



**TESTIMONY
OF
COLE T. LYLE
DIRECTOR
LEGISLATIVE DIVISION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL
AFFAIRS
ON
"PENDING LEGISLATION"
June 25, 2026**

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Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of National Commander Dan K. Wiley, and more than 1.5 million dues-paying members of The American Legion, we thank you for the opportunity to offer our written testimony regarding proposed legislation.

The American Legion is guided by active Legionnaires who dedicate their time and resources to serve veterans, service members, their families, and caregivers. As a resolutions-based organization, our positions are directed by more than 107 years of advocacy and resolutions that originate at the post level of our organization. Every time The American Legion testifies, we offer a direct voice from the veteran community to Congress.

We fight to keep earned disability compensation whole against the erosion of inflation, and to see that the claims process treats every veteran fairly and without needless delay. With equal conviction, we work to ensure that no veteran is forgotten at the end and that a place of honor lies within reach of those who served. We also fight to ensure that the unclaimed and the unidentified are brought home and laid to rest as the veterans they were. The measures before you today fall along that arc, and the Legion weighs each the same way: against what our members have resolved, and against the promise this nation makes to everyone who wears its uniform.

H.R. 8552: Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2026

To increase, effective as of December 1, 2026, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

The American Legion supports H.R. 8552, consistent with Resolution No. 164, Oppose Lowering of Cost-of-Living Adjustments.¹

A disability rating is the nation's accounting of what a veteran gave; that account should not lose value when our nation's economy naturally fluctuates. Protecting earned compensation from inflation is critical. Without an annual cost-of-living adjustment, the dollar figure holds when the rent, groceries, and prescriptions do not. Keeping pace with inflation and the rising cost of living

¹The American Legion, "Resolution No. 164: Oppose Lowering of Cost-of-Living Adjustments," August 30, 2016, <https://archive.legion.org/node/384>.

for those, many of whom are already on a fixed income, will bring financial stability to household budgets. After all the sacrifices made, ensuring the financial stability of our nation's disabled veterans, their survivors, and dependents is the right thing to do. Additionally, H.R. 8552 ties the December 1, 2026, adjustment to the same index that governs payment rates for Social Security.²

The American Legion can support this legislation through Resolution No. 164, Oppose Lowering of Cost-of-Living Adjustments.

The American Legion supports H.R. 8552 as written.

H.R. 8767: Compensation Fund Recrediting Act

To amend the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to wind down the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund.

The American Legion takes no position on H.R. 8767. The provisions of the legislation fall outside the scope of established resolutions of The American Legion.

Equal service earns equal benefits, regardless of when or where a veteran served. A promise the nation made to the men who answered its call should not lapse because of an arbitrary filing window.

Congress created the fund in 2009 to honor the benefits promised to the Philippine Scouts and the recognized guerrilla forces of World War II—men called into United States service by President Roosevelt in 1941—and stripped from them by the Rescission Act of 1946.³ Eligibility turned on the U.S. Army's recognition of a claimant's wartime service, certified through the records held at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. Claimants had one year from enactment to file, a window that closed in February 2010. Men who served but were never recognized in the Army's wartime program, or whose proof rested on records held by a foreign government, were left unable to establish eligibility.⁴

We urge this committee to ensure that no veteran who earned this benefit is left uncompensated.

The American Legion has no position on this legislation.

²“Disabled Veterans, Military Veterans to See COLA Increase in 2025,” The American Legion, December 3, 2024, <https://www.legion.org/information-center/news/veterans-benefits/2024/december/disabled-veterans-military-veterans-to-see-cola-increase-in-2025>.

³ Recognizing the Extraordinary Contribution of Filipino Veterans," The White House, Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund Interagency Working Group, July 9, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2013/07/09/recognizing-extraordinary-contribution-filipino-veterans>

⁴ American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5, § 1002(c)(1); February 2010 cutoff per Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund: Inquiry into the Adequacy of Process in Verifying Eligibility, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, H. Comm. on Veterans' Affairs, 113th Cong. (2014)

H.R. 9006: Locating Our Unclaimed Veterans Act

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a centralized portal within the Department of Veterans Affairs for the storage of information with respect to the unclaimed remains of veterans, and for other purposes.

The American Legion supports H.R. 9006. The location and identification of unclaimed remains of veterans is a top priority for the organization and we remain committed to ensuring that all missing and unclaimed veterans are identified, returned home, and laid to rest with dignity. A centralized, reliable means of tracking these veterans serves an end the Legion has long pursued, and we support the bill's intent to secure it.

In 2024, an Inspector General report identified inefficiencies with VA's ability to intake and identify unclaimed remains of veterans. The report found that though VA has approximately 27 programs addressing unclaimed remains, there was not a single office that owned or maintained streamlined oversight over these programs.⁵ As a result of the report, VA stood up an integrated project team, created the Unclaimed Veterans Remains program under its Pension and Fiduciary Service, and implemented the Inspector General's data-sharing recommendation.

The American Legion agrees that VA should be more efficient and supports efforts that strengthen information sharing across the department and interagency. However, implementing this portal would require new Memorandums of Understanding for data sharing between agencies, which is a complex process. We would like more information from VA as to how they would integrate the proposed centralized portal into their existing systems and implementation timelines on the MOU process, as well as reporting on the feasibility of standing up a portal under their current IT infrastructure and appropriations which do not account for this expenditure in the current operating budget.

The American Legion supports this legislation through Resolution No. 24: Identify, Honor and Inter Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans.⁶

The American Legion supports H.R. 9006 as written.

H.R. 6588: Priority Response for Veterans Impacted by Disasters and Emergencies (PROVIDE) Act

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expedite the processing of claims for disability compensation by veterans affected by major disasters.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), natural disasters—such as hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, and wildfires—are occurring at a greater rate year over

⁵ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General (VA OIG). Improvements Needed to Ensure Final Disposition of Unclaimed Veterans' Remains. Report No. 19-09592-262. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, October 15, 2024 <https://vaoig.gov/reports/review/improvements-needed-ensure-final-disposition-unclaimed-veterans-remains>

⁶ The American Legion, "Resolution No. 24: Identify, Honor and Inter Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans," May 9, 2007. <https://archive.legion.org/node/3069>

year and leave behind billions of dollars' worth of property damage in their wake.⁷ Last year, flooding in North Carolina and central Texas and wildfires in southern California demonstrated how lethal these natural disasters can be and how quickly an entire community can be completely upended.

H.R. 6588 seeks to address the challenges that are presented to veterans who are experiencing hardship as a result of a disaster. The proposal would grant priority processing to any veteran who resides in an area the President of the United States declares a major disaster under the Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. 5170), as well as provide flexibility for evidence requirements and filing deadlines. The American Legion has experienced first-hand at the post level how devastating and overwhelming the aftermath of a disaster can be, especially if a veteran is forced to relocate or lost sensitive documents in the chaos.

Extending priority to these veterans' claims is a welcomed improvement for exigent circumstances, however, the language must include broad eligibility requirements as to not inadvertently exclude some veterans over others, such as the homeless; terminally ill; former prisoner of war; Medal of Honor recipients, or; Purple Heart recipients. VA has tools to help a veteran impacted by a natural disaster. For instance, VA can extend filing deadlines, reschedule exams and hearings, and grant additional time to submit evidence or respond to a decision. A veteran in severe hardship—sudden job loss, imminent homelessness, foreclosure, a utility shutoff—can already obtain priority processing by filing VA Form 20-10207, which places a hardship flash on the claim. Furthermore, the Board of Veterans' Appeals already advances cases on its docket for hardship, advanced age, homelessness, or terminal illness, and the Chair has the authority on to advance cases for veterans who are impacted by natural disasters and need relief. In this bill, there should also be consideration of the feasibility for VA to, either directly or through a third-party contractor, provide disability examinations in a disaster area with some sites being affected by the disaster.

The American Legion supports H.R. 6588 through Resolution No. 123: Increase the Transparency of the Veterans Benefits Administration Claim Processing, but offer the following amendment:

Amend Section 3 (5)(b): Strike “relating only to subsection (a)(5)” and include “The Secretary shall prescribe additional regulations that do not restrict the veteran to one specific location at the time of filing. Including other instances like disaster, unsheltered homelessness, extreme illness, age, and death. Eligibility criteria should include providing proof of residence impacted by the disaster or special circumstances related to terminal illnesses, cancer, extreme medical debt and the inability to meet basic living conditions.”

Additionally, we remain concerned that moving a veteran's claim up due to a natural disaster risks compounding harm if VA rules against the veteran and lowers their rating. Therefore, we request an additional amendment that moves up cases that are ready to be decided, and that decision results in a positive result for the veteran that increases their disability rating and/or their monetary compensation.

The American Legion supports H.R. 6588 with amendments.

⁷ Smith, Adam B. U.S. Billion-dollar Weather and Climate Disasters, 1980 - present (NCEI Accession 0209268). NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information. Dataset. <https://doi.org/10.25921/stkw-7w73>

H.R. 6921: Hawai'i National Cemetery Act

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a site-selection study for an additional national cemetery in the State of Hawai'i, and for other purposes.

Hawai'i's only national cemetery, the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, holds some 53,000 who served from World War I through Vietnam. The cemetery stopped in-ground casket burials in 1991, and its cremation operations will close by 2036.⁸ This closure will result in roughly 112,000 veterans who call Hawai'i home to lose the ability to be put to rest in the only national cemetery within 2,000+ miles, leaving the state's veterans to rely solely on VA-funded state veteran cemeteries.

As emphasized by our Legion posts in Hawai'i, we know how important it is to honor native Hawai'ian culture and ensure that veterans can be laid to rest on the islands. Cemetery allotment has become an increasing concern across VA's National Cemetery Administration and is even a challenge at high-profile cemeteries, such as Arlington National Cemetery. The American Legion believes that the final wishes of a veteran should be the top priority and highly support the creation of an additional cemetery to meet the needs of the Hawai'ian veteran population.

The American Legion supports H.R. 6921, consistent with Resolution No. 181: National Cemetery Administration, which calls for new national and state cemeteries wherever the need is plain and for the funding to build them.⁹

The American Legion supports H.R. 6921 as written.

Discussion Draft: Unclaimed Veterans' Legacy Grant Program Act

To temporarily expand the authorized uses of grants awarded under the Veterans Legacy Program of the National Cemetery Administration, and for other purposes.

The draft legislation seeks to expand the Veterans Legacy Program's ability to provide grants to organizations that assist in the intake and identification of veterans' remains. As a nation, it is our duty to find, recover, and memorialize veterans with dignity so that their legacy may live on.

The Veterans Legacy Program was built to support community-engagement with non-profits, and those are exactly the organizations this draft should strengthen. The volunteers and American Legion post members of groups like the Missing in America Project, who have done this work for years on donations and resolve. These grants would not create a new capability; they would resource one already proven, and long underfunded. Congress must ensure that organizations who carry out this vital mission have the resources to work efficiently and are adequately funded.

⁸Statement of Ronald P. Han Jr., Director, State Office of Veterans Services, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Field Hearing, October 5, 2022, <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/services/files/7BB899A2-31A0-4150-AAB8-9AC0CCF96D88>.

⁹The American Legion, "Resolution No. 181: National Cemetery Administration," August 30, 2016, <https://archive.legion.org/node/394>.

The American Legion supports the Unclaimed Veterans' Legacy Grant Program Act, consistent with Resolution No. 24: Identify, Honor and Inter Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans.¹⁰

The American Legion supports the discussion draft as written.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and Members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion thanks you for your leadership and for allowing us the opportunity to provide feedback on legislation.

The American Legion looks forward to continuing this work with the Committee and providing the feedback we receive from our membership. Questions concerning this testimony can be directed to Bailey Bishop, Deputy Legislative Director, at b.bishop@legion.org.

¹⁰ The American Legion, "Resolution No. 24: Identify, Honor and Inter Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans," May 9, 2007. <https://archive.legion.org/node/3069>