



## **Statement for the Record**

Paul Shipley  
National Commander  
AMVETS

Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

February 3, 2026

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of AMVETS, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide our testimony on these pending pieces of legislation. As the nation's most inclusive Congressionally-chartered veteran service organization, AMVETS represents the interests of over 20 million veterans, including those from the Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve components.

The legislation before this Subcommittee touches the core of AMVETS' national priorities, particularly mental health, survivor equity, and accountability within the veterans benefits system. While these bills address distinct policy areas, they are connected by the common purpose of ensuring that veterans and their families are not failed by the systems they rely on after service. Whether through how disabilities are recognized, how appeals are resolved, or how survivors are supported after loss, these policies shape outcomes and trust in the system.

AMVETS views disability, memorialization, and accountability as part of a single continuum, and the proposals under consideration today represent practical, targeted opportunities to advance those priorities while delivering fairness and finality for veterans and their families.

### **I. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SUPPORTED BY AMVETS**

#### **H.R. 1004, Love Lives on Act of 2025**

AMVETS is proud to help lead the charge in supporting the Love Lives on Act of 2025. For far too long, the federal government has penalized the surviving spouses of our fallen heroes for finding love after the tragic loss of their loved ones. Under current law, surviving spouses who remarry before the age of 55 face the immediate termination of their Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities.

Most post 9/11 surviving spouses were widowed in their twenties or thirties, yet current law effectively asks them to place their lives on hold for decades to preserve financial stability. More than 95% of eligible surviving spouses choose not to remarry to avoid losing these benefits, forcing an unreasonable choice between companionship and economic security. These benefits are earned entitlements, not welfare. A servicemember's sacrifice does not diminish because a surviving spouse finds a way to move forward.

This legislation would also restore access to TRICARE and other earned benefits if a subsequent marriage ends, and it would bring military survivors into parity with survivors of many first responders who already retain benefits after remarriage.

For the past several years, AMVETS has listed this bill as one of our top national priorities, marching alongside our fellow military service organizations, veteran service organizations, and, most importantly, the surviving families themselves. We cannot claim to honor the fallen while simultaneously penalizing the ones they left behind.

### **H.R. 1685, Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025**

AMVETS also offers full and unwavering support for the Justice for ALS Veterans Act. Although the VA recognizes ALS as a presumptive service-connected condition, the current survivor benefits framework fails to reflect the biological reality of the disease.

Under existing law, surviving spouses only receive the increased DIC rate if the veteran was totally disabled for eight continuous years prior to death. For ALS veterans, that requirement is nearly impossible to meet. Average life expectancy following diagnosis is only two to five years, and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) data shows a median survival of roughly 590 days. ALS is a rapidly progressive disease that places an immediate and overwhelming burden on family caregivers, many of whom must leave the workforce and exhaust savings to provide round-the-clock care.

H.R. 1685 corrects this inequity by removing the eight-year requirement for ALS-related deaths, ensuring that surviving spouses receive the appropriate level of compensation. AMVETS also strongly supports the reporting requirement included in the bill, which will help identify other high-mortality service-connected conditions that warrant similar treatment, so no family is penalized because a disease progresses too quickly to meet an arbitrary statutory timeline.

### **H.R. 5339, Susan E. Lukas 9/11 Servicemember Fairness Act**

AMVETS is proud to stand with the Reserve Organization of America (ROA) in supporting the Susan E. Lukas 9/11 Servicemember Fairness Act. While the PACT Act and the Zadroga Act addressed many toxic exposure gaps, servicemembers who reported for duty at the Pentagon between September 11 and November 19, 2001, were left without presumptive coverage despite exposure to hazardous substances, including asbestos, jet fuel, and pulverized building materials.

Lieutenant Colonel Susan Lukas and thousands of others performed critical recovery and security operations in an environment that was not deemed safe for months. These veterans are currently forced to pursue direct service connection claims that are exceedingly difficult for cancers and respiratory illnesses that emerge years later.

This bill would extend presumptive status to those exposed at the Pentagon and finally close this long-standing gap. By passing H.R. 5339, Congress can finally acknowledge that the toxic wounds sustained at the Pentagon following the 9/11 terrorist attacks are no less deserving of recognition or care.

#### **H.R. 4469, PRESUME Act**

AMVETS strongly supports the Providing Radiation Exposed Servicemembers Undisputed Medical Eligibility (PRESUME) Act. This legislation addresses a long-standing barrier for “atomic veterans” exposed to ionizing radiation during nuclear testing, the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and cleanup operations at radioactive sites.

Current VA regulations rely heavily on dose reconstruction estimates produced decades after exposure, a process AMVETS believes is fundamentally flawed. Radiation affects individuals differently, and requiring veterans to prove a specific dose level often delays or denies care altogether.

The PRESUME Act would prohibit the VA from requiring dose reconstruction for veterans who were present at recognized radiation risk activities and later developed service-connected illnesses. If a veteran was on-site at a recognized radiation-risk activity and has a service-connected illness, they should receive care. We must shift the focus from measuring the dose to treating the veteran. We are proud to stand with Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) in supporting this effort.

#### **H.R. 6698, Board of Veterans Appeals Annual Report Transparency Act of 2025**

AMVETS also supports the Board of Veterans Appeals Annual Report Transparency Act of 2025. Through decades of direct advocacy and litigation support before the Board of Veterans’ Appeals, AMVETS has seen firsthand how delays, remands, and inconsistent decision-making affect veterans and their families. While the Appeals Modernization Act represented meaningful progress, the appeals process remains opaque and deeply frustrating for veterans seeking a final resolution of their claims.

The Board frequently highlights record numbers of decisions issued each year, yet many of those decisions are remands that return cases to regional offices for further development rather than delivering finality. From AMVETS’ experience assisting veterans through the appeals process, transparency is essential to accountability and reform. This legislation would require clearer reporting on the causes of delays and remands, helping ensure the Board is evaluated not just on the volume of decisions issued, but on efficiency, consistency, and timely justice for veterans.

## **II. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SUPPORTED WITH AMENDMENTS**

### **H.R. 5723, FRAUD in VA Disability Exam Act**

AMVETS supports the FRAUD in VA Disability Exam Act, if amended, to protect honest veterans from unintended harm. While rooting out fraud is critical, oversight must be precise. AMVETS is concerned that without safeguards, veterans could be penalized for relying on private medical providers or for clerical errors beyond their control.

We urge Congress to include protections clarifying that private Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) are not inherently suspect, to establish a right to cure minor deficiencies before adverse action is taken, and to direct investigative resources toward systemic abuse rather than isolated claims. Fraud prevention must never become a new barrier to earned benefits, and AMVETS looks forward to working with Committee leadership to ensure this legislation serves as a shield for veterans, not a weapon against them.

## **III. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS WITHOUT FORMAL POSITION**

AMVETS does not have a formal position at this time on the remaining bills before the Subcommittee. As these proposals focus primarily on Departmental reporting, administrative corrections, and specific land-use authorizations, we believe they fall outside of our current primary legislative jurisdiction:

- H.R. 2164, Dayton National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2025
- H.R. 6943, Veterans Burial Allowance and Reimbursement Act of 2026
- Discussion Draft, The National Cemetery Administration Annual Report Act of 2026

However, AMVETS remains committed to the dignity of our National Cemeteries, and we will continue to monitor these proposals as they advance.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

Thank you again for the opportunity to present the views of AMVETS. The legislation before this Subcommittee represents practical opportunities to strengthen that continuum. Whether by ensuring survivors are not penalized for moving forward with their lives, correcting inequities for families affected by ALS, closing long-standing gaps for toxic-exposed servicemembers, or improving transparency in the appeals process, these bills address points where system failure carries real and lasting human consequences.

AMVETS remains committed to working with this Subcommittee to advance policies that deliver fairness, accountability, and finality. We believe that strengthening these systems is essential not only to honoring past service, but to preventing future harm and reinforcing the trust that veterans and their families place in the institutions designed to serve them. We appreciate the Subcommittee's bipartisan engagement on these issues and stand ready to assist as these measures move forward.

### **National Commander, Paul Shipley**

National Commander Paul Shipley was elected to the organization's highest office by his peers in August 2025 at the AMVETS National Convention in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Commander Shipley is a U.S. Army Combat Veteran, having served from 2004 to 2014. He served in Iraq from 2006 to 2007 and was awarded the Combat Action Badge, Army Commendation Medal, and Iraq Campaign Medal. He lives in Uniontown, PA, with his wife and three daughters.

## About AMVETS

AMVETS is the most inclusive congressionally chartered veterans service organization in the United States. Our membership is open to all active-duty service members, reservists, guardsmen, and honorably discharged veterans. As a result, AMVETS members have played a vital role in defending our nation in every conflict since World War II.

Our dedication to these men and women dates back to the post-World War II era, when countless returning service members sought access to the health, education, and employment benefits they had earned. Navigating the government bureaucracy to secure these benefits proved challenging for many, prompting experienced veterans to form local groups to assist their peers. As the veteran population surged into the millions, it became evident that a national organization was needed—one distinct from groups that had been established to serve veterans of previous wars. The emerging generation of veterans sought an organization of their own.

With this vision in mind, 18 delegates from nine veterans' clubs convened in Kansas City, Missouri, on December 10, 1944, to establish The American Veterans of World War II. Less than three years later, on July 23, 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed Public Law 216, officially recognizing AMVETS as the first congressionally chartered organization for post-World War II veterans.

Over the years, our congressional charter has been updated to welcome veterans from subsequent conflicts. AMVETS has also evolved to better meet the needs of newer generations of veterans and their families. To further this mission, we maintain partnerships with other congressionally chartered veterans' organizations as part of the "Big Six" coalition. Additionally, we collaborate with newer groups such as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and The Independence Fund. Our commitment to veterans' well-being is further demonstrated through our partnership with the VA's Office of Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, working to combat the tragic epidemic of veteran suicide.

As AMVETS looks toward the future, we remain steadfast in our dedication to serving those who have defended our nation. We urge the 119th Congress to join us in this commitment by making policy decisions and casting votes that protect and support our veterans.

## **Information Required by Rule XI 2(g) of the House of Representatives**

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts:

Fiscal Year 2025 – The AMVETS National Service Foundation received two active Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP) grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS), under the Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (CFDA 17.805). These grants support employment and reintegration services for veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and include:

- A HVRP award for service delivery in Phoenix, Arizona (AMVETS National Service Foundation, \$500,000).
- A HVRP award for service delivery in Salt Lake City, Utah (AMVETS National Service Foundation, \$500,000).

Fiscal Year 2024 - None

Fiscal Year 2023 - None

Fiscal Year 2022 - None

Fiscal Year 2021 - None

Fiscal Year 2020 - None

Fiscal Year 2019 - None

Disclosure of Foreign Payments – None