



# GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY REPORTS

*WEEK ENDING*  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2025

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## CONTENTS

LEGISLATIVE .....	2-4
NATIONAL SECURITY .....	5-8
VETERAN AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION.....	9-13
VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION .....	14-20



# **LEGISLATIVE DIVISION WEEKLY REPORT**



## National Legislative Division Weekly Report February 7, 2025

### **On Monday, February 3, Leg Div Staff:**

- Tuned in to the HVAC majority check-in call.
- Attended the VSO meeting on VBA claims, appeals, and legislative issues meeting.
- Attended the White Oak collaborative meeting.
- Interviewed an internship candidate

### **On Tuesday, February 4, Leg Div Staff:**

- Tuned in to the POLITICO webinar on the “First 100 Days” of the Administration.
- Met with PVA about joint legislative priorities.
- Met with Rep. Golden’s office to discuss TAP bill and other legislative priorities.
- Met with Auxiliary leadership to talk about logistics for Washington Conference.
- Attended training for Personify360.
- Attended the Blue Star Family Lifestyle Survey results release: “Strengthening Military Families Amid Global Challenges.”

### **On Wednesday, February 5, Leg Div Staff:**

- Met with VFW about joint legislative priorities.
- Met with staff directors for HVAC and SVAC to plan for Washington Conference.
- Attended a meeting held by VFW to discuss predatory claims companies & the way ahead in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress.
- Attended the “Discussing Healthcare Policy Priorities in 2025 and Beyond” seminar.

### **On Thursday, February 6, Leg Div Staff:**

- Attended the weekly Washington Conference Production meeting.
- Met with Rep. Graves’s office to discuss legislative priorities.
- Watched the HVAC subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing “*VA First, Veterans Second: The Biden-Harris Legacy.*”
- Interviewed a LegAssociate candidate.
- Attended a social sponsored by HillVets

### **On Friday, February 7, Leg Div Staff:**

- Attended the Star Act working group meeting.
- Met with American Federation of Government Employees.
- Said goodbye to Patrick, our Legislative Associate, before he moves to the West Coast.

### **Hearings next week:**

As of 2/6, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, February 11, 10:15 am: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight Hearing – *Bureaucratic Barriers: Making VBA Education Services Work for Veterans and not the Bureaucracy*



## National Legislative Division Weekly Report

### February 7, 2025

- Wednesday, February 12, 2:15 pm: House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing – *Roles and Responsibilities: Evaluating VA Community Care*

#### **Summary of the week:**

This week, Legislative Division had several meetings on the Hill to speak about legislative priorities for the new Congress. The Division met with the offices of Rep. Graves and Rep. Golden, as well as both staff directors for HVAC and SVAC. The division also spoke with several other VSOs, such as PVA and VFW, to speak about joint legislative priorities. We tuned in to several calls and group meetings on the net, such as the Star Act working group, the HVAC majority check-in meeting, and the White Oak Collaborative meeting. We worked on finalizing written Statements for the Record for the hearings later this month to keep Congress informed of the Legion's position on these issues.

LegDiv has continued to diligently plan for Washington Conference, which is now less than a month away. The National Commander's written testimony is in draft format and will be finalized by the end of next week for Executive Director review. We are working closely with the Staff Directors of H/SVAC to ensure a good presentation of the Legion's testimony on Feb 26<sup>th</sup>. This week, the Division focused on following up on RSVPs and confirming speakers for the Commander's Call and our Commission meeting.

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# **NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION WEEKLY REPORT**



**VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA  
NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION'S WEEKLY REPORT**

Ariel A De Jesus Jr, Acting Director

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(February 3, 2025 – February 7, 2025)

**Meetings**

- NS Staff participated in an MSO/VSO roundtable hosted by the Department of the Army. The discussion centered on newly implemented changes the Secretary of Defense introduced and updates on Army recruiting efforts.
- NS Staff participated in a collaborative meeting with other Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) to discuss the progress of the Richard Star Act. Attendees received updates on the legislation's current status and deliberated on strategic approaches to support its continued advancement.
- NS Staff members participated in a meeting where Blue Star Families presented their 2024 Military Family Lifestyle Survey findings. The session highlighted key challenges and opportunities facing service members, veterans, and their families, offering insights into well-being, community engagement, and support programs.
- NS Staff have conducted meetings and discussions with potential guest speakers in preparation for our upcoming Annual Washington Conference. These conversations aim to ensure diverse expert insights and perspectives to inform and enrich our National Security Commission members.

**Policy**

- NS Staff completed comprehensive reviews of four bills: the BLUE Pacific Act, the Protecting Military Parents Leave Act, the Golden TAP Bill, and the Combating Cartels Bill. These reviews are now pending the Acting Director's approval.
- NS Staff continues to carefully track and develop comprehensive summaries of newly issued Executive Orders affecting the Department of Defense, the State Department, and the Department of Homeland Security. This ongoing effort ensures we remain informed about policy updates and their implications.

**Programs**

- NS Staff is compiling and reviewing all Firefighter and Law Enforcement Officer nominations. These submissions will be presented to the Law & Order and Homeland Security Committee, which will select the 2025 regional and national award recipients.

- NS Staff remains vigilant in monitoring the inbox for TACOM/JMC requests from Departments, promptly reviewing and fulfilling all incoming inquiries to maintain efficient and timely support.

### **The American Legion Military Surplus Equipment**

Items requested: Ammo- 4960; Rifles- 0; Clips- 0; Static Displays – 0

Requests submitted by: Posts- 3; Departments- 3

### **POW/MIA**

**Feb 4, 2025**

- Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Mestas, O.)

DPAA has identified/repatriated (20) service members this year.

### **Be The One:**

#### **Army says fitness plans cut injuries and drug use and aid in mental health.**

Early data from Army brigades implementing the service's new comprehensive fitness program indicate fewer injuries, reduced behavioral health concerns and substance abuse, and quicker returns to duty among soldiers assigned to units with dedicated program staff. As the Army reaches the midpoint in deploying the Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) program across the force, the general overseeing its rollout told Army Times that the next priorities include refining data management, educating incoming commanders about the program's principles, and adapting H2F for use in both the National Guard and Reserve components. [Click Here](#) to learn more.

### **Focus Topic:**

#### **TRICARE Pharmacy Network Expands With Addition of Kroger Pharmacies**

On Feb. 5, the Kroger Family of Pharmacies rejoined the [TRICARE Pharmacy Program](#) network. This means that TRICARE beneficiaries now have access to over 2,200 additional network pharmacies in rural, suburban, and urban locations across 35 states.

Kroger Pharmacy is a [retail network pharmacy](#), meaning you'll pay network pharmacy copayments if you fill your prescriptions there. As described in the [TRICARE Costs and Fees Fact Sheet](#), the retail network pharmacy copayments\* are:

- **Generic formulary drugs:** \$16
- **Brand-name formulary drugs:** \$43
- **Non-formulary drugs:** \$76

\*These copayments are for up to a 30-day supply of your prescription. (**Note:** Some non-formulary drugs and maintenance medications may not be available at retail network pharmacies.)

I'm not sure if you have a Kroger Pharmacy nearby. Other Kroger Pharmacy brand names include:

- Baker's Pharmacy
- City Market
- Dillons
- Fred Meyer
- Fry's
- Harris Teeter
- King Soopers
- Mariano's
- Pick'n Save
- QFC
- Ralphs
- Smith's

You can use the [Find a Pharmacy tool](#) to search for nearby retail network pharmacies. There are also other options to fill your prescriptions. You can get your drugs:

- At [military pharmacies](#)
- Through [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#)
- At [other network pharmacies](#)
- At [non-network pharmacies](#)





# **VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION WEEKLY REPORT**

# VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

## WEEKLY UPDATE

Week Ending — 02/07/2025

### *Division Operations*

#### **Meetings:**

- February 3: Division director attended VA&R Division's first session of brief for Commander's testimony.
- February 3: Director attended American Legion Board of Veterans Affairs Appeals monthly connect.
- February 4: Director attended Government Weekly Leadership Meeting.
- February 4: Director attended VA&R Brief for Commander's Testimony – second session.
- February 5: Director attended VA&R Brief for Commander's Testimony – third session.
- February 5: Director submitted a Statement for the Record for the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Community Care
- February 6: Director attended the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation Oversight Hearing titled, "[VA Accountability: What has Happened to Hampton?](#)".
- February 6: Director attended a Black Feather Foundation event.
- February 7: Director attended a Senate roundtable on VA's Workforce Posture

## *Health Policy Team (HPT) Operations*

### **Meetings:**

- February 3: Health Policy Team (HPT) and VA&R Director met with the Chairman of VA&R Commission and provided a brief regarding community care issues facing veterans and The American Legion's legislative positions.
- February 5: HPT and VA&R director met with the Chairman of VA&R Commission to discuss the implementation of VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) and The American Legion legislative positions.
- February 5: HPT virtually attended the VA's Center for Women Veterans monthly meeting that discussed heart disease and how it affects women veterans.

### **Legislative Bill Reviews:**

- **H.R. X – Helping Heroes Act**
  - To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish the Veteran Family Resource Program, and for other purposes.

Position: **Support**

Supporting Resolutions:

- [Resolution No. 7: Ensuring VA Remain the Center of Care](#)
- [Resolution No. 30: Continued Operation of the Family Support Network](#)

## *Claims & Appeals Team Operations*

### **Accreditations**

- Applications Received from TAL Departments	18
- Certifications Submitted by TAL Washington Office	22
- Certifications Approved by VA's Office of General Counsel	9

### **The American Legion Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) Unit**

- AMA Appeals Pending (125+ Days)	0
- Informal Hearing Presentations (IHPs) Prepared	249
- Memos Generated	3
- Internal Quality Reviews	3
- Individual Training	1 hour
- Team Training	0 hours
- Hearings	1
- Board Dispositions	88
o Appeals Granted	27 (30.7%)
o Remanded	46 (52.3%)
o Denied	12 (13.6%)
o Other	3 (3.4X%)
 Retroactive Awards Won for Veterans	 \$1,510,080

### **National Veterans Service Office**

- Phone Calls	140
- Emails	33
- Referrals	12
- Discharge Upgrades	2
- Written Correspondence	0
- Claims Submitted	19
- Evidence Submitted	0
- POA Submitted	5
- Training Hours	0

### **Pension & Debt Management**

- New Claims	35
- Supporting Submissions	3
- Sensitive Claims	4
- Rating Reviews/Audits	207
- Contacts	293
- Debt Notices Received	293
- Insurance Questions	0
- Waivers Granted	67
- Hearings	0
- Miscellaneous Notification Letters Processed	211
- Debt Waiver Granted	\$1,333,282

## ***Benefits Policy Team (BPT) Operations***

### **Meetings**

- Jan 30th - Policy Team virtually attended a VSO PACT Act / Toxic Exposure Group meeting.
- Feb 3rd – Benefits Policy Team attended the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) Majority “Call-in” to learn about proposed mark-up hearings and proposed legislation hearings on the horizon.
- Feb 5th – Deputy Director for Benefits & Claims (DDBC) attended Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) VSO Bi-weekly check-in meeting. The meeting discussed new VBA senior leadership changes and other mutually concerned issues.
- Feb 5th – Benefits & Claims Services conducted monthly Department Service Officer (DSO) Leadership Check-in to discuss mutually concerned matters from the field.
- Feb 5th – Benefits Policy Analyst and Legislative Associate attended a VSO meeting with legal experts from the National Organization of Veteran Advocates (NOVA) and National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) concerning anticipated legislation concerning unaccredited claims agents, hosted by Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

### **Projects**

- The Policy team is working with Department of France and the Department of Latin America on a joint resolution regarding the Foreign Medical Program. A follow-up meeting will be held once VA OIG reports concerning FMP are published.
- The 2024 ROAR Report and presentation is under Review.
- The Service Officer Code of Procedure 2025 edition is being drafted.

### **Cole Lyle**

Director  
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division  
(202)-263-5759  
End of VA&R weekly update – 02/07/2025



**VETERANS  
EMPLOYMENT &  
EDUCATION  
WEEKLY REPORT**

# The Weekly Report

## National Veterans Employment & Education Commission



### *Our Latest Announcement!*

#### **Hearts for Heroes: Caring for Displaced Veterans**


**Homeless Site Visit – Tuesday, February 25, 2025**


As part of the **65th Annual Washington Conference**, the **Veterans Employment & Education (VE&E) Division** is hosting a **homeless site visit** to engage with organizations dedicated to supporting displaced veterans. This initiative provides a firsthand look at the impactful work being done to assist our nation's heroes in securing stable housing and essential resources. **Site Visit**


#### **Locations:**

- **Friendship Place** – 4713 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016
- **Veterans on the Rise** – 5002 Sheriff Rd NE, Washington, DC 20019
- **Unity in the Community** – 11414 Livingston Rd, Fort Washington, MD 20744

This visit is part of the **National Veterans Employment & Education Commission's Homelessness and Housing breakout session** during **The American Legion's Washington Conference**.

 **Date:** Tuesday, February 25, 2025

 **Time:** 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

 **Departure Location:** Washington Hilton, 1919 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009 (*Concourse Level*)

◆ [Register Here](#) – Registration closes on February 18, 2025.

Join us in supporting our veterans and making a meaningful impact.  
**Together, we can change lives!**



In the Report

**Economy**.....1  
**Education**..... 2-3  
**Employment and Transition** ..... 3-4  
**Homelessness & Housing** .....5

# Economy

## Jobs report shows a hiring slowdown as companies are acting like ‘they’re in a recession’

By [Alicia Wallace](#), CNN

The US economy kicked off 2025 by adding 143,000 jobs in January, fewer than expected; but the unemployment rate dipped to 4%, according to data released Friday by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Economists were projecting the unemployment rate would stay at 4.1% and 170,000 jobs would be added, according to FactSet estimates.

While cold and severe weather as well as the [wildfires in Los Angeles](#) were expected to be influential factors on January’s report, they had “no discernible effect” on last month’s payroll numbers, earnings, hours worked or the unemployment rate, BLS officials noted.

### Ad Feedback

Friday’s report — which also featured some significant data adjustments that happen at the start of every year — also provided more clarity on recent labor market trends, indicating that job growth last year was weaker than previously estimated.

The latest benchmark revision — an annual process that squares up estimates — showed there were 589,000 fewer jobs added to the economy in 2024.

Accounting for the revisions, there were just shy of 2 million jobs added last year, amounting to roughly 166,000 jobs per month — a pace practically equal to what was seen in 2019.

“The foundation of the labor market remains incredibly sturdy,” Cory Stahle, an economist at the Indeed Hiring Lab, wrote in a statement on Friday. “Revisions to the past year’s data may have rearranged a few rooms in the house, but they did not fundamentally change the structure.”

In the years following the economy-upheaving pandemic, the labor market has slowed, but it has not collapsed. Growth has remained solid enough to fuel consumer spending and put the economy on track for a “soft landing” of reining in inflation without triggering a recession.

It’s also been historic. Through January, the US economy has posted monthly job gains for 49 months, marking the second-longest period of employment expansion on record, according to BLS data that goes back to 1939. (The longest was a 113-month streak from October 2010 to February 2020).



# Education

## VA education and training benefits

The **Veterans Employment & Education (VE&E) Division** is committed to educating veterans about **VA education and training benefits**. We provide valuable information on the **GI Bill** and other resources to help veterans, service members, and their families access education, job training, and career opportunities.

### ✦ **VA Education Benefits:**

VA education benefits help **veterans, service members, and their qualified family members** with essential needs like **paying college tuition, finding the right school or training program, and getting career counseling**. Learn how to **apply for and manage the education and training benefits** you've earned.

### ✦ **Key Education & Training Resources:**

- [GI Bill benefits](#) – Learn about tuition assistance, housing stipends, and other financial support.
- [Veteran Readiness & Employment \(VR&E\)](#) – Get assistance with career counseling, job training, and employment services.
- [On-the-Job Training & Apprenticeships](#) – Use your GI Bill benefits to earn while you learn.
- [Yellow Ribbon Program](#) – Find schools that help cover tuition costs beyond the GI Bill cap.
- [VA Education & Training Resources](#) – Explore all VA-sponsored programs designed to support your educational journey.

For more details on maximizing your **education and career opportunities**, reach out to our **VE&E Division**. We're here to help veterans build brighter futures through education and training!

### **Get GI Bill® and other education benefits**

- [About GI Bill benefits](#)

Learn how the GI Bill works and explore your options to pay for school or cover expenses while you're training for a job.

- [Eligibility](#)

Find out if you're eligible for GI Bill or other VA education benefits.

- [How to apply for education benefits](#)

Learn how to prepare and apply for the GI Bill or other VA education and training benefits.

- [After you apply](#)

Find out when to expect a decision from us on your application and what to do next.

- [Veteran Readiness and Employment \(VR&E\)](#)

Check if you qualify for help exploring employment options, any training you may need, and other vocational rehabilitation services.

- [Educational and career counseling \(Chapter 36\)](#)

Find out how to get free educational and career counseling if you are leaving active service soon, have been discharged within the past year, or are a Veteran or dependent who is eligible for VA education benefits.

Veterans and National Guard or Reserve members.

## Employment

### Trump's VA pick defends hiring freeze amid staffing concerns

Trump's VA pick, former Rep. Doug Collins, said the VA may be trying to fill positions, but many of those vacancies have gone unfilled for weeks or longer.

#### [Jory Heckman](#)

President Donald Trump's pick to run the Department of Veterans Affairs says his plan to remove poor-performing VA employees would boost morale for the rest of the workforce.

Former Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.), an Iraq War veteran and Air Force Reserve chaplain, told members of the Senate VA Committee that he also supports expanding veterans' options for health care outside the VA.

"VA will not have a stronger fighter for the employees and the workforce than this secretary, if confirmed — and also one that will make sure that we're held accountable, because good work begets good work, and others need to be held accountable," Collins said Tuesday.

Members of the Senate VA Committee, however, raised concerns about a [governmentwide hiring freeze](#) impacting the VA's health care mission and whether the Trump administration would pursue cuts to its workforce.

"There will be potentially heavy pressures on you to cut and slash, to reduce access and eligibility, because the VA, frankly, is a target-rich environment for cost-cutters, and we know that there is a Department of Government Efficiency looking for those kinds of cost-cutting opportunities," Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) told Collins.

The VE&E Division is in the final stages of preparing for the Annual 65th Washington Conference. The agenda is nearly complete, and we are excited to announce that the Small Business Panel will feature seven phenomenal speakers.

Themed “*From Service to Veteran Entrepreneurship*,” the panel will focus on empowering student veterans to explore entrepreneurial opportunities and build successful careers after their service. It promises to provide valuable insights and actionable strategies for fostering veteran success in small business ventures.

The Washington Conference agenda will also feature guest speaker David MacEwan for a discussion on veteran incarceration, themed “From Service to Second Chances: Advancing Justice for Veterans.” The session will focus on alternative sentencing practices for justice-involved veterans that take prior service into consideration, particularly in terms of transition and mental health. More updates on panelists and session details will follow as we finalize preparations.

Additionally, Division Staff have refined the 2025 legislative priorities in preparation for the incoming Congress and administration. Key areas of focus include:

- Modernizing TAP with the creation of a mobile app.
- Achieving National Guard and Reserve GI Bill parity.
- Prioritizing veterans in federal contracting.

The Division also managed an influx of VE&E Employer Award applications and is pleased to announce submissions from 16 departments: Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

## Homelessness and Housing

### Learn About VA Programs Supporting Homeless Veterans

The **Veterans Employment & Education (VE&E) Division** is committed to ending veteran homelessness. We actively participate in **monthly meetings with the VA** to share resources and improve the lives of both housed and displaced veterans.

Recently, the **VA highlighted the impact of telehealth services** on veterans' healthcare. Below are key **FY24 telehealth usage statistics from VHA Data**:

- **Total Telehealth Use:** 65,090
- **Home Telehealth:** 2,601
- **Clinical Video Telehealth:** 29,858
- **Store-and-Forward Telehealth (SFT):** 8,216
- **Video Offsite Telehealth:** 29,255
- **Remote Patient Monitoring:** 30,517

If you are a **veteran experiencing homelessness or at risk**, or if you need to connect with a **Veterans Justice Outreach specialist**, please call the **National Call Center for Homeless Veterans** at **877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838)**.

✦ **Resources to Learn More & Get Involved:**

- Visit the [VA Homeless Programs website](#) to learn about housing initiatives and other programs for Veterans exiting homelessness.
- Check out the [Ending Veteran Homelessness podcast](#) to learn more about what the VA is doing about Veteran homelessness.
- Learn how to [get involved with housing homeless Veterans](#).
- [Subscribe to the Homeless Programs Office newsletter](#) to receive monthly updates about programs and supportive services for Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Together, we can work toward **ending veteran homelessness and ensuring every hero has a home.**

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