



## House passes legislation expanding veterans' benefits

**B**efore Congress adjourned for the Memorial Day recess, the House of Representatives, by a vote of 235-179, passed legislation to significantly expand support for catastrophically wounded veterans and Gold Star families. The legislation also expands the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) home loan eligibility for thousands of National Guard and reserve members.

The Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Expansion Act will expand benefits for more than 7,000 severely disabled veterans and a half-million Gold Star families. The legislation increases monthly benefit rates for disabled veterans who suffered service-connected disabilities such as traumatic brain injuries or other severe disabilities by offering an additional \$10,000 annually for those who require regular, in-home medical care. The bill also provides a 1.5 percent increase from the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation program, and aids in the purchase of new homes by expanding the eligibility requirements for National Guard members and reservists from 90 days of active-duty service to 14 days of qualifying service.

While the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Expansion Act faces uncertainty in the Senate, in May the Senate introduced legislation to increase certain VA benefits. The Veterans' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act of 2026, S. 4487, will increase VA benefits such as disability compensation, clothing allowances, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. S. 4487 was introduced with 15 original bipartisan co-sponsors.

### Tracking legislation affecting veterans

Several bipartisan bills remain in Congress that address several critical issues, such as access to quality healthcare, safeguarding earned benefits, and mental health issues that include suicide prevention. Below is a list of the bills that were first reported in January.

#### 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, Duckworth and Kim 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-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. This bill would help ensure that 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 deaths by suicide. 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,

## Veteran legislation (continued)

only those who died between Nov. 11, 1998, and Oct. 1, 2024, are eligible. The bill 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 healthcare services delivered to veterans, ensuring that VHA policies are driven by best practices, data and accountability. On Dec. 18, 2025, S. 787 passed the Senate by unanimous consent. It awaits action in the House.

### 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 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 healthcare services for veterans in underserved rural communities.

For updates on legislation and other congressional action that affects our veteran members, check the "Government Affairs" section on [nalc.org](http://nalc.org).

## Veteran profile: Charlie Balmos

**C**harlie Balmos, a retired letter carrier from Camden, NJ Merged Branch 540, spent 32 years carrying mail, from March 1989 until July 2021. During this time and after retirement he has been heavily involved in the union, serving as shop steward for 31 years and health benefits rep roles for about 13. He still helps his local branch by meeting with carriers and helping cover for shop stewards who are unavailable. But before his postal career, he spent four years in the Navy, from March 1984 to March 1988.

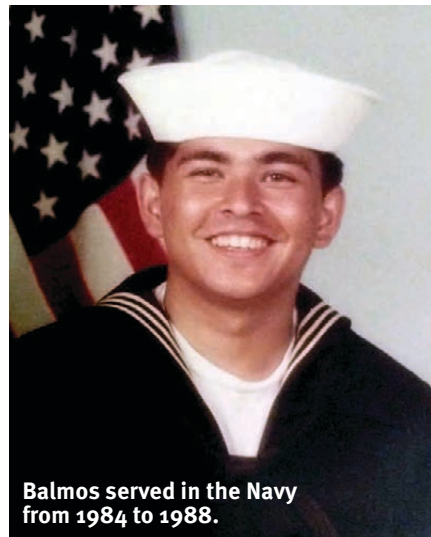
Balmos joined the Navy when he was 19 with his best friend, Steven Oliva, because they wanted more direction in life and thought the military would provide that. They chose the Navy because it was the branch that would take them the fastest.

After boot camp in Orlando, FL, Balmos trained as a storekeeper, specifically a supply specialist, and was assigned to the Navy Seabees in the Naval Mobile Construction Battalions. Rather than serving

aboard ships, he worked supporting land-based construction operations. His job involved ordering, tracking and managing materials needed for military construction projects, including lumber, electrical supplies, plumbing materials, vehicle parts and other equipment. He was responsible for ensuring that construction crews had everything necessary to complete projects without delays.

That sometimes led to difficult work, having to work long hours and arrive at construction sites about a month to a month and a half early to have everything set up before construction began.

The highlight of his military service was his deployment to Camp David in Maryland in 1987, where his battalion built barracks for Marines assigned there. After the project was completed, he and his fellow Seabees met the president and first lady of the United States at the time, Ronald and Nancy Reagan. The president personally thanked the crew.



Balmos served in the Navy from 1984 to 1988.

"He was very down to earth, very humble, nice guy," Balmos said. "He was shaking our hand, getting a picture with you, just, you know, because he was appreciative of what we did."

Aside from the work, Balmos enjoyed military field exercises, where he qualified as an expert with the M60



Balmos meets President Ronald Reagan while deployed to Camp David.

machine gun and a marksman with the M16. He was deployed to Italy and Guam for nine- to 11-month periods and traveled through Germany. He also played softball and formed lasting friendships with fellow service members from around the country,

military service, he worked in construction for about 10 months before his letter carrier encouraged him to apply to the Postal Service. He spent his entire postal career working in Willingboro, and lives about a 15-minute drive away.

some of whom he still talks to today.

After his four years were up, he planned to reenlist in the Navy. He was supposed to be assigned to Australia to work in an E5 rank, a promotion, but he was bumped from the orders before he was able to sign. Balmos was instead assigned to Brooklyn, NY, in a position that did not appeal to him, so he decided not to reenlist and instead returned to his hometown of Willingboro, NJ.

After finishing his

Although he found it difficult to think of many similarities between being in the Navy and working as a letter carrier, he said, “In the military, we had a job to do. We’d get it done. Same thing in the Post Office. You come to work, you get it done, and you went home.”

Despite the positive experiences he had in the Navy, he said his decision not to reenlist “was a blessing, ’cause I met my wife delivering the mail.”

She was a doctor at an office that Balmos delivered to on his route. Their first date was June 4, 1994. They got married on March 2, 1996, and have one daughter.

Other than meeting his wife on his route, he found many reasons to like being a letter carrier.

It provided him with a good pension and early retirement, allowing him to retire at 56. By going to the NALC national conventions, he was able to travel more, visiting Florida; Minnesota; Detroit, MI; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Philadelphia, PA; and Atlantic City in his home state.

“For me, it was the perfect job,” Balmos said.

## Join the NALC Veterans Group

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members—both active and retired letter carriers—who are also military veterans the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans. It is free to join.

Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for your military service and membership in NALC.

If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at right and mail it to the address included. A fillable version is also available at [nalc.org/veterans](http://nalc.org/veterans).



You continue to serve your country—  
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## NALC Veterans Group

Complete this form and mail it to:  
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