

Issues Up Front: Get Involved

VFW's Action Corps is the organization's tool to wield its legislative influence - here's what it does and how you can be a part of it

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VFW's Action Corps is a force of more than 300,000 grassroots political activists. Its members reinforce VFW's positions—such as the organization's Priority Goals—through emails, letters, phone calls and social media posts aimed at the nation's lawmakers.

According to Ken Wiseman, who leads the Action Corps, the group is a sophisticated tool that harnesses the power of the VFW's and its Auxiliary's 1.7 million members.

“The Action Corps is what gives the VFW its strength in advocating for our nation's heroes,” said Wiseman, associate director of VFW's National Legislative Service. “The Action Corps allows us to flex our collective strength.”

Free and open to all who care about veterans, troops and their families, the Action Corps has been a force for VFW for some 25 years. Wiseman added that since June 2015, the Action Corps has experienced a nearly 900 percent surge in members.

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Over the past two years, its members have advocated on issues such as suicide prevention, VA privatization and Agent Orange exposure. Leading up to the general election last fall, they promoted voter registration, led Get Out The Vote drives and communicated VFW's reviews of the presidential candidates' veterans policies.

They stay informed on the issues by reading the electronic newsletter The VFW Action Corps Weekly, receiving Action Alerts from VFW's Washington Office and visiting VFW's website for the latest talking points.

Wiseman says Action Corps members will also play an important role during VFW's Legislative Conference in March.

"They should be on social media sending posts and tweets that highlight VFW positions," Wiseman said. "They should 'tag' their members of Congress so the lawmakers know we are active and watching what they do. Our members also can visit their local congressional offices during that week to press VFW's message locally."

Wiseman stressed that when sending messages to lawmakers on behalf of VFW, Action Corps members are most effective if they focus on issues most important to them individually.

“A personal story about why change is needed goes much further than a canned speech,” he said. “Members of Congress pay attention to what their constituents need. Highlighting those needs is best.”

Throughout the rest of 2017, Wiseman says Action Corps members can make monthly phone calls to their lawmakers in Washington and pay regular visits to the local offices “to show we will not just disappear once a bill is passed.”

He also would like to see more VFW members attend VFW’s September legislative conference and town hall meetings with their own lawmakers.

“Our members can learn about these events by staying connected to their respective VFW Department’s legislative service committees,” he said. “I send updates weekly about those events and all our members are welcome to attend them.”

Going forward, Wiseman says he wants “more local involvement.” Specifically, his goal is to have “two or three” VFW and Auxiliary members at each Post serving as the local contact for their VFW Department’s National Legislative Committee member.

“Keeping all politics local means more personal relationships and more influence that the VFW can wield toward accomplishing our goals,” Wiseman said.

He also stressed professionalism when acting as a VFW representative.

“VFW does not endorse specific candidates or political parties,” Wiseman said. “We cannot be partisan, but we can be prepared and involved. The Action Corps educates and organizes veterans advocates so that VFW’s political activism is most effective.”

Photo caption: John D. Hanson, a VFW Action Corps member from Post 1874 in Grand Forks, N.D., listens to Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) speak in August 2016 at a town hall meeting in Devils Lake, N.D. Action Corps members are grassroots political activists who promote VFW positions and forge relationships with their local, state and national lawmakers.

This article is featured in the February 2017 issue of [VFW magazine](#) and was written by [Tim Dyhouse](#), senior editor, VFW magazine. Photo courtesy of the Office of Congressman Kevin Cramer.