

LEGISLATION
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We are, fundamentally, a nation of laws. The Legislative Program celebrates this foundational element by helping the Auxiliary to be advocates for legislation that promotes and elevates veterans' affairs. Our veterans, active service members, and their families have sacrificed so much to protect America's legislative system – they should get the best it has to give back to them. We can help make that happen.

All 435 seats in the House of Representatives are up for election this year. Of the 100 U.S. Senate seats, 35 are up for grabs and governors will be chosen in 36 states. Thousands of state-level senators and representatives will be voted in, or out, of office, as well. The candidates are listening: you can make your voice heard and tell our legislators that you care about veterans' issues and you expect them to do the same.

Ideas for activities:

- Connect with your Hospital Program volunteers to help distribute vote-by-mail applications to hospitalized veterans and/or other limited-mobility citizens
- Pass out "I Vote In Honor of A United States Veteran" stickers
- Host a candidate forum and invite candidates to speak and respond to questions relating to veterans affairs – consider combining this with a Family Freedom Festival gathering.

We have some excellent tools at hand to help us articulate our message: the **VFW Priority Goals** and the **VFW Action Corps Weekly**. Each year, the VFW defines the main legislative goals for us to support, broken into eight main areas of concern:

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| ▪ Budget | ▪ Education, Employment and Transition Assistance |
| ▪ Workforce Development and Accountability | ▪ Defense and Homeland Security |
| ▪ Healthcare | ▪ Military Quality of Life |
| ▪ Compensation and Benefits | ▪ POW/MIA |

The **Priority Goals** outline the principal legislative initiatives we promote, such as allocating proper funding to ensure an adequate VA system for all veterans and reducing the claims backlogs, addressing veteran homelessness and suicide, and promoting education and

employment opportunities to assist service members and their families when transitioning back to civilian life. Released every January, it is posted on the national website at www.vfwauxiliary.org -- select "What We Do" and then "Legislative." Every candidate for the House and Senate should be given a copy of this one-page document.

The **VFW Action Corps Weekly** is a free, short newsletter, in which the VFW's Washington Office summarizes (in plain English) all legislative activity affecting veterans, active service members and their families. This is one of the best tools we have to educate our members about veterans' concerns, and about where we want our legislators to focus *their* attention and support.

- Note: When the **Action Corps Weekly** sends you an "Action Alert," it's a call to action to tell our legislators by letter / e-mail / fax / phone call of the position we want them to take on a particular bill in Congress. As our elected representatives, we can and should hold them accountable if they do not share our views. The **Action Corps** website has a wonderfully simple tool that has short notes *already drafted* to send your legislators (based on your Zip Code) about pressing issues. You can edit it as you wish, and send it electronically in seconds, or you can print out the notes for mailing to share with those who do not have Internet connectivity. In whatever way you choose, you can make your voice be heard and be counted, and thereby make a difference.

The focus of the Legislative Program is on engagement: become involved both individually AND collectively with your Auxiliary, your schools and your community. We can fill an important role by contacting schools and providing a brief program on the legislative process and citizen advocacy, using the Auxiliary's "Guide to the Legislative Process" and the "Guide on Contacting Your Legislators" as well as other materials from the national website to help students learn more about veterans and their needs. In doing so, you can help students to find *their* voices, and use them to promote citizen advocacy effectively.

Ideas for activities:

- Contact a high school, junior college or adult education civics class and ask to give a short talk on the legislative process and how it can affect our service members and their families, and then pass out **Action Corps Weekly**, the **Priority Goals** and copies of any "**Action Alert**" letters

- Team up with your Auxiliary's Scholarships and/or Youth Activities Program Sisters and Brothers to make it a joint event, reaching out to Scout Troops, youth sports teams and kids' church groups
- Prominently feature copies of the **Priority Goals** and **Action Corps Weekly** at the Legislative booth in your Family Freedom Festival – you can create a simple game, quiz or coloring sheet that steps through the legislative process and then offer a "Random Act of Patriotism (RAP)" card or coin, or a piece of wrapped candy, for children's entries.

RESOURCES and WEBSITES:

VFW Priority Goals

VFW Action Corps Weekly

"Guide to the Legislative Process"

"Guide to Contacting Your Legislators"

"VFW Auxiliary Involvement in Elections and Political Activities"

www.vfwauxiliary.org

www.vfw.org/advocacy/grassroots-efforts

www.veterans.house.gov

www.veterans.senate.gov

www.whitehouse.gov

www.thomas.gov



AWARDS:

There will be awards for the **Outstanding District Chairman** and **Outstanding Auxiliary Chairman**. All awards will be based on the **best promotion** of the Legislative Program, using the criteria set forth by the National Legislative Ambassador:

1. How did your Auxiliary/District promote the VFW Priority Goals?
2. How did you educate youth on the legislative process?
3. How did your Auxiliary/District encourage members to communicate with legislators on veterans' issues?
4. How many members signed up for the Action Corps Weekly?
5. How did your Auxiliary/District communicate pending legislations and special legislative alerts?
6. How did you use the tools outlined in the "Guide to Contacting Your Legislators"?

The "**Legacy Awards**," honoring our Past Department Presidents, go to the Auxiliary Chairman in the state who best promotes the following:

- Legacy Award in Honor of Past Department President Marilyn Peck – Best Creative Promotion of the Legislative Program Tools (Priority Goals, Action Corps Weekly, "Guides" noted above, etc.)
- Legacy Award in Honor of Past Department President Judy Jones – "Best Promotion of Student Education on the Legislative Process."

