



# VFW, SVA Announce 2025/2026 Legislative Fellowship Selectees

## Next student veteran cohort readies for advocacy on Capitol Hill

Oct 08, 2025

**WASHINGTON** – The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), together with Student Veterans of America (SVA), is pleased to announce its selection of six student veterans to complete the 2025/2026 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship. Now in its 12th year, student veteran fellows gain experience advocating for a solution to a pressing veterans’ issue by engaging leaders within their local communities, through social networking and in the halls of Congress.

“Veteran advocacy is just as important today as it was back in the Bonus March days,” said VFW National Commander Carol Whitmore. “As a team that spans generations, it’s up to us to ensure we receive the benefits we earned and were promised. Through the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship, we equip emerging veteran advocates and leaders with the tools they need to develop sound advocacy plans and carry them through to action,” Whitmore continued. “I’m so proud of this partnership with SVA because our fellows will help amplify the veteran’s voice on Capitol Hill.”

The VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is a roughly semester-long immersive experience through which fellows receive advocacy training and mentorship from each organizations’ professional staff, create community outreach plans, and actively engage community and national leaders on a shared VFW and SVA policy priority. To qualify for the fellowship, student veterans must be a VFW member, be currently enrolled in an accredited college or university program, write an essay conveying the importance of veteran advocacy, submit a video detailing why they are a good fit for the program, and complete an interview.

“The VFW–SVA Legislative Fellowship prepares the next generation of veteran advocates – student veterans who turn lived experience into actionable, bipartisan policy,” said SVA National President and Chief Executive Officer Jared S. Lyon, a VFW Post 3308 Life member in Tallahassee, Florida. “Together with the VFW, we’re training leaders who

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research, build and brief real solutions on Capitol Hill, and they're already shaping outcomes for our community. As a proud VFW Life member and SVA's president & CEO, I see in every fellow the future of veteran advocacy: informed, disciplined and unafraid to lead."

The six fellows selected for the 2025/2026 class are:

- Shadic Anderson, Marine Corps veteran, California State University
- Juanita Murillo Garcia, Army veteran, Northeastern University
- Giancarlo Gonzalez, Army veteran, St. Petersburg College
- Kimmie Kim, Navy veteran, Vanguard University of Southern California
- Austin Lawrence, Navy veteran, Harvard University
- Sarah Lively, Air Force veteran, Concordia University

New this year, fellows will now participate in the SVA Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C., from Oct. 15-19, 2025, where they will receive comprehensive leadership training alongside SVA's top chapter leaders. In January 2026, the cohort will attend SVA's 18th Annual NatCon before heading to Washington, D.C., at the end of February to participate in the VFW's annual Washington Conference. During the VFW's conference, fellows will join with VFW advocates from their respective states to discuss the shared VFW-SVA policy priority with lawmakers and their staff on Capitol Hill. This culminating experience enables fellows to employ the skills they learned throughout their fellowship to affect meaningful policy change as students and as future leaders.

Operating for more than a decade, the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship continues to be a beacon of collaboration between two organizations whose passions are rooted in serving veterans. Student veterans who complete this program often continue to make noteworthy local and national contributions to the veteran community through myriad roles including those in leadership, service and advocacy. Notable program alumni include, but are not limited to, SVA's very own Vice President of Government Affairs, Tammy Barlet; Jennifer Ross, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America Manager of Federal Policy; Katherine Cassell, VFW Assistant Director for Veterans Health Policy; and Ken Wiseman, member of VFW's National Council of Administration and National Legislative Committee.

To interview any of the selected fellows, contact VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director, Joe Grassi, at [jgrassi@vfw.org](mailto:jgrassi@vfw.org).

**About SVA:** With a focused mission on empowering student veterans, Student Veterans of America® (SVA) is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Through a dedicated network of nearly 1,600 on-campus chapters in all 50 states and 4 countries representing more than 750,000 student veterans, SVA aims to inspire yesterday's warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders. Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential. For more information, visit us at [studentveterans.org](http://studentveterans.org).