

Student Veterans Have Voices Heard on Capitol Hill

Members of the Student Veterans of America and VFW each year are given the opportunity to meet lawmakers and act on issues affecting military members, veterans and their families as part of the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship

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Since 2013, members of VFW and SVA have had the opportunity to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill.

The veterans involved in the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship program are allowed to meet lawmakers and administrators responsible for implementing veterans' policy on Capitol Hill.

VFW's collaboration with SVA provides students with a semester-long academic experience involving research, action, reporting and advocating for policies affecting military members, veterans and their families. This year, the legislative fellows pushed lawmakers to pass the Not Just a Number Act (S. 928).

If approved, the Not Just a Number Act would require VA to examine how veterans are using benefits. The evaluation could point to correlations between VA benefits and suicide outcomes. The Not Just a Number Act also would require VA to analyze which VA benefits and programs have the greatest impact on preventing suicide.

VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci said that his office made changes to the program that allowed the fellows to work with each other and their mentors at VFW sooner than in year's past. Gallucci added that this empowered the fellows to share ideas with each other and work together on one common objective.

"Our goal for the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is to shape student veterans into strong

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veteran advocates,” Gallucci said. “The students are VFW members, and much like our Patriot’s Pen and Voice of Democracy programs, we want Posts and Departments to rally around VFW’s legislative fellows.”

The following are the 2023/2024 VFW-SVA fellows:

- Bryce Kyle, Army veteran, University of Texas – San Antonio
- Lyssa Losa, Army veteran, Texas A&M University – College Station
- Alex Ortiz, Army veteran, Inter American University of Puerto Rico – School of Law
- Jennifer Ray, Air Force veteran, Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas
- Jamie Springston, Navy veteran, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia
- Alexander Thymmons, Army veteran, University of Hawaii – Manoa
- Terren Wise, Navy veteran, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

The VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is open to VFW members in good standing and enrolled in an accredited college or university. Candidates are evaluated based on the submission of an essay and short video proposal explaining the importance of veteran advocacy. Students of any major are eligible to apply.

SVA is based in Washington, D.C., and works to ensure student veterans and their family members are supported in their higher education. SVA and VFW signed a memorandum of understanding in 2013 to pool the resources of both organizations to help veterans. Since then, VFW has hosted the annual VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship program.

Student veterans interested in the fellowship can visit vfw.org/StudentFellowship for more information. Students are encouraged to check the website in August 2024 to be a part of the 2024/2025 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship.

Find an SVA Chapter near you at <https://studentveterans.org/chapters/find-a-chapter>.

This article is featured in the 2024 June/July issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.