



MISSION ROLL CALL

2022

Impact
Report





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What is MRC's Mission?

The veteran community is a diverse, resilient, and vital demographic in America. Their service has built and sustained the American way of life, and their sacrifice has been woven into the fabric of our national character. As such, our nation's veterans deserve more: more efficiency in the healthcare they utilize; more recognition for their sacrifices through sustained existing benefits and unique new ones; more direct advocacy in Washington. These are the fundamental reasons Mission Roll Call (MRC) exists.

MRC is a veteran-led nonpartisan movement committed to providing former service members a powerful, unified voice that is heard by our nation's leaders. We feed our community's concerns directly to policymakers to advocate for positive change. Since launching in 2020, our top three priorities have remained steadfast and vital:



End veteran suicide.



Ensure veteran access to quality healthcare and benefits.



Advocate for uniquely underserved veteran populations.

There is still plenty to be done. But as we work toward achieving these goals with the help of our invaluable supporters, every year we get closer to ensuring that our veterans' needs are heard and honored.

Our movement is a space where veterans and their families share stories, voice concerns, and present solutions for their benefit. MRC taps into unfiltered veteran opinions, connects former service members with an array of support groups, and speaks up for veterans to ensure no one is left behind.

It is telling that nearly **half of all veterans** are unaffiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or a veteran service organization. Veterans can easily become overwhelmed navigating bureaucracy at the local, state, and national levels. Over the past two years, MRC has built awareness of our platform among veterans and leaders, connected with supporters, and pushed for policy improvements on Capitol Hill.

*Through consistent polling, outreach, and media campaigns, our aim is to give every veteran a voice. We gather and share their stories and concerns with lawmakers and interest groups who can make a tangible impact on policy that affects **every** veteran.*

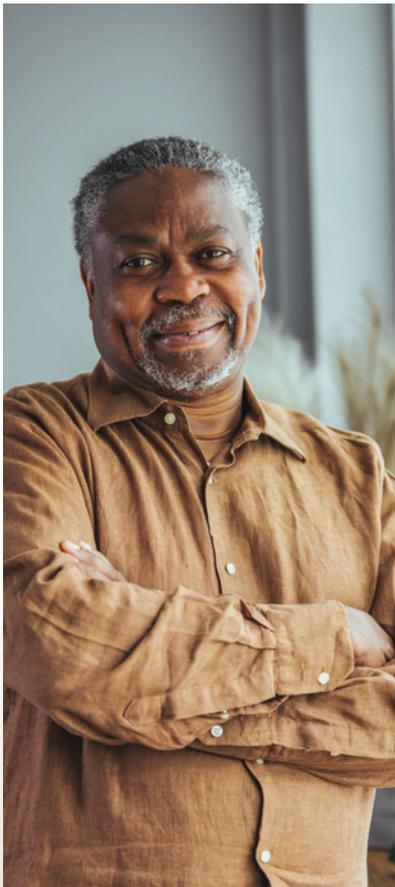


State of Veterans in the U.S.

An estimated **250,000** men and women transition from U.S. military service and return to civilian life each year. As of 2021, there were a reported **16.5 million** former service members in the U.S.

After helping to secure our nation's freedoms and interests at home and abroad, the brave men and women who leave or retire from the military often go on to enrich their local communities by taking on service-based roles in law enforcement, medicine, business, emergency management, or mentorship. Here's a look at the promising trends in the veteran community, along with the challenges MRC is working to address.

PROMISING VETERAN TRENDS



Veterans have highly transferable skills. A majority of former service members say their military career assisted them in gaining **skills and training** that is useful for civilian jobs.

Veterans are more likely to be civically engaged than non-veterans: voting participation among veterans has risen since 2012; and on average, veterans contribute more volunteer time in their communities than non-veterans.

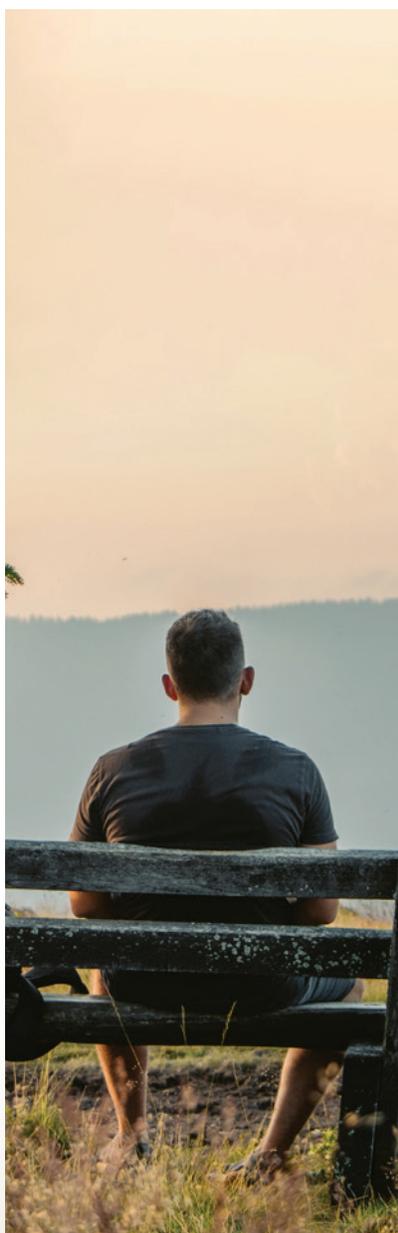
Veterans are working. As of December 2022, the seasonally-adjusted veteran **unemployment rate was 3.2%**, up from 2.7% the previous month but unchanged from the prior year. The non-veteran unemployment rate was 3.4%.

Veterans are role models. The **majority of Americans** look up to people who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. And both former service members and the general public see veterans as more disciplined and patriotic than those who have not served in the military.

Veterans are diverse. American Indians and Alaska Natives serve in the military at **higher rates** than any other group — **five times** the national average. Women veterans are the **fastest-growing** demographic, and the number of Hispanic veterans is expected to double by 2046 — rising from **8% to 16%**.

Despite these positive trends, veterans face significant challenges in several key areas that need to be addressed.

VETERAN CHALLENGES



Veteran suicide rates: America's Warrior Partnership's (AWP) **2022 interim report** points to at least 40 to 44 former service veterans dying by suicide or self-injury each day. Without the proper support, many veterans in crisis can turn to harmful coping mechanisms and are more likely to die by suicide.

Transition assistance: The DoD/VA's **Transition Assistance Program** (TAP) takes a broad approach to helping service members prepare for transitioning to civilian life. But based on **veteran feedback** in the *Journal of Veterans Studies*, more attention should be given to work environment adjustments, educational opportunities, financial management, finding housing, and mental health support.

Homelessness: Veterans make up around 13% of the **homeless adult population**, though only 7% of the general population claim veteran status. This is often attributed to affordable housing shortages, untreated mental health issues, lack of support networks, or ignorance of federal benefits and resources.

Post-traumatic stress (PTS) and other mental health challenges: Veterans are at a higher risk for PTS than non-veterans. The condition usually develops after exposure to traumatic incidents and can cause severe emotional anguish, mental stress, and decreased quality of life for veterans. More broadly, RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research findings show that less than half of veterans in need of mental health services receive treatment or evidence-based care.

Underserved veteran communities: Tribal and rural veterans represent communities that are facing serious health disparities, high poverty rates, social isolation, and a history of discrimination. These former service members can often be disproportionately affected by issues in veteran care and support.

MRC's Priority Issues: A Deeper Look

VETERAN SUICIDE

The VA's National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, released in September 2022, found that there were 6,146 veteran suicide deaths in 2020, or an average close to 17 per day. Veterans remain far more likely to die by suicide than their civilian peers. The VA estimates there were an average of nearly 32 suicide deaths per 100,000 veterans in 2020 compared to 16 suicide deaths per 100,000 civilians. **More concerning is that the veteran suicide rate is likely higher than the VA's tally.**

America's Warrior Partnership (AWP) released a striking interim report in September 2022, suggesting that the veteran suicide rate is 2.4 times greater than the VA estimates. According to AWP's findings, between 22 and 24 former service members ages 18-64 die by suicide each day, and between 18 and 20 in the same age group die per day by self-injury. This would mean between 40 to 44 former service members are taking their lives every day.

EVERY DAY
40-44 former service members take their own life.

Source: America's Warrior Partnership



There are several factors that contribute to high rates of veteran suicide, and the issue should not only be looked at through the lens of mental health. Many join the military to serve, to find a sense of community they didn't have at home, or to earn benefits they would otherwise not have access to. When they transition back to civilian life, they may find themselves stripped of their purpose, feeling detached from their military community, and trying to navigate a complex web of uncoordinated benefits. This can exacerbate the practical difficulties of adjusting to life after service and make it harder to cope with the changes.

Lack of mental health care support can also play a role. Service members often face ongoing exposure to stressors and threats, and they are at a higher risk for post-traumatic stress (PTS) than those who have not served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The condition usually develops from exposure to traumatic incidents, such as life-threatening events, war tragedies, or natural disasters. It can cause severe emotional anguish, mental stress, depression, loss of interest in activities, and overall decreased quality of life for veterans.

Improvements in protective gear and medicine have increased survival rates among injured service members, but those who survive can return home with mental trauma. As such, PTS has come to be known as the “**signature wound**” of veterans of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The VA **reports** that between 11 and 20 out of every 100 veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) experience PTS symptoms in a given year.

But factors contributing to PTS go beyond the dangers commonly associated with war and can be attributed to less-mentioned **factors** like the impact of military culture, moral wounds, or sexual traumas. Holistic care — from medical care to employment to community support and destigmatizing veteran trauma within our culture — is essential to promoting the well-being of our former service members.

AWP’s **statistics** underscore the need for greater suicide prevention efforts. MRC has called on the U.S. government to be more proactive in addressing the concerning number of veterans who are dying daily by suicide. There must be a holistic approach that focuses not only on access to mental health care but also improvements in transition assistance, job placement, and funding for community providers who specialize in veteran needs.

VETERAN ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE & BENEFITS

More than **9 million veterans** are enrolled to receive services from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). This number represents about **half of veterans**. MRC’s goal is to help remove barriers to care, ensuring veterans are aware of the benefits and care available to them.

The Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN) **surveyed** 8,638 military and veteran families for its 2021 report. Respondents listed access to the VA healthcare system to be one of their top concerns.

Navigating the healthcare system can be overwhelming for retiring or transitioning veterans. When it comes to mental healthcare, in particular, the numbers reflect a troubling disparity. Data from the RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research **shows** that less than half of veterans in need of mental health services receive treatment. Of those who do receive treatment — for PTS and major depression specifically — less than one-third are getting appropriate evidence-based care.



The VA must work to improve veteran access to care and benefits by providing comprehensive roadmaps to help navigate existing options, and to improve trust and confidence in the VA system. Policymakers need to evaluate the current gaps in veteran care and provide a well-defined plan to address these issues, which includes reducing wait times for connection to providers, right-sizing VA equities in underserved and underutilized areas, and increasing community care provisions.

UNDERSERVED VETERAN POPULATION

Tribal, rural, and other underserved veteran populations have played a significant role in the U.S. Armed Forces throughout history. These groups often face unique challenges in receiving the support they need upon retiring or exiting from the military.



There are an estimated 160,000 Indigenous veterans across the country; American Indians and Alaska Natives serve in the military at **higher rates than any other group** — **five times** the national average — and have the highest per-capita service rate of any population.

Unfortunately, research shows that tribal veterans are dying by suicide at a high rate. In 2020, the **suicide rate** was 30.2 per 100,000 among Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander veterans and 29.8 per 100,000 among American Indians or Alaska Native veterans.

Although this is below the overall average of veteran deaths by suicide, it reveals a pressing need for culturally-tailored prevention initiatives.



Issues surrounding suicide and mental health are particularly sensitive topics among Indigenous groups, and there is still a lack of analysis on the subject. However, factors such as **cultural stigmas**, substance use, social isolation, poverty, limited access to healthcare, and high unemployment rates have been found to play a role, along with historical traumas and discrimination unique to tribal communities.

Rural veterans also often face significant challenges in civilian life. There are an estimated **4.7 million** veterans in this demographic; almost a quarter of all service members in the U.S. return from active duty to reside in rural communities.



Though more research is needed on the impact geographical locations have on quality of life for veterans, it is known that rural veterans often have problems accessing proper care and support after their time in service due to disparities in local healthcare facilities, social isolation, unfamiliarity with benefits, lower internet connectivity rates, and limited federal outreach to rural communities.

Healthcare is closely connected to socioeconomic realities. MRC urges our leaders to create culturally-tailored health initiatives that can help improve health outcomes in tribal and rural veteran communities. There also needs to be consistent government outreach to these demographics to ensure tribal and rural veterans are aware of and have access to the benefits they are eligible for.



Issues & Priorities for MRC

& How We Address These

MRC's 2022 efforts were strategically framed around our top priorities: ending veteran suicide; ensuring veteran access to healthcare and benefits; and advocating for underserved veteran populations. We consistently raised awareness about these issues and urged policymakers to implement practical, effective solutions.

MRC's Advocacy Based on Veteran Feedback

VETERAN SUICIDE



MRC called on policymakers to:

- Solve issues with VA data collection and management of medical and disability records, so that federal reports reflect the true state of the veteran community and issues impacting them.
- Expand the VA budget for suicide prevention, with proper oversight to ensure funds are being allocated effectively, and ensure the VA gives qualifying organizations plenty of time to apply for grants.
- Take a holistic approach to veteran suicide prevention that focuses not only on mental health care but also improvements in transition assistance and funding for community providers.
- Make suicide prevention the VA's #1 overall priority.

VETERAN ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE & BENEFITS



MRC pushed our nation's leaders to:

- Maintain current access standards for community care so veterans can receive care they need when the VA cannot provide it within a reasonable time or distance.
- Increase the visibility of VA benefits prior to military separation.
- Significantly improve the Electronic Health Record Management system or start over.
- Take a proactive approach to veteran mental health care and support, including well-defined initiatives to increase awareness of mental health issues, suicide prevention, and PTS treatments.

UNDERSERVED VETERANS



MRC advocated for leaders in Washington to:

- Create culturally tailored initiatives to improve health outcomes and suicide prevention in tribal and rural veteran communities.
- Reduce wait times for connection to VA providers, right-size VA equities in underserved and underutilized areas, and increase community care provisions.
- Conduct further research on the impact geographical locations can have on quality of life for rural veterans, and how historical discrimination and disparities impact tribal veterans.

In 2022, Mission Roll Call focused its advocacy efforts on its top priorities. Our approach to representing our community, creating visibility for these policy issues, and challenging lawmakers to act included:

- 1. *Humanizing issues by gathering and telling veterans' personal stories, sharing these with policymakers.***
- 2. *Hearing from veterans directly through polls within the community.***
- 3. *Leveraging our annual research survey findings on the American public's opinion about veteran issues for our advocacy campaigns.***
- 4. *Raising awareness about issues and perspectives by sharing facts, data — from MRC polls and other sources — and stories via social media, news media, with the aim of clarifying or focusing needs among veterans.***
- 5. *Advocating directly to policymakers and through other governmental channels to change policies and programs that impact veterans, and holding policymakers accountable.***

At Mission Roll Call, we are committed to working tirelessly on behalf of U.S. veterans, so that no one is forgotten and overlooked. Their service and sacrifices mattered and still matters.





Actions & Results

HEARING FROM VETERANS:



Sent out **30 MRC Polls** and received **159K responses**.

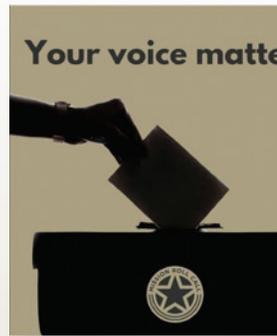
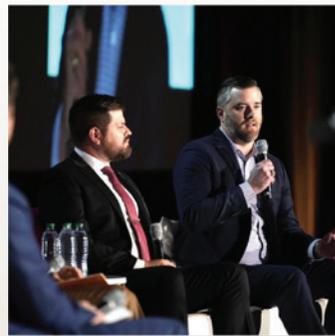
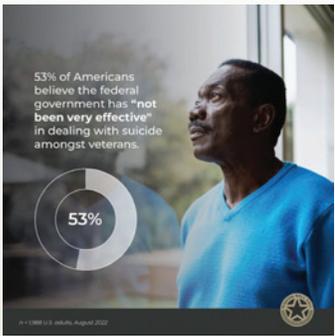
Spoke to approximately **5,000 veterans** in person.

MRC ACTION, BY THE NUMBERS



Referred **523** veterans for care coordination; **82%** closed successfully so far.

More than **62 million** paid and organic impressions on social media channels.



700 published posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, resulting in engagement with **1.5 Million** people!



A total of **92** media interviews including:



39 million
potential reach

8 op-eds placed in national and regional media outlets and picked up by **30 local outlets** with a potential reach of **39 million**.



35 million
potential reach

57 TV & radio broadcast interviews and features with **19 million** impressions and replays reaching **35 million** potential viewers and listeners.



200 million
potential reach

25 print & online articles and features with a potential reach of **22 million** visitors with an additional **68 pickups** garnering an estimated reach of almost **200 million**.



GENERAL SUPPORT FOR EXPANDED ACCESS TO CARE FOR VETERANS

MRC Polls

- Exposure to Toxic Substances Poll

[Of those potentially exposed to toxic substance] Do you plan on submitting a disability claim for your exposure to toxic substances while serving?

29% - No 71% - Yes

- Veterans VA Care Poll

Do you feel educated and informed about your options to receive care between the VA, community providers, and community organizations?

71% - No 29% - Yes

- Community Care Poll

VA Secretary Denis McDonough recently testified that the cost of veterans seeking healthcare by private providers outside of the VA system now accounts for 33% of the VA's total healthcare budget. Because of this, the VA has said it may alter the rules for accessing community care, effectively making it harder for veterans to get the care they need in a timely fashion. **Should Congress make the current rules permanent before the VA tries to make changes to access standards?**

18% - No 82% - Yes

In response to this poll, Secretary McDonough stepped back from proposed changes and agreed to maintain Community Care access for Veterans.

- VA Budgeting Poll

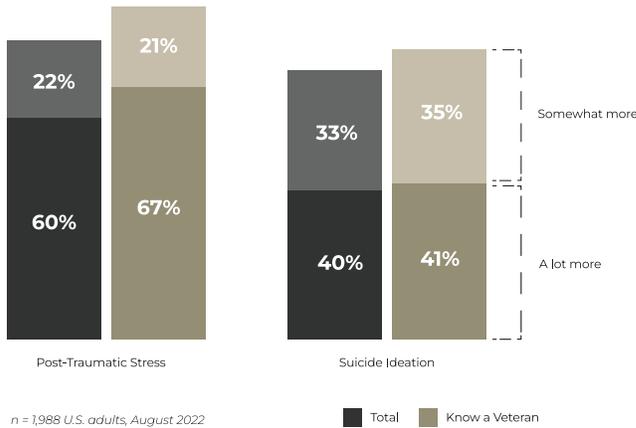
The VA's budget request this year is a record \$301 billion. If passed, this would be a \$104 billion (53%) increase since 2018. For comparison, total Medicare/Medicaid spending in the U.S. only grew by (32%) during the same period, and \$104 billion is equivalent to 3.5 million 2022 Ford F-150s, or 8 new aircraft carriers. **Should Congress continue to support sharp increases in the VA budget, or focus on reforms and efficiency?**

57% - Continue to support increases 43% - Focus on reform & efficiency

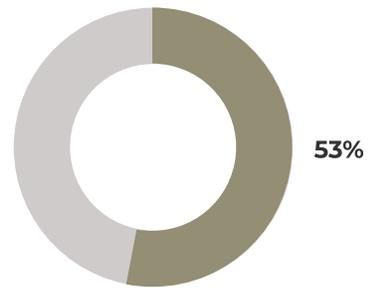
Americans' Perspectives on Veterans Issues

This study shows that most U.S. adults are supportive of veterans and believe veterans do not get as much support from the government as they should. This research is featured on MRC's website and has been included in a variety of social and news media articles and content as well as in conversations with policymakers.

What proportion of Veterans do you believe deal with the following conditions, relative to the average adult?



53% of Americans believe the federal government has "not been very effective" in dealing with suicide amongst Veterans.



n = 1,988 U.S. adults, August 2022

Media coverage and blogs



- **Blog** about increased support for military-to-civilian transition.
- **YouTube video** featuring Daniel Rubio about the difficulties of transitioning back to civilian life after his time in military service.
- **Feature interview** with The Hill discussing access to care for veterans.
- **Washington Times op-ed** about wait times and poor VA care.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS & ACCESS TO CARE

MRC Poll

- VA Mental Health Provider

Do you think the VA should allow veterans with service-connected mental health challenges to access the mental health provider of their choice, even if not in the VA system?

6% 94% - Yes

No

Media coverage and blogs about veteran suicides and mental health

The Dallas Morning News

KOMO abc 4



THE DAILY WIRE



The Washington Post

MilitaryTimes iHeart RADIO



The Miami Herald

DeseretNews.

Dallas Morning News Article/Blog and KBTX TV Interview
On service members and mental health during the holidays.

The Washington Post article, Deseret News article, Fox News Radio story

Focus on veteran suicides for Veterans Day.

Fox News feature

On veteran suicide.

Blog featuring in-depth stats on veteran suicide

Featured in **Dallas Morning News** as an op-ed and articles in the **Daily Caller, National Review, Sara Carter Show** and many others.

Dallas Morning News article / Blog

Referencing Afghanistan pull-out and mental health.

Blog

Tied to Afghanistan anniversary.

Spectrum News 1 Texas

Interview for Mental Health Month in May.



We owe it to the veterans already lost to suicide to do the hard work and prevent former service members in crisis from becoming another overlooked statistic. As veteran suicide rates continue to outpace that of civilians, we all need to do better."

- **COLE LYLE** ("VA's bad data puts vets at risk," Dallas Morning News)

RURAL AND TRIBAL

Rural and tribal veterans were not featured in legislation this year, but their stories were highlighted in MRC blogs and social media.



Blog

The Unique Challenges of Tribal and Rural Veterans

Youtube Video

Navajo Veterans, nearly 1,000 views

Youtube Video

Alaska/Indigenous Veterans, nearly 5,000 views

NEWS OF THE DAY

Amplifying the voice of veterans on topics trending in the news.

MRC Polls

- Afghanistan Anniversary Poll

One year later, are you satisfied with the level of accountability amongst senior civilian and/or military officials for the execution of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

84% - No

16% - Yes

Used to connect with stories on mental health impact of service in Afghanistan as well as general reactions to the pull-out.



Article in The Hill

On Afghanistan regret

Social media posts and engagement

• GI Bill Poll

For decades, the GI Bill has been one of the military's best recruiting tools by providing free college for most veterans that serve. But as the cost of higher education increases, many have called on the President and Congress to forgive federal student loan debt for everyone. Do you believe federal student loan debt should be forgiven for everyone who did not serve in the military?

76% - No

24% - Yes



Fox News TV [interview 1](#) and [interview 2](#) about student loan forgiveness bill.
Fox Business News [TV interview](#) about student loan forgiveness bill.

PROGRESS WITH POLICYMAKERS

- MRC representatives met with members of Congress and staff members on the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees eighty-three times.
- MRC fed policymakers information about veterans and the [PACT Act](#), ultimately helping them thoughtfully craft and pass the legislation.
- MRC's parent organization, America's Warrior Partnership, testified to [the House of Representatives](#) about veteran suicide prevention and Operation Deep Dive in September.
- MRC met with House and Senate leadership about veteran policy priorities going into the 118th Congress.

MRC KEY EVENTS



The Bob Feller Act of Valor Foundation – Walk for Life

Annual **Toys for Tots** Drive

The Wounded Warrior Experience Panel moderated by Jennifer Griffin



2023 Priorities & Conclusion

Through outreach efforts across America, polling, earned media, and our social platforms, we've stayed on the pulse of veterans' needs. What we learned from our diverse community in 2022 will continue to fuel our legislative pursuits around:



Veteran suicide awareness and prevention



Ensuring veteran access to quality care



Improving support for underserved veterans

THIS YEAR, WE WANT TO SEE CONGRESS AND THE VA:

- Make veteran suicide prevention their **#1** overall priority.
- Increase funding for the VA's Office of Suicide Prevention by **100%**.
- Move the VA's Office of Suicide Prevention out of VHA to report directly to the Secretary of the VA.
- Strengthen comprehensive healthcare for veterans through the Mission Act.
- Develop a holistic approach to **mental healthcare**.

Furthering our mission to present the authentic, unfiltered voices and stories of veterans to Washington, we will continue our fact-finding tour this year. MRC is committed to gathering information "on the ground" from veterans, especially in remote locations, in order to identify challenges, successes, and the effectiveness of current policies, as well as opinions on what's needed to improve veterans' experiences. We will provide this feedback to policymakers to keep the collective veteran story at the forefront of their decision-making process.