



WWP WARRIORS MEET WITH CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES DURING OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2024 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the Spring 2024 issue of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Advocacy News. WWP™ advocacy efforts connect you and your fellow warriors with your elected officials, providing you a voice in our nation's capital and empowering you to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 wounded, ill, and injured veterans, Service Members, and their families.

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LETTER FROM OUR VP
**The Impact of
Warrior Advocates**

MORE THAN 75 WWP WARRIORS JOIN TOGETHER ON STEPS OF CAPITOL HILL.

Working in Washington, DC, I periodically get the opportunity to go for a jog around the National Mall. I often stop at one of my favorite monuments, the Korean War Memorial. The image of soldiers patrolling in Korea wearing their ponchos reminds me of my time in service.

As I run back toward the World War II Memorial, I reflect on the many lessons I learned from the late Senator Bob Dole, a great mentor. He was a huge influence in my life and the reason I chose a career in advocacy that ultimately gave me the great privilege of serving as vice president of government and community relations at WWP.

I recall a conversation we had when I questioned whether what we were doing was making a difference. Being new to DC and Capitol Hill, it was hard to see how what we were doing wasn't being drowned out by every other big issue on Capitol Hill or on the news. It is a question I'm sure many WWP warriors also have when they first get involved in WWP's advocacy efforts.

"Are we really making a difference when we write a letter to our member of Congress or meet with our member or their staff?"

It is easy to give you the same response I got from Sen. Dole: "If not you, then who will speak up for your fellow brothers and sisters in arms?"

I would add that when you speak up, you WILL have an impact. Let me share some of the impact you have had recently.

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LETTER FROM OUR VP (CONT.)

“Are we really making a difference when we write a letter to our member of Congress or meet with our member or their staff?”

During WWP’s Operation Advocacy Fly-In in March, WWP warriors from across the country had nearly 120 meetings with congressional offices on Capitol Hill. Because it was you, veterans from across the country, visiting with your members, over 40 members of Congress joined the meetings, not just their staff. These were meetings led by your fellow WWP warriors, not our staff here in DC.

After one week, here’s what happened:

- Thirty-one additional Representatives and three Senators cosponsored the Not Just a Number Act, a bill that would require VA to prepare an annual report on suicide prevention and examine veterans’ benefits usage to evaluate the relationship between VA benefits and suicide outcomes.
- Two additional Senators cosponsored the Major Richard Star Act that would eliminate the dollar-for-dollar offset for soldiers wounded in combat and medically retired.
- One new Representative cosponsored the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship Opportunity Act, which would reform the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship by removing the requirement that applicants must have exhausted their post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and allowing student veterans to use the scholarship toward graduate classes.

Now, I can’t tell you with 100% certainty that all of those new Congressional supporters were a result of those meetings, but I can tell you that several Congressional offices followed up with us and told us **they signed on as cosponsors SPECIFICALLY because of your advocacy.** The hard work of every warrior who flew into DC and met with members of Congress — that’s what had an impact.

I appreciate how busy we can get in our daily lives, and asking you to take time out of your busy schedules is not lost on us. That is why, when we ask you to take action on



WWP WARRIORS PREPARE FOR CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS DURING OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN.

an issue, we do so knowing that your efforts will make a difference. The impact isn’t always immediate and often can take a while — the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act (PACT Act) is a great example. But change does happen. We see it all the time here in Washington, DC.

The bottom line is that your actions make a difference.

The emails you send, the phone calls you make, and the meetings you have — all of them make a difference.

You’ll find plenty of opportunities in this newsletter issue to take action and make a difference, but I want to highlight one in particular. The Major Richard Star Act is in a similar situation to what the PACT Act was a few years ago. While this bill is overwhelmingly supported by both sides of the aisle in the U.S. House of Representatives (326 cosponsors) and the Senate (73 cosponsors), we have not been able to get it over the finish line.

WWP is launching a major campaign this summer to put pressure on Congress to finally get the job done. It will involve letters, meetings, and even public events with elected officials, asking them to pass the Major Richard Star Act.

You can read more in our article below, but this is a huge opportunity to make an impact. There’s no good reason for not passing the Major Richard Star Act. It’s time we tell Congress to get the job done, and I hope you’ll join us when we launch the campaign.

To honor and empower,



JOSE RAMOS
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
VP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS


SPRING ADVOCACY UPDATES

Legislative and Program Updates

WOMEN WARRIORS INITIATIVE ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION IN TACOMA, WA

Omnibus Veterans Bill

WWP continues to hear from legislative offices that an omnibus veterans bill will move through Congress this year. The bill, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veteran Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, would include several bipartisan proposals to enhance and reform service delivery at VA. Some of the proposals would focus on providing more support for caregivers, ensuring total funding for the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) education program, and enhancing the VA Community Care program.

WWP's priority will be to ensure inclusion and total funding for the VA Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program, which provides medical, psychological, rehabilitative, and restorative care in a therapeutic environment. WWP will continue to monitor the status of this omnibus bill and will alert warriors if action is needed to ensure its passage.

EXPLORE Act

The House of Representatives has passed H.R. 6492, the [Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences \(EXPLORE\) Act](#). This comprehensive bill supports outdoor recreation at federal parks by modernizing the visitor experience, reducing overcrowding, and improving access for those with disabilities — among other improvements. The bill is important to warriors, as nearly 55% of WWP warriors reported using physical activity to deal with stress, emotional challenges, and mental health concerns (per WWP's 2023 Annual Warrior Survey).

WWP specifically supports provisions in the EXPLORE Act that were first introduced by [Rep. Jen Kiggans \(R-VA-2\) as part of H.R. 6342, the Military and Veterans in Parks \(MVP\) Act](#). That bill would require the establishment of at least three new accessible trails and two new accessible recreation opportunities in each region managed by the United States Forest

Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, the act will establish a pilot program under which the federal government employs veterans in positions that relate to the conservation and resource management activities of the Department of the Interior.

The EXPLORE Act now heads to the Senate, where WWP will be working to ensure that the MVP Act provisions described above remain in the final version of this or similar legislation. We will alert warriors if advocacy action is needed.

WWP Women Warriors Initiative

A series of roundtable events and focus groups, both in person and virtual, are scheduled throughout 2024 and 2025 that will engage WWP women warriors in discussions about critical issues, challenges, and opportunities they are currently facing. In-person events will feature both a public component, such as a panel or open forum, and a private discussion where WWP women warriors will cover a variety of subjects related to transition and life after military service. The ideas and perspectives that result from the discussions will be reflected in the 2025 Women Warriors Report.

The first two roundtables, which kicked off in March in Los Angeles, CA, and Tacoma, WA, featured panels that included representatives from VA, veteran service organizations, and local, state, and federal lawmakers' offices. WWP is especially appreciative of Reps. Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) and Derek Kilmer (D-WA-06) for their participation and support of these events.

This year's roundtable events, as well as the 2024 Women Warriors Summit, are made possible through Boeing's support. WWP is appreciative of their support for these events and for women veterans.



CALL TO ACTION

The Major Richard Star Act

MAJOR RICHARD STAR (CENTER) AND WIFE, TONYA, (RIGHT) SPEAK TO CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES.

You've probably heard about the Major Richard Star Act by now — it's been one of WWP's major legislative priorities for years. But while the bill has significant bipartisan support, (326 cosponsors in the House and 73 in the Senate), it has yet to be approved by Congress. Two years ago, the bill was in a similar situation: substantial bipartisan support, but it wasn't added to the National Defense Authorization Act or any military or veteran legislation Congress ultimately passed.

We can't let that happen again, which is why we're asking warriors to get involved with a new campaign later this summer to push for passage of the Major Richard Star Act.

What Is the Major Richard Star Act?

The Major Richard Star Act (S.344 / H.R.1282) would provide both disability compensation and retirement pay simultaneously for retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability. Currently, only military retirees with at least 20 years of service and a disability rating of at least 50% can collect both benefits at the same time. For all other retirees, current law requires a dollar-for-dollar offset of these two benefits, meaning they must forfeit a portion of the benefits they earned in service.

The bill would allow military retirees who are eligible for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) to receive both their full retirement pay and disability compensation. Veterans wouldn't be required to take advantage of the act, but it would give them another choice to consider as they figure out what's best for them when planning for their military transition.

Being forced to retire because of combat injuries represents one of the most significant sacrifices a soldier can make to their country. Penalizing them is just wrong.

The Major Richard Star Act does not impact a significant number of veterans relative to the overall veteran population. There are an estimated 16.5 million veterans in the United States. This policy affects 53,000 veterans or .321% (less than a third of 1 percent) of all veterans. Yet, these long-time wounded veterans have been denied thousands, and potentially hundreds of thousands, of dollars in retirement pay.

CALL TO ACTION (CONT.)

The Campaign: How You Can Help

WWP will announce when the campaign will launch this summer. It will begin in stages, initially targeting certain Congressional districts and states and gradually involving more warriors. A campaign resources webpage will include everything you need to help your fellow warriors, such as:

- ★ Talking points about the bill.
- ★ Sample emails to your members of Congress.
- ★ Social media posts you can use on Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter).
- ★ Questions about the bill you can ask your candidates running for Congress at local political events.
- ★ Timelines, updates, and the latest information about the bill.



PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR JEREMY VILLANUEVA, SEN. ROGER WICKER (R-MS), AND TONYA STAR

POTENTIAL IMPACT

The Major Richard Star Act would ensure that every veteran who qualifies for combat-related special compensation can receive their full disability benefits and retirement pay.



16.5 M
veterans in the United States.



This policy affects **53,000** veterans or 0.321% (less than a third of 1 percent) of all veterans.



100% qualifying veterans can receive both their full retirement pay and disability compensation.

Most importantly, the webpage will have an email template you can send to your fellow veterans, encouraging them to get involved. It's critical that a large number of veterans get engaged with this campaign. The support needs to be so overwhelming that Congress will realize it must act.

The Major Richard Star Act would ensure that every veteran who qualifies for CRSC can receive their full disability benefits and retirement pay. It shouldn't matter how long a veteran who was forced to medically retire due to combat or combat-related injuries served. Being forced to retire because of combat injuries represents one of the most significant sacrifices a soldier can make to their country. Penalizing them is just wrong.

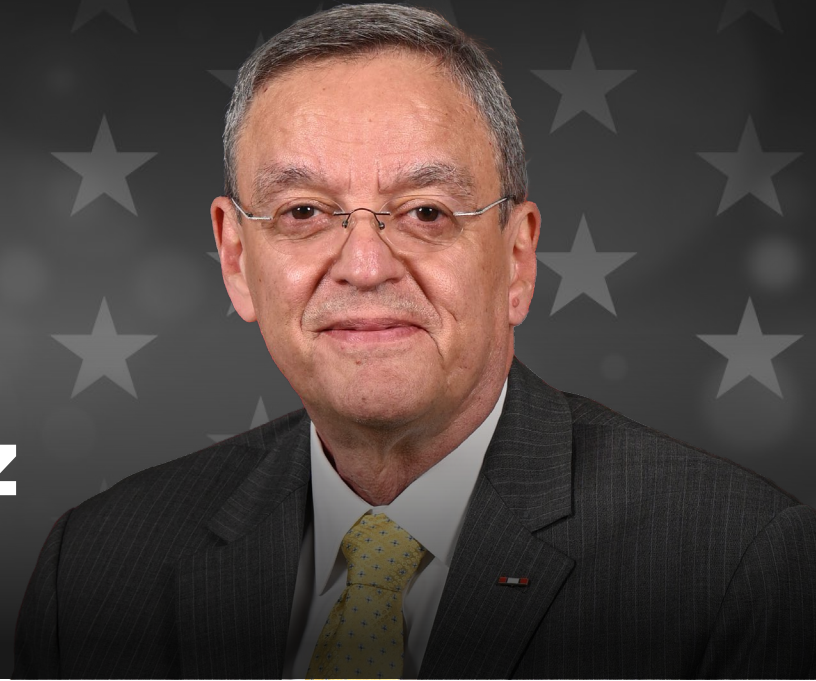
We urge you to get involved, learn more about the bill, contact your members of Congress, and urge your friends and fellow veterans to do the same.

If you have any questions, please email advocacy@woundedwarriorproject.org.

WWP INTERVIEW

Dr. Lester Martinez-Lopez

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs



On February 16, 2023, the Senate confirmed Dr. Lester Martinez-Lopez as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (ASD(HA)). He joined the U.S. Army in 1978 and was sent to Fort Bragg, now Fort Liberty, in North Carolina, where he received his specialty training in family practice and was commissioned a captain upon the completion of his training. He selflessly served in the Army for nearly three decades, retiring in 2005 after 27 years of service.

Dr. Martinez-Lopez is now tackling many of the concerns that families, retirees, and WWP have raised related to access to care and staffing shortages across the Military Health System (MHS). He is also addressing issues that were highlighted by a November 2023 Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Inspector General (OIG) [report](#).

A variety of factors have contributed to the current challenges to the MHS, and WWP welcomes Dr. Martinez-Lopez's attention to ensuring the system is viable for the long term and that beneficiaries always have access to military treatment facilities (MTFs) across the country. This is a key priority for WWP, since over 50% of WWP warriors use the DoD MHS.

An important aspect of Dr. Martinez-Lopez's plan is to reverse the department's previous strategy of outsourcing many health care services, increase capacity

at MTFs, and improve the overall veteran experience. The department's ultimate goal is to reattract patients back to DoD direct care system.

WWP was pleased to be able to interview Dr. Martinez-Lopez and hear directly about his background and priorities in his important role at DoD. To learn more about the Military Health System Strategy, we encourage you to read DoD's [Military Health System Strategic Plan for 2024 - 2029](#).

“This plan is a guide to the hard work ahead as we work together to implement this strategy. Success will require all of us moving in the same direction with a shared commitment to those we serve.”

— **DR. LESTER MARTINEZ-LOPEZ**
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS

WWP INTERVIEW (CONT.)

Q

You retired from the U.S. Army as a major general in 2005 after having achieved multiple major accomplishments while in service, such as being the first Latino to head the Army Medical Research and Materiel Command. After a full career in the military and a successful post-service career as the chief medical officer at the Brandon Regional Hospital in Florida and the senior vice president and administrator of the Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital in Texas, what motivated you to come back to serve as the ASD(HA)?

Dr. Martinez-Lopez: I was happily retired in Tampa, enjoying my grandchildren, when the call came. I was honored to be asked to take on this role, and anyone who has served knows that when the Commander in Chief asks you to serve your country, you have to consider it seriously. But more than that, I saw this as an opportunity to apply my three decades of experience in military medicine to help set policy for a critical requirement for the defense of the United States: readiness. We are in a very challenging period for health care in general, and military health care in particular, and it's a privilege to be part of meeting those challenges.

Q

For those who don't know what the ASD(HA) does, can you tell us what your role is within DoD MHS?

Dr. Martinez-Lopez: The ASD(HA) is the principal advisor to the Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD P&R) for all DoD health and force health protection policies, programs, activities, and the Integrated Disability Evaluation System. In carrying out these responsibilities, the ASD(HA) exercises authority, direction, and control through the Defense Health Agency over DoD medical and dental personnel authorizations and policy, facilities, programs, funding, and other consolidated resources. It is like being the Secretary of Health for DoD.

“I saw this as an opportunity to apply my three decades of experience in military medicine to help set policy for a critical requirement for the defense of the United States: *readiness.*”

— **DR. LESTER MARTINEZ-LOPEZ**
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS

Q

How does being a veteran, a provider, and a beneficiary who uses TRICARE, influence your approach to directing the MHS strategy?

Dr. Martinez-Lopez: Each of those roles gives me valuable insight into the needs of our beneficiaries and our providers. Over the past year, I have visited many MTFs, research centers, and partner locations, and I think my past experiences helped me be a better listener. I know what the providers are talking about when they tell me they want to spend their time taking care of patients. I know what Service Members mean when they talk about wanting to know that their families are well cared for. I know what retirees are going through in getting access to care. I take all this into consideration as we evaluate the impact of policy choices so that I can make fully informed recommendations to the Secretary of Defense.

WWP INTERVIEW (CONT.)

“Our providers want and need to see patients on a regular basis — it’s the only way to maintain clinical readiness and keep skills fresh.”

— **DR. LESTER MARTINEZ-LOPEZ**
 ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
 FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS



You recently released the 2024-2029 MHS strategy, and one of the goals is to stabilize the MHS. Can you talk about the role beneficiaries play in helping the system stabilize and how using MTFs impacts readiness?

Dr. Martinez-Lopez: One of the keys to stabilizing the MHS is to reattract beneficiaries to MTFs. Too many patients have been sent out to the private network, and we need to reverse that trend. It’s a readiness issue. Our providers want and need to see patients on a regular basis — it’s the only way to maintain clinical readiness and keep skills fresh. We are working on processes to do this, starting with specialty areas in which we have available capacity. This situation was years in the making, and it will take some time for us to rectify, but we are making progress.



You spent 27 years serving our country. What was your most memorable experience while in service?

Dr. Martinez-Lopez: I have had so many memorable experiences while in uniform that it is difficult to pick only one. But if I had to choose, I would say it was my first overseas assignment as a young Army doctor. I was deployed to the Sinai as part of a multinational United Nations force following the Camp David Agreement. I saw firsthand the power of international cooperation as well as the medical needs that exist around the world. Until that deployment, I wasn’t sure how long I would stay in the Army, but that experience brought home the kind of impact I could make as part of the military medical force and influenced my decision to make military medicine my career and continue to serve.



About DoD’s TRICARE Program

TRICARE is the health care program for uniformed Service Members, retirees, and their families that is managed by the Defense Health Agency under the leadership of the ASD(HA).

The TRICARE Open Season is an annual period when veterans can enroll in, change, or disenroll from a

TRICARE health plan. Each year, it runs from the Monday of the second full week in November through the Monday of the second full week in December. Changes made during the TRICARE Open Season go into effect on January 1 of the following year. You can learn more about TRICARE [here](#), including [eligibility](#).

GREEN & GOLD CONGRESSIONAL AIDE PROGRAM




Career Opportunities for Gold Star Families, Veterans, and Active-Duty Spouses

Are you interested in working with Congress, developing your skills, or even starting a new career?

The Green & Gold Congressional Aide Program was established to create employment opportunities within the U.S. House of Representatives for veterans, Gold Star Families, and active-duty spouses (collectively known as Green & Gold Aides).

These positions provide Green & Gold Aides with the experience and exposure necessary to broaden their career opportunities. Green & Gold Aides may be assigned to specific members of Congress, congressional committees, or House officers and will serve as two-year, paid full-time staff in Washington, DC, or member district offices across the country.

To participate, you must meet all the following requirements:

 VETERANS	 GOLD STAR FAMILY APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS	 ACTIVE-DUTY SPOUSE APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Honorably discharged; Released from active duty within the last six years; and Pay grades at or below E-5/O-3/W-2. Veterans promoted to the pay grades of E-6/O-4/W-3 within six months of separation from active duty are eligible if they also meet ALL other eligibility requirements. Veterans who receive a 20-year or Temporary Early Retirement (TERA) retirement are not eligible for the program. 	<p>Applicants must be the spouse, child/stepchild, parent/stepparent, sibling/stepparent of a veteran who died either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the line of duty while serving in the armed forces. Of a service-connected disability. 	<p>Applicants must be the spouse of an active-duty Service Member. Active-duty Service Members work for the military full time and are subject to permanent change of station or permanent change of assignment orders upon completion of each tour of duty.</p> <p>Those subject to Title X mobilization are not eligible.</p>

Duties and More Information

Duties will vary depending on specific office requirements, but may include constituent services, resolving issues with federal agencies, liaison to local veterans service organizations, attending local events, and performing legislative work.

Positions are not guaranteed to lead to continued employment beyond the two-year assignment.

In addition, applicants should understand that while the website lists numerous opportunities, the appropriations process limits the number of fellowships that can be filled. Once a certain number of fellowships have been finalized and the program budget has reached its limit, no more fellowships will be approved, even if opportunities are still listed on the website.

To apply through the Green & Gold Congressional Aide Program, you must use the [online application process](#) and should not contact or submit applications to a specific congressional office.



WWP OPERATION ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT

VA Service

Assistive Technology for Veterans

THE TEAM OF REHABILITATION ENGINEERS AT ROOM HAVE PRODUCED ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR VETERANS FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS.

Earlier this year, WWP staff visited the Veteran Health Affairs (VHA) Richmond Office of Advanced Manufacturing (ROAM) and IDEAS Center. At the center, VHA staff, led by Director Melissa Oliver and Site Lead Brian Burkhardt, are doing extraordinary work in the areas of anatomical models and assistive technology. They provide personalized solutions for individual wounded veterans, ranging from wireless new call systems and shoe pressure sensor alarms to adaptive utensils and electric toothbrush holders.

WWP asked the center to write the following article for Operation Advocacy newsletter about its work, how it is impacting veterans, and how warriors can potentially work with ROAM.

VA's Office of Advanced Manufacturing (OAM) and its Central Virginia VA Health Care System opened a new advanced manufacturing lab in Richmond, Virginia, earlier this year. This newly renovated 7,300-square-foot space is a flagship location for VA's 3D-printing capability.

OAM is VA's national program office providing oversight for six advanced manufacturing sites across the U.S. OAM is VA's first entity to attain FDA 510k clearance

for 3D-printed devices, and the organization oversees product development and manufacturing infrastructure. It also promotes best practices across the nation's largest integrated health care network.

If a veteran in Los Angeles needs a custom 3D-printed device, it can be created in Richmond and shipped directly to the veteran.

"It's impressive to see VA's commitment to advancing health care for veterans through the ROAM lab," said Brian Burkhardt, site leader for ROAM. "This dedication showcases VA's adaptability and commitment to serving veterans."

VA SERVICE SPOTLIGHT (CONT.)

“They have everything I need; I just have to ask. This is the smartest thing I ever did. I don’t know where I would be without the VA.”

— **TIM MEYERS**
NAVY VETERAN



ROAM HAS THE CAPABILITY TO CREATE ADAPTED PRODUCTS FOR VETERANS IN A VARIETY OF MATERIALS, INCLUDING METAL.

This approach gives VA access to product availability that’s practically unlimited, which led to OAM’s slogan: “We make what we cannot buy.”

The goals of the OAM network are to provide equitable access to new products, fuel collaboration between clinicians and product designers, strengthen supply chain resiliency by insourcing manufacturing capabilities, and to spread successful products to the more than 170 VA medical centers around the country.

ROAM has increased its 3D-printing capacity by an estimated 50% and can create adapted products in a variety of materials, including metal. ROAM has also added other capabilities, including injection molding, water jet cutting, vacuum forming, and computer-assisted manufacturing machines for a higher degree of precision. Engineers at the Richmond facility can also design 3D products that can even be printed at another VA facility.

VA’s teams in Richmond have focused on assistive technology for more than a decade. This small, dedicated team of rehabilitation engineers, led by an occupational therapist, has produced 3D-printed solutions for veterans to increase their quality of life and independence. For veterans who are paralyzed or have limited mobility, these improvements can have a substantial impact on their day-to-day lives.

The products created at ROAM can vary widely in complexity — from models of patients’ organs for pre-surgical planning to a simple device that allows veterans

to grip pens or pencils more easily. What they all have in common, though, is that they give veterans access to better tech and tools while expanding the unique options that VA clinicians can offer as part of veteran care.

Tim Meyers, a Navy veteran, worked with rehabilitation engineers in Richmond to develop a customized device that enables him to push elevator buttons from his wheelchair. The concept sounds simple, but every veteran has their own range of motion, dexterity, and abilities, and simply holding onto a pole to push a button requires solving each individual’s unique set of problems.

Meyers said he was impressed by the care team’s customized solution.

“They have everything I need; I just have to ask,” he said. “This is the smartest thing I ever did. I don’t know where I would be without the VA.”

VA has made significant strides in providing access to high-quality health care for veterans in recent years. With the implementation of new legislation, such as the PACT Act, COMPACT Act, and SERVICE Act, VA constantly works to bring the best to our nation’s heroes.

Are you interested in learning more about these VA services? Talk to your VA provider about expanded access to VA care or about how 3D-printed medical devices can help you. Visit the Office of Advanced Manufacturing [website](#) for deeper insights into this groundbreaking work.

OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN

WWP Warriors Hit Capitol Hill to Advocate for the Veteran Community

FORMER WWP CEO, LT. GEN. (RET.) MIKE LINNINGTON TESTIFIES AT THE HOUSE AND SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEES JOINT HEARING.

In early March, 75 WWP warriors from across the country traveled to Washington, DC, as part of Operation Advocacy, WWP's grassroots advocacy program that connects warriors with elected officials and provides them a voice in our nation's capital.

Over two days, warriors met with 120 congressional offices to discuss WWP's top legislative priorities, including mental health, access to gender-specific care for women veterans, and financial wellness. During these meetings, warriors shared their experiences and spoke about the unique challenges veterans face.

"For me, it was empowering to walk the halls of the Capitol and meet with the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Mike Bost, to discuss issues related to suicide prevention," said WWP warrior and Army veteran Anton Harb Jr., who lives in Michigan.

Matthew Templeton, a WWP warrior and Army veteran, traveled from his hometown of Evansville, Indiana, and met with congressional offices from several Midwestern states, including Indiana's Rep. Frank Mrvan (D-IN-01) and Sen. Todd Young (R-IN).

"After meeting with different representatives, senators, and their staff members, I was excited to see how many of them care for the veterans and the work they put in to

ensure we are getting the benefits we have earned and deserve," said Matthew.

In addition to these meetings, the warriors also participated in WWP-hosted advocacy training and team meetings to learn best practices when advocating for specific issues. "The WWP fly-in fully prepared warriors to understand legislative priorities key to improving the quality of life for all our nation's veterans," Anton added.

For the first time, Warrior Advocate Leaders — or WALs, a new volunteer position created under Operation Advocacy — took the lead during the meetings, with WWP staff attending only a few. In addition to supporting the fly-in, WALs lead WWP's legislative efforts at the local level and regularly engage with members of Congress and their staff, as well as other government officials, to advance policies that support and empower the warrior community.

"With this being my second fly-in, I felt like a true pro this time around," said WWP warrior Teneka Nieves, who

OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN (CONT.)

lives in Virginia. “WWP did an amazing job preparing me as a WAL, which in turn allowed me to better assist my team in our meetings.”

The fly-in coincided with a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on March 6. Former WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington joined fellow leaders of other veterans service organizations to testify on critical legislation to better support veterans, including the Major Richard Star Act (S.344; H.R.1282).

WWP warriors were able to watch the hearing live in the committee hearing room. “Getting to sit in on a joint veterans committee hearing and listen to all the representatives from different organizations discuss the needs of the veteran community really showed me just how many have our backs and are willing to support us,” said Matthew.

WWP’s work advocating for legislation like the Major Richard Star Act wouldn’t be possible without the hard work and dedication of WWP warriors. Their stories and experiences help shed light on the challenges veterans and Service Members face and underscore the critical need for legislation in these areas.

“Following the fly-in, I realize I’m in a unique position to speak up for others,” said Tom Smoot, WWP warrior and special operations Army veteran. “I’m excited to continue to give back to the community as I further transition from military service.”

“We’re seeing the evolution of our grassroots program, taking the next step by having our congressional meetings led by our WALs,” said Justin Beland, WWP director of grassroots and constituent affairs. “The evolution will continue by holding more trainings, introducing webinars to educate more warriors about our legislative priorities and how to advocate, and creating more opportunities for engagement. It’s a very exciting moment for our Operation Advocacy program, and I encourage all warriors to get involved.”

“For me, it was empowering to walk the halls of the Capitol and meet with the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Mike Bost, to discuss issues related to suicide prevention.”

— ANTON HARB JR.
WWP WARRIOR AND ARMY VETERAN



WWP WARRIORS MEET WITH CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERS AND STAFFERS DURING OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN.

OPERATION ADVOCACY FLY-IN (CONT.)



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP WARRIOR JEROME MITCHELL, WWP REGIONAL GRASSROOTS DIRECTOR COLEMAN BROOKS, AND WWP WARRIOR KENNERY FOSTER

★ Thank You to the Warriors Who Participated in the 2024 Operation Advocacy Fly-In ★

- ★ Joel Grace
- ★ Danette Fleishman
- ★ Scott Moehl
- ★ Teneka Nieves
- ★ Caroline Fermin
- ★ Rana Clark
- ★ Brent Reiffer
- ★ Brandon Gregory
- ★ Deanna Love
- ★ Tom Smoot
- ★ Joshua Jordan
- ★ Heather Rivera
- ★ Glenn Gain
- ★ Clark Sabo
- ★ David Sella
- ★ Harry Dumont
- ★ Stacie Parsons
- ★ Matthew Templeton
- ★ David Staffa
- ★ Perry Cooke
- ★ Phillip Stolz
- ★ Shawn Johnson
- ★ Terry Vickers
- ★ Adonica Simpkins Heard
- ★ Argenis Mendez Rosario
- ★ Jason Knowlton
- ★ James Richard
- ★ Manuel Acuna
- ★ Alhajie Fofanah
- ★ David Devan
- ★ Lesa Prime
- ★ Eric Donoho
- ★ Kevin Beaudry
- ★ Robert Campagnone
- ★ Andrew Brewer
- ★ Larry Welch
- ★ Matejka Baumgardner
- ★ Robert Hoaglund
- ★ Patrick Harmon
- ★ John Mikelson
- ★ Kennerly Foster
- ★ Jerome Mitchell
- ★ Amy Fiene
- ★ Anton Johnson
- ★ Christopher Carver
- ★ Brent Whitten
- ★ Charles Henry
- ★ Elizabeth Dykstra
- ★ Marisa Schultz
- ★ Fred Boyer
- ★ Lisa Juve
- ★ Mike Sydara
- ★ Anton Harb
- ★ Cassandra Johnson
- ★ Anina Blankenship
- ★ Frank Montoya
- ★ Caleb Emerson
- ★ Nathaniel Faulk
- ★ Parris Sewell
- ★ Jessica Sanders
- ★ Thomas Sims
- ★ Christopher Richard
- ★ Christopher McGrath
- ★ Maria Sutherland
- ★ Jessica Roza
- ★ Ryan Knapp
- ★ John Monroe
- ★ Connie Johnson
- ★ Starlyn Lara
- ★ Jason Halverson
- ★ Christopher White
- ★ Lani J. Kelp
- ★ Keara Torkelson
- ★ Lisa Olivas
- ★ Aaron Tilley

OUR TEAM

- ★ Jose Ramos, Vice President, Government and Community Relations
- ★ Michael Nilsen, Communications Director, Government and Community Relations
- ★ Shannon Walker, Administrative Assistant

Government Affairs

- ★ Brian Dempsey, Government Affairs Director
- ★ Aleks Morosky, Government Affairs Deputy Director
- ★ Jeremy Villanueva, Government Affairs Associate Director
- ★ Lindsey Stanford, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ Kirsten Laha-Walsh, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ Anne Marie McLean, Senior Policy and Legislative Analyst
- ★ Kimberly Powell, Policy and Legislative Analyst
- ★ Aaron Locker, Policy and Legislative Analyst

Grassroots and Constituent Affairs

- ★ Justin Beland, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Director
- ★ Coleman Brooks, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ Ben Watkins, Senior Constituent Affairs Specialist
- ★ Juan Valdez, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Coordinator

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

va.gov

844.698.2311

X: [@DeptVetAffairs](https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs)

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

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X: [@DeptofDefense](https://twitter.com/DeptofDefense)



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RESOURCE
CENTER**

resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org

888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or 904.405.1213

Fax: 904.405.1301 ★ woundedwarriorproject.org

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