

# Trump signs appeals modernization act at American Legion convention

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President Trump signed legislation Wednesday at The American Legion's National Convention that will go a long way toward fixing the beleaguered VA appeals process.

"To fulfill our patriotic duties, we must take care of our great veterans," Trump told about 9,000 American Legion members at the second day of the general session in Reno, Nev. "One year ago at this gathering, I promised you that I would make it my priority to fix the broken VA system and deliver to our veterans the care they so richly deserve."

The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 creates three appeals "lanes." Veterans would choose the one that best suits his or her needs. The three lanes will be:

- Local Higher Level Review Lane in which an adjudicator reviews the same evidence considered by the original claims processor.
- New Evidence Lane in which the veteran could submit new evidence for review and have a hearing.
- Board Lane in which jurisdiction for the appeal would transfer immediately to the Board of Veterans Appeals.

"I want to thank The American Legion for getting this done," the president said. "It's something they've been trying to get done for 40 years. And we've passed VA accountability legislation. The Legion has a lot of power and they use it well."

The law's impact will be felt for a long time. "No longer will veterans be waiting to get their appeals heard," Trump said. "And they will get decisions much more quickly in a fraction of the time."

As of last spring, more than 470,000 appeals of claims decisions were pending. The average wait time for these appeals to be fully adjudicated is five years. If nothing changes, by 2027 veterans will wait an average of 10 years to get a decision.

The bipartisan bill, H.R. 2288, was crafted with much input from The American Legion. It is expected to shorten the average wait time for final appeal decisions from five years to 125 days.

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt welcomed the news.

"Today's signing is a major victory for America's veterans," Schmidt said. "I can think of no better place for the president to sign this bill than at the national convention of America's largest and most influential veterans service organization. The legislation is a simple, fair and appropriate way to ensure that our nation's veterans — and their families — receive their earned benefits in a timely and efficient manner."

During his speech to The American Legion, Trump also addressed other key issues:

- **Patriotism:** "The American Legion embodies the spirit of patriotism. That is the true source of our strength and the hope for our future. You cherish our values and you defend our great American flag."

- **American flag:** "It is time to heal the wounds that have divided us, and to seek a new unity based on the common values that unite us. We are one people, with one home, and one flag,"

- **Infrastructure:** "We don't have to be content with a dilapidated road system with crumbling buildings or rusted out factories. We can build gleaming new highways and state-of-the-art manufacturing and modern works of wonder. And we can do it all with American workers and American iron, aluminum and steel."

- **Young people:** "Every veteran here today is part of a long, unbroken chain of American heroes. We salute your service. The American Legion not only teaches history, you help keep history alive. You teach young Americans to have pride in our history so that they will have confidence in our future, history and culture. For generations now, The American Legion has taught young people the principles of America. You've emphasized the need to preserve the nation's cultural, moral and patriotic values. You encourage the observation of patriotic holidays. You stress the need to enforce our laws, including our immigration laws."

- **Newly signed Harry Colmery GI Bill:** "Under this legislation, veterans can use their GI Bill at any point in their lifetimes."

- **Recent violence:** "We will never tolerate crime in our cities, bloodshed in our communities, or acts of hatred or terrorism against our citizens. We will always support our great law enforcement personnel."

- **Defense spending:** "We are committed to expanding and improving our missile defense systems to shoot down missiles in flight. We are getting better and better at it. We will develop better surveillance and long-strike capabilities to prevent our enemies from launching them in the first place."

Trump also noted positive gains in the war on terrorism, while noting that more work needs to be done to prevent Islamic State and other organizations from using the Internet as a recruiting tool. "We will pursue an honorable outcome in Afghanistan," Trump said. "Our troops have already made a tremendous sacrifice. We will give the men and women in uniform the tools they need and the trust they have earned to fight and to win."