



VETERANS DAY UPDATE

RICK SCOTT | NOVEMBER 10, 2023
FLORIDA'S U.S. SENATOR

TABLE OF CONTENTS



02

Table of Contents

03

Message from Senator

04

About Rick Scott

05

Current Legislation

09

Victories for Veterans

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATOR

Dear Friend:

As a Navy veteran myself and the son of a World War II veteran, I know firsthand the sacrifices our veterans, military members and their families make to defend our freedom. Veterans of our Armed Forces truly represent the best of what it means to be an American and a Floridian. I think about my adopted dad, Orba. He had a sixth-grade education, joined the Army as a teenager, fought in the Battle of the Bulge and did all 4 combat jumps in World War II with the 82nd Airborne. He didn't talk about his service often, but he was so proud to be in the U.S. Army, and proud to put on our nation's colors and defend our freedoms.

None of the opportunities and freedoms we have as Americans would be possible without the dedicated service of our brave heroes like my father and those who have served.

That's why, throughout my time as Governor of Florida, I made it my mission to turn our state into the most military and veteran-friendly state in the nation by championing important legislation and funding to support priorities that matter most to Florida's military and veteran families. Fighting for our heroes continues to be one of my top priorities as a U.S. Senator and a member of the Armed Services Committee. I will always do everything I can to support our veterans and their families so they can succeed and pursue their dreams in our state.

To those who have served, I'd like to say THANK YOU and God Bless America.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator



ABOUT RICK

Since joining the U.S. Senate in 2019, Senator Scott has served as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), which has full jurisdiction over the United States Armed Forces. In 2023, Senator Scott was named as the Ranking Member for the SASC Personnel Subcommittee for the 118th Congress. In this role he oversees work related to military and Department of Defense (DOD) civilian personnel policies, end strengths for military personnel, military personnel compensation and benefits, military health care, and military nominations.

An important part of caring for our military personnel includes when an individual transitions from active duty to civilian life. Working to ensure our nation's veterans receive the highest quality of care is of the utmost importance.

The sacrifice that soldiers make when joining the world's greatest military cannot be understated. All proposals before Congress must take that into consideration before changes to any programs that touch our veterans.

This booklet highlights some of the proposals before Congress that have become law with the support of Senator Scott as well as measures he continues to fight for. At the end, you can find where to submit suggestions for improving federal programs.

1,450,000+
VETERANS IN
FLORIDA



87,000+
FLORIDA PACT
ACT RELATED
CLAIMS SINCE
AUG. 2022

165+
VETERANS
RELATED
PIECES OF
LEGISLATION
PASSED



CURRENT LEGISLATION

Senator Scott is always working to make Congress, and the entire federal government, more efficient and work for the American People.

Through advocacy, outreach, and casework, issues arise that highlight the need for increased oversight and Congressional action. The following bills are either sponsored or cosponsored by Senator Scott during the 118th Congress.

Veterans Accessibility Act of 2023

Veterans with disabilities have a right to equal access to programs, services and information at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Yet, recent Congressional oversight found that VA has failed to consistently make its websites, kiosks, and other technology accessible for people with disabilities, as required by law. Over 60 million adults in the United States have a disability, including over one-quarter of our Nation's veterans. Older adults are more likely to develop a disability, including more than 8 million veterans age 65 or older. Older adults in general are a rapidly growing segment of America's population, making accessibility essential for maintaining access to programs and benefits. This legislation provides veterans and people with disabilities a voice to improve accessibility at VA, so no one is left behind.

The *Veterans Accessibility Act of 2023* will establish a Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access at VA. The advisory committee will issue regular reports on VA's compliance with federal disability laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. The reports will include recommendations for improving VA's compliance, and will be shared with Congress, the public, and agencies that oversee the Nation's disability laws. Veterans with disabilities will be among the advisory committee's members, ensuring that their voices are heard.

SCHEDULES for Veterans Act

The *Scheduling for Community Health and Easy Data to Understand for Legislators to Evaluate Services for Veterans Act* directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish an overall timeliness standard from when a consult is entered into the system and a veteran's appointment actually happens. It also requires a quarterly report on the percentage of referrals to providers in the community and appointments at VHA facilities that meet the set standards.

Major Richard Star Act

Current law requires a dollar for dollar offset of these two benefits, meaning they have to forfeit a portion of the benefits they earned in service. It is time to fully honor veterans who were medically retired as a result of injuries incurred in combat or combat-related training. Regardless of time in service, these veterans have earned all their benefits through their extraordinary sacrifice in defending our nation.

The *Major Richard Star Act* is a step in the right direction for providing benefits for those who have earned them.

Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act

This legislation would expand community-based services for aging veterans as well as improve VA support for veterans and caregivers of all ages.

The *Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act* exemplifies former Sen. Elizabeth Dole's passion for supporting veterans and their caregivers by expanding access to home and community-based care programs for veterans, increasing support for noninstitutional care, assessing VA's caregiver and long-term care programs and more.

U.S.-Israel PTSD Collaborative Research Act

The *U.S.-Israel PTSD Collaborative Research Act* would allow the Department of Defense (DoD) to create partnerships through the Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program with American and Israeli institutions aimed at advancing PTSD research, while establishing a grant program to fund the collaborative research conducted through these partnerships.

Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act

The *Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act* establishes a new federal criminal offense for knowingly executing, or attempting to execute, a scheme to defraud an individual of veterans' benefits, or in connection with obtaining veteran's benefits for an individual. A violator is subject to criminal penalties—a fine, a prison term of up to five years, or both.

Supporting Economic Opportunity of Veterans

Senate Bill 291 establishes the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration to administer economic opportunity assistance programs for veterans and their dependents and survivors.

Specifically, the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration must administer the following Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs:

- vocational rehabilitation and employment programs,
- educational assistance programs,
- veterans' housing loan and related programs,
- the Transition Assistance Program, and
- the database of small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans.

Prior to the transfer of administrative responsibilities, the bill requires the VA to certify that (1) the transition of the provision of services will not negatively affect the provision of such services to veterans, and (2) such services are ready to be transferred.

Protecting Veteran Community Care Act

The *Protecting Veteran Community Care Act* addresses the issue of access to mental health care resources for veterans. It strengthens the existing community care program and limits the VA's ability to restrict access to care in the community as well as requires the VA to track relevant community care data.

Veterans Homecare Choice Act of 2023

Access to labor for homecare services has been in decline. In response to that, this bill reinstates veterans' access to home care professionals operating as independent contractors by making any nurse registry eligible for the Community Care Network - expanding access to include more providers for at-home care.

VICTORIES

The most support a Senator can give to a bill is their vote. Below you will find important veterans bills that Senator Rick Scott supported that are now the law of the land.

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022

The PACT Act is the most significant expansion of benefits and services for toxic-exposed veterans in more than 30 years. This law adds to the list of health conditions that are assumed or “presumed” to be caused by exposure to these substances, which helps provide generations of veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve. This law is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history.

The PACT Act provides the VA with mechanisms to enhance claims processing and to increase the workforce. Veterans and survivors can file claims for all conditions in the PACT Act immediately and the law covers all presumptive conditions. A presumptive condition is an illness that is assumed or presumed to be caused by a veteran’s service, and the PACT Act includes new diagnoses and an expanded list of respiratory conditions and cancers. The law covers veterans from Vietnam through Iraq and Afghanistan, and it addresses a broad spectrum of toxic exposures.

The PACT Act is the result of a unified call to strengthen health care and benefits for America’s veterans and their survivors by comprehensively addressing toxic exposures that have impact veterans, as well as their families and caregivers.

While some ailments caused by toxic exposure can present quickly, others can take years to manifest, which left many veterans outside their eligibility window to enroll in VA health care. The PACT Act helps address this issue by expanding care and benefits to veterans and their survivors who were exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

VICTORIES

Faster Payments to Veterans' Survivors Act of 2022

This act is designed to expedite and streamline the process of disbursing payments to the survivors of deceased veterans. Its primary aim is to reduce bureaucratic delays and administrative obstacles that have historically slowed down the distribution of benefits to veterans' surviving family members. By facilitating faster payments, this act seeks to ensure that survivors receive the financial support they are entitled to in a more timely and efficient manner.

Improving Access to the VA Home Loan Benefit Act of 2022

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to update regulations, requirements, and guidance related to appraisals for housing loans guaranteed by the VA.

Specifically, such regulations or requirements must specify when an appraisal is required, how an appraisal is to be conducted, and who is eligible to conduct an appraisal for such loans. The act also requires the VA to submit to Congress recommendations for improving the delivery times for appraisals for VA loans and to take such recommendations into consideration in prescribing its updated regulations or requirements.

The VA must also provide additional guidance for desktop appraisals, which are performed remotely using information gathered by third parties with whom a VA-approved appraiser has entered into an agreement for such appraisal. In updating such guidance, the VA must specifically take into account situations where (1) desktop appraisals provide cost savings for borrowers, and (2) a traditional appraisal requirement could cause time delays and jeopardize the completion of a transaction.

Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to consult with the Department of Defense to identify and refer members of the Armed Forces with health care occupations for employment with the VA during their separation from the Armed Forces.

The VA must refer interested members to a recruiter for consideration of open positions in the member's specialty and geography of interest. Referrals must not be made earlier than one year before the member's separation from the Armed Forces.

VICTORIES

Patient Advocate Tracker Act

This bill creates an online portal where veterans can electronically file and track the status of complaints they file with the VA.

SVAC Act of 2022

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to seek to enter into an agreement with a federally funded research and development center to provide a cybersecurity assessment of five high-impact VA information systems and the effectiveness of the VA's information security program and information security management system.

The VA must submit a plan to Congress to address the findings of the assessment.

The Government Accountability Office must review the assessment and the VA's response to the assessment and report its findings to Congress.

Veterans and Family Information Act

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to make all of its fact sheets available in English, Spanish, Tagalog and each of the 10 most commonly spoken languages not listed. The bill also requires the VA to establish a publicly available website that provides links to all VA fact sheets. Finally, the VA must report to Congress regarding the utilization of such fact sheets as well as the details of the Language Access Plan of the VA

Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022

The Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide an additional automobile allowance immediately to eligible veterans if 30 years have elapsed since the date they received their first automobile grant. Over time, the period would shorten to 10 years.

The Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 would also change the definition of "medical services," to include certain vehicle modifications like van lifts, which are offered through VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program. This latter provision would help ensure veterans with non-service-connected illnesses and injuries continue to receive help through the AAE program. A newly added provision would designate non-articulating trailers designed to transport powered wheelchairs, powered scooters, or other similar mobility devices as adaptive equipment.

VICTORIES

Veterans Eligible to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act

This bill requires the VA to work with students and explain the school credit transfer process and to provide them with a certificate of eligibility from the VA providing proof of their restored benefits.

VA Transparency & Trust Act of 2021

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit a plan for obligating and expending covered funds, which are funds made available to the VA for response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bill requires the VA to submit biweekly reports regarding obligations, expenditures, and planned uses of the funds until seven days after the VA has expended all covered funds.

The Inspector General of the VA must submit reports examining the obligations and expenditures made using covered funds during the specified reporting period.

Finally, the Government Accountability Office must submit an interim report and final report containing a review of obligations and expenditures made using covered funds.

DUMP Opioids Act

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to designate periods during which any individual may dispose of controlled substances medications at VA medical facilities with an on-site pharmacy or a physical location dedicated for law enforcement purposes.

The bill also authorizes the VA to carry out public information campaigns regarding the designated disposal periods.

Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), during FY2022, to establish and maintain three new centers of the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) Program in areas with interest from personnel and a need for additional mental health care for rural veterans. The RANGE Program serves veterans in rural areas who are experiencing mental illness.

The bill requires the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study and report on whether the VA has sufficient resources to serve rural veterans who need mental health care that is more intensive than traditional outpatient therapy.

VICTORIES

Protecting Moms Who Served Act

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement the maternity care coordination program. The VA must provide community maternity care providers (i.e., non-VA maternity care providers) with training and support with respect to the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans, particularly regarding mental and behavioral health conditions in relation to the service of the veterans in the Armed Forces.

Additionally, the Government Accountability Office must report on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among pregnant and postpartum veterans, with a focus on racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes for veterans.

Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program Restoration and Recovery Act of 2022

This bill prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from charging any entitlement to retraining assistance under the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program in situations where an individual was unable to complete a course or program as a result of the closure of an educational institution or the disapproval of a program by the state approving agency or the VA. The period for which retraining assistance is not charged must be equal to the full amount of retraining assistance provided for enrollment in the program of education.

In the event of a closure or disapproval, the educational institution must not receive any further payments under the program, and any payment already made must be considered an overpayment and constitute a liability of the institution to the United States.

PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act:

This bill implements a program and a policy related to service dog therapy for veterans. Specifically, the bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement a five-year pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as an element of a complementary and integrative health program. Eligible veterans are those who are enrolled in the VA health care system and have been recommended for participation by a qualified mental health care provider or clinical team.

VICTORIES

Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions Act

This act addresses the administration of certain Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) educational assistance benefits.

First, the act extends through June 1, 2022, certain adjustments for veterans' education benefits that were put in place due to COVID-19.

The act allows the VA to waive the requirement that an educational institution verify the enrollment of a student utilizing VA educational assistance if the VA determines the institution uses a flat rate tuition and fee structure that would make the use of a second verification unnecessary.

The act provides an exception from the imposition of specified disciplinary actions (e.g., suspending course and program approval) in situations where an educational institution provides a commission, bonus, or other incentive payment to entities engaged in student recruiting or admission activities related to recruiting foreign students who reside in foreign countries and are ineligible for federal student assistance.

Additionally, the act generally exempts from certain requirements and restrictions imposed by the VA or a state approving agency educational institutions (1) located in foreign countries, or (2) that provide information regarding the costs of a program of education using a form or template developed by the Department of Education.

The act also exempts educational institutions located in foreign countries from (1) having records and accounts that pertain to an individual who is not receiving VA educational assistance examined by government representatives, and (2) furnishing certain information related to tests that require payment.

The act authorizes the VA, in certain circumstances, to provide educational assistance (including a housing stipend) to veterans or eligible persons who are in their last academic period (e.g., semester) of a program of education and are pursuing the program on less than a half-time basis. Specifically, such assistance may be provided if the number of credits the person needs to complete the program of education is less than the number of credits that would constitute enrollment on more than a half-time basis for that last academic period and the person (1) is enrolled in or has completed every course offered by the program of education during that academic period, and (2) enrolls in an additional course that is not required for the program of education to reach enrollment on a more than a half-time basis.

The act extends certain loan fee rates through January 14, 2031, under the VA's home loan program.

Finally, the act removes the cap on the number of full-time VA employees who provide equal employment opportunity counseling.

VICTORIES

Solid Start Act of 2022:

This act permanently authorizes and expands the Solid Start program, which is an outreach program for veterans in their first year of separation from the military.

Specifically, the act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to coordinate with the Department of Defense to

1. collect updated contact information during transition classes or separation counseling for members of the Armed Forces who are separating from service;
2. explain the existence and purpose of the program;
3. call veterans three times within the first year of separation;
4. publish information about the program in booklets and on the VA website;
5. provide women veterans with information tailored to their health care and benefit needs;
6. provide information on access to state and local resources, such as Vet Centers;
7. gather and analyze data that assesses the effectiveness of the program;
8. ensure calls are tailored to each veteran's needs by conducting quality assurance tests; and
9. prioritize outreach to veterans who have accessed mental health resources prior to separation from the Armed Forces.

Under the act, the VA is authorized to (1) encourage members of the Armed Forces to provide additional contact information if they are unreachable following their separation, and (2) follow up on missed phone calls.

Wounded Veterans Recreation Act

This bill instructs the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to make the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass available, without charge and for the lifetime of the passholder, to (1) any U.S. citizen or person domiciled in the United States who has been medically determined to be permanently disabled, if the citizen or person furnishes adequate proof of the disability and such citizenship or residency; and (2) any veteran who has been found to have a service-connected disability.

VICTORIES

Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative Act of 2020

This bill establishes the Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative within the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The initiative shall:

- serve as legal and policy advisor on DOJ's efforts to enforce criminal and civil laws that impact service members, veterans, and their families;
- develop policy recommendations for improved enforcement of federal law to support service members, veterans, and their families;
- serve as the liaison and point of contact between DOJ and the military departments;
- provide counsel for the Office of Justice Programs to ensure that funding decisions take into account service members, veterans, and their families;
- serve as a liaison and point of contact with the Consumer Protection Branch of DOJ's Civil Division with respect to the prosecution of federal crimes involving fraud that target service members; and
- serve as a liaison and point of contact with other DOJ components as needed to support the enforcement of other federal laws that protect service members and veterans.

Supporting Veterans in STEM Careers Act

This bill addresses the participation of veterans in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, including by making veterans eligible for certain National Science Foundation (NSF) programs.

(Sec. 3) The bill directs the NSF to (1) encourage veterans to study and pursue careers in STEM and computer science in coordination with other federal agencies that serve veterans, and (2) submit a plan to Congress for enhancing veterans outreach.

The National Science Board shall provide in its annual report on the state of science and engineering in the United States relevant data on veterans in science and engineering careers or education programs.

The bill provides for veterans' participation in (1) the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship program to recruit and train mathematics and science teachers, (2) NSF fellowships and masters fellowships for mathematics and science teachers, (3) computer and network security capacity building grants, and (4) traineeship grants leading to a doctorate degree in computer and network security research.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy shall establish an interagency working group to improve veteran and military spouse equity and representation in STEM fields.

(Sec. 4) The Government Accountability Office must study (1) the academic success rates of student veterans pursuing an undergraduate degree in STEM, computer science, medicine, or other fields identified as meeting national needs; and (2) the barriers faced by such students in pursuing such degrees.

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