



NEWSLETTER | FALL 2023

PROJECT ADVOCACY

Welcome to the fall 2023 issue of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Advocacy News. WWP's advocacy efforts connect you and your fellow warriors with your elected officials, providing you a voice in our nation's capital and empowering you to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.



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LETTER FROM OUR CEO

20 Years of Working Together to Serve the Warrior Community



Wounded Warrior Project started in 2003 when a group of caring citizens decided to support critically wounded veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan by providing backpacks filled with comfort items to their hospital bedsides at Walter Reed. That original act of service and respect began two decades of honoring and empowering our nation’s wounded warriors.

Since that time, we have grown to honor and empower more than 192,000 registered post-9/11 veterans and 48,000 of their registered family members. Over two decades, WWP has innovated and evolved to create the more than 20 life-changing programs and services we have today, all developed in direct response to the needs of those we serve. The WWP *Annual Warrior Survey* — the largest, most comprehensive survey of wounded post-9/11 veterans — has been an invaluable platform provided to WWP-registered warriors to voice their most pressing needs, ultimately informing our ongoing efforts to serve them.

Between 2003 and 2022, WWP invested more than \$2 billion in programs and services for wounded warriors, families, and caregivers focused in the areas of mental and physical health, financial wellness, and long-term rehabilitative care. Programs like Project Odyssey®, started in 2007, have helped wounded warriors heal from invisible injuries through adventure-based learning. Warriors to Work® began in 2008 to help warriors and family members find new careers in the civilian workforce. The Independence Program launched a few years later to provide much-needed support for our nation’s most severely wounded veterans, their families, and caregivers. In 2015, WWP created Warrior Care Network®, a first-of-its-kind clinical treatment option for veterans

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experiencing mental health challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury. These programs, in tandem with our full offering of programs and services, are meeting wounded veterans and their families right where they are and helping them create a path toward a fulfilling life.

Additionally, part of our commitment to those we serve lives within the advocacy efforts of our Government and Community Relations team. That team, based in our nation's capital, has become a critical part of our mission — expanding impact to improve support and care for all our nation's veterans.

WWP's Government and Community Relations team advocates tirelessly alongside other organizations to pass life-changing legislation, but we simply cannot do it without each of you, our warrior and family support member communities. Without your efforts — calls, email messages, personal representation, and (most importantly) personal stories and testimonies shared with members of Congress and others — none of these victories would have been possible.

The **Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act** is a perfect example. The legislation represents the most significant expansion of Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) health care and benefits in decades. The passage of this legislation would not have been possible

without the support of every warrior who reached out to their representatives.

Neither would the **Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010**, which created an unprecedented level of direct services and support for family caregivers of veterans.

... or the **Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018**, which was the largest expansion of military benefits in decades for veterans.

... or the **Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing (SAH) Improvement Act of 2019**, which, among other items, increased the amount of funding available to veterans adapting their homes to accommodate their disabilities.

... or the **Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021**, which supports veterans who are at high risk for homelessness and/or inpatient hospitalization.

There are many more examples I could list, but no matter the issue, one truth remains constant: You make a difference in the passage of legislation with your grassroots advocacy. Your engagement with your members of Congress, your VA representatives, and your local officials changes policy, changes our community, and changes how our country serves and empowers veterans.

On behalf of WWP, thank you for your interest and involvement in our advocacy efforts. Please stay engaged, remain informed on the issues, and use your voice. Together, we've accomplished so much over the last 20 years, and I know we'll do even more over the next 20 to ensure we properly honor and empower the warrior community that has given so much to our country.



MICHAEL S. LINNINGTON, CEO, WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U.S. ARMY, RETIRED



WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT & REPORT

WWP Women Warriors Hit Capitol Hill to Push for Mental Health, Access to Care, and Other Legislation

WOUNDED WARRIOR **RANA CLARK** (LEFT) SPEAKS ABOUT ISSUES FACING WOMEN WARRIORS WITH CNN REPORTER **MELANIE ZANONA** IN FRONT OF THE CAPITOL.

During the week of September 18, more than 50 WWP women warriors from across the country traveled to Washington, DC, to participate in the 2023 Women Warriors Summit.

The summit was an opportunity for post-9/11 women warriors to connect with fellow veterans and meet with key government leaders to advocate for legislation to improve the lives of our nation's women veterans. Warriors attended the release of WWP's groundbreaking *2023 Women Warriors Report* on Capitol Hill with Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) and Rep. Nikki Budzinski (D-IL).

With women representing the fastest-growing segment of the veteran population, WWP created the **Women Warriors Initiative** to ensure the unique needs of women veterans were being addressed. More than 34,000 women warriors have registered for WWP programs, resources, support, and connections that are helping to transform their personal and professional lives.

The summit featured a panel discussion on the findings of the *2023 Women Warriors Report*, presentations by

the VA staff on critical programs, meetings with members of Congress and their staff, a roundtable discussion with the Congressional Women Veterans Task Force, and discussions with White House staff on veterans issues.

"I've always believed that in order to overcome barriers for women veterans, especially related to access to care and gender-specific care, you need to have the right policy and the right people in place," said WWP warrior Merci McKinley, who served in the U.S. Army and now lives in Maryland. "I can't influence the latter, but I can influence the first part of the battle and help move the needle on legislation. That's why I attended the WWP Women Warriors Summit — our group came to battle, and we battled well. The experience gave me great personal satisfaction and deepened my appreciation for WWP and how it gives us a voice."

WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT & REPORT (CONT.)

★ REPORT RELEASE

The cornerstone of the summit was the release of the **2023 Women Warriors Report**, a biennial study to help policymakers better support women warriors and address the unique challenges and gaps in care that they face. The report shows that women veterans continue to experience significantly more challenges than their male counterparts when it comes to accessing health care, achieving financial wellness, and adjusting to civilian life, among other issues (see sidebar with specific data from the report).

A critical part of the report is a series of recommendations for additional research and new policies for Congress, the VA, veterans service organizations, and others to undertake to further support women veterans. "WWP did not want to simply publish this data without also offering solutions," said WWP Chief Program Officer Jen Silva. "This report points the way forward in a comprehensive and holistic manner, highlighting the need for greater partnerships and unified action to support the women veteran community."

"The WWP 2023 Women Warriors Report sheds light on the significant challenges faced by women veterans after their service," said Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC). "It is our duty to ensure they receive the support they deserve. By providing comprehensive support systems, access to health care, educational opportunities, and career resources, we can empower these remarkable individuals to thrive beyond their military service. Over the next few months, we are committed to working closely with Wounded Warrior Project and other stakeholders to develop effective policies and programs that uplift and empower our women veterans."



HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY DATA POINTS FROM THE WWP 2023 WOMEN WARRIORS REPORT:

Access to Care

- ★ WWP women warriors face barriers to care within the VA. **More than half (55.2%) use non-VA providers.** The top reasons WWP women warriors report using non-VA providers included wanting more accessible care, appointments at more convenient times, and higher-quality care.
- ★ **More than half (53.2%) of WWP women warriors** indicated they had difficulty or put off getting needed care for physical injuries or problems, a higher proportion than male warriors (42.0%).

Financial Wellness

- ★ Despite attaining higher education at higher rates, **WWP women warriors have a higher unemployment rate (10.0%)** than male warriors (6.3%).
- ★ **Almost two-thirds of WWP women warriors (65.4%) did not have enough money** to make ends meet at some point in the past 12 months.

★ READ THE REPORT

TO READ THE 2023 WWP WOMEN WARRIORS REPORT, VISIT [WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG/WOMENWARRIORS.](https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/womenwarriors)

WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT & REPORT (CONT.)

Tracy Farrell, vice president of program partnerships and operations at WWP, then led a panel of women veterans who discussed the key findings from the report and how they connected with the data through their own experiences. Farrell was joined by Dr. Caroline Fermin, a WWP warrior from Beaufort, South Carolina; Erin Scanlon, military legislative aide to Rep. Mace; and Kirsten Laha-Walsh, government affairs specialist for WWP.

“The Women Warriors Report, the largest dataset in the country on women veterans, provides rich and compelling data on the fastest-growing subgroup within the veteran population. I personally am very interested in the differences between women and men transitioning from military service to civilian life. The challenges and obstacles women face are not intuitive but, once highlighted, are significant and lead to increased loneliness and isolation. The study, which focuses on numerous issues related to transition, is a jump-off point to drill down deeper into some of these critical issues to equip warriors better as they move from active service to civilian life.”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR **DR. CATHERINE FERMIN**



REP. NANCY MACE (R-SC) SPEAKS DURING THE ROLLOUT AND PANEL DISCUSSION FOR THE 2023 WOMEN WARRIORS REPORT.

Mental Health

- ★ WWP women warriors are more likely to present with moderate to severe symptoms of **depression (58.7%)**, **PTSD (50.7%)**, and **anxiety (49.3%)** than male warriors.
- ★ The **rates of suicidal ideation (29.1%)** and the **prevalence of at least one attempted suicide (33.2%)** are higher among WWP women warriors than male warriors.

Military Transition

- ★ In focus groups, WWP women warriors talked about: **Discrepancies in perceptions of women and male veterans, lack of support and preparation for transition, and impact of a military career on mental/physical readiness and preparation for civilian life.**
- ★ Compared to their male peers, **WWP women warriors felt they faced more negative perceptions.** For instance, sometimes others would assume that because they're women, they are not the veteran in the household.

Social Health

- ★ WWP women warriors report **significantly higher levels of loneliness (73.0%)** than males (64.9%).
- ★ WWP women warriors report that their **identity as a veteran significantly affects their social health**, often keeping military and civilian friends separate and not talking about military experiences with civilian friends.

WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT & REPORT (CONT.)

★ CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS

During the summit, WWP women warriors went to Capitol Hill and held meetings with congressional offices to advance legislation that would address the disparities highlighted in the [2023 Women Warriors Report](#). In total,

the group met with 50 congressional offices and talked about three key priority areas: financial wellness, mental health, and military transition/social health.

“Meeting with congressional offices was so exciting, and during the summit, I found my ‘why’ and my voice — why I’m inspired to continue to advocate for women veterans’ issues going forward. The most impactful moment for me was when I found my voice speaking to Senator Tim Kaine’s staff and sharing both my own personal experiences and the challenges that women warriors face. I felt seen and, most importantly, heard. I felt like the warrior carrying my fellow women warriors as I used my voice and physical presence to advocate for them.”

— WOUNDED WARRIOR **CAROLE BAILLIE**, WHO SERVED IN THE COAST GUARD RESERVE AND NOW LIVES IN VIRGINIA



TO READ THE 2023 WWP WOMEN WARRIORS REPORT,
VISIT [WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG/WOMENWARRIORS](https://woundedwarriorproject.org/womenwarriors)



WOMEN WARRIORS MEET WITH
SEN. JON OSSOFF (D-GA).


LEGISLATIVE UPDATES
VET PFAS ACT (H.R. 4249, S. 2294)

This legislation would provide hospital care and medical services to veterans and their dependents who were stationed at military installations where they were exposed to certain harmful chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). It would also create a presumption of service connection for certain veterans who were stationed at military installations where they were exposed to PFAS.

What are PFAS? Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are chemicals that resist grease, oil, water, and heat. Aqueous film-forming foam — the substance widely used to put out aircraft and vehicle fires on military installations — washes into groundwater and is known to be the main source of PFAS contamination on military bases.

**ACT
NOW**

Learn more and send your email to Congress:
woundedwarriorproject.quorum.us/campaign/51495

DRIVE ACT (H.R. 1278, S. 592)

This bill increases the mileage reimbursement rate available to beneficiaries for travel to or from VA facilities in connection with employment training, required counseling, exams, treatment, or care.

What is the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS)? Veterans and caregivers can be reimbursed by the VA for mileage and other travel expenses to and from approved health care appointments. BTSSS is an online tool that aims to make the process easier. Find out if you're eligible and how to file a claim at va.gov/health-care/get-reimbursed-for-travel-pay/

**ACT
NOW**

Learn more and send your email to Congress:
woundedwarriorproject.quorum.us/campaign/51490

**AUTONOMY FOR DISABLED VETERANS
ACT (H.R. 2818)**

Many veterans need special home alterations and adaptations for them to live comfortably in their own homes. The VA offers Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grants so that qualifying veterans can perform medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to their primary residence.

What would H.R. 2818 correct? Lifetime benefit is only \$6,800 for alterations for a veteran's service-connected disabilities, and \$2,000 for veterans who are at least 50% service-connected disabled and need alterations for non-service-connected conditions. Even as prices and inflation have risen over the last few years, the money available to veterans through HISA grants has not been adjusted since 2010.

**ACT
NOW**

Learn more and send your email to Congress:
woundedwarriorproject.quorum.us/campaign/51489

**ELIZABETH DOLE HOME CARE ACT
(H.R. 542, S. 141)**

This comprehensive bill addresses many of WWP's concerns with services provided to severely wounded warriors and their caregivers, including challenges with navigating the VA's extended care services and availability of those programs at all VA medical centers.

Who is Elizabeth Dole? Sen. Elizabeth Dole served in five presidential administrations, including as President Ronald Reagan's secretary of transportation and President George H.W. Bush's secretary of labor, which made her the first woman to serve in two different cabinet positions of two different presidents. She was the president of the American Red Cross, a U.S. senator for North Carolina from 2003 to 2009, and in 2012, founded the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, which is dedicated to military caregivers.

**ACT
NOW**

Learn more and send your email to Congress:
woundedwarriorproject.quorum.us/campaign/51496

Q&A

VETERANS CHAMPION

Rep. Nikki Budzinski

(D-IL)



Rep. Nikki Budzinski was elected to the House in 2023 to represent Illinois' 13th congressional district and serves on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. She has already become deeply engaged with veterans issues and the WWP warrior community.

Q Why did you decide to run for Congress?

A: I ran for Congress to build on my life's work of advocating for hardworking middle-class families. And now that I'm here, I'm focused on bringing the voices of folks in Central and Southern Illinois to Washington, putting their needs over petty politics, reaching for compromise, and delivering results for the communities I serve.

Q Why was it important for you to serve on the Veterans Affairs Committee?

A: As the grandchild of two World War II veterans, I grew up understanding the deep debt of gratitude we owe to the men and women who've served our country. I wanted to join the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs so that I could focus on ensuring that every veteran in the communities I serve and across the country has access to the benefits they've earned and deserve.

Q What led you to create a Veterans Advisory Council?

A: With a seat on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and its Subcommittee on Health, I want to bring the voices of our local heroes to the table as we find ways to improve access to VA services and benefits. My Veterans Advisory Council has been a critical part of that work, and it has allowed me to hear directly from constituents about the challenges they're facing and the ways I can help.

Q I understand you held a roundtable in early September for women veterans. How did that go, and what were some of the issues that were discussed?

A: The roundtable was a huge success. It was truly an honor for me to sit with a group of brave women veterans from my district to discuss the issues they

Q&A (CONT.)

continue to face here at home. Women are the largest growing demographic within the veteran population, yet they still lack significant access to gender-specific care. For example, the women at our roundtable expressed the need for increased maternal health services, improved support for military sexual trauma survivors, and comprehensive behavioral health care treatment. I'm honored to be the voice for these women in Congress and on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Q

I know you've talked a bit about rural health access for veterans, especially the challenges around mental health care and substance abuse treatment. What are some of your plans to address that issue?

A: From meetings with veterans and veterans service organizations to my Veterans Advisory Council, I've heard how much veterans, especially our rural vets, struggle to find the services and resources they need to treat their mental health or substance use disorders. Veterans often face unique and traumatic experiences while serving our country, and they deserve access to high-quality treatment.

We also need to be doing everything we can to help our veterans who are suffering from substance misuse. To me, this means improving access to lifesaving medications such as Naloxone, which can reverse the effects of an overdose. I was happy to take a step in that direction with my colleagues Congresswomen Brittany Pettersen and Kim Schrier with our recent introduction of the HANDS Act, which would require Medicare, Medicaid, and TRICARE to cover the cost of Naloxone to patients deemed at risk of an overdose. Additionally, as a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I will continue to hold the VA, our Community Care Partners, and our government accountable when we fall short of providing the best care to our vets.

Q

Another priority for you is setting up veterans with opportunities to accelerate their careers after service, especially in STEM fields. Can you talk a little about why that issue is important and what you're planning to do legislatively?

A: Improving and building upon our veterans' transition services is crucial to getting them accustomed to civilian life after serving, and that extends into educational opportunities. Laws like the GI Bill have been foundational to improving access to higher education, including trade schools for our student veterans. That being said, I also think there's room to improve the rates of student veterans going into STEM fields. These degrees often take longer to complete and can be more expensive, which can serve as major barriers. We need more veterans going on to become teachers, doctors, scientists, architects, and more. But to do that, we must do our part to improve those levers to accessing STEM degrees. I'm currently working on legislation that addresses this issue.

Q

One of WWP's biggest legislative priorities was the passage of the PACT Act last year, and it's now been a year since it passed. The focus is now on implementation and ensuring the VA has enough support to handle the big influx of claims and veterans enrolling in VA health care. How do you think it's going so far from your perspective?

A: It's important to recognize that the VA has had an immense task on its hands in implementing the PACT Act, and we must ensure the agency has the tools, personnel, and funding it needs to roll the policy out successfully. I think, as would be expected with such a large piece of legislation, there have been some bumps in the road, but I believe the VA is taking positive steps. Since passage, they've undertaken a massive campaign to recruit and train new talent to handle the major influx of claims coming in. And as a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I'm doing my part to ensure the VA has the resources it needs to fully address the needs of our veterans.

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IN ACTION

AUGUST 2023 DISTRICT MEETINGS REPORT



For the first time ever, WWP warrior advocate leaders (WALs) met with members of Congress and their staff in district offices during the August congressional recess break.

WALs are part of WWP's grassroots advocacy initiative, connecting warriors with their elected officials in Washington, DC, and across the country. Building stronger relationships between warriors and their elected officials has been instrumental in helping WWP advocate for legislation to improve services and support for veterans.

In August, WALs visited 50 congressional offices in 14 different states to discuss some of the unique challenges wounded warriors face and corresponding legislation that would address those issues.

Specifically, WALs advocated for passage of the Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282, S. 344), which would provide both VA disability compensation and Department of Defense (DoD) retirement pay simultaneously for retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability. Currently, warriors retired under Chapter 61 with less than 20 years of service are not able to collect both sets of benefits at the same time, and their retirement pay is offset by their disability compensation.

Other priorities for WALs included supporting policies that foster a strong mental health workforce and better, timelier

care for veterans. Some of the bills WALs discussed during their meetings included the Not Just a Number Act (H.R. 4157, S. 928), which would create consistent reporting from the VA on veteran suicide, and the VA CAREERS Act (S. 10), which would provide the VA with more tools to recruit and retain the best health care talent.



PREPARING FOR MEETINGS

"When it comes to advancing legislation, there's no greater sort of return on investment for being a veteran advocate than actually going to Capitol Hill to talk to lawmakers and staff and influence changes that would be made into law," said Brent Reiffer, a WAL from Virginia who met with his senators, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine.

As with other congressional meetings, WWP grassroots and public policy staff helped ensure that the WALs were prepared for all aspects of their meetings.

"WWP staff provided the packets — which included the key issues, a flyer of WWP's impact on my home state, an overview of the services WWP provides, and more — for

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IN ACTION (CONT.)

us to hand out to members of Congress and their staff,” said Josh Jordan, a WAL who resides in Kentucky. “These resources ensure the members of Congress and their staff are well informed. WWP also provided me a sheet of talking points to reference as I’m discussing these issues.”

WAL Marisa Schultz, who lives in Illinois, met with Rep. Mike Bost, chair of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, as well as with staffers from the offices of Sen. Tammy Duckworth and Sen. Dick Durbin.

“All my meetings were really great,” said Marisa. “My first one was a bit nerve-racking, but then everything came easily because I feel passionately about veterans and advocacy.”



WWP WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER **DANETTE FLEISHMAN** WITH **THOMAS RENNER**, STAFFER FOR REP. BECCA BALINT (D-VT)



WWP WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER **JOEL GRACE** (LEFT) WITH **REP. BARRY MOORE** (R-AL)

★ MAKING IT PERSONAL

Beyond the talking points, warrior leaders were encouraged to talk about their own experiences. “Talking about my own struggles and triumphs as a wounded warrior really resonated with congressional offices,” said Josh. “It humanized the issues we discussed.”

He explained the importance of helping members of Congress understand the issues that veterans and their families face every day. “Several years ago, I contacted WWP to find out what I could do to help advocate.

After talking with the government relations team, I knew continuing advocacy on WWP’s behalf was a no-brainer.”

When asked about her decision to become a WAL, Marisa pointed to her enduring connections within the veteran community. “I see how legislative issues affect people that I know,” she said, “My entire unit — whom I deployed with almost 20 years ago — we’re all still connected. When somebody’s struggling, it affects me.”

“Right now, I’m capable of advocating for myself,” she continued, “but there’s going to be a point in my life where I may not be able to do that. I do it so that other veterans don’t have to struggle. That’s why it’s critically important.”

Brent spoke about the importance of fighting for better mental health policies. “We certainly know how prevalent suicide is in the veteran community. To me, it’s just such a need that continues to be a big shortfall in the United States — particularly for veterans. And so, it’s something I try to emphasize when I can.”

“WALs are critical to WWP’s ability to push forward legislation on Capitol Hill and ensure veterans’ voices are heard in Washington,” said Justin Beland, WWP’s director of Grassroots and Constituent Affairs. “I want to thank all our WALs for engaging with their members of Congress in August. Being a leader in their respective communities and engaging congressional offices on your own — with WWP’s support — is a big step, and they did an amazing job. Their meetings helped set the stage for our work when Congress reconvenes in the fall.”



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WWP’S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES, VISIT [WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG/PROGRAMS/GOVERNMENT-AFFAIRS](https://woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/government-affairs)





**WARRIOR ADVOCATE
LEADER SPOTLIGHT**

**Katie
Fulmer**

Q: Tell us a little about yourself:

A: I am a full-time licensed clinical social worker with the VA in Anchorage, Alaska. In my personal time, I volunteer with WWP and the Alaska Warrior Partnership, as well as assisting with feeding those who are experiencing homelessness and mentoring teens in my local community. I love spending time outdoors — hiking, kayaking, gardening, and foraging. I also enjoy baking and spending time with those I love!

Q: Why did you decide to become a legislative advocate for WWP?

A: I'm not the type of person to just voice a problem — I want to back it up with a solution or idea, even if it might not be feasible at the moment. I don't want to show up empty-handed or just complain. Being a WWP warrior advocate leader ties into my professional life as a clinical social worker and gives me the education, resources, and connections to help make an impact for our veteran population.

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

Access to care with the VA is probably most important to me. I stayed away from the VA for over a decade because of personal issues I had with the VA, as well as the stories I heard from friends.

Fast-forward several years, and I landed my dream social work internship with my local VA and was hired full-time after graduation. I decided I needed to enroll because I couldn't legitimately work to get veterans educated about and connected to VA services if I had never used them. I also realized that if I wanted to address issues and help change veterans' perceptions of the VA, I needed to do it from the inside.

Now that I am a supervisor I mentor my team on the importance of follow-up and availability, persistence with veteran engagement, building community relationships, working on relatability, and focusing on veteran-centered needs. This is all extremely important to me because it impacts my own care as well as those we serve.

WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER SPOTLIGHT (CONT.)

Q: How did you prepare for the August 2023 district meetings?

A: Cohort meetings with other warrior advocates were very important for me. I also researched legislation in advance and talked with other veterans and caregivers about their concerns and how their issues could be related to the bills we're advocating for.

Q: What were your meetings like?

A: Since Alaska is a geographically large state (the largest in the U.S. — sorry/not sorry, Texas!), many of our members were traveling to villages and other areas. My meetings took place virtually. Since I had participated in two other fly-ins (September 2022 and March 2023), many of the congressional staff members remembered me, and I felt like the relationship was built. I was able to bring WWP's legislative priorities to the forefront and was asked by staff to bring information and other bills back to the WWP team for review and feedback. Ultimately, this is the goal — to build that relationship based on reciprocity and communication!

Q: Why is it important for Congress to hear directly from veterans?

I'm a firm believer that you can't enact a plan or create change without understanding whom it impacts. Hearing directly from veterans gives Congress a chance to listen, ask questions, gain insight, and problem-solve with exactly those who are being affected!

Q: What advice or guidance would you give to other WWP warriors interested in getting involved?

We need more veterans to tell their story. I try to live by two mottos. First, "You can't change the world for everyone, but you can change the world for one." And second, "Create ripple effects."

What I mean is that sometimes people think problems are too big or outside their control, but nothing is out of reach — we just need the right connections. WWP gives us those connections, and we are being heard! It's all about making that initial ripple in the water, and then that ripple becomes bigger and begins reaching out farther and farther. That's how our stories and experiences have been received — one by one, they are impacting congressional members and their staff!

MEET THE 2023 WWP
LEGISLATOR OF THE
YEAR AWARDEES:

Congratulations to the 2023
Legislator of the Year recipients:

- ★ Sen. John Boozman (R-AR)
- ★ Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA)

Every year during the WWP Courage Awards and Benefits Dinner, WWP recognizes policymakers who have worked closely with WWP to bring forward policies that have tremendous impact on the lives of those we serve.



LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR
SEN. JOHN BOOZMAN (R-AR)



FROM LEFT: WWP CEO **LT. GEN. MIKE LINNINGTON**, U.S. ARMY (RET.), LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR **REP. MARK TAKANO** (D-CA), AND WWP VICE PRESIDENT FOR GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS **JOSE RAMOS**

OUR TEAM

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

Government Affairs

- ★ **Brian Dempsey**, Government Affairs Director
- ★ **Aleks Morosky**, Government Affairs Deputy Director
- ★ **Jeremy Villanueva**, Government Affairs Associate Director
- ★ **Lindsey Stanford**, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ **Kirsten Laha-Walsh**, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ **Anne Marie McLean**, Policy and Legislative Analyst
- ★ **Kimberly Powell**, Policy and Legislative Analyst

Grassroots and Constituent Affairs

- ★ **Justin Beland**, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Director
- ★ **Coleman Brooks**, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ **Jacques Dubose**, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ **Ben Watkins**, Senior Constituent Affairs Specialist
- ★ **Juan Valdez**, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Coordinator

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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202.225.9756

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

armedservices.house.gov

202.225.4151

X: [@HASCDemocrats](#) ★ [@HASCRepublicans](#)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

armed-services.senate.gov

202.224.3871

X: [@SASCDems](#) ★ [@SASCGOP](#)

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

va.gov

844.698.2311

X: [@DeptVetAffairs](#)

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

defense.gov

X: [@DeptofDefense](#)



**WWP
RESOURCE
CENTER**

resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org

888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or 904.405.1213

Fax: 904.405.1301 ★ woundedwarriorproject.org

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday - Friday, 9 am - 9 pm EST



1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

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