

SUPPORTING ARIZONA'S VETERANS

A NOTE FROM REP. GALLEGO...

WHEN I CAME HOME FROM IRAQ, I EXPERIENCED FIRSTHAND HOW OUR GOVERNMENT DOES - AND TOO OFTEN DOESN'T - TAKE CARE OF OUR VETERANS. I SAW HOW MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN ARMS WERE LEFT TO ADJUST BACK TO CIVILIAN LIFE ON THEIR OWN - TO DEAL WITH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WOUNDS, TO FIND FINANCIAL SECURITY, TO RETURN TO SOME FORM OF "NORMAL." IT'S WHAT MADE ME DECIDE TO RUN FOR OFFICE. WE NEED LEADERS IN CONGRESS WHO KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO SEND TROOPS INTO COMBAT AND WHAT IT TAKES TO SUPPORT THEM WHEN THEY RETURN HOME. THAT'S WHY I'M FIGHTING EVERY DAY TO FIX THE SYSTEM FOR MY FELLOW VETERANS.

ARIZONA IS HOME TO OVER 500,000 VETERANS. IN CONGRESS, I HAVE WORKED TIRELESSLY TO GET THEM AND THEIR LOVED ONES THE FULL BENEFITS THEY'VE EARNED THROUGH SERVICE AND SACRIFICE - INCLUDING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE RESOURCES TO HELP THEM TRANSITION BACK TO CIVILIAN LIFE.



If you or a loved one requires assistance with the VA, please contact Rep. Gallego's office at 602-256-0551 or visit rubengallego.house.gov.



Expanding Access to Benefits

Our country must do better to care for those who sacrificed to keep us safe. Tragically, the federal system has let bureaucratic red tape and misguided concerns over costs get in the way of serving veterans. It's unacceptable, and it's why **Rep. Gallego continues to work so that every veteran with an underlying condition or service-related disability gets the benefits they are owed.**

Like too many veterans, **Rep. Gallego and his Lima 3/25 brothers slept next to burn pits in Iraq, so he has seen the devastating effects firsthand.** That's why, as a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, he fought to secure passage of the **Honoring Our PACT Act – the most significant expansion of VA benefits in decades.**¹ The PACT Act finally expanded benefits for veterans exposed to toxins during their service, including burn pits, and it made it easier for veterans to prove exposure if they have a qualifying condition. And, when the VA was falling behind on evaluating PACT Act claims, Rep. Gallego called them out and told them they needed to do more to follow through on their promise to get veterans approved.²

To see if you qualify for PACT Act benefits and apply, visit va.gov/pact or call **800-698-2411 (TTY: 711)**

azcentral.

'Peace of mind': For Arizona veterans exposed to toxins, health care benefits are finally here

Rep. Gallego also knows we cannot forget about our Agent Orange-exposed veterans and their families. He has long advocated for the over 170,000 Vietnam-era veterans in Arizona who may have been exposed to herbicidal agents, many of whom are still waiting over 50 years later for VA benefits.³ He cosponsored the

Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which was signed into law, to expand benefits for people serving in the "Blue Water" region just off the coast of Vietnam, and he is fighting to ensure every veteran suffering from Agent Orange gets the benefits they deserve.⁴

Veterans Should Keep Their *FULL* Benefits

Rep. Gallego has seen that a veteran's struggles with bureaucratic red tape do not stop when they get approved. Veterans face numerous obstacles to getting their full benefits, many of which they are not told about when they enter the military, including compensation offsets, disability rating downgrades, and businesses that prey on veterans.

As we see time and again, a veteran's service-related disabilities may not show up until years or even decades after they separate. However, when they are approved for VA benefits, they have to pay back their separation pay – money veterans have already spent because it was theirs. That

is why Rep. Gallego introduced the **Restore Veterans Compensation Act** to end this unjust practice once and for all.⁵ Rep. Gallego also backs the **Major Richard Star Act** to allow medically retired veterans to receive their earned Department of Defense retirement pay and their full VA compensation.⁶

azcentral.

Phoenix Vietnam veteran receives the honorable discharge he deserved



Rep. Gallego and a veteran his office helped secure an honorable discharge for.

Veterans also risk losing their benefits to shady businesses that prey on veterans. They make veterans sign lengthy, confusing contracts that require them to pay a “company” a percentage of their benefits for life. **Rep. Gallego firmly believes that our veterans are not a dollar sign to be exploited**, which is why he co-sponsors the **GUARD VA Benefits Act** to make it illegal for bad actors to charge a fee or take a cut of a veteran's benefits⁷. It is the job of elected officials and Arizona's incredible licensed **Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)** to work with the VA on behalf of veterans.

Health Care

As a disabled veteran who has received care through the VA, Rep. Gallego knows that the veteran-specific care offered at the VA is the best option for most veterans. He also knows that the VA needs improvements and accountability to serve Arizona's veterans best.



Rep. Gallego delivers Valentines for Veterans at the Arizona State Veterans Home in Phoenix.

During his time in Congress, **Rep. Gallego has fought against efforts to completely privatize and shutter the VA.** He sees these efforts for what they are – attempts to make money off veterans.

Rep. Gallego believes we should always look for ways to improve care for veterans and their families. **He has had two bills signed into law to improve transparency and quality of care at the VA.** The first, the **VA Quality Health Care Accountability and Transparency Act**, requires the VA to improve how it publishes patient wait times, staffing information, quality care measurements, and patient outcomes. The second, the **VA FOIA Reform Act**, improved the process for how veterans and VSOs can conduct oversight of the VA.⁸

Rep. Gallego has had **FOUR** bills signed into law to improve veteran health care

Rep. Gallego also wants to expand which services are offered at the VA. This includes expanded access to dental care through the **Dental Care for Veterans Act**. Veterans often have multiple underlying conditions with complex treatment plans, requiring them to see specialists that may not be available at a VA facility, which is why Rep. Gallego is working to both increase the number of doctors nationwide and attract the nation's best doctors to the VA system, including by offering increased incentives.⁹

In a state like Arizona, not every veteran has access to VA facilities or clinics. For these veterans, **VA Telehealth Services** are a critical lifeline. And, when a veteran is not able to get care at a VA facility or faces unacceptable wait times, **Rep. Gallego supports allowing veterans to get care in their communities.**

As the former Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples, **Rep. Gallego understands the barriers veterans in Tribal communities face to receiving care.** That is why he successfully got his bill, the ***Purchased and Referred Care for Native Veterans Act*** signed into law. The law allows Native veterans to receive specialty and contracted care at Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribally run health facilities. In keeping with our treaty obligations, he also eliminated co-pays for Native veterans at the VA through his ***Native American Veteran PACT Act***.¹⁰

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

As a veteran who has been open about his own journey with PTSD following deployment, Rep. Gallego is working to end the veteran mental health and suicide crisis in this country. **In Arizona in 2021, 241 veterans took their lives**, the greatest loss since 2014. And because not every veteran is enrolled in VA care, that number may be higher.¹¹

Rep. Gallego strongly supports increasing mental health care at the VA because,

for many veterans in crisis, it may be the only resource they know of or can access. He voted for a record \$14 billion in mental health care funding in Fiscal Year 2023, including almost \$500 million for suicide prevention outreach, to support the nearly 2 million veterans who receive mental health services at the VA.¹²



Rep. Gallego visits his local American Legion, Post 47.

But he knows that funding alone is not enough, which is why he wants to expand access to mental health care for all veterans, recruit more mental health

To reach the **Veteran Crisis Line**, dial **988** and press 1, **text 838255**, or visit **veteranscrisis-line.net**

professionals, improve the quality of services offered at Vet Centers, and update employee training on how to recognize and treat a veteran in crisis. **He also wants to improve the Veterans Crisis Line** because when that number is called, there should always be somebody with compassion and understanding on the other end.¹³

Rep. Gallego knows the importance of Arizona's veteran community and network of VSOs who offer support and camaraderie – he's relied on it himself. **He knows that any solutions at the**

federal level must be in complete coordination with local leaders in the community if there is to be success.

Women Veterans

Women are the fastest-growing population in the veteran community.

In 2000, only 4% of service-members were women. By 2043, the VA estimates that the number will grow to 18%.¹⁴ Currently, there are over 51,000 women veterans in Arizona.¹⁵ **That is why Rep. Gallego believes investing in women-specific health care and research at the VA is critical.**



A fellow veteran sneaks a picture with Rep. Gallego at American Legion Post 61 in Phoenix.

One of the most valuable aspects of the VA is the ability for veterans to receive nearly all their care in one system. Too often, however, women veterans must go to multiple facilities, both inside and outside the VA, to receive specialized care.¹⁶ **Rep. Gallego wants to improve women's access to treatments at the VA.** To that end, he cosponsored and voted for the **Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans Act**, now law, which expands breast cancer treatments and mammograms at the VA.¹⁷

He is also working to combat Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and to support and treat veterans who have experienced MST. During VA provider screenings, about 1 in 3 women respond “yes” when asked if they experienced MST.¹⁸ And it is unacceptable that MST prevalence in the military is not decreasing.¹⁹ **As the Co-Chair of the Military Sexual Assault and Prevention Caucus and a former enlisted Marine, Rep. Gallego is committed to holding anybody who commits sexual violence fully accountable, no matter their rank.**

And, when a veteran says they are suffering from MST, he believes they should get the support and care they need – no questions asked.²⁰

Reproductive Rights

In a recent survey, almost half of respondents said they receive contraception through the VA.²¹ **But far too often, veterans are at risk of getting caught up in extremists’ efforts to enact nationwide bans on contraception, abortion, and in-vitro fertilization (IVF).**

That is why Rep. Gallego wants to protect the right to abortion and contraception nationwide, including through the **Women’s Health Protection Act**²² and the **Equal Access to Contraception for Veterans Act**.²³ He also supports the **EACH Act** to require TRICARE to reimburse for abortion services.²⁴

Historically, the VA’s policy on IVF has been cruel and anti-family, leaving out same-sex, single, unmarried, and many disabled veterans. Although the VA rightfully expanded IVF to include single, same-sex, and many disabled veterans by allowing donated genetic material and surrogacy,²⁵ Rep. Gallego does not want to stop there. **He’s fighting to expand IVF to cover all veterans**, not just those with a recognized service-connected disability, since the link between service and infertility in women is not yet fully known.²⁶



Rep. Gallego and his mother, shortly before he deployed to Iraq.

Military Families

As a father, Rep. Gallego knows the importance of making sure your loved ones are taken care of should you not be there to do so yourself. **He is committed to protecting access to benefits and compensation for a veteran's loved ones** should anything happen to them, and he wants military families to be able to access high-quality, affordable medical care.



Rep. Gallego listens to constituents during a veterans and military telephone town hall.

Immediate family members of retired or deceased service members can qualify for health care through TRICARE, allowing them to receive affordable care.²⁷ However, TRICARE does not always offer the same level of coverage as private health insurance. **Rep. Gallego wants to bring TRICARE in line with the private market, including extending coverage for dependents from 21**

years old to 26, the same as under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).²⁸

Rep. Gallego is a strong supporter of the Caregiver Program. He believes that caregivers, many of whom sacrifice every day to care for our wounded heroes, should have access to health care, job opportunities, and mental health services. He also wants to increase reimbursements for adaptive housing improvements and vehicles **so veterans and their families can live where and how they choose.**

Lastly, veterans should have peace of mind that their loved ones will be taken care of when they're gone. That's why Rep. Gallego wants to increase the monthly benefits rates for surviving spouses of disabled veterans and reduce the number of years a veteran must be rated totally disabled for their spouse to qualify.²⁹ And should a surviving spouse eventually remarry, he believes the VA and DOD should not automatically punish them by taking away their benefits.³⁰

Education and Employment

Too often, service members have trouble adjusting to civilian life or figuring out how their skills and certifications from the military can transfer to a new career. While Rep. Gallego supports and wants to improve the DOD Transition Assistance Program (TAP), **he also wants to improve the educational and employment resources for veterans.**

The logo for Military.com, featuring the word "Military" in a blue serif font and ".com" in a blue sans-serif font, both underlined with a blue line.A light blue, torn-edge graphic containing the text "Bill Would Provide Better Education Benefits to Native American Veterans".

Bill Would Provide Better Education Benefits to Native American Veterans

First and foremost, **Rep. Gallego strongly supports the GI Bill.** Following the passage of the ***Forever GI Bill***, supported by Rep. Gallego, which expanded access to advanced education and improved flexibility for veterans,³¹ the VA failed many veterans by not implementing the law. This led to veterans being evicted from their homes or being hit with late fees on their tuition. Rep. Gallego led a bipartisan letter calling out the VA and pushing them to honor our promise to veterans.³²

Rep. Gallego secured the signing of his ***Native VetSuccess at Tribal Colleges and Universities Act*** into law to connect Native veteran students with VA services and to provide educational counseling. He has also supported **increased funding for the Veteran Technology Education Course (VET-TEC)** program as well as a provision to protect student veterans completing their education from being unfairly stripped of their housing benefits in their final semester of school.³³ Rep. Gallego is working to build on these efforts and offer more flexibility in when a veteran decides to use their earned education benefit and what they choose to pursue, including job training and certifications.

Rep. Gallego is fighting to improve the employment training services at the VA. Arizona is perfectly positioned to be the national engine for advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, construction, and transportation. **He believes that Arizona's veterans are critical to the state's growth** and that the VA's job training and career counseling must reflect these growing fields if veterans are to fully benefit from the billions of dollars in investments flowing to Arizona.

Housing and Homelessness

The sad fact is that veterans are more likely to become homeless than non-veterans. **On any given night in Arizona, an average of almost 950 veterans are sleeping in shelters or on the streets.** And this number is likely even higher because not every person who is a veteran is counted or discloses that they are a veteran. **Rep. Gallego is working at all levels – local, state, and federal – to address veteran homelessness and get veterans affordable housing.**

Rep. Gallego is strongly supportive of increased funding to address veteran homelessness, including HUD-VASH, Homeless Provider Grants, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans, and Healthcare for the Homeless Veterans Program. **But he also knows that these programs need reforms.**

He wants to fund additional caseload management resources for the HUD-VASH program to address landlords being hesitant about renting to veterans due to red tape and bureaucracy.

He also supports initiatives to increase the supply of veteran housing, like increasing grants for transitional housing³⁴ and removing cost-related barriers to providing transitional housing assistance.³⁵ **He has secured over \$4.3 million in direct funding for programs to provide affordable housing to Arizona veterans.**

When veterans are looking to buy a home, many lack the credit history they need to secure a loan they can afford. That is why Rep. Gallego strongly supports the VA Home Loan Guarantee Program, and he wants to require that VA loans be listed side-by-side with conventional loans so veterans can make informed financial decisions. **When buying a home, veterans should not be punished because they were serving their country.**³⁶



Rep. Gallego presents funding to U.S.Vets for veterans housing in Phoenix.

Endnotes

- 1 [Gallego Celebrates House Passage of the Honoring our PACT Act | U.S. Congressman Ruben Gallego](#)
- 2 [Gallego Pushes the Department of Veterans Affairs to Speed Up PACT Act Processing | U.S. Congressman Ruben Gallego \(house.gov\)](#)
- 3 [Veteran Population - National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics \(va.gov\)](#)
- 4 [H.R.299 - 116th Congress \(2019-2020\): Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 5 [Gallego, Bilirakis Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Protect Veterans' Disability Pay | U.S. Congressman Ruben Gallego \(house.gov\)](#)
- 6 [Cosponsors - H.R.1282 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Major Richard Star Act | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 7 [Gallego Joins Colleagues to Call on VA to Protect Veterans Filing Benefits Claims | U.S. Congressman Ruben Gallego \(house.gov\)](#)
- 8 [H.R.2617 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 9 [H.R.2256 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 10 [H.R.7105 - 116th Congress \(2019-2020\): Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 11 [VA_State_Sheets_2001-2021_Appendix_508.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)
- 12 [Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies FY23 Summary.pdf \(house.gov\)](#)
- 13 [House Passes Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Priorities as Part of Comprehens...](#)
- 14 [Facts and Statistics - Women Veterans Health Care \(va.gov\)](#)
- 15 [Veteran Population - National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics \(va.gov\)](#)
- 16 [wwp-women-warriors-initiative-report-2021.pdf \(woundedwarriorproject.org\)](#)
- 17 [untitled \(congress.gov\)](#)
- 18 [Military Sexual Trauma - PTSD: National Center for PTSD \(va.gov\)](#)
- 19 [Department of Defense Releases Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military > U.S. Department of Defense > Release](#)
- 20 [ciclt.net/sn/clt/gsba/poc_detail.aspx?P_ID=&ClientCode=gsba&LegComID=22774](#)
- 21 [wwp-women-warriors-initiative-report-2021.pdf \(woundedwarriorproject.org\)](#)
- 22 [H.R.12 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Women's Health Protection Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 23 [H.R.12 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Women's Health Protection Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 24 [H.R.561 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): EACH Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 25 [VA to cover IVF for single veterans, same-sex couples after lawsuits \(msn.com\)](#)
- 26 [Gallego Lauds Veterans Affairs Department for Expanding Access to IVF Treatments | U.S. Congressman Ruben Gallego \(house.gov\)](#)
- 27 [Eligibility | TRICARE](#)
- 28 [H.R.1045 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 29 [Cosponsors - H.R.1083 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Caring for Survivors Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 30 [Cosponsors - H.R.3651 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Love Lives On Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 31 [H.R.3218 - 115th Congress \(2017-2018\): Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 32 [Rep. Gallego and Veterans in Congress Call for Full Reimbursement of Underpaid GI Benefits | U.S. Congressman Ruben Gallego \(house.gov\)](#)
- 33 [H.R.2617 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 34 [H.R.491 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): Return Home to Housing Act | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 35 [H.R.5470 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): HOMES for our Veterans Act of 2021 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)
- 36 [Cosponsors - H.R.2369 - 118th Congress \(2023-2024\): VALID Act of 2023 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)