



April 24, 2026

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

STAY INFORMED: LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES NOW AVAILABLE

Want to see the issues Legionnaires are discussing with lawmakers? The 119th Congress, 2nd Session Legislative Priorities materials are available now.

View and download them on the Legion website [here](#).

CALL TO ACTION

This week's legion family we are calling on you because combat-injured veterans face a reduction in their retirement pay for every dollar of disability compensation they receive.

The Major Richard Star Act aims to rectify this by allowing combat-injured veterans to receive both their earned retirement pay and disability compensation without offset.

Your action in advancing this crucial legislation is essential and greatly appreciated. Contact your Senators today!

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 showcase the impact of Legion advocacy [here](#).

LAWMAKERS, VETERANS MAKE ANOTHER PLEA FOR THE RICHARD STAR ACT



This article's original publication can be found [here](#)

USS Veterans groups, led by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., returned to Capitol Hill on Wednesday to make another plea for Congress to pass the Major Richard Star Act, which would grant full retirement pay plus disability compensation to combat-wounded veterans whose injuries forced them to leave the military early.

The bill has stalled in Congress over several sessions because of the cost — an estimated \$9.75 billion over 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

“This needs to get done this year. For far too long service members forced to medically retire have been denied full military retirement and disability for their sacrifice,” Bilirakis said during a news conference held in view of the U.S. Capitol.

Currently only veterans with disability ratings above 50 percent and more than 20 years of service are eligible to receive the full amount of their military retirement from the Defense Department plus disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, according to lawmakers.

“I will make sure we will fight to include this bill in any supplemental package. I will fight to include it in the National Defense Authorization Act, when we mark it up this spring —

and use any other opportunity. We can afford this,” said Blumenthal, the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

Veterans now must waive a portion of their retirement pay when they opt to receive VA disability compensation, according to the Wounded Warrior Project, which is advocating for passage of the bill.

The reduction is known as a “disabled veteran tax.”

There are an estimated 54,000 wounded veterans who would benefit from the bill, according to lawmakers and the bill’s supporters.

The Veterans Justice Alliance, a group of veterans that would benefit from the bill, advocated for the legislation at the news conference and met with lawmakers at their offices.

William Brooks, a medically retired Army sergeant from Mississippi, was among them.

Brooks, who uses a wheelchair, said he lost both his legs in a roadside bomb attack in Iraq more than 20 years ago.

“Leaving part of your body on the battlefield should not result in losing your retirement,” Brooks said to applause. “Stop punishing veterans for giving it their all.”

Blumenthal — the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee — said that he tried twice to bring the bill to a vote, but objections were raised over the cost.

He said he plans to try again.

“What a minuscule part of \$1.5 trillion,” Blumenthal said, referring to President Donald Trump’s request to fund the defense budget in fiscal 2027. “Whatever the cost, we owe it to these veterans. We can afford it. Let’s get the job done.”

Retired Army 1st. Sgt. David Star — brother of the late Richard Star, an Army Reserve veteran — also spoke in support of the legislation.

Richard Star died in 2021 after suffering lung cancer that was linked to burn pit exposure during military service.

“My brother stood in this very spot asking for support of this bill,” Star said. “He passed away five years ago, and we’ve had four congresses since then to get it done. It is time to move this bill. Get these veterans the financial stability they need.”

NORTH KOREA AGAIN TESTS CLUSTER MUNITIONS IN A LAUNCH OBSERVED BY KIM AND HIS DAUGHTER

This article’s original publication can be found [here](#)

North Korea said Monday it test-launched ballistic missiles with cluster bomb warheads in the second such test this month, likely underscoring its push to expand its capabilities to penetrate U.S. and South Korean defenses.

The report by the North's official Korean Central News Agency appeared to refer to the multiple ballistic missile launches South Korea, Japan and the U.S. detected Sunday off North Korea's east coast.

KCNA photos showed North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his teenage daughter, both wearing black leather jackets, watching from a coastal observation point as a projectile soared over the water, trailing gray smoke. South Korea's spy service recently assessed that the daughter, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae, could be considered Kim's heir.

Kim oversaw the launches of five upgraded surface-to-surface Hwasong-11 Ra ballistic missiles with cluster bomb warheads and fragmentation mine warheads, KCNA said.

The missiles struck an island target and Kim expressed satisfaction over the launches, saying "It is of weighty significance in military actions to boost the high-density striking capability," according to KCNA.

In the earlier launch this month, North Korea tested Hwasong-11 Ka surface—to-surface ballistic missiles with cluster bomb warheads that it said "can reduce to ashes any target covering an area of 6.5-7 hectares (16 to 17.2 acres)."

North Korea has tested cluster bomb warheads before. But observers say the Iran war may have prompted North Korea to display it has cluster munitions and accelerate efforts to develop better ones.

The destructiveness of cluster munitions has been highlighted in the ongoing war, with Israel accusing Iran of using such weapons to challenge the country's stretched air defenses. The warheads burst open at high altitudes, scattering dozens of smaller bomblets across a wide area that are difficult to intercept.

More than 120 countries have signed an international treaty banning the use of cluster munitions, but North Korea, Iran, Israel and the United States are not among them.

North Korea has been pushing to expand its nuclear arsenal and acquire an array of high-tech weapons since Kim's nuclear diplomacy with U.S. President Donald Trump fell apart in 2019. Among them are multi-warhead nuclear missiles, hypersonic weapons and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, whose possessions would sharply increase prospects for North Korea defeating U.S. and South Korean missile defenses.

Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to restore diplomacy with Kim, and the North Korean leader has recently left open the door for dialogue with Trump but urged Washington to drop demands for the North's nuclear disarmament as a precondition for talks.

Trump is to travels to Beijing for a rescheduled summit with Xi Jinping in May. Some observers North Korea's recent testing activities were likely meant to increase its leverage in future dealings with the U.S., as the Trump-Xi meeting could provide a diplomatic opening with Pyongyang.

CHINESE WARSHIPS SAIL THROUGH JAPANESE WATERS AS REGIONAL TENSIONS GROW

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)

Two Chinese naval vessels sailed between Japan's southwestern islands this week, Japan's military said, in a passage that follows training in the Western Pacific.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force spotted the guided-missile destroyer and frigate south of Hateruma Island around 3 a.m. Wednesday, according to a Joint Staff news release that day. Both ships were moving northwest.

The same vessels were later seen sailing northeast between Yonaguni and Iriomote islands, entering Japan's contiguous zone and heading toward the East China Sea, the release said. Both islands are part of Okinawa prefecture.

Foreign vessels are allowed to pass through the roughly 35-nautical-mile-wide waterway under international law, though Japan may respond if ships enter its territorial waters, which extend 12 nautical miles from shore.

The same vessels were tracked Sunday sailing northwest between Amami Oshima and Yokoate Island in Kagoshima prefecture. The destroyer JS Akebono, assigned to a Sasebo-based surface squadron, monitored the Chinese vessels during their transit, the Joint Staff said.

China's defense ministry said the ships were returning from an exercise. The Chinese navy's Formation 133 was passing through the area after it "completed its training in the Western Pacific ... effectively testing its operations capabilities on the far-seas," spokesman Senior Col. Xu Chenghua said Wednesday in a news release on the ministry's website.

The movements come as naval activity in nearby waters has increased in recent days.

China's aircraft carrier Liaoning sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Monday, according to Taiwan's defense ministry. It was the first such transit since Beijing's newest carrier, Fujian, made a similar passage in December.

Japan has also stepped up its presence in the area. The guided-missile destroyer JS Ikazuchi transited the Taiwan Strait on April 17, marking the fourth such passage by Japan's navy since June, according to Japanese media reports.

The move drew criticism from Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun called the transit a “dangerous plot of some in Japan to militarily intervene in the Taiwan Strait and undermine peace and stability there,” according to a government transcript. China has increasingly used the waterways near Japan’s southwestern islands to travel between the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea.

In September 2024, the Liaoning became the first Chinese aircraft carrier to pass between Yonaguni and Iriomote.

The transit — along with a separate incursion by a Chinese survey vessel into Japanese territorial waters near Kagoshima — prompted Tokyo to lodge “strong protests” with Beijing.

PROMISE OF A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR OUR VETERANS AND THEIR LOVED ONES

This article’s original publication can be found [here](#)

National Commander Wiley praises president's order that will expedite psychedelic treatments for mental health, offering relief to GWOT veterans and others dealing with PTSD, TBIs and other invisible wounds of war.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order April 18 aimed at accelerating research and improving access to emerging therapies, including certain psychedelic treatments for mental health conditions affecting veterans.

The American Legion has long-supported, evidence-based research into innovative treatments for conditions such as PTSD, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain and severe depression; issues that continue to affect many who served, particularly those from the Global War on Terrorism.

"Thanks to the advancements of research, there is hope that these psychedelic drugs will serve as a pathway to and promise of a brighter future for our veterans and their loved ones," said American Legion National Commander Dan K. Wiley. "We must ensure that any treatment brought forward is grounded in sound science, proven safe and accessible through the Department of Veterans Affairs when appropriate."

Last October, The American Legion approved [Resolution 13](#) that calls for further research on the safety and efficacy of emerging therapies, including psilocybin, ibogaine root, lysergic acid diethylamide, 5MeO-DMT, cannabis and MDMA to treat PTSD, TBI and other ailments in veterans and their partners.

TRUMP CLEARS PATH FOR EXPANDED PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH TO TREAT VETERANS’ PTSD

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)

Sitting at the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office on Saturday, President Donald Trump described the quieter tolls of wars — one that follows veterans' home and lingers long after the fighting ends.

“Since 9/11, we've lost over 21 times more veteran lives to suicide than on the battlefield,” he said. “Today, we're bringing them new hope.”

Trump, in a declaration suffused with urgency, [signed an executive order](#) directing the Food and Drug Administration to accelerate the review of certain psychedelic therapies to treat mental illnesses.

Specifically, the order commits at least \$50 million in federal funds to boost research on [ibogaine](#), a powerful hallucinogen derived from the African shrub iboga.

Ibogaine is classified as a Schedule 1 substance in the United States — the same category as heroin — which means the [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) considers it to have a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical use. Yet it has drawn mounting scientific attention in recent years for its potential to ameliorate conditions ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder to depression.

Much about the treatment remains opaque, but researchers argue the magnitude of the benefits observed in small, controlled trials merits further investigation. [A 2024 Stanford University study](#) of 30 special operations veterans with traumatic brain injury and repeated blast exposure found significant improvement in functioning, as well as an easing of PTSD, depression and anxiety symptoms after a single ibogaine session. No serious adverse side effects were reported, and no cardiac complications of the kind occasionally associated with the drug were observed. The authors cautioned, however, that larger studies were needed to better understand its safety and efficiency.

“If these turn out to be as good as people are saying, it's going to have a tremendous impact on this country, and other countries, too,” Trump emphasized. “It's for a lot of people, but it's for our military in particular. The suicide epidemic among veterans is a national tragedy.”

Health Secretary [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#), appearing alongside Trump on Saturday, said, “We owe it to our war fighters and veterans to turn over every stone” to alleviate the mental health challenges stemming from their deployments. He acknowledged that the Schedule 1 restriction has caused veterans to seek treatment abroad, where ibogaine is legal.

“It's disturbing to me and to the president that hundreds, in fact thousands, of veterans are having to travel to Mexico, or other countries, to experiment with interventions that hold great promise,” Kennedy added.

Trump's directive would not immediately change the categorization of any substance. Instead, it aims to ease the regulatory constraints that have long stymied research, including for therapies already well advanced along the FDA's approval process.

The Trump administration will also create a pathway for ibogaine to be "administered to desperately ill patients under the 'Right to Try' law." This would permit patients with life-threatening conditions — who have exhausted all approved care — to access experimental medicine not yet fully supported by the FDA.

Marcus Capone, a Navy SEAL veteran with multiple combat deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq, told Military Times that he found relief in the unconventional treatment. He credits the intervention, without hesitation, for saving his life.

"Every time you come home from a war zone, you feel like you lose a little bit of yourself," he said, recalling cycles of emotional volatility which encompassed anger and sadness. Over the years, he tried both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical treatments, none of which proved to have long-lasting benefits.

As a last resort, his wife Amber Capone arranged for him to attend a medically supervised retreat in Mexico involving ibogaine. The treatment itself extends between six to 24 hours. Such sessions, he said, are psychologically demanding and physically taxing. At times, they can involve dark imagery and periods of intense emotional processing. But he insists that, for him at least, the gains were worth it.

"The psychedelic shows you not what you want to see, but what you need to see," he explained. "So when you're dealing with a traumatic experience, and you go revisit that, you deal with it. You get past the grief, the shame, and move on with your life. They actually get to the root cause of issues."

The Capones have since established a foundation, Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, or VETS, focused on expanding safe access to psychedelic-assisted therapy for those who have exited the military.

"There is hope," Amber Capone told Military Times. "It's not a one-size fits all, it's not for everyone even. But there is hope, and you can actually live rather than simply survive."

"I've always believed in ensuring that the American patients have access to breakthrough treatments and therapies with love for our veterans, and I have a real love for our veterans," the president concluded.

DID YOU KNOW...

POSTS PLANNING AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY DAY EVENTS

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)

On April 25, posts will invite members of their communities to various celebrations of The American Legion Family.

On American Legion Family Day, posts are encouraged to open their doors to members of their community for the day to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of Legionnaires, Sons of The American Legion members, Legion Riders and American Legion Auxiliary. The day also serves as an ideal opportunity to bring awareness to the Legion's Be the One mission to reduce the rate of veteran suicide.

American Legion Family Day was established through the National Executive Committee's Resolution No. 7, American Legion Family Day at its Fall Meeting in October 2022. This year, American Legion Family Day falls on April 25.

The following are what some posts have planned for American Legion Family Day. If you're conducting a similar event, please share your stories and photos on Legiontown.org.

Continue [reading here](#).

LEGION FAMILY PROMOTES CHILDREN & YOUTH MONTH WITH EVENTS

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)

April is Children & Youth Month where the Legion Family is called to show community members the organization's dedication to young people.

American Legion Family members are showing support for April in Children & Youth Month as well as Month of the Military Child. During this month, Legion Family members are encouraged to show the organization's dedication to young people by supporting child health, education, family and more.

The following are a few of the many ways American Legion posts, Auxiliary units and Sons of The American Legion squadrons are supporting American Legion Children & Youth Month or Month of the Military Child. Share what your post is doing to support children and youth in your community this month by sending an email to dispatch@legion.org or submit your story to www.legiontown.org.

Continue [reading here](#).

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Address>

THIS WEEKS TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS:

Kansas	283
Tennessee	249
Wisconsin	219
West Virginia	106
New York	63

Register more participants in your Department and help amplify the voice of veterans on Capitol Hill. Maybe your state just might earn a spot-on next week's Letter Board! Register with the link below:

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress? Check out our [information papers and Legislative priorities](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

10 Tips for a Successful Meeting on Capitol Hill and the *Legislative Meeting Worksheet* are now available for viewing and download on The Legion's website. You can find them and other legislative resources on the [Legislative Advocacy Resources & Toolkit page](#).

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the [key legislation section of VoterVoice](#).

Register for Action Alerts today at

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>



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.

Robert Kraemer, Department of Kentucky

Robert, thank you for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities; we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

Robert met with Representative Barr and sent leaders to both Speaker Johnson and Leader Jeffries urging them to ensure the passage of the Major Richard Starr Act, whether through floor consideration as a standalone bill, or inclusion in broader legislative vehicles such as the National Defense Authorization Act, or another appropriate package

Thank you, Robert, for your report and for the time you have dedicated to advancing The American Legion's legislative priorities.



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 4/24, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Monday, April 27, 3:30 PM: Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces – Hearings to examine Department of Defense missile defense activities in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program.
- Tuesday, April 28, 9:30 AM: Senate Armed Services – Closed hearings to examine the posture of United States Special Operations Command and United States Cyber Command in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program; to be immediately followed by an open session at 11:00 a.m. in SD-G50.
- Wednesday, April 29, 10:00 AM: House Armed Services – Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request
- Wednesday, April 29, 4:00 PM: Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs – Hearing to Consider Pending Legislation

HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)