

## Citizenship for Honorable Service

Many veteran immigrants say they have been deported after discharge because they failed to acquire U.S. citizenship while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The American Legion supports measures to ensure the process of naturalization through military service is completed prior to discharge, to include reinstatement of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative, training for military recruiters and commands about the naturalization process, and the reopening all USCIS field offices abroad to serve servicemembers stationed overseas. The Legion also supports providing expedited citizenship applications and the resources to complete the applications to deported honorably discharged veterans.

*Naturalization at Training Sites Act of 2022*

*H.R. 1182/S. 3212 - Veteran Deportation Prevention and Reform Act*

## Address the Forever Wars & Restore Congressional War Powers

After decades of protracted military conflicts overseas with little congressional input, Congress needs to reclaim its rightful role in matters of war and peace. Too often, the use of military force, as opposed to diplomacy, is considered the primary instrument of national power. The American Legion urges the renewal of a proper constitutional balance to U.S. foreign policy decision-making by urging Congress to renew its war-making oversight role beginning with repealing outdated Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMFs), reforming the 1973 War Powers Resolution, and properly resourcing civilian tools of diplomacy.

*S.J.Res.10 - Repeal the 1991 & 2002 Iraq AUMFs,*

*S.2391 - National Security Powers Act of 2021*

## Pay the Coast Guard

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out missions vital to our national security, but they serve in the only military branch working without pay during government shutdowns, due to their status under the Department of Homeland Security. The repeated and common threat of government shutdowns brings severe and unnecessary hardship on these men, women and families. The American Legion urges Congress to reintroduce and pass the Unwavering Support for our Coast Guard Act, which would guarantee that Coast Guard personnel are paid without delay, even in the case of a government shutdown.

*S.1845 - Unwavering Support for our Coast Guard Act (USCG) Act*

## Protect the American Flag

The American Legion urges Congress to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag. Additionally, The American Legion urges Congress to pass the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021 to amend the U.S. Flag Code to codify multiple common patriotic customs and practices as described in American Legion Resolution No. 19: Flag Code Amendment.

*H.J.Res. 51/S.J.Res.20/H.R. 4212*



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# The American Legion Legislative Agenda

for the 117th Congress, 2nd Session

The American Legion is the voice of nearly 2 million U.S. military veterans and servicemembers. A resolutions-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its members.

## VA Health-care Modernization

The future of VA health care is as a hybrid system consisting of VHA-provided inpatient and outpatient care, telehealth and community care. Ensuring VA is equipped to meet the unique needs of an increasingly diverse veteran population requires that VA fully leverage all health-care modalities and ensure a seamless transition between them. Modernizing electronic health records, veteran-centric access standards and a transparent online scheduling system for both VHA-provided care and community care is essential to ensuring our veterans receive the care they deserve. The means by which VA delivers care may change, but one thing will not: VA should continue to deliver the best care anywhere to our nation's veterans.

## Suicide Prevention & Peer Support

Several studies have shown that peer support is beneficial for people who are experiencing mental health issues or are making the transition back to civilian life. The American Legion has its own peer-support program known as the "Buddy Check" which encourages outreach and veteran peer-to-peer engagement. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation requiring VA to establish a national Buddy Check Week to encourage veterans to reach out to those with whom they served. The American Legion also encourages legislation to establish a peer-support program that would offer grants to place peer-support specialists in local posts of veterans service organizations.

*S.544 - "Buddy Check Week" Act*

## Address Toxic Exposure & Burn Pits

A disturbingly high percentage of veterans has been exposed to airborne toxic contaminants, often the result of proximity to local environmental hazards during military service. For decades, The American Legion has fought for service-connected disability benefits for adverse health conditions linked to exposures from a variety of toxic substances. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that (1) creates a list of presumptive illnesses based on scientific evidence; (2) requires VA to presume exposure for veterans deployed to areas with known environmental hazards; and (3) mandates VA toxic exposure studies.

*H.R.3967 - Honoring Our Promise To Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act Of 2021*

*S.3003 - Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops (COST) of War Act of 2021*

## Improve Health Care for Women Veterans

VA has an obligation to develop and expand health-care services for women, the fastest-growing demographic in the veteran community. A high percentage of women veterans who are not enrolled in VA health care say lack of gender-specific services and awareness about VA benefits are primary reasons. The American Legion urges Congress to diligently oversee implementation of recently passed VA pilot programs, research initiatives, and policy revisions to address this issue. Additionally, The American Legion encourages expansion of child and newborn care services at VA.

*S.2533/H.R.4794 - the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act*

*H.R. 344 - Women Veterans TRUST Act*

## Concurrent Receipt

Currently, 42,000 military retirees with combat-related injuries qualify for retirement pay for their service from DoD, and compensation for service-connected disabilities from VA. However, for retired veterans with disability ratings less than 50%, their VA compensation is deducted from their DoD retirement pay. The American Legion strongly supports ending this unfair policy of forcing

many military retirees to forfeit their retired pay to receive equal amounts of disability compensation. The Major Richard Star Act would repeal this draconian offset, allowing disabled veterans to concurrently receive both their retirement pay and their disability compensation.

*S.344 - Major Richard Star Act*

## Guard & Reserve GI Bill Parity

National Guard and Reserve servicemembers are being deprived of education benefits that active-duty servicemembers enjoy, despite completing the same duties. According to the law, as it is currently written, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers only accrue GI Bill entitlement when called to active duty under federal orders. When National Guard and Reserve servicemembers are activated under state orders, they do not accrue eligibility for Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits like their active-duty counterparts do. The American Legion believes that every day in uniform counts, and urges Congress to recognize the service of National Guard and Reserve servicemembers as eligible for the GI Bill.

*H.R. 1836 - Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2021*

## GI Bill for Honorable Service

To receive most VA benefits, a veteran's character of discharge or service must be "under honorable conditions." However, education assistance benefits within the GI Bill have a requirement that servicemembers receive an "honorable discharge." If the character of service is "general under honorable conditions," the Post-9/11 GI Bill remains out of reach for these veterans. The American Legion urges Congress to correct this statutory incongruity by amending U.S. Code to allow access to VA educational assistance to veterans with "general under honorable conditions" discharges.