



# VFW Chief Tells Congress to ‘Honor the Contract’

## The highlight of VFW’s annual Washington Conference featured a testimonial from VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt to House and Senate VA committee members

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On March 4, VFW Commander-in-Chief Alfred “Al” Lipphardt testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate VA committees at the Dirksen Senate Office Building chamber during the 2025 VFW Washington Conference.

Lipphardt opened his testimony by expressing his honor in representing more than 1.4 million members of the VFW and its Auxiliary. He then reached into his pocket and unfolded his DD Form 4, calling on the joint committee members to ‘Honor the Contract.’

“This is not charity,” Lipphardt stated, following his recitation of the contract that binds veterans and their country in perpetuity. “Everyone who served honorably, like every member of the VFW, has upheld our end of the contract. We call on our leaders to do the same.”

### CLAIM SHARKS

Lipphardt testified about the VFW’s ongoing efforts to advocate against unaccredited, predatory claims consultants — also known as claim sharks — who charge veterans for assistance with VA disability claims.

“The VFW and other accredited VSOs provide this service at no cost, as required by statute,” Lipphardt said. “Unfortunately, criminal penalties for unaccredited claims agents were eliminated from the United States Code nearly 20 years ago, providing a loophole through which these predatory claims agents built this market sector.”

Lipphardt called for Congress to pass legislation to reinstate these penalties and urged the

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committee to advocate for passage.

“Several of these predatory companies have made statements that there is no avenue for them to seek VA accreditation, but this is false,” Lipphardt said. “There are no restrictions for these consultants to be accredited by VA, but they refuse to do so because they would no longer be able to charge exorbitant fees.”

### **TOXIC/ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES**

Lipphardt expressed gratitude for the passing of the *Honoring Our PACT Act (P.L. 117-168)* in 2022 and for what it has accomplished for many veterans. However, he emphasized that this historic passage is not the end of the journey for all veterans and their survivors.

“The PACT Act also included an enduring framework to guide VA’s continuous evaluation of toxic exposures not included in the legislation,” said Lipphardt, who served in the Army from 1965 to 1979, which included two tours in Vietnam. “This is referred to as the Presumption Decision Process, and oversight of this process is where we are currently focusing efforts.”

Lipphardt mentioned several examples of military installations where toxic exposure has impacted veterans with serious health conditions that fall outside the coverage of the PACT Act.

“The military is an inherently hazardous profession,” Lipphardt said. “We must take care of our K2 veterans, those who served at Fort McClellan, veterans exposed to radiation, ‘forever chemicals,’ and others. The VFW urges Congress to conduct oversight of VA’s presumptive process because veterans cannot keep waiting.”

### **THE TRANSITION FROM MILITARY TO CIVILIAN LIFE**

Lipphardt then detailed some of the challenges that service members encounter when transitioning from military to civilian life and emphasized the crucial role of the Department of Defense and the VA in actively supporting them.

He urged Congress to pass legislation such as the *TAP Promotion Act* and establish a position in the DOD to ensure service members have every opportunity to thrive during their transition.

“The VFW urges Congress to establish an Under Secretary of Defense for Transition,” Lipphardt said. “This position is essential for effective management and accountability. Improving transition has the potential to enhance recruitment and retention, lowers risk for suicide and sets veterans on a path to success.”

### **STRENGTHEN CARE AND RESEARCH FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

Lipphardt segued from securing a smooth transition for his fellow veterans into civilian life with another cause for alarm — mental health. He addressed concerns, which included the VA’s tendency to overprescribe medications, particularly antidepressants.

This led to a call for Congress and the VA to fund research on alternative treatments and solutions to help break the cycle of dependency and overmedication.

“The VFW acknowledges that there is a growing need for alternative PTSD treatments, and we have a resolution that speaks to the need for this important exploratory research,” Lipphardt said. “Our goal is to identify more tools for the veteran community to address suicide and mental health instead of simply continuing to spend money without tangible results.”

### **PARITY OF SERVICE BENEFITS**

Lipphardt also advocated on behalf of members of the National Guard and Reserve. He mentioned their high rates of overseas deployments since Sept. 11, 2001, and how they are denied the same VA educational benefits as their active-duty counterparts.

“The time is long past for parity,” Lipphardt said.

To address this inequity, Lipphardt asked Congress to pass the *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2025*, which would allow any day spent in uniform for which military pay is received to count toward Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility.

Lipphardt addressed a key VFW legislative priority: the *Major Richard Star Act*, which aims to provide full concurrent receipt for deserving veterans. He also noted that Congress recently passed the Social Security Fairness Act, eliminating an unjust offset for Social Security recipients.

“It is time to correct this injustice for our military retirees,” Lipphardt said. “The VFW calls on Congress to fix this now.”

### **A REMINDER OF THE SACRIFICES**

Lipphardt concluded his testimony on a personal note. He stood before Congress and named five soldiers he served with during the Vietnam War: Pvt. Lewis Sloan of East Point, Georgia; Cpl. Kenneth Adams of Santa Barbara, California; Cpl. Philip Adams of Croton Falls, New York; Pfc. Robert Waddell of Batavia, Ohio; and Cpl. Rodney Loatman of Newark, New Jersey.

“I would ask these men to stand and be recognized, but they can’t,” Lipphardt said. “Their names are on the Vietnam Wall along with all those who gave the last full measure of devotion to this nation acknowledged by the contract we each signed.”

Lipphardt went on to add, “Our nation must never forget our warfighters.”

To listen to Lipphardt’s entire testimony, visit [vfw.org/VFWDC2025](https://www.vfw.org/VFWDC2025).

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