



Veterans' legislative update

During the first six months of the 119th Congress, Congress introduced several bipartisan legislative initiatives aimed at protecting veterans. Unfortunately, the second half of the year brought serious concerns.

Collective-bargaining agreements under attack at VA

In March, President Trump signed an executive order directing several agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to be removed from federal labor-management programs. The president cited national security concerns for this action. On Aug. 6, 2025, the VA announced the termination of most of its collective-bargaining agreements with federal employee unions, affecting roughly 370,000 employees. Federal employee unions immediately filed legal challenges; an appeals court allowed the administration to proceed while litigation continued.

VA services affected during 2025 government shutdown

This past Veterans Day fell on Day 42 of the longest government shutdown in history. While the government reopened the following day and returned to normal operations, veterans across the country felt the effects of the shutdown. The VA was affected for more than a month, with thousands of its employees furloughed and certain services unavailable. According to the VA, a total of 37,000 workers were either furloughed or working without pay. Affected services included transition briefings for members planning to leave the armed services, career counseling and call centers. In addition, more than 50 regional benefits offices were closed during the shutdown. Numerous other services were curtailed or shut down as well; however, compensation and pension pay-

ments were still processed and paid to veterans during the shutdown.

Tracking legislation affecting veterans

As Congress begins the second session of the 119th Congress, several bipartisan bills remain in Congress that address several critical issues, such as access to quality health care, safeguarding earned benefits, and mental health issues that include suicide prevention. Below is an updated list of the bills that were first reported last summer.

Protect Veteran Jobs Act— H.R. 1637/S. 914

Introduced in February in the House by Rep. Derek Tran (D-CA) with 45 original co-sponsors, and in March in the Senate by Sens. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Andy Kim (D-NJ), this bill seeks to restore employment protections for veterans affected by recent federal workforce reductions. It provides reinstatement eligibility for veterans who were involuntarily removed or dismissed without cause from civil service positions between Jan. 20, 2025, and the date of enactment. Eligible veterans must be reinstated to their former positions or to other civil service roles for which they qualify. This legislation directly addresses the thousands of veterans affected by layoffs under the Trump administration. In March, Kim and Duckworth introduced the measure as an amendment to the Republican-led continuing resolution, but it was blocked from passage.

Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act—H.R. 965/S. 1415

Introduced in February in the House by Reps. Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Monica De La Cruz (R-TX) and passed by voice vote, this bill was introduced in the Senate in April by Sens. Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Dave McCormick (R-PA). The

legislation would permanently exclude veterans' disability compensation from being counted as income when determining eligibility for housing assistance under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. This bill would help ensure disabled veterans do not lose access to housing support due to benefits intended to compensate for service-connected disabilities. H.R. 965 was passed by voice vote in the House on Feb. 10, 2025. The House-passed bill was sent to the Senate, where it is awaiting action.

Saving Our Veterans Lives Act— H.R. 1987/S. 926

Introduced in March in the House by Reps. Chris DeLuzio (D-PA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), and in the Senate by Sens. Angus King (I-ME) and Tim Sheehy (R-MT), this legislation builds on a version from the 118th Congress. It would authorize the VA to implement a program providing free firearm lockboxes to veterans. Research has shown that limiting access to firearms for individuals at risk can significantly reduce suicide deaths. The bill represents a targeted suicide prevention strategy grounded in evidence-based public health policy.

Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act— H.R. 1344/S. 1127

Introduced in April in the House by Reps. Chris DeLuzio (D-PA) and Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA), and in March in the Senate by Sens. John Fetterman (D-PA) and Dave McCormick (R-PA), this bipartisan legislation would allow a memorial headstone or marker to be provided through the VA for an eligible spouse or dependent child of a veteran interred in a national, state or tribal veterans cemetery—regardless of the date of death. Currently, only those who died between Nov. 11, 1998, and Oct. 1, 2024, are eligible. The bill



Steven Abasta



Abasta joined the Marines in 1976.

Veteran profile: Steven Abasta

would eliminate this restriction and extend the benefit beyond 2024 for an additional eight years, ensuring equitable and lasting recognition for veterans' families.

VetPAC Act of 2025—S. 787

Introduced in February by Sens. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Mazie Hirono (D-HI), this legislation would establish the Veterans Health Administration Policy Advisory Commission (VetPAC). The commission would be charged with conducting a transparent, expert-led review of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) operations. Its goal is to improve the efficiency and quality of health care services delivered to veterans, ensuring that VHA policies are driven by best practices, data and accountability. On Dec. 2, 2025, S. 787 was placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar under the general rules and is awaiting a possible Senate vote.

Rural Transportation to Care for Veterans Act—H.R. 1733/S. 784

Introduced in February in the House by Reps. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D-WA) and Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ), and in the Senate by Sens. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) and Susan Collins (R-ME), this legislation would expand eligibility for the VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) Program. The program provides grant funding to veteran service organizations and state veterans service agencies to offer transportation at no cost for rural veterans traveling to VA health facilities. This expansion would increase access to vital health care services for veterans in underserved rural communities.

Stay tuned to the "Government Affairs" section of nalc.org for any future updates on NALC veteran issues.

Inspired by his father and uncle since childhood, Los Angeles, CA Branch 24 member **Steven Abasta** followed in their footsteps and entered the military in 1976, shortly after graduating high school. Although they both had served in the Navy, Abasta followed his own path by enlisting with the Marines. The Marines' slogan, "first to fight," resonated with him, as he valued the Marine Corps's reputation for being strict and disciplined.

Abasta spent three years in the Marines, working in administrative roles. He began as a private and worked his way up to corporal in an E-4 position. He spent all three years in California, saying that, to his surprise, he actually got to travel more with NALC than with the Marines.

Despite the strictness associated with the Marine Corps, his enlistment came with some fun, too. He was a member of the military all-star softball team, which gave him the opportunity to fly in helicopters to his games.

He also said that he developed "some lifelong friendships ... those are the people that would have your back."

"I liked serving my country," Abasta said. "I felt like I was doing my part, you know, for the country that's given me everything I have."

Despite the positive experience, he didn't like the treatment his fellow Marines were subjected to, which he said he believes "would never fly today in today's Marine Corps."

"If you weren't liked for whatever reason, or you weren't doing the job exactly the way they wanted to, you had to deal with a lot of stress," he recalled. He added, "I also saw a drill instructor tip over a desk on top of a recruit because he wasn't doing his exercises properly."

When his enlistment period ended, Abasta thought about reenlisting and becoming a helicopter mechanic, but it required a six-year commitment.

"I didn't want to get stuck in a situation," he said. "What if I didn't like it and I had to be there for six years?"

After leaving the Marines in 1979, Abasta spent four years working at a series of other jobs before finally applying to the Postal Service in 1983. A former paper route customer, who had become his mailman, urged Abasta to apply. It was several years before he got heavily involved in union work, becoming a shop steward in 1990 and a member of the service relations committee from 2001 to 2013. Although he officially retired in 2013, he continued serving the union as executive vice president of Branch 24 until 2017. He then became an arbitration advocate, a position he has held ever since.

He noticed similarities between the military and the Postal Service, such as heavy use of acronyms and manuals, and the similarities in what Marines and letter carriers had to endure from upper management.

"There's ... harassment that goes on in the military, and there's also harassment that goes on in the Postal Service," Abasta said. "Only in the military, you don't have a shop steward. You have to deal with it on your own. That's one of the main reasons I became [involved in the union]—to protect the letter carriers from that type of harassment."

Join the NALC Veterans Group

If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at nalc.org/veterans.