



June 20, 2025

## WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for *House Bill 1815*! This bill will provide a one-time bailout for veteran homeowners who are struggling to make their mortgage payments and are in delinquent status, facing foreclosure or a short sale of their property. If implemented, this bill will help veterans maintain homeownership and financial stability, enhance the effectiveness of the VA's housing assistance, and contribute to the overall market stability by reducing foreclosure rates. *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far. Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.*

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The American Legion's 106<sup>th</sup> National Convention is from August 22-28 in Tampa Bay, Florida. To stay up to date on information, schedules, and more, go to the information page [here](#).

## WHITE HOUSE TAPS NOMINEES FOR VA'S TOP BENEFITS, TECHNOLOGY ROLES

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



President Donald Trump has nominated [Karen Brazell](#) to serve as the next Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Benefits, putting the senior advisor in charge of processing and management for nearly \$200 billion in financial aid to millions of veterans.

The post is one of the top leadership roles at the department, but was unveiled quietly on Monday through official nomination correspondence with lawmakers on Capitol Hill. [Brazell](#) would be the permanent replacement to Josh Jacobs, who stepped down from the role at the start of the new administration in January.

Currently, [Margarita Devlin](#) is serving as the Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, and performing the duties of the vacant under secretary role.

Brazell was named a senior advisor to Secretary Doug Collins earlier this year. She previously worked in the department as principal executive director and chief acquisition officer for VA's Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction during the first Trump administration.

In that role, she oversaw department contract administration and supply chain management, managing a budget over \$30 billion and supervising more than 1,700 employees.

Her new role will hold significantly more responsibility, with a staff of more than 30,000 Veterans Benefits Administration employees and a portfolio of dozens of different department benefits programs.

Brazell is an Army veteran who also worked as a defense contractor and a Defense Department employee.

Her role as a senior advisor to Collins is likely to draw scrutiny from Senate Democrats, who have been critical of department moves in recent months to dismiss probationary employees and look for significant cuts to the VA workforce.

White House officials also nominated Alan Boehme to serve as Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Information and Technology, the replacement for Kurt DelBene. Boehme previously worked as Chief Technology Officer for the H&M Group, a fashion and design company.

Senate officials have not scheduled a confirmation hearing date for either of the new nominees.

## **THOUSANDS OF MEDICALLY RETIRED VETERANS QUALIFY FOR RETROACTIVE COMBAT DISABILITY PAY AFTER SUPREME COURT RULING**

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

Thousands of medically retired veterans are eligible for additional retroactive [combat disability pay](#) following a Supreme Court decision that ends a cap on compensation for individuals with less than 20 years of service.

The court unanimously ruled in favor of [Marine Corps veteran Simon Soto](#), who filed a class-action lawsuit arguing the federal government incorrectly reduced the combat-related special compensation that he received after military service.

Under federal law, retired veterans waive a portion of their military retirement pay to receive disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But veterans receiving combat-related disability pay are an exception under a statute that Congress passed in 2008, according to the Supreme Court decision issued June 12.

Justice Clarence Thomas, writing for the court, stated, "Where, as here, the statutory scheme involves a small group of particularly deserving claimants, it is not extraordinary to think that Congress wished to forgo a limitations period."

The National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit firm that represented Soto, estimated the court decision could affect up to 9,000 combat-disabled veterans.

Soto's case had been pending before the Supreme Court since last fall. The court heard oral arguments in April.

Soto, a former corporal who is 100% disabled, had served from 2000 to 2006 with two deployments to Iraq before he was medically retired. Soto worked in mortuary affairs while on active duty. His job was to search for and recover U.S. war casualties, according to court documents.

"He struggled to adjust to civilian life following deployment and eventually received a diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder," according to court documents.

PTSD is a mental health condition that can develop from witnessing terrifying events.

Soto filed for combat-related disability compensation in 2016. The payment is non-taxable, and retirees must apply to their service branch to receive it, according to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service at the Defense Department.

The Navy had granted Soto combat-related special compensation but incorrectly applied a six-year statute of limitation to calculate retroactive payments, giving him compensation back to 2010, according to the decision.

The Navy cited a federal law called the Barring Act.

Soto's pay was backdated to July 2010 based on the Barring Act, which requires veterans to file compensation claims within six years of receiving a VA disability rating, according to court documents.

But the Supreme Court ruled there is no six-year cap.

Under a statute adopted by Congress in 2008, "a retired veteran who establishes that his disability is attributable to a combat-related injury may receive special compensation up to the amount of waived retired pay," according to the court's decision.

The Supreme Court stated: "The Barring [Act] establishes default settlement procedures for claims against the government and subjects most claims to a six-year limitations period. However, the act includes an exception: If another law confers authority to settle a claim against the government, that law displaces the Barring Act's settlement mechanism, including its limitations period."

"We are grateful that the Supreme Court recognized that Congress intended veterans to receive the full amount of their combat-related special compensation, no matter when they seek it," said Paul Wright, director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program.

Sidley Austin, a private law firm headquartered in Chicago, and the National Veterans Legal Services Program filed a lawsuit in federal court in 2017 on behalf of Soto and similar veterans denied more than six years of retroactive combat disability pay.

“The court’s ruling ensures that combat-disabled veterans will receive all the combat-related special compensation they are entitled to by law,” said Tacy Flint, an attorney with Sidley Austin.

In 2021, a district court in Texas ordered the government to pay all military retirees whose combat-related compensation had been limited.

But a circuit court later reversed the ruling on appeal, prompting Soto’s attorneys to file a petition in 2024 with the Supreme Court.

“Because of this decision [by the Supreme Court], thousands of combat-disabled veterans will finally receive the full amount of the compensation they earned through their service,” Wright said.

## **LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK**

To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we will 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.

### **Justin Cofer, Tennessee**

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

This week, Justin met with Congressman Tim Burchett and his veteran caseworker at his office in Knoxville. They discussed the need for good bills that help all veterans. They also discussed issues like veteran suicide and veteran homelessness. Justin also provided the Congressman’s aide material from the legislative agenda.



*Thank you, Justin, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.*

## GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress on ***The Veteran's Role in Supporting the Military?*** Check out our [information papers](#) in the [Legislative Toolkit](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

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](mailto:grassroots@legion.org) or [ejohnson@legion.org](mailto:ejohnson@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>***





## UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 6/20, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, June 24, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services, Full Committee Nomination Hearing -- *“To consider the nominations of: Vice Admiral Charles B. Cooper II, USN to be admiral and Commander, United States Central Command; and Lieutenant General Alexis G. Grynkewich, USAF to be general and Commander, United States European Command and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe”*
- Tuesday, June 24, 10:15 AM: House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Full Committee Oversight Hearing -- *“Strengthening the Transition Assistance Program: Exploring Outcomes to Improve the Transition to Civilian Life”*
- Tuesday, June 24, 1:15 PM: House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Legislative Hearing -- *“Legislative Hearing on: H.R. 3123, Ernest Peltz Accrued Veterans Benefits Act; H.R. 3627, Justice for America’s Veterans and Survivors Act of 2025; H.R. 3833, Veterans’ Caregiver Appeals Modernization Act of 2025; H.R. 3834, Protecting Veterans Claim Options Act; H.R. 3835, Veterans Appeals Efficiency Act of 2025; H.R. 3854, Modernizing All Veterans and Survivors Claims Processing Act; H.R. 3983 Veterans Claims Quality Improvement Act of 2025; H.R. 3951, Rural Veterans’ Improved Access to Benefits Act of 2025; H.R. 659, Veterans Law Judge Experience Act; H.R. 2055, Caring for Survivors Act; H.R.*

*2701, Fallen Servicemembers Religious Heritage Act; H.R. 2721, Honoring our Heroes Act.”*

- Wednesday, June 25, 2:30 PM: Seante Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support Hearing -- *“To receive an update on matters within the jurisdiction of the Assistant Secretaries for Energy, Installation, and Environment in support of the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act”*
- Wednesday, June 25, 4:00 PM: Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs -- *“Correcting Mismanagement of the Veterans’ Crisis Line”*

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](#)