior advocates – veterans who bring lived experience into legislative chambers and speak with authenticity and credibility. We are working alongside veteran service organizations and partners who share our commitment to ensuring fairness for combat-injured retirees. Together, we are building a unified voice that is impossible to ignore.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the state legislators who have stepped forward as champions of this effort. In Alabama, Arizona, California, Iowa, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania, lawmakers have introduced resolutions in support of the Major Richard Star Act and have publicly affirmed their commitment to the warrior community. Their leadership matters. It sends a powerful signal to policymakers that this issue resonates in statehouses across the nation.

To our warrior advocates: Your voice is the driving force behind this movement. When you share your story, when you build relationships with your state representatives, when you show up and engage, you turn policy into something personal. You remind decision-makers that this

legislation is not about numbers on a page; it is about real families, real sacrifices, and real commitments made in service to this country.

This doesn't just apply to the Major Richard Star Act, either. It applies to **every issue we are working on**, such as access to innovative mental health care solutions or research and treatment for blast over-pressurization injuries.


As life has taught me, progress may not always be immediate, but it is always possible. The strength of our advocacy lies in our persistence. In our unity. In our willingness to continue pushing forward even when the finish line feels distant.

This new year presents opportunity. Opportunity to expand our network of state champions. Opportunity to strengthen coalitions. Opportunity to continue advancing issues like the Major Richard Star Act with clarity, purpose, and resolve.

Just as I learned that mastery of my prosthetic would only come through steady effort, we know that legislative success comes through sustained advocacy.

**“If we stay committed and continue to show up, speak up, and lead, what once felt out of reach will become reality.”**

Thank you for your dedication and leadership. And thank you for standing shoulder to shoulder in this mission that will save lives and help millions of our fellow brothers and sisters in arms.



**JOSE RAMOS**  
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT  
VP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

## VA SECRETARY INTERVIEW

## Putting Veterans First: A Conversation with VA Secretary Doug Collins

PICTURED: VA SECRETARY DOUG COLLINS

The current VA Secretary reflects on the values that led him into public service, his mission to put veterans first, and the department's progress in expanding access, reducing backlogs, and modernizing outreach. He also shares how his deployment shaped his leadership. Learn more about his vision.

*This interview, recorded on February 4, 2026, is part of our effort to keep you connected with senior government leaders. Please note that featuring an interview doesn't reflect Wounded Warrior Project's endorsement of any specific policies or statements.*

As the landscape of veterans' needs continues to evolve, strong leadership is essential to ensuring every warrior receives the care and support they've earned. Doug Collins, the 12th Secretary of Veterans Affairs, brings decades of experience across military, legal, and public service roles. In this exclusive Q&A, he reflects on the values that shaped his calling to public service and shares how the department is adapting to better serve veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors nationwide.

Q

**You have served in many distinct public service positions, including in the U.S. Air Force Reserve and Navy Reserve, and as a member of Congress in the U.S. House of Representatives, for Georgia's 27th State House District. You are also an accomplished lawyer and a pastor who has ministered in the community and as a military chaplain. What first drew you to a career in public service, and what does it mean to you to be the 12th Secretary of Veterans Affairs?**

A

I grew up watching my mother and father serve others, and they instilled that value in me from an early age.

My dad is a retired state trooper who served in law enforcement for more than 30 years, and my mom was a caregiver to senior citizens. They are the reason I decided to minister, represent Georgians, and join the military.

As VA Secretary, I have one metric for success, and that is making VA work better for the veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors the department is charged with serving.

I call it putting veterans first.

To achieve that goal, I'm constantly asking why and encouraging all VA leaders to do the same. Why does VA do things a certain way? Is there a way to do it quicker, faster, or better? How do we make it easier for veterans and VA beneficiaries to access care and benefits?

VA SECRETARY INTERVIEW (CONT.)

Q

**Looking ahead to the next 30 years, what do you see as the most pressing and evolving needs of the veteran community, and how is the department preparing to meet those needs to ensure we fulfill our promise to care for those who served?**

A

Over the next three decades, veterans' needs are going to be relatively similar to what they are now. They're going to need a smooth transition from military to civilian life, health care that's tailored to their unique needs, and programs and benefits to help them achieve the American Dream.

The challenge for VA is that we have to constantly adapt to reach new generations of veterans. Post-9/11 veterans, for instance, are different from previous generations in that they're less likely join groups, such as legacy veterans service organizations, and many don't take advantage of all the benefits VA has to offer.

That's why, under President Trump, we're rethinking the way VA does outreach to these folks. We've vastly expanded our use of social media, we're utilizing other new media like podcasts to promote the reforms we are making, and we're revamping the way the department does advertising.

The goal is to ensure as many veterans as possible are enrolled in VA benefits and services. We want veterans to take advantage of what they've earned, and statistics show that those who do are at a lower risk for suicide, which has been a scourge on the veterans community for too long.

Q

**For veterans who have never engaged with the VA's system, what would you say to encourage them to give it a try, and what improvements have been made to make the experience more accessible and veteran-focused?**

A

I encourage all eligible veterans to claim their VA benefits, which could be worth thousands of dollars per year. Our programs go far beyond the low- or no-cost health care that comes to mind when most people think about VA. We also offer home loans, disability compensation, and vocational training, to name a few benefits.

Over the last year, we've made dramatic improvements in the way VA is serving veterans. The biggest thing we've tried to do is transform the department from a bureaucratic organization to service organization. As a result:

- ★ The backlog of veterans waiting for VA benefits is **down 60%** since Jan. 20, 2025, after it increased 24% during the Biden Administration.
- ★ VA has **eliminated the backlog of veteran families waiting for VA health care.**
- ★ VA **is processing record numbers of disability claims,** reaching an all-time fiscal-year high of **3 million claims processed by Sept. 30.**
- ★ VA opened **25 new health care clinics,** expanding access for veterans around the country.
- ★ Since Jan. 20, VA has offered veterans more than 1.4 million appointments outside of normal operating hours. These early morning, evening, and weekend appointments are giving veterans more timely and convenient options for care.
- ★ VA **permanently housed 51,936 homeless veterans** across the country in FY25, the highest total in seven years.

Q

**Can you share a memorable personal experience regarding your deployment to Iraq and how it shaped what's happening at VA?**

A

One vivid memory that sticks out for me was when we did a 5K run at Balad Air Base. They had a giant American flag hanging between two cranes, and they played the national anthem. I was 6,000 miles away from home with tears streaming down my face, and I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be because that flag was right there.

That memory inspired me to sign a VA policy limiting the display of flags at VA facilities in most instances to the U.S. flag and the POW/MIA flag, since those are the flags that unite us all.

## 2025 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE OVERVIEW

## A Year of Momentum: Key Veteran Policy Advances in 2025

The first session of the 119th Congress brought significant momentum for WWP-backed legislation, including new laws and key committee and floor victories. Highlights span cancer studies, housing access, prosthetics coverage, mental health care, military sexual trauma (MST) support, and caregiver protections. See the full breakdown.

During the first session of the 119th Congress (2025), WWP endorsed 59 pieces of legislation. Two have been signed into law, while several others have advanced through either the House or the Senate. Below is an update on select WWP priority bills and their progress through Congress in 2025.

### **The Aviator Cancers Examination Study (ACES) Act (S. 201, H.R. 530) – Signed into Law, Now P.L. 119-32**

The ACES Act, signed into law on August 14, 2025, directs the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a comprehensive study on cancer incidence and mortality among current and former military aviators and aviation ground personnel in coordination with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. A 2023 Department of War (DoW) study found that exposure to unique occupational hazards, such as cosmic radiation, jet fuel exhaust, sustained g-forces, and high-altitude hypoxia, has been linked to increased incidences of certain cancers among air crews compared to the general U.S. population.

### **The Disabled Veterans Housing Support Act (H.R. 224) – Signed into Law, Now P.L. 119-70**

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides grants to urban communities for development activities focused on revitalizing neighborhoods and improving community facilities and services. Veterans may be disqualified from receiving benefits associated with CDBG programs, like emergency rental assistance or home repairs, if they receive service-connected disability compensation, which is considered income during eligibility determinations.

The Disabled Veterans Housing Support Act, signed into law on Jan. 20, 2026, requires the exclusion of VA service-connected disability compensation from income calculations used to determine low- and moderate-income households eligible for benefits. Additionally, the bill mandates that the Government Accountability Office submit a report providing legislative recommendations to improve housing support for veterans.

**2025 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE OVERVIEW (CONT.)**
**Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Program Integrity Act (H.R. 3579) – Passed the House**

H.R. 3579 would make modest adjustments to the VR&E program to increase its effectiveness, including:

- ★ Streamline the collection of veterans' job and education histories to help improve the quality of initial program screenings.
- ★ Ensure VR&E counselors are assisting veterans who are actively searching for employment.
- ★ Implement new reporting requirements to adequately track veteran wages and employment outcomes to better assess program performance.

H.R. 3579 was passed by the House of Representatives on September 15, 2025. The legislation has been sent to the Senate and referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs for further review.

**Veterans Supporting Prosthetics and Recreational Therapy (SPORT) Act (H.R. 1971) – Passed the House**

Current law restricts VA from providing recreational prosthetics unless deemed a "direct and active component" of medical treatment, not merely for comfort, convenience, or the opportunity to pursue health activities that go beyond a specific rehabilitation plan. The Veterans SPORT Act expands VA coverage by adding sports and recreational prosthetics to VA's standard medical services, removing the need for special authorization.

The SPORT Act passed the House on May 22, 2025, as part of H.R. 1969, the No Wrong Door for Veterans Act. To learn more and send your letter of support to Congress on this bill, [click here](#).

**Veterans' Assuring Critical Care Expansions to Support Servicemembers (ACCESS) Act (H.R. 740, S. 275) – Passed the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs**

The Veterans' ACCESS Act aims to improve veterans' access to VA's Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs (RRTPs), and mandates improvements in their operations, coordination, and oversight.

VA has established access standards in law for most of its health care programs, but these standards do not apply to RRTPs. 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 the veteran to an RRTP program within 48 hours of the decision.

H.R. 740 was passed by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 23, 2025, while S. 275 was approved by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 30, 2025. To learn more and send your letter of support to Congress on this bill, [click here](#).

**Precision Brain Health Research Act of 2025 (S. 800) – Passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

S. 800 would 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.

The bill was advanced out of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 30, 2025. To learn more and send your letter of support to Congress on this bill, [click here](#).

**Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support (SAVES) Act of 2025 (S. 1245) – Passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

MST — which includes sexual harassment or assault during service — can have impacts lasting long after service, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, relationship challenges, and isolation. The SAVES Act would expand the definition of MST to include online harassment and digital abuse, and direct VA to study how technology can support survivors. It would also create a workgroup at VA to review MST-related disability claims, staff training, and evaluate current standards. In addition, the bill would extend MST-related counseling and services to members of the Reserve components.

The bill was approved by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 30, 2025. To learn more and send your letter of support to Congress on this bill, [click here](#).

2025 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE OVERVIEW (CONT.)

**Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act (S. 879, S. 2148) – Passed the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs**

VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) provides financial stipends to post-9/11 caregivers of severely wounded veterans. However, recent changes to PCAFC eligibility have put many caregivers at risk of losing these benefits, and many are currently struggling through the uncertainty of the program. S. 879 would expand support for PCAFC caregivers of seriously injured veterans, addressing economic hardship by extending health care, offering employment assistance (like fee reimbursement for certifications), providing retirement planning, and requiring studies for caregiver retirement savings and VA job opportunities, aiming to help them transition financially after caregiving ends.

S. 2148 was approved by the United States Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (SVAC). on July 30, 2025. To learn more and send your letter of support to Congress on this bill, [click here.](#)



**OTHER WWP PRIORITY BILLS**

**PASSED THE HOUSE:**

- ★ Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act (H.R. 965) – passed the House (February 10, 2025)
- ★ CHIP IN for Veterans Act (H.R. 217) – passed the House (May 19, 2025)
- ★ Protecting Veteran Access to Telemedicine Services Act of 2025 (H.R. 1107) – passed the House (September 15, 2025)
- ★ Women Veterans Cancer Care Coordination Act (H.R. 1860) – passed the House (September 15, 2025)
- ★ Automotive Support Services to Improve Safe Transportation (ASSIST) Act of 2025 (H.R. 1364) – passed the House (May 19, 2025)

**PASSED THE SENATE:**

- ★ Lactation Spaces for Veteran Moms Act (S. 778) – passed the Senate (November 9, 2025)

**Passed the House Committee on Veterans Affairs:**

- ★ Veterans’ National Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act (H.R. 1336) – advanced by HVAC (October 17, 2025)

**Passed the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs:**

- ★ Servicewomen and Veterans Menopause Research Act (S. 1320) – advanced by SVAC (December 2, 2025)

For more information on any of these bills, contact the WWP Government Relations Team at [advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org).

**2026 LOOK AHEAD - PRIORITIES, MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT, VALOR COALITION**

## Building Momentum: What's Next for WWP's Advocacy in 2026

WWP is gearing up for an even more impactful 2026, with nine major legislative priorities ranging from mental health and toxic exposure to women veterans, caregiver support, and the Major Richard Star Act. New partnerships like the VALOR Coalition will also drive innovation in veteran care. Explore what's ahead.

**A**fter an exceptionally busy 2025, the congressional landscape is poised for an even more productive 2026 for WWP's Government Affairs team. With an expanded set of legislative priorities, the team is now positioned to advance additional policies that will further improve the quality of life for veterans.

### **2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

Outlined below is a summary of WWP's nine legislative priorities.

#### **1. Major Richard Star Act**

Pass the Major Richard Star Act, which would allow veterans with less than 20 years of service and who were forced to medically retire due to combat-related injuries to receive both their full Department of Defense (DoD) retirement pay and VA disability compensation.

#### **2. Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

Advance policies that ensure timely, coordinated, and evidence-based mental health and substance-use care, strengthen suicide-prevention initiatives, and support the responsible integration of emerging therapeutic modalities.

#### **3. Brain Health and Traumatic Brain Injury**

Promote comprehensive brain-health strategies across the military-veteran continuum through enhanced prevention, surveillance, access to proven treatments, and sustained investment in research that informs clinical practice now and into the future.

#### **4. Severely Wounded, Ill, and Injured Veterans and Service Members**

Support policies that ensure continuous and integrated care, advance prosthetic and adaptive-device capabilities, bolster caregiver support, sustain medical readiness to treat complex cases, and expand programs that foster independence and quality of life.

#### **5. Women Veterans**

Strengthen equitable access to gender-specific services, ensure full implementation of key legislation, improve tailored outreach and recognition, and promote policies that advance economic and family stability for women veterans.

#### **6. Economic Empowerment**

Enhance economic stability for veterans by modernizing the VR&E program, expanding employment pathways across government, and advancing housing and homelessness-prevention strategies that promote long-term self-sufficiency.

2026 LOOK AHEAD (CONT.)

**7. Transition Support**

Improve the military-to-civilian transition by aligning DoD, VA, and community systems to ensure uninterrupted health care, timely benefits delivery, robust career readiness, and access to programs that strengthen community reintegration.

**8. Toxic Exposure**

Refine exposure-related policy by strengthening VA's presumptive process, expanding longitudinal exposure tracking, improving prevention and monitoring of environmental hazards, and ensuring access to high-quality, exposure-informed cancer care.

**9. Force Readiness**

Advance a fully resourced and ready Military Health System through strengthened workforce capacity, enhanced DoD-VA partnerships, support for financial readiness, sustained research investment, and policies promoting comprehensive force health and readiness.

WWP's full legislative priorities can be found on the [WWP website](#).

**★ MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT**

Passage of the Major Richard Star is WWP's highest legislative priority for the year, and WWP has helped launch two new campaigns and projects to raise awareness and push action on the bill.

First, a large group of veterans' service organizations has come together to create the Star Act Alliance, focused on ensuring the Major Richard Star Act is ultimately signed into law. The [Star Act Alliance website](#) will serve as the hub for all information and activities related to advocacy for the bill.

In addition to information about the bill, sample posts for social media, template emails to send your message of support to Congress, maps showing support for the bill from different states and members of Congress, and other resources to engage with the campaign are also available [online](#).

Second, through the Star Act Alliance, WWP has launched a campaign to encourage state legislatures to pass resolutions in support of the Major Richard Star Act. WWP is working with veterans in each state to have their state lawmakers introduce non-binding resolutions that call on Congress to pass the bill.

To encourage participation in the campaign, the Star Act Alliance has created two different toolkits. The first contains step-by-step instructions for introducing a Major Richard Star Act resolution in a state. The second toolkit contains resources to help increase awareness of the bill once it's been introduced: sample social media posts, letters to the editor, and more. Both of these toolkits can be found on the Star Act Alliance [website](#).

WWP will keep warriors updated throughout the year on the status of the Major Richard Star Act, with at least one major call to action (if not more) likely occurring later in the year near the end of the legislative session.



2026 LOOK AHEAD (CONT.)



★ VALOR COALITION

In September of last year, WWP joined Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions (VETS), the Navy SEAL Foundation, and the Green Beret Foundation to launch the Veteran Alliance for Leadership, Outreach, and Recovery (VALOR).

The VALOR Coalition is a first-of-its-kind national organization uniting veteran-serving organizations, researchers, and policy advocates to drive research, education, and federal policy that expands access to psychedelic-assisted care — especially for veterans with treatment-resistant PTSD, TBI, and depression.

In particular, the Coalition will be working to advocate for legislation, both on the state and federal levels, that addresses the nationwide veteran suicide crisis by:

- ★ Advancing research-backed psychedelic-assisted therapies.
- ★ Supporting policy solutions grounded in safety and science.
- ★ Expanding access to effective, medically supervised care for veterans.

While much of the legislative progress has been on the state level so far (more than 20 bills have been introduced in different state legislatures since 2020), these efforts are setting the stage for national change. WWP will keep warriors posted on the Coalition’s work and when grassroots action may be needed. You can learn more at the Coalition’s [website](#).



## HOLIDAY RECEPTION

## Honoring Public Servants Who Serve Warriors

WWP's annual Congressional Reception honors the public servants who strengthen care and support for veterans behind the scenes. This year's event recognized staff leaders, policy experts, and partners whose work, from cancer research to MST reform, continues to improve the lives of warriors and their families. Learn more about the honorees.

For more than two decades, WWP® has stood shoulder to shoulder not only with those who served our nation in uniform, but also with those who directly deliver government services to veterans, Service members, and their families, as well as those who shape the policies that guide and improve those services. Each year, WWP hosts a Congressional Reception to bring together friends and colleagues and recognize government officials, congressional staff, and policy leaders who work tirelessly behind the scenes to support veterans, their families, and their caregivers.

During the 2025 reception, WWP joined partners from across the veteran community to express gratitude and thank congressional staff and Administration officials for their selfless service and dedication throughout the year. While many individuals are deserving of recognition, WWP was honored to specifically recognize the following outstanding recipients:

**Jon Clark:** As the Staff Director for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Jon has played a pivotal role for many years in advancing initiatives to improve the care and services provided to veterans. He helped coordinate efforts in the House for key legislation like the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act (Public Law No. 118-210), which was passed at the end of the last Congress. Jon continues to lead efforts on access to care and compensation for the most severely injured warriors.

**Dr. Jenna Moffit:** As a Congressional Fellow in the office of Representative Morgan McGarvey (D-KY-3), Jenna has leveraged her lived experience as an Air Force air traffic controller, her service at VA, and her academic training to support veteran-focused public policy initiatives. Selected as a 2025 Veteran Fellow at the Hoover Institution, she applied research-driven insight to complex issues facing the veteran community. Jenna has also played a pivotal role in advancing legislation to strengthen access to earned benefits and improve transition outcomes.

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



JON CLARK (MIDDLE)



DR. JENNA MOFFIT (MIDDLE)

HOLIDAY RECEPTION (CONT.)

**Bradley Plunkett:** As a professional staff member for the majority of the SVAC, Bradley has proven to be a passionate advocate for our nation’s veterans. He has worked tirelessly on Committee Chair Jerry Moran’s (R-KS) Precision Brain Health Research Act, as well as the SAVES Act, which will help VA become more transparent in its disability claims process. Bradley also helped facilitate important conversations about emerging therapies that can lead to more effective policies to ensure innovative treatments are advanced to improve veterans’ lives.

**Abby Roubal:** As a professional staff member for the minority on SVAC, Abby has been a consistent and effective advocate on many key policies and bills. She worked to advance important mental health legislation, such as the Not Just A Number Act, and organized critical oversight hearings on VA efforts to prevent suicide. Abby also played a key role in Ranking Member Sen. Richard Blumenthal’s (D-CT) efforts around MST and women veterans. She has worked tirelessly to ensure the veteran community is included in conversations and the development of key legislation.

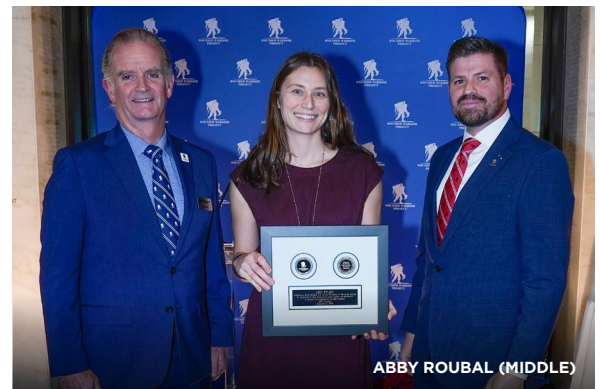
**Jon Garcia:** As a U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sergeant and Skillbridge Fellow at WWP, Jon stepped easily and enthusiastically into his role and has soaked up every aspect of government affairs and public policy. Jon focused his efforts on the sustainability of Virginia’s Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program, including coordinating community meetings with key stakeholders and helping the Governor’s Joint Leadership Council develop an advocacy road map to sustain the program.

**Randy Reese:** WWP was proud to present the WWP Congressional Lifetime Achievement Award to Randy Reese, retiring Executive Director for Disabled American Veterans (DAV). Randy spent more than two decades advocating for veterans, joining DAV in 1995. His leadership helped shape VA policy and influence Congress through his advocacy for landmark legislation, including the Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 and the Elizabeth Dole Act of 2025.

WWP congratulates all our honorees and thanks them for their work supporting warriors, their families, and the veteran community.



BRADLEY PLUNKETT (MIDDLE)



ABBY ROUBAL (MIDDLE)



JON GARCIA (MIDDLE)



RANDY REESE (MIDDLE)

WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER INTERVIEWS

# Russell “Russ” Adams and Kimberly D. Washington

Meet two of our Warrior Advocate Leaders (WALs) – WWP-trained veterans who are driving change in their communities and championing policy that empowers their fellow warriors. In these Q&A interviews, they share what fuels their advocacy and why this work matters.

I currently reside in Idaho Falls, Idaho, with my supportive and amazing spouse of 23 years and our five children (ages 32, 27, 22, 19, and 18), as well as three beautiful grandchildren. I am currently a Nuclear Facility Technical Trainer, having been with the Department of Energy for over 20 years.



★ **RUSS ADAMS**

**Q** Tell us a little about yourself:

**A** I was born and raised in a small farming community in Sterling, Idaho. I grew up active in sports and working on the family farm. I attended Idaho State University before enlisting in the Army as a chaplain assistant in June of 2000. I completed basic training at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. Following my AIT training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, I was assigned to serve with the 1st 66th Armor Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, at Fort Hood in Texas. I was married in November of 2002 and deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom early in the spring of 2003. I returned home in March of 2004.

**Q** Why did you decide to become a WAL for WWP?

**A** First, I want to give back to and support a program that has done so much for me personally. While I may never be able to repay the support I received, I feel that I can give my time and energy to help others obtain the support and energy they have earned. Second, I am a firm believer that we all have a voice and a responsibility to speak up on behalf of others. I want to share my story and the stories of my brothers and sisters to influence the people making decisions regarding our futures and the future of our country’s veterans.

**Q** What was your experience during the recent WAL training?

**A** I had an amazing time at the WAL training in Nashville during the first week of December 2025. The Grassroots team provided excellent training and resources to help us become effective leaders and warrior advocates.

**“I was able to collaborate and get to know so many other wonderful warriors and WWP team members. It was a great experience, for which I am extremely grateful.”**

**RUSS ADAMS INTERVIEW (CONT.)**

**Q Was there a particular experience or moment in your military or post-service journey that inspired you to get involved in advocacy and use your voice to support other veterans?**

**A** There are so many moments and experiences that pushed me in this direction that it’s hard to pick just one. As a chaplain assistant, part of my responsibilities was to act as a voice for our enlisted members and share their concerns with the chain of command. As they brought up concerns and challenges, I advocated for them and their families. Those kinds of experiences inspired me to perform this type of advocacy work today.

**Q Is there any issue that is most important to you personally? Why?**

**A** Mental health and suicide prevention are extremely important to me. I have personally lost several brothers and sisters to suicide, and those experiences have profoundly shaped my commitment to mental health advocacy. Understanding brain health and TBIs will help advance our understanding of the mental health challenges that our veterans face, and that, in turn, will ultimately contribute to meaningful solutions. I am also extremely passionate about ensuring our women veterans are equally represented and given equal treatment and quality care.

**Q From your perspective as a warrior advocate, what do you believe people most need to understand about today’s veterans and the issues that they face?**

**A** People need to understand that those of us who served our country and sacrificed so much for this nation deserve access to quality care, resources, and support. The issues are complex and vary from veteran to veteran, but we can’t afford to let them down, no matter the cost. They need to be heard, supported, and cared for.



**★ KIMBERLY WASHINGTON**

**Q Tell us a little about yourself:**

**A** I am a mother of three, a daughter-in-law, and a grandmother of three. I joined the military in 1989 and am a veteran of the Iraq War. I was medically discharged in 2004 after serving 15 years, 3 months, and 28 days, and I am a proud native of New Jersey.

I am the only daughter of Sgt. Victor L. Washington, Jr., a Vietnam veteran with the 173rd Airborne Brigade (“Sky Soldiers”), who passed in December 2022, and Ms. Jerolyn P. B. Washington, a New Jersey State Corrections Officer, who passed in October 2021. For two and a half years, I served as a caregiver for multiple family members.

KIMBERLY WASHINGTON INTERVIEW (CONT.)

**Q Why did you decide to become a WAL for WWP?**

**A** When my father was diagnosed in December 2021 with stage IV bladder cancer (due to exposure to Agent Orange), I was still grieving the loss of my mother. While taking him to his treatments at the Philadelphia VA Hospital,

**“I was heartbroken at seeing so many veterans lined up along both sides of the oncology hallway because there simply weren’t enough seats in the waiting area. Seeing those soldiers, all battling cancer, left an imprint on my heart that will never fade.”**

In those moments, I made a vow to be a voice for veterans whenever and wherever I could. At the time, I didn’t know what a WAL was, nor was I aware that WWP had a Grassroots team. While attending Peer Support Group training in 2024, I met Scott Moehl, who has since become family. When he asked if I would be interested in becoming a WAL, my answer was immediate and heartfelt: “Absolutely, yes.” The rest is an ongoing, wonderful story, a blessing I don’t take lightly.

**Q What was your experience during the recent WAL training?**

**A** The training itself was wonderful and really helped me better understand how our government works and how bills are actually passed — far beyond the “Schoolhouse Rock” version of “I’m Just a Bill!” I love that the WAL program is still so new, but thriving, and that we all get to help build the movement.

**Q What experience or moment in your military or post-service journey inspired you to get involved in advocacy and use your voice to support other veterans?**

**A** It took 16 years of fighting for myself after my discharge to get my medical benefits finally in order, and there’s still some work that needs to be done! I have listened to veterans who were dissuaded from getting basic medical treatment because of paperwork and a lack of support. My experiences supporting the ones I love — helping my dad, supporting neighbors and others as they requested their records, getting my great uncle (a veteran) and aunt’s headstone fixed, and helping my cousin get her husband’s military honors when he passed — have brought me great joy.

**Q Is there any issue that is most important to you personally? Why?**

**A** Ensuring that when veterans seek help through their state and county VSOs, they are met with care, dignity, and genuine support—as family, not strangers—is essential. We also have a responsibility to make sure VSOs themselves are supported so they can fully show up for the veterans they serve.

**Q From your perspective as a warrior advocate, what do you believe people most need to understand about today’s veterans and the issues they face?**

**A** People need to understand that today’s veterans are carrying far more than they can see. Many are dealing with unseen wounds, PTSD, health issues, and financial stress while trying to navigate a system that can feel overwhelming. Veterans aren’t asking for sympathy; they’re asking to be heard, believed, and supported. I truly believe that when we show up with compassion, patience, and a servant’s heart, God uses that to open doors and restore hope. Supporting veterans isn’t charity; it’s a responsibility, and an honor.

# VA UPDATES

## CIVILIAN HEALTH AND MEDICAL PROGRAM BENEFITS

The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs (CHAMPVA) is a cost-sharing program available for a qualified spouse, dependent, or survivor of a veteran who meets certain service-connected disability requirements.

If you do not qualify for TRICARE (the Defense Department's health care program for Service members and their families), and one of the following descriptions is true, you may be eligible for CHAMPVA:

- ★ You're the spouse or dependent child of a veteran who's been rated permanently and totally disabled from a service-connected disability, or
- ★ You're the surviving spouse or dependent child of a veteran who died from a service-connected disability, or
- ★ You're the surviving spouse or dependent child of a veteran who was, at the time of their death, rated permanently and totally disabled from a service-connected disability

### Some of the types of care that CHAMPVA covers include:

- ★ Family planning and maternity care
- ★ Hospice care
- ★ Inpatient care (when you stay in a hospital)
- ★ Mental health care
- ★ Outpatient care and procedures (like office visits)
- ★ Skilled nursing care (medical care by licensed providers to help with medications, wound care, and other recovery and medical needs)

### CHAMPVA also covers other treatments and services such as:

- ★ Ambulance service
- ★ Medical equipment that your provider prescribes to support your everyday activities
- ★ Organ transplants
- ★ Prescription medications

**Applying for CHAMPVA can be done online, by mail, or fax. Visit [VA's website](#) for more information on how to apply, and other important details of this benefit.**

## TRANSFERRED EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

If you are a spouse or dependent child of a veteran or Service member, you may be eligible to use transferred education benefits for your education if you meet all of these requirements:

- ★ The DOW approved the Service member's request for a Transfer of Education Benefits, and
- ★ You're enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, and
- ★ You'll use the transferred benefits during the required timeframe: [Find out when you can use transferred benefits.](#)

If you were married to the veteran or Service member but are now divorced, you will remain eligible as long as the veteran or Service member does not revoke the transfer of benefits. Also note that if you are eligible for more than one education benefits program, you can only get payments through one program at a time.

VA UPDATES (CONT.)

Transferred education benefits can be used for these types of programs:

- ★ Undergraduate and graduate education
- ★ Non-college degree programs (like HVAC repair, truck driving, EMT, or cosmetology school)
- ★ Flight training
- ★ On-the-job training and apprenticeships
- ★ Correspondence school

You may be eligible for help with the costs of housing, books, or supplies during your program. Additionally, you can use transferred benefits for national standardized tests (such as the SAT) and licensing and certifications fees.

Before applying for these benefits, you will need to make sure the DoW has approved the request to transfer benefits to you. If the DoW has approved the veteran's or Service member's request, you can apply [online](#). If your preference is to apply by mail, fill out an [Application for Family Member to use Transferred Benefits \(VA Form 22-1990e\)](#) and mail to the VA regional processing office listed on the form.

If approved to use transferred benefits, you will be sent a Certificate of Eligibility, which will show how many months of transferred benefits you can use and how much time you have to use them.

For spouses, benefits can be used right away while the Service member is still on active duty, or after they have separated from service. Note that the time limit for these benefits depends on when the Service member separated from service:

- ★ If the Service member separated **before January 1, 2013**, you can use these benefits for up to 15 years after their separation from active duty. This is as long as the Service member or veteran doesn't revoke (cancel) the transfer of benefits.
- ★ If the Service member separated **on or after January 1, 2013**, you can use these benefits at any time. There's no time limit on the benefits, as long as the Service member or veteran doesn't revoke (cancel) the transfer of benefits.

Spouses do not qualify for the monthly housing allowance while the Service member is on active duty.

Dependent children of Service members can start using transferred benefits only after the Service member has finished at least 10 years of service. These benefits can be used while the Service member is on active duty, or after they have separated from service. Dependent children must meet these requirements:

- ★ You have a high school diploma (or a certificate that's equivalent) or you turned 18 years old, and
- ★ You use these benefits before you turn 26 years old.

Additionally, you may qualify for a monthly housing allowance, even when the Service member is on active duty.

**Additional information can be found on [VA's website](#).**



VA UPDATES (CONT.)

★ **WOMEN VETERANS CAN NOW BETTER MANAGE THEIR CARE**

Access to gynecological care at VA has gotten easier for women veterans. Under a new streamlined policy, women veterans can now schedule appointments directly with VA gynecology providers without first obtaining a referral from their primary care provider. This change removes an unnecessary step in the process and makes it faster and simpler to get essential care.

The updated approach will help ensure that more than 1 million women veterans have greater control over their health by allowing them to book appointments as soon as they need them. By reducing barriers to timely gynecological services, VA is taking an important step toward improving access, convenience, and the overall health care experience for women veterans.

Visit [VA's website](#) for more information on this change.

★ **2026 COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT**

In 2026, retired military members and disabled veterans will receive a 2.8 percent increase in their monthly benefits. This adjustment reflects the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), which is applied to help ensure benefits keep pace with inflation and rising living expenses.

The COLA will apply to the following benefits:

- ★ VA disability payments
- ★ Special monthly compensation
- ★ Veterans pension
- ★ Survivors pension
- ★ VA Dependency and indemnity Compensation

These annual increases are part of long-standing federal policy to preserve the purchasing power of retirement and disability benefits as inflation changes over time.

More information on the COLA for 2026 can be found on the [Social Security Administration's website](#).

★ **SIMPLIFIED VA TRAVEL CLAIMS PROCESS**

Great news! VA has rolled out a simplified process to submit mileage-only travel reimbursement claims using the [VA Health and Benefits mobile app](#).

For eligible veterans who drive to VA-approved medical visits, this means you can:

- ★ Submit mileage-only travel reimbursement claims for VA-approved health care appointments using the VA Health and Benefits mobile app.
- ★ Access a travel claim option on the app's home screen after an eligible appointment.
- ★ Review and submit your claim directly in the app.
- ★ Track the status of your claim without completing or mailing paper forms.

This enhancement is part of VA's ongoing efforts to use modern technology to better serve veterans and their families.

Visit [VA's website](#) to learn more.





CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

# Watch WWP CEO Speak Before Congress on Key Veterans' Issues

PICTURED: WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT

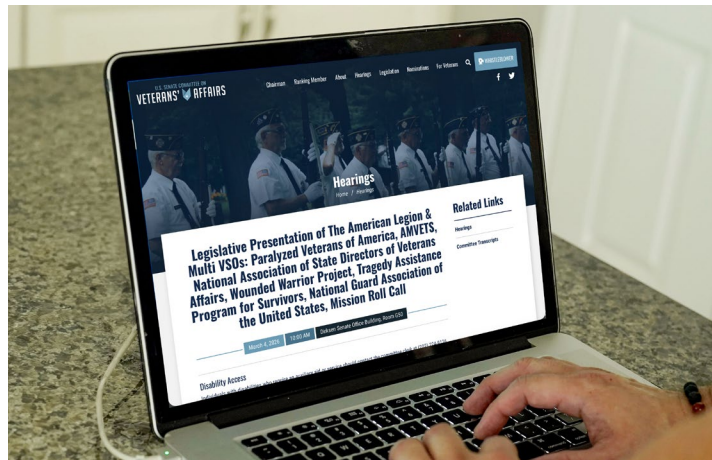
WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Piatt is heading to Capitol Hill to champion key legislation impacting veterans' benefits, mental health care, and housing. Read more to find out when he speaks and how to watch his testimony live.

On Wednesday, March 4, WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (ret) Walter E. Piatt will speak before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee about WWP's key legislative priorities for 2026.

You can watch Walt's testimony live on that day. The hearing begins at 10:00 am, with his testimony scheduled for the second panel. Visit the [hearing webpage](#) to watch his testimony live and to review WWP's written comments.

While WWP's written comments will cover a wide range of issues related to WWP's [2026 legislative priorities](#), Walt will discuss three key pieces of legislation in his oral comments: the Major Richard Star Act, the VA Centers for Excellence in Innovation Act (which addresses mental health and research on evidence-based therapies, such as psychedelics), and the Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act.

[Click here to watch live on March 4 at 10:00 am](#)



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