



WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT



WWP WOMEN WARRIORS ATTEND THE WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON, DC.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ NEWSLETTER | JANUARY 2025 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the January 2025 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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Act and Elizabeth
Dole Healthcare Act
Updates

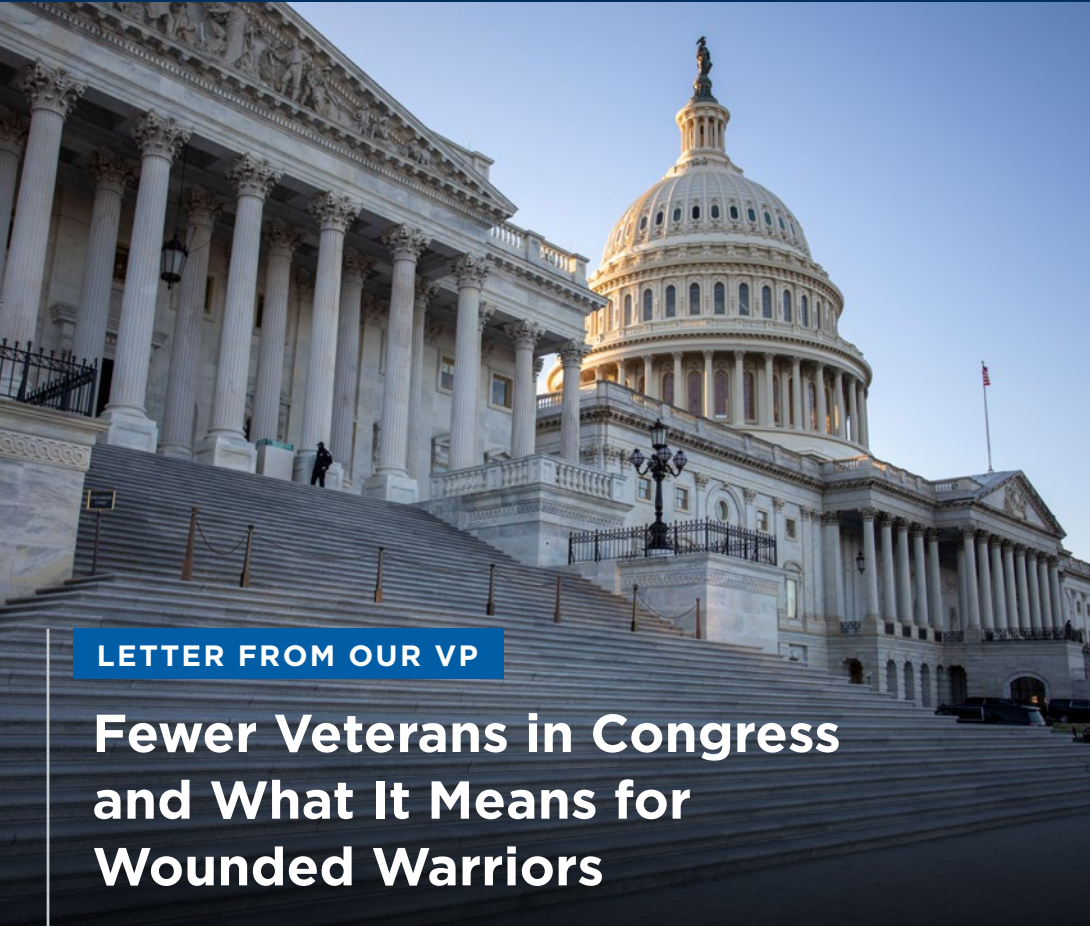
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LETTER FROM OUR VP

Fewer Veterans in Congress and What It Means for Wounded Warriors

On November 5, 2024, we all participated in our national elections. While it took over a month to call all the races, the dust has settled. The Republican Party will now control the White House and the U.S. Senate. They also retain a very narrow majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Our next newsletter will be dedicated to helping you get to know the incoming administration and newest members of Congress, particularly those who are veterans. WWP will also continue to evaluate the impact of these shifts and will keep you informed of what it could mean for you.

WWP has had a strong working relationship with every White House, including the first Trump administration, and is optimistic about continuing these connections in the new term. Veterans’ issues remain among the most bipartisan in Washington, and we expect progress on our priorities as we look toward 2025.

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However, while we are optimistic about progress in the new year, the makeup of Congress remains a growing challenge. In the recent elections, approximately 190 veterans ran for Congress, with about 80 emerging victorious. Adding the 13 Senators with military experience who were not up for re-election, the incoming Congress will consist of roughly 17% members with a military background.

In 1967, 75% of the U.S. House of Representatives had military experience, and by 1975, 81% of Senators had served in the military. Today, less than 20% of both the House and Senate have military backgrounds.

This figure is concerning, and it's part of a broader trend we've seen over the past few decades: the percentage of Americans with military experience has sharply declined. In 1980, veterans made up 18% of the U.S. population. By 2022, that number had dropped to just 6%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

So, why is this a problem? Fewer veterans in Congress means fewer lawmakers with direct, first-hand experience of the challenges veterans face. Understanding and addressing these challenges requires meaningful relationships and conversations. As the number of veterans in our communities decreases, fewer Americans — especially our elected officials — will fully grasp the complexities of military service and the unique struggles veterans endure.

This lack of understanding can have a significant impact on policy decisions that affect veterans. If our elected officials haven't served in the military, where are they getting their information about veterans' needs? Are they truly committed to advocating for veterans, or are we just another constituency they need to manage when it's time to vote?

I'm not suggesting that members of Congress without military experience can't be effective champions for veterans. There are numerous examples of non-veteran lawmakers who have shown unwavering commitment to veterans' issues. Sen. Angus King, one of our Legislators of the Year, is a great example.

However, with fewer lawmakers arriving in Washington with military experience, it becomes increasingly important to educate and inform them about veterans' perspectives, challenges, and needs. That's precisely why WWP has created grassroots programs to help warriors engage in public policy. These conversations

with lawmakers are crucial not just for raising awareness about the issues but also for helping them connect to the power of military service, understand the lived experience of veterans, and remind them of the sacrifices we continue to make for our country.

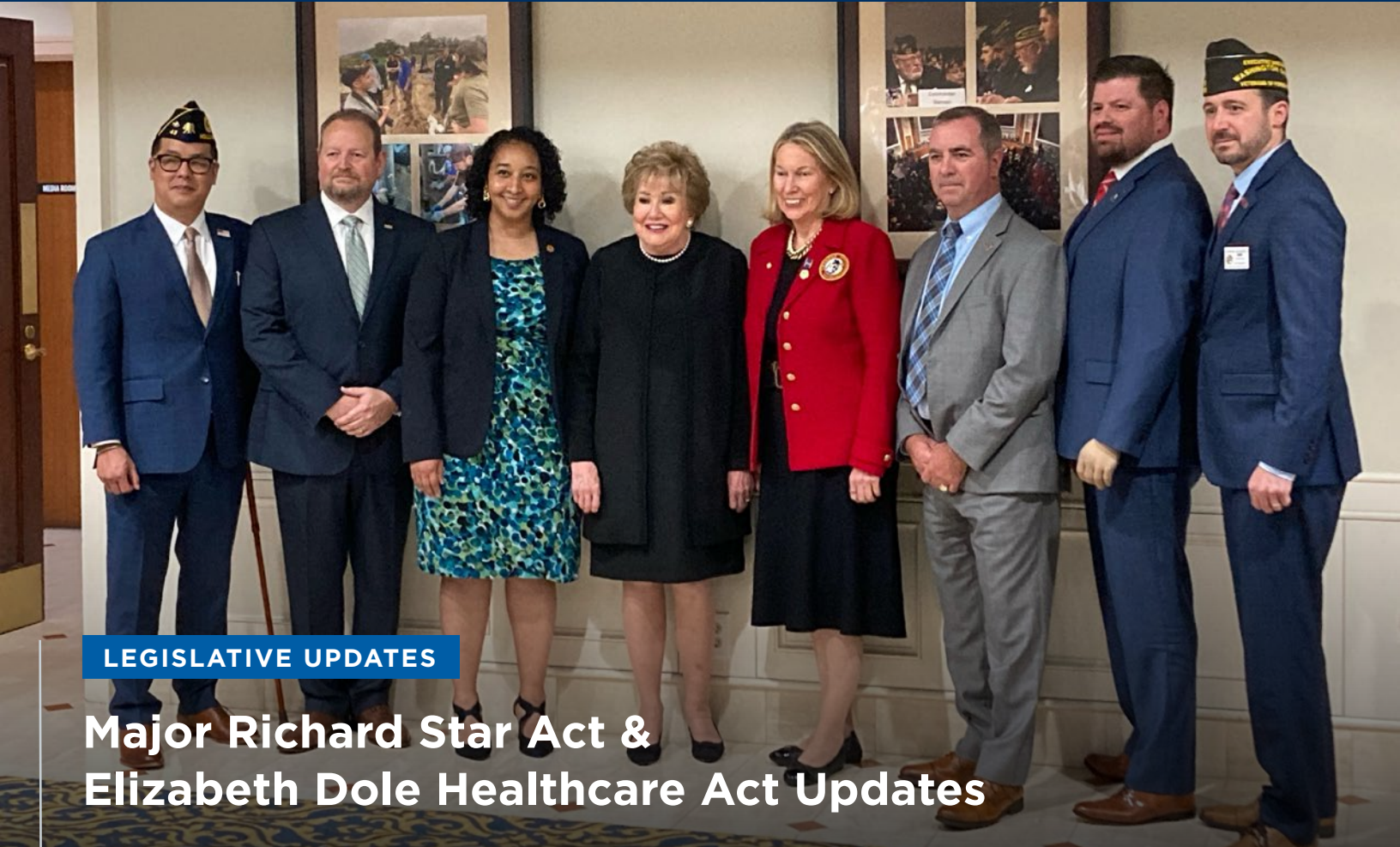
These discussions are more important than ever. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) projects that the number of living veterans will continue to decline over the next 25 years, from today's 18.3 million to 12.1 million by 2048. With fewer veterans, there is a greater risk of our needs being overlooked as Congress shifts its attention to other priorities. Funding for VA could become even more contentious, and passing legislation may become more challenging. A prime example is the Major Richard Star Act, which has overwhelming support but has been stalled for years, waiting for a vote.

However, this doesn't have to be the case. You, as a veteran, are an invaluable resource in helping lawmakers understand the needs of the veteran community. It starts with being proactive — sharing your story, reaching out to policymakers, and responding to WWP alerts to connect with your Representatives.

WWP's mission to ensure policymakers understand and support veterans remains steadfast. Our team in D.C. will continue to engage with lawmakers on Capitol Hill, and I encourage you to reach out to your local members of Congress, particularly if they're newly elected. Your story can help create new champions for veterans, and WWP is here to support you every step of the way.



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



Major Richard Star Act & Elizabeth Dole Healthcare Act Updates

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHANIN NUNTAVONG, DISABLED VETERANS OF AMERICA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS EDWARD REESE, NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS CEO KATHRYN MONET, ELIZABETH DOLE FOUNDATION FOUNDER SEN. ELIZABETH DOLE, TAPS FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT BONNIE CARROL, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA CEO, NATIONAL OFFICE, CARL BLAKE, WWP VICE PRESIDENT GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS, AND VFW WASHINGTON OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RYAN GALLUCCI.

Elizabeth Dole Omnibus Veterans Bill

Last month, Congress passed H.R. 8371, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (Dole Act), with overwhelming bipartisan support. President Biden has now signed the bill, which contains dozens of provisions focused on veterans addressing a wide range of issues, including mental health, long-term care, caregivers, women veterans, student veterans, and National Guard and Reservists. WWP is beginning to create informational materials about the bill, and we'll keep you informed about everything you need to know. For a detailed look into the bill, visit the [WWP Newsroom](#).

WWP is grateful to all the members of Congress who came together in a bipartisan fashion to develop and pass the Dole Act. The work of Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Representatives Mike

Bost (R-IL) and Mark Takano (D-CA) was especially instrumental in ensuring the bill's passage. In addition, we would like to thank all warriors who wrote messages to Congress in support of the bill - thank you for your grassroots efforts!

Major Richard Star Act

The Major Richard Star Act was not included in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) or the Continuing Resolution which Congress passed to keep the federal government running through March 14. The legislation continues to be one of WWP's legislative priorities, and we are now leading a coalition of VSOs and developing new strategies for the next Congressional term in 2025 and 2026. We will keep warriors updated on when the Major Richard Star Act is reintroduced in the 119th Congress and how you can help WWP advocate for the bill.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Blast Overpressure Safety Act

PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: NEW YORK STATE SEN. JESSICA SCARCELLA-SPANTON, U.S. SENATOR KRISTEN GILLIBRAND, AND WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT ATTEND THE PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THE BLAST OVERPRESSURE SAFETY ACT.

Last summer, WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Piatt joined Sen. and New York City Commissioner of Veterans' Services James Hendon at the WWP New York office to announce legislation aimed at reducing traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) among Service members and veterans.

The Blast Overpressure Safety Act (S.4109 / H.R.8025) is a bill supported by both major political parties and both houses of Congress. It would require the Department of Defense (DoD) improve how it handles blast exposure and strengthen its brain health initiatives.

Blast overpressure happens when a shock wave creates pressure higher than normal air pressure. This can injure the brain by moving it inside the skull and causing deep cell damage. Service members and veterans who have blast-related brain injuries, like a TBI, may suffer from hallucinations, seizures, and an increased risk of suicide and depression.

“WWP strongly supports this legislation and is working to see it passed by Congress and signed into law.”

— **WALT PIATT**
WWP CEO
LT. GEN. (RET.)



WOUNDED WARRIOR
RICHARD OTTUM (MIDDLE)

The bill would improve DoD’s brain health programs by requiring the following:

- ★ Regular brain function tests throughout a Service member’s career, starting with a baseline test before training.
- ★ Create blast overpressure exposure and TBI logs for all Service members.
- ★ More transparency regarding blast overpressure safety in the weapons purchasing process.
- ★ Improved data on concussive and sub-concussive brain injuries Service members sustain.
- ★ Enhanced efforts to reduce exposure and help Service members get care.
- ★ Create a Special Operations Comprehensive Brain Health and Trauma program, making the National Intrepid Center of Excellence a program of record, requiring DoD to provide child care for those receiving treatment there, and mandating training for medical and training staff on blast exposure and TBIs.
- ★ Review by the Government Accounting Office on DoD efforts to address blast exposure.
- ★ Carry out recommendations from a 2023 report by DoD Inspector General, which found that DoD doesn’t always identify the care needed for Service members with TBIs.

Piatt stressed the importance of this legislation by reminding the audience that WWP is “committed to ensuring that care and support are in place from the time someone raises their hand to serve, until the moment they recognize a need for help, whenever that time comes.”

“WWP is committed to ensuring that care and support are in place from the time someone raises their hand to serve, until the moment they recognize a need for help, whenever that time comes.”

— **WALT PIATT**
WWP CEO
LT. GEN. (RET.)

VA UPDATES

2025 COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT

Starting in 2025, retired military members and disabled veterans will receive a 2.5 percent increase in their monthly benefits. This increase will come from the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for 2025, done annually to keep pace with inflation.

Military retirees will receive an increase of \$25 for each \$1,000 of military retirement pension received monthly.

If you entered military service on or after August 1, 1986, and chose the CSB/Redux retirement plan:

- ★ You will receive a 1% reduction and a smaller increase of \$15 per \$1,000.
- ★ If you retired in 2024:
You will receive a prorated COLA in 2025. This amount will be based on the retirement date and may be adjusted depending on when a member enlisted and which retirement plan was selected.

Individuals receiving survivor benefit plan payments will receive an increase in their payments at the same amount as retirees.

The COLA will also increase benefit payments for disabled veterans.

- ★ Veterans with a 10% rating will see an increase of about \$4.28.
- ★ Veterans with a 100% rating and no dependents will receive about \$93.45.
- ★ Surviving spouses of disabled veterans who receive dependency and indemnity compensation will also see an increase in benefits.

VA ENHANCES CLAIM STATUS TOOL

VA has improved its free claim status tool, making it easier for veterans to access their claims online or on mobile devices anytime. This upgrade helps veterans manage their claims quickly and easily.

To get started, you will need to create a secure, personal online account on [VA's website](#) using [Login.gov](#) or [ID.me](#) services. You can also access your account with your existing Login.gov, ID.me, DS Logon, or MyHealtheVet account.

You will have instant access to view a claim, upload any required information, and download available decision letters without waiting for a representative to process the request.

New features include:



Improved navigation and layout make finding what you need simpler.



Real-time notifications and clear updates about your claim status and next steps.



Flexibility to manage your claim on your phone or tablet anytime and anywhere.

For more information:

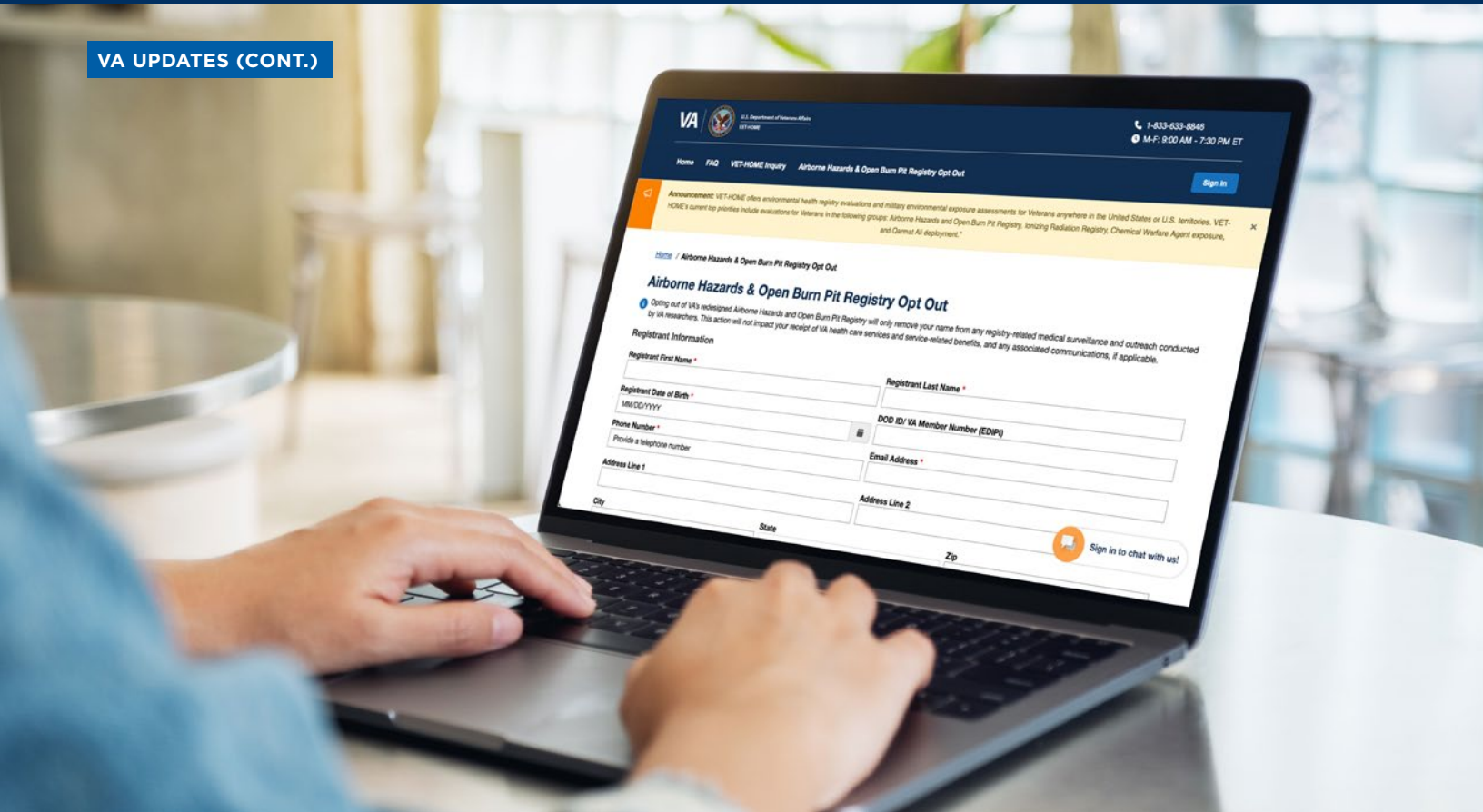
VA Claim Status Tool

Visit [VA's website](#) for step-by-step instructions on how to use the tool.

COLA for 2025

Visit [Social Security Administration website](#)

VA UPDATES (CONT.)



VA REDESIGNS AND EXPANDS BURN PIT REGISTRY

VA has updated and expanded the [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#) to better study and understand health challenges faced by veterans. The registry helps VA collect important information from veterans and Service members exposed to airborne hazards and burn pits during their service.

The registry changes will expand eligibility criteria and automatic enrollment based on DoD records, including approximately 4.7 million new veterans and Service members. An opt-out option is available.

If you were enrolled in the registry before the redesign launched, you will automatically be included in the new registry. Those who served in certain locations during specific periods, including deceased veterans or Service members who qualify, are also automatically added to the new registry.

More information on eligibility criteria can be found [here](#). Individuals should contact their [local Environmental Health Coordinator](#) to confirm whether they have been included in the registry.

Other important things to note about the registry:

- ★ Participation in the registry does not impact your care or benefits. It helps VA to identify and study health challenges affecting veterans and Service members.
- ★ Opting out of the registry will not impact your health care or benefits because being in the registry isn't the same as enrolling in health care or applying for benefits.
- ★ To opt out, visit the [Burn Pit Registry webpage](#) and complete the online form.
- ★ The registry includes DoD and VA data, including deployment locations, military personnel information, and demographics. No medical information is stored in the registry.
- ★ The information collected in the registry will be accessible to select VA researchers, and the data will be used to conduct medical and public health research over time.

For more information:

Visit the Burn Pit Registry's [website](#).

LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR

2024 Courage Awards Recognize Key Veteran Advocates in Congress



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP VICE PRESIDENT GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS, REP. MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS, AND WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT

WWP proudly celebrated wounded warriors and supporters during the annual Courage Awards and Benefit Dinner® sponsored by Goldman Sachs at historic Union Station in Washington, DC. Robert Griffin III, a Heisman Trophy winner and former Pro Bowl quarterback, was the master of ceremonies for the event.

Two awards presented during the evening were for Legislator of the Year. This award recognizes outstanding legislative effort and achievement to improve the lives of post-9/11 wounded, ill, and injured veterans. Congresswoman Mariannette Miller-Meeks and Sen. Angus King were this year’s award recipients.

Outstanding Leader in the House

Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, representing the first congressional district of Iowa, has used her position as Chairwoman of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health to sponsor pivotal legislation that positively impacts veterans’ lives. She has helped lead efforts to make VA’s health care system more accessible and accountable by sponsoring the Veteran Care Improvement Act. She is also at the forefront of the needs of female veterans by pushing for the SERVICE Act, which ensures VA provides mammograms to female veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic environments.

“I’m deeply honored to receive this recognition from Wounded Warrior Project,” said Rep. Miller-Meeks. “Supporting our veterans is both a duty and a privilege. As a veteran now serving in Congress as Chair of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health, I’ve worked to make VA health care system more accessible and accountable and to improve VA services. I remain committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those who have served our nation.”

Outstanding Leader in the Senate

Sen. Angus King of Maine has used his membership in both the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Veteran’s Affairs to champion the needs of veterans and their caregivers by advocating for legislation that helps them access the benefits they have earned. He has worked to ensure veterans’ benefits keep pace with inflation through the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2023 and supported

LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR (CONT.)

initiatives such as the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act, which aims to improve veterans’ health care and benefits.

“Our veterans have made countless sacrifices to defend and serve our nation,” said Sen. King. “We have a solemn duty to return that service to them long after they hang up their uniform. From helping our veterans navigate the transition to civilian life to ensuring they have accessible, affordable care, we have made tremendous strides together. But there is still much work to be done to step up for those who wore the uniform. I want to thank Wounded Warrior Project for this award and will work with anyone in Congress on behalf of our veterans in Maine and across the nation.”

“Our two Legislators of the Year understand the incredible service and sacrifice veterans have given to our country,” said WWP Vice President of Government and Community Relations Jose Ramos.

“We are grateful for the extraordinary dedication and leadership Sen. King and Rep. Miller-Meeks have shown our community, working to ensure all veterans can live their fullest, most empowered lives. Wounded Warrior Project is honored to partner with them as we continue to support post-9/11 veterans into the future.”

— **JOSE RAMOS**
WWP VP GOVERNMENT AND
COMMUNITY RELATIONS



SEN. ANGUS KING ACCEPTS THE LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD DURING THE ANNUAL COURAGE AWARDS & BENEFIT DINNER.

Other Awards

In addition to the Legislator of the Year award, several other awards were presented at the event:

- ★ **2024 Courage Award:** Sean Karpf Honors a warrior who exemplifies bravery, courage, and strength.
- ★ **2024 Service Award:** Adam Sandoval Highlights community supporters who have made exceptional efforts to raise awareness and support for warriors and their families.
- ★ **2024 Empowerment Award:** CSX Recognizes exceptional corporate support that helps WWP honor and empower wounded warriors.

“This night signifies the promise we made to wounded veterans — to be there no matter what and to help them reconnect with their personal strength, perseverance, and resilience to triumph over adversity,” said WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Walt Piatt. “We’re grateful for our partners and supporters who help us keep that promise.”

[Read more about the event.](#)

WWP INTERVIEW


Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks

Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (IA-01) serves as Chairwoman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health and has advocated for veterans, working on issues like substance use disorder, organizing care, and new mental health treatments, among many others. She also has helped lead efforts to make VA health care system more accessible and accountable.

The Congresswoman was gracious enough to sit down with WWP for a few minutes and talk more about her interest in veterans' issues, her proudest moment, and how she'll continue to support veterans in the future.



You served for 24 years in the Army, so maybe this question is obvious. But why are you so committed to veterans' issues?

My maternal grandfather died when my mother was 2 years old, reportedly from invisible "wounds of WWI," and my maternal uncle, whose ship was sunk in the Pacific in WWII, spent his entire life institutionalized in VA facilities in Oklahoma and could only converse about his life before the Navy. My second oldest brother was never completely the same after returning from Vietnam and carried that trauma with him to his premature death. That alone would be enough, but given that my father was career military, six of the eight children served, and my husband was also military, to say that veterans' issues are important to me would be an understatement.

Supporting our veterans is both a duty and a privilege. As a veteran now serving in Congress, I remain committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those who have served our nation.

— **REP. MILLER-MEEKS**

WWP INTERVIEW



REP. MILLER-MEEKS (R-IA-01) AND WWP VICE PRESIDENT FOR GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS TALK WITH OTHERS AFTER A HEARING ON VA AMPUTEE PROSTHETICS CARE ON NOV. 20, 2024.

Q

What veterans’ legislation or issues are you most concerned about and/or focused on right now?

I have three main issues that are most important for me right now: The Elizabeth Dole Community Care Act, emerging breakthrough therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide prevention, and oversight of VA system.

But the truth is, there’s no aspect of the veteran experience that should not be examined to see how we can better support the veteran community. The Brandon Act, which improves the referral process for Service members seeking a mental health evaluation and allows them to seek help confidentially, as well as other bills, have been introduced to ensure acknowledgment of and treatment for brain health and suicide prevention. The VIP Act, which recognizes that active-duty Service members, veterans, and Gold Star families should be treated like VIPs in America’s national parks and on our public lands, is part of restoring mental, spiritual, and physical health as well. The Service Act and Mammo Act address issues for female veterans, and the Global War on Terror Memorial allows veterans to visit a memorial dedicated to them while they are alive. Those are all bills that are extremely important to me. Lastly, oversight of VA is needed to ensure that appropriated funds are used to deliver high-quality care to veterans.

Q

Are there issues that you’d like to see Congress work on in the near future?

So many, but the top two that come to mind are better access to community care and successful outcomes from suicide prevention.

Q

What does receiving the WWP Legislator of the Year award mean to you?

I was surprised and very humbled. I don’t think I deserve this award, and I credit all my staff and the House Committee on Veterans Affairs staff for their tireless efforts on behalf of veterans. Supporting our veterans is both a duty and a privilege. As a veteran now serving in Congress, I remain committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those who have served our nation.

Q

What message do you have for veterans across the country about Congress and getting involved in grassroots advocacy?

I welcome veterans in the area of advocacy — they are greatly needed. In particular, I encourage veterans to look beyond their personal priorities and work with Congress to ensure that VA functions better and properly spends and allocates the resources it is given.

“But the truth is, there’s no aspect of the veteran experience that should not be examined to see how we can better support the veteran community.”

— REP. MILLER-MEEKS



WWP WARRIOR AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS FELLOW TENEKA NIEVES

WWP WARRIOR SPOTLIGHT

Government Affairs Fellow: Teneka Nieves

In 2024, the WWP Government and Community Relations team welcomed our first DoD SkillBridge Fellow, Teneka Nieves. Teneka is a Transition and Wellness Resource Coordinator in the United States Army, and after 16 years of service, she has begun her transition out of the military.

DoD connects Service members to programs like SkillBridge to help them gain civilian work experience through training, apprenticeships, or internships during their last 180 days of service. Partners like WWP have developed specific SkillBridge programs to help Service members transition into the civilian career workforce.

Through her fellowship at WWP, Teneka has served as policy analyst supporting the efforts of the government affairs team.

Q **What prompted you to transition out of the military after 16 years of service?**

My military career came to an end when I had an accident while pregnant. That moment forced me to confront the reality of my situation and reassess everything that truly mattered. The sense of duty and passion that once fueled me in the Army was no longer the same. The injuries I sustained, coupled with the worsening of my PTSD, left me standing at a crossroads. As a result, I'm now undergoing a medical evaluation board. After 16 years of dedicated service, I had to face the difficult truth that it was time to transition out of the military and begin a new chapter of my life.

Q **How has your fellowship with WWP impacted your career goals post-military?**

My fellowship with WWP has been transformative in shaping my career goals post-military. By joining the WWP government affairs team, I've been able to directly channel my experiences and passion for advocacy into meaningful action. It's not only deepened my understanding of the challenges veterans face but also amplified my ability to effect change on a broader scale.

This role has given me a platform to continue advocating for fellow veterans, leveraging my military background to drive legislative and policy advancements that directly impact their lives. It's allowed me to take the skills I developed during my service — leadership, strategic thinking, and resilience — and apply them to the vital work of improving veteran support systems.

— TENEKA NIEVES

Q

You're also involved in advocacy efforts as a WWP Warrior Advocate Leader. How did you get involved in that program?

I became a Warrior Advocate Leader (WAL) because I wanted to be more than just a voice for myself. I wanted to be a voice for others who've walked similar paths but might not have the platform to share their stories. My time in the Army showed me firsthand the sacrifices and struggles we face, especially as women veterans, and it fueled a deep commitment to stand up and speak out. Our stories and experiences matter, and they need to be heard.

Through advocacy events like the Women Warriors Summit, I have the opportunity to share my journey and draw attention to our unique challenges. I'm here to ensure that our contributions are recognized, our needs are met, and our resilience is celebrated.

Q

In what ways has your fellowship expanded your leadership or strategic thinking skills?

My fellowship with WWP has expanded my leadership and strategic thinking skills in ways I never imagined. Being part of the government affairs team has challenged me to step into a new arena, one where my voice and experiences as a veteran can influence decisions that affect thousands of others. This role has pushed me to think beyond immediate challenges and look at the long game — crafting strategies that will create lasting change for veterans across the nation.

It's no longer about just leading a team; it's about leading a movement. I've had to sharpen my ability to analyze complex policies, understand the nuances of the legislative process, and find ways to collaborate with diverse stakeholders. Every day in this fellowship, I'm using my military-honed discipline and adaptability to navigate unfamiliar territory while staying laser-focused on the mission: advocating for my fellow veterans.

Q

What are the most significant lessons you learned during your fellowship?

I've learned about the power of advocacy, the importance of collaboration, and the true meaning of purpose after military service.

I realized that our voices as veterans are incredibly powerful when we speak with conviction and clarity about the issues that matter most. I learned how to turn my personal experiences into meaningful dialogue with policymakers, translating the challenges I and other veterans face into actionable change.

Collaboration has also been a major lesson. In the military, I was used to leading teams in a structured, hierarchical environment. But in this fellowship, I've learned the value of working alongside diverse stakeholders — government officials, nonprofit leaders, fellow veterans — and how combining our unique strengths creates a far greater impact than any one of us could achieve alone.

This fellowship has also reaffirmed for me that purpose doesn't end when we take off the uniform. I learned that my mission continues, just in a different capacity.



TENEKA JOINED OTHER WOMEN WARRIORS AT THE WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON, DC IN SEPTEMBER.



Q What do you want to do after you finish your fellowship?

I'm still unsure where I will end up, but I know that my passion lies in helping people. As long as I am making a positive impact on others' lives, I believe I'll eventually find where I'm meant to be.

Right now, I'm focused on learning and growing through the fellowship, knowing that each experience brings me closer to that place where I can make the most difference.

Q What advice would you give Service members and veterans on transitioning to the civilian workforce?

Remember that your military experience is invaluable. The leadership, discipline, and resilience you've developed in the service are your greatest assets, and they're in high demand in the civilian workforce. Embrace the opportunity and go into it knowing that your service has prepared you for this next chapter of your life.

“I realized that our voices as veterans are incredibly powerful when we speak with conviction and clarity about the issues that matter most. I learned how to turn my personal experiences into meaningful dialogue with policymakers, translating the challenges I and other veterans face into actionable change.”

— TENEKA NIEVES



OPERATION ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Warrior Advocate Leader Training Summit

THE 2024 WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER SUMMIT WAS HELD IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, TRAINING AND CERTIFYING 19 NEW WALs.

WWP continues its commitment to engaging warriors in public policy through the Warrior Advocate Leader (WAL) program. In its second year, the program is charging ahead with renewed energy and commitment!

This initiative empowers dedicated WWP warriors to become powerful voices in public policy, amplifying WWP’s efforts on national, state, and local fronts. Through this program, WALs have the tools and knowledge to support our legislative initiatives and drive meaningful change for warriors. The WAL program exemplifies our ongoing dedication to shaping policies that matter and ensures our mission remains at the forefront of legislative discussions.

WALs work with WWP’s Grassroots team to engage with members of Congress, their staff, and government officials to advance WWP legislative priorities. Additionally, they recruit, train, mobilize, and lead other community volunteer advocates.

The 2024 Warrior Advocate Leader Summit was held last summer in San Antonio, Texas, training and certifying 19 new WALs.

“I’m thrilled to welcome our new group of WALs and grateful this group of volunteers has committed to advocating on the issues that impact warriors,” said WWP Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Director Justin Beland. “Each WAL completed our extensive training program and is prepared to effectively advocate for the needs of veterans.

Their commitment and passion will make a real difference in our efforts to support legislation that positively impacts the lives of veterans, their families, and caregivers.”

The summit focused on equipping WALs with the skills, knowledge, and resources to understand and navigate a complex and challenging political landscape. The training covered topics such as how to conduct a meeting, WWP’s current policy priorities, lobbying, building relationships with policymakers, and much more.

“I believe in the power of community and engaging with lawmakers to create change. The training helped all of us not only understand the legislative process but also the importance of storytelling. Learning how to effectively share our personal stories as veterans and those of others in the community is a powerful way to influence change — turning my own experiences into a tool for advocacy, making our message more compelling and relatable.”

— CHRIS MCGRATH
WWP WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER



OPERATION ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Empowering Women Veterans: Highlights from the 2024 Women Warriors Summit

WWP WOMEN WARRIORS AND FEMALE VETERANS FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS MET WITH 60 CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES DURING THE SUMMIT IN SEPTEMBER.

WWP was thrilled to host more than 50 female veterans — including WWP warriors and female veterans from partner organizations — in Washington, DC, for the 2024 Women Warriors Summit in September. The summit, sponsored by Boeing, was a powerful demonstration of unity, providing participants with a platform to connect, build relationships, and engage with their elected officials to advocate for legislation that addresses the needs of the growing female veteran population.

This year's summit was a comprehensive event focused on honoring and celebrating women veterans' accomplishments and shedding light on their challenges. The women in attendance shared their unique and profound stories of resilience, courage, and bravery. They took part in events, including panel discussions, workshops, and networking sessions, all designed to uplift the stories of female veterans, leaving them inspired, motivated, and ready to enact change.

“My goal is to meet with legislators and advocate for legislation that will improve the quality of life for women veterans. Primarily, my goal is to break the stereotype. Women warriors often face the challenge of being under-represented or overlooked in veteran-related conversations.”

— CAROLINE FERMIN
WWP WARRIOR

PERSONAL BRANDING

Understanding the importance of personal branding is a core aspect of advocating successfully. Each attendee was given the necessary tools to create a personal brand statement that reflects their values, strengths, and career goals. This credibility is vital in advocacy, as it lends weight to their voices, making their stories heard and truly felt.

LEADERSHIP

Warriors had the opportunity to hear from a distinguished group of veterans and active Service members who shared their experiences. Among the guest speakers was Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tanya Bradsher. As the highest-ranking woman in VA history, Bradsher had a wide range of experiences and perspectives to share on leadership in the military and civilian life.

A panel discussion hosted by Boeing featured women veterans and active Service members who shared insights into what women face in the military and civilian life. The panel included Senior Director for Acquisition and Sustainment Policy in Government Operations Lynn Williams, United States Army Lieutenant General Michele Bredenkamp, United States Army Major Sidney Jaques, and President and CEO of Halfaker and Associates Dawn Halfaker.

CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS

Participants also met with more than 60 congressional offices championing support for various bills, including:

- **H.R. 7596: Servicewomen and Women Veterans Menopause Research Act** – This bill would require DoD and VA to research menopause, perimenopause, or mid-life women’s health. Details of the bill can be found [here](#).
- **S. 3722/H. R. 7214: Improving Access to Maternal Health for Military Moms and Dependent Moms Act** – This bill would require a report on access to maternal health care within the military health system. The full [Senate](#) and [House](#) bills are linked.
- **H.R. 8371: Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Health Care & Benefits Improvement Act** - This bill contains multiple provisions that support veterans, their families, and caregivers. During the congressional visits, warriors discussed Sections 212 and 402, which focus on financial wellness for veterans. The full bill can be viewed [here](#).

- **H.R. 5785: Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship Opportunity Act** – This bill would expand eligibility for an existing VA STEM-focused scholarship by increasing the award amount and requiring reporting on those denied the scholarship. The full bill can be viewed [here](#).

These meetings were not just discussions but significant steps towards addressing the unique challenges and needs female veterans experience.

“Relying on a single voice to reach those who can make change is simply not enough. Bills often stall when they lack personal stories or compelling reasons for change,” said WWP warrior Esther Martinez. “The summit is crucial because it brings together women warriors from all across the United States, allowing us to speak together.”

“Grassroots advocacy is so important to the success of our legislative efforts,” said Justin Beland, WWP grassroots and constituent affairs director. “We empower warriors to engage in the political process by using their voice to advocate for the issues that affect them as veterans. Having this strong coalition of grassroots advocates ensures a wide range of warrior voices are considered in the decision-making process and that the best possible bill for veterans is ultimately signed into law.”

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— **JUSTIN BELAND**
WWP GRASSROOTS AND CONSTITUENT
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