AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

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WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

The American Legion was established in 1919, and not even a year after its founding, the organization was already encouraging Legionnaires to register and vote. Since 1920, countless resolutions have been enacted, and the message has only grown stronger, no longer just encouraging Legionnaires to vote, but encouraging them to bring others along as well.

Now, as America celebrates 250 years of independence, a midterm election is on the horizon. On Tuesday, November 3rd, 2026, that century-long tradition continues. More than 100 years of Legionnaires have stood up and made their voices heard, and now it is your turn to do the same. Encourage others to vote. Watch the debate. Ask the candidates for the hard questions. Show up to the polls. Your voice matters, and the only way it goes unheard is if you choose not to use it.

For more information on the American Legion's Get Out the Vote program, visit legion.org/advocacy/get-out-the-vote.

The American Legion appreciates your advocacy efforts. Visit the Action Center to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress. Remember to report any recent meetings or calls to help highlight the impact of Legion advocacy here.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BOWEN GIVES FIVE TASKS TO LEADERS DURING FALL MEETINGS

This article's original publication can be found here

American Legion National Commander Jay Bowen shared the tasks during his opening remarks to the National Executive Committee at National Headquarters.

Send messages to Congress, visit military bases to support servicemembers, promote Get Out the Vote, recruit and be part of the solution were five tasks American Legion National Commander Jay Bowen presented to the National Executive Committee (NEC) during his remarks Wednesday morning at National Headquarters for Fall Meetings.

The Take Care of America's Veterans Act (TCAVA), the GI Bill Parity Act and SHIPS for America Act are a few of The American Legion's legislative priorities and important issues facing today's veterans, Bowen said.

Bowen encouraged the NEC and other Legion leadership at The American Legion National Headquarters to send messages to their members of Congress through the Grassroots Action Center about these issues affecting veterans. Legion Family members already have sent more than 91,000 emails in support of TCAVA. Click here to send your message now.

The Grassroots Action Center "allows you to easily relay your support for our priorities to Congress," Bowen said. "Our priorities and our support for the military are essential given the dangers we face today."

Bowen referenced how last week, British authorities arrested five men for allegedly planning an explosive attack on U.S. Air Force personnel at the Fairford Royal Airbase. "Even though the threat isn't always obvious, our troops are always in harm's way," Bowen said, adding this is why The American Legion has always advocated for a strong national defense as part of its National Security pillar. "The American Legion will always fight for our military to receive the firepower, training and resources it needs to succeed on the battlefield. And today's battlefield isn't always a 'field.' It includes the sea, air, cyber and space."

American Legion staff and the Department of Florida recently visited Patrick Space Force Base as part of the Legion's Base Assessment and Servicemember Experience (BASE) program.
"These BASE visits are enormously helpful to our efforts as advocates. Not only do they help with our communications to Congress, but they also send an important message to members of the military that they have friends in The American Legion who care about their wellbeing and success," Bowen said. "In an all-volunteer force, quality of life is essential."

Bowen recommended for Legionnaires who live nearby military bases to also check on the needs of today's servicemembers whether it's with housing, food or childcare.

"If housing isn't up to par, if daycare isn't readily available and if the pay cannot keep up with the local economy, the best and the brightest will leave the service and join the private sector," he said. "The services must constantly seek to improve military life if they want to compete with the salaries that are available in the corporate world."

Election Day is Nov. 3, and Bowen asked NEC members to promote The American Legion's "Get Out the Vote" efforts that date back to the 1920 National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

"The founders of The American Legion recognized the sacrifice that so many veterans made while defending freedom abroad," Bowen said. "The least we can do is participate in our democratic process here at home. So please vote and encourage all American Legion Family members in your department to do the same."

Bowen ended his remarks with a membership reminder that strength comes in numbers and any Legionnaire who recruits two new members will receive his BPOTS (be part of the solution) membership incentive pin. A new member is any eligible veteran joining for the 2027 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2026 membership year. Transfers do not count as new members.

“We will always be a service-first organization, but we also recognize that there is strength in numbers. The larger we are, the more effective we can be with our advocacy and programming,” Bowen said.

Bowen’s BPOTS theme as national commander aligns with The American Legion’s Be the One suicide prevention mission to ask, listen and save lives.

“I know that you are just as committed as I am to being part of the solution,” he said. “BPOTS. Be The One.”

IN THE NEWS

DISABLED VETERANS, MILITARY RETIREES ON TRACK FOR 3.6-PERCENT BENEFIT INCREASE IN 2027

This article's original publication can be found here

Military retirement checks and Department of Veterans Affairs disability benefits are on track to increase by 3.6 percent in 2027 following an annual cost-of-living adjustment.

Military retirement checks and Department of Veterans Affairs disability benefits are on track to increase by 3.6% in 2027 following an annual cost-of-living adjustment that the Social Security Administration announced on Wednesday.

The effective date is Dec. 1, but veterans should expect to see the increase reflected in their VA disability payments on Dec. 31 or in early January 2027.

Retired military members will receive a $36 increase per $1,000 of retirement pension received monthly. More than 8 million military retirees and veterans receive monthly benefit payments. The annual COLA rate, which is tied to inflation, is based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Veterans do not need to submit any paperwork. The increase will be applied automatically.

VA disability compensation rates will increase by the same percentage as Social Security benefits, after Congress passes — and the president signs — the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act.

By law, military pensions and Social Security have permanent, built-in statutory language that allows their COLAs to trigger automatically without legislative intervention. But VA disability benefits do not have the same clause. Instead, Congress must pass a specific bill every year to direct the VA to increase compensation rates, after the COLA is determined.

The bill requires the VA to increase the amount payable for wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children, according to language in the legislation.

But veterans still may not see much relief at the cash register. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that prices in September were 3.7% higher than a year earlier. September's rate was higher than August, which was at 3.4%, the bureau reported.

"It's important to keep in mind that a larger COLA is not necessarily a financial gain. It may seem like good news, but it generally reflects higher prices for goods and services. A bigger COLA may simply mean you're also paying more for gas, groceries or other expenses," according to First Command Financial Services, of Texas, which offers financial coaching and investment planning to veterans and the military community.

Adam Jacob has a 100% VA disability rating for PTSD and a back injury, after serving in the Marine Corps and Army, with deployments to Kosovo, Iraq and Syria. But Jacob, 48, said he does not expect that the cost-of-living increase to his monthly disability check will make a big difference as he tries to live within his household budget.

"The COLA [cost of living adjustment] never really keeps up with inflation. The extra dollars each month for someone who is 100% disabled are not life changing. Don't get me wrong. I am still grateful for it," said Jacob, who is unemployed and relies on a service dog.

Jacob said that, in his view, veterans on fixed incomes would fare better if their VA disability payments were divided into two payments per month.

"I live from check to check and am running out of money at the end of each month," he said.

The 3.6% increase covers all types of VA disability benefits, including standard disability compensation, total disability based on individual unemployability, special monthly compensation, and dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors.

The Social Security Administration is required by law to use a specific, mathematical formula linked directly to inflation data that looks at price shifts in consumer expenses when determining the annual COLA rate change.

Instead of tracking an entire year, the formula takes the average from the third quarter — July, August and September — and compares it to the most recent year a COLA was approved, according to the Social Security Administration.

With inflation ticking upward through September, the comparison yielded a 3.6% increase for 2027, compared with 2.8% in 2026 and 2.5% in 2025.

Veterans with a 100% disability rating and no dependents, for example, will see their monthly benefits rise from $3,939 to $4,080 in 2027, according to CCK Law, which

helps veterans with their disability claims. Veterans with a 10% disability rating and no dependents will receive $186.92 per month, up from $180.42 in 2026.

“I know groceries, utilities and everyday expenses continue to stretch household budgets. Every additional dollar matters,” Brett Martin, a retired Navy captain who heads the Oklahoma Veterans Commission, said on social media.

Tens of millions of civilian retirees collecting Social Security will receive the 3.6% increase in their monthly checks, too.

The full retirement age for Social Security is 66 or 67, depending on the recipient’s birth year, according to the Social Security Administration.

LAWMAKER WANTS PENTAGON TO TRACK CIVILIAN SUICIDES

This article’s original publication can be found here

Five people assigned to support U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency died by suicide over the course of five weeks in June and July.

The Defense Department could begin tracking suicides across its civilian workforce under a new legislative proposal on Capitol Hill.

Rep. Sarah Elfreth (D-Md.) is pushing to add a provision to the annual must-pass defense policy bill requiring DoD to collect data on civilian suicides, as it already does for uniformed troops and their families.

The effort follows a spate of deaths at Maryland’s Fort Meade, where service members and civilians team up on mentally grueling missions at the country’s top cyber warfare units. Five people assigned to support U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency died by suicide over the course of five weeks in June and July.

“One loss of life is one too many,” said Elfreth, a freshman lawmaker who sits on the House Armed Services Committee. “We must do everything we can to make sure our service members, civilians, contractors and everyone at Fort Meade has the full mental health support and resources they need so that a tragedy like this does not occur again.”

She wants to clarify the Pentagon’s definition of a suicide cluster, and direct the military to report all troop and civilian deaths by suicide that occur within a certain stretch of time. The Banner Montgomery first reported on the deaths and Elfreth’s proposal.
A July 2025 directive defined a suicide cluster as a “group of suicide deaths that occur closer together in time, space or both than would historically be expected in a military population.”

But the military isn't required by law to collect data on suicide in the civilian workforce like it is for troops, nor does it need to report civilian suicide clusters to lawmakers. And while identifying a cluster of troop deaths sets off a series of interventions and support for those affected, led by the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, that same support doesn't kick in when civilians are involved.

It's up to House and Senate leadership to decide whether to include Elfreth's suggestions in the draft National Defense Authorization Act, which is on track to come up for a vote this winter following the midterm elections. Lawmakers don't typically discuss their negotiations as they hash out a compromise bill that both chambers will vote on.

Fort Meade, located just north of Washington, is one of the largest Army-run installations in the continental U.S. Its units employ around 35,000 civilians.

Elfreth told Federal News Network she's working with Maryland Sen. Dawn Gile, another Democrat, and Ed Rothstein, the head of the state's Department of Veterans and Military Families, to cut the time it takes mental health professionals to transfer their licenses to practice in Maryland and on military bases.

Last year's defense policy legislation required the military cyber enterprise to hire mental health providers with security clearances at their installations, so staff can speak more candidly about their concerns. Lawmakers called for quarterly briefings on the initiative's progress.
"I'm fighting to ensure full funding for this provision," Elfreth said.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached by phone call or text

Legionnaire of the Week

To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we spotlight an individual every week. These individuals demonstrate exceptional grassroots activism by meeting with/contacting their Congressional Representative/Senator to advocate for veterans. Efforts like these truly make a difference and give veterans a voice in Congress.

STEVE FOSNESS, DEPARTMENT OF MINNESOTA

Steve, thank you for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities; we are honored to recognize you as Legionnaire of the Week!

Steve recently participated in a veteran's roundtable at American Legion Post 36 in Fairmont, Minnesota, with Congressman Brad Finstad and Minnesota Representative Bjorn Olson. The discussion focused on key issues affecting America's veterans, including the Major Richard Star Act, access to health care for veterans in rural communities, care for women veterans, and veteran suicide prevention.

Steve also highlighted Bravo Zulu House, which provides housing for veteran men and women, and discussed efforts to advance the Medal of Honor for World War II veteran Earl Nolte and Vietnam War veteran Jim Wolter.

Thank you, Steve, for your continued advocacy and dedication to our nation's veterans!

TOP STATES FOR GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY FOR THE WEEK:

Kansas	**267**
Tennessee	**234**
Wisconsin	**141**
New York	**52**
Florida	**52**

THE CLOCK IS TICKING ON THE 119TH CONGRESS

Time is running out. The 119th Congress is approaching its final stretch, and that means every day counts for the legislation our veterans depend on. Now is the time to push your representatives to act on the American Legion's legislative priorities before this session ends. Do not let these bills die on the table. Contact your Members of Congress, make calls, send letters, and make your voice heard.

Want to know exactly what to push for? The 119th Congress, 2nd Session Legislative Priorities materials are available now. View and download them on the Legion website here.

OTHER GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Strengthen advocacy in your state. Encourage members to connect with their elected officials. Find your representatives here.

Grow your post's reach. Not yet registered? Sign up using the link here and add your voice to the movement

Prepare for your next Capitol Hill meeting. The *10 Tips for a Successful Meeting on Capitol Hill* and the *Legislative Meeting Worksheet* are ready to download on the Legislative Advocacy Resources & Toolkit page on The American Legion website.

Get personalized training. Legislative Division staff can deliver Grassroots Training tailored to your department's needs. Reach out at grassroots@legion.org to schedule a session.

Stay informed on key legislation. Track bills and The American Legion's positions anytime in the Key Legislation section on VoterVoice.

Ready to take action? Register for alerts at *votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register*

MAKE THE CALL. MAKE THE VISIT. MAKE IT COUNT.

The House of Representatives and the Senate are both now in recess and will return on November 9th. In the meantime, we encourage all Legionnaires to schedule a meeting or call with your Member of Congress. And on November 3rd, "Get Out the Vote" and make your voice heard at the ballot box this election season.

View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here