

# Legislative Priorities for the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress



The American Legion is the voice of 2.4 million American veterans and servicemembers. As a resolution-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its members. The accompanying publication "Our Pillars, Your Platform" conveys The American Legion's positions on a variety of issues, based on our four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth.

**1608 K St. NW**  
**Washington, D.C. 20006**  
**(202) 861-2700**

[www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

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## **Protecting Veterans and DOD from the harmful cuts imposed through sequestration**

The American Legion recognizes and supports the need for a fiscally responsible government, and looks forward to working with the new Congress to develop deficit reducing strategies that do not degrade the nation's ability to defend itself, or further assault the earned benefits currently being received by our nation's military veterans (HR55).

## **Military Sexual Trauma**

The American Legion encourages Congress to pass legislation in order to ensure reporting, tracking, and actions taken upon incidents of sexual assaults at all VA facilities. Furthermore, The American Legion urges the DOD to improve their investigation and prosecution of reported cases of Military Sexual Trauma. The underreporting of MST in the military must be examined and DOD must permanently maintain the records necessary for victims to prove service connection for any later disabilities resulting from events in service.

## **Oppose any further increases in TRICARE fees, including prescription drug fees**

The American Legion stands strong against those who would dilute the promises made in the contract with those who serve in our nation's defense. We strongly oppose any proposed degradation of the health care promised to retired service members when they enlisted through increases in fees for TRICARE For Life, increases in pharmacy co-pays or any further breaches of the contract of trust between this nation and those who have defended it.

## **Stolen Valor Act**

In *United States v. Alvarez* the Supreme Court ruled the 2005 Stolen Valor Act was unconstitutional, yet left the door open for a more carefully tailored

law to criminalize profiting from lies about military service. The American Legion supports legislation to restore the criminality of lying about military service and received decorations (HR258/S210).

## **Claims Backlog**

America's veterans deserve better than a disability claims system mired in delays and backlogs, where over 69% of claims are delayed over VA's target of 125 days to complete. The American Legion believes VA can only change the bureaucratic culture causing these delays by implementing a work credit system that places as much incentive on getting a claim done right the first time as it does on the raw volume of claims processed.

## **Disabled Veterans Tax/Widows Tax**

VA disability compensation should not be offset from military retired pay regardless of the VA rating percentage, nor should VA survivor benefits (DIC) from military Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities. The American Legion supports legislation that would completely repeal these unjust offsets (HR333/HR303/HR32).

## **DOL-VETS and TAP**

The VETS program should be kept in its rightful place within DOL. DVOPs and LVERs should be solely focused on getting veteran's jobs. Congress has already passed legislation to improve the Transition Assistance Program, but DOD is improperly executing it. The American Legion looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that TAP offers the services and information necessary for transitioning service members and veterans.

## **Small Business Verification**

Businesses owned by veterans have earned the right to compete fairly through federal procurement. The

American Legion calls on Congress to ensure that the federal government makes its 3% procurement goal for the first time in history, and demands that VA address and repair the current small business verification program.

## **End Veteran Homelessness**

The American Legion strongly supports the Administration's goal of eliminating veterans homelessness by 2015 and calls on Congress to pledge whatever resources are necessary to accomplish this goal, to include medical, rehabilitative and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families (S62/HR385).

## **Quality Education through Post 9/11 GI Bill**

As one of the founding authors of the original GI Bill, The American Legion wants to protect our veterans with oversight that include provisions to evaluate post-secondary education institutions on quality factors such as accreditation, transferability, cost, graduation rates, and acceptance in the job market. State Approving Agencies should be returned their original power to protect the GI Bill along with adequate funding to execute their mandate. Student-veterans should be allowed in-state tuition rates regardless of residency status (HR357/S257).

## **Military to Civilian Credentialing**

DOD spends a lot of money training our military. The skills learned need to directly translate to their civilian equivalent, and seamless certification is long overdue.

## **The American Flag**

The American Legion remains committed to protecting Old Glory, and continues to support legislation that safeguards our nation's flag from physical desecration (HJRES19).