

“Marshallese citizens have served honorably in the United States Armed Forces for generations, often at one of the highest per-capita rates of military service in the world. The United States military continues to recruit in the Marshall Islands, and with that recruitment comes a shared responsibility to ensure veterans can access the care and benefits they earned through their service.”
—Foreign Minister Kalani Kaneko

Push to get care for our veterans



GIFF JOHNSON
Securing essential healthcare services for Marshallese US military veterans remains a persistent challenge.

Despite the US Congress specifically authorizing in-country services by the US Veterans Administration for veterans of the three freely associated states, the Trump administration over a year ago suspended

ongoing talks to implement services. All three island nations, including RMI,

Talks need to resume

From page 1

lation approved by the United States Congress specifically mandates the provision of VA services to the Freely Associated States,” he told the Journal this week. “This was not intended to be a symbolic commitment, but a practical obligation reflecting the unique relationship between our nations.”

Kaneko said the discussions that the Veterans Administration halted over a year ago have not yet formally resumed. “Formal discussions have not fully resumed, and we have not yet received a definitive timeline from the US government regarding next steps,” he said. But, he added, the government is continuing to advocate for its veterans “to ensure this issue remains a priority.”

In comments issued last month to the US Government Accountability Office, FSM Ambassador to the US Jackson Soram said that based on the US Congress approved Compact legislation, the “freely associated states had been in dialogue with the VA on increased access to healthcare for FAS veterans...In April 2025, after negotiations were underway, the Department of Veterans Affairs unexpectedly suspended the discussions that had been authorized by the US Congress.”

Soram said all three FAS governments

want to resume discussions on this. “This is a fundamentally important goal of the FAS,” Soram added.

Kaneko confirms this sentiment.

“The RMI continues to engage the United States government regarding the implementation of VA services under the 2023 Amended Compact,” Kaneko said. “Late March this year, Senator Wilbur Heine and I led an RMI delegation to Washington, DC to meet directly with officials from the Veterans Health Administration and other relevant US agencies to address this issue and several other Compact implementation concerns affecting our people.

“During those discussions, we expressed our serious concerns regarding the continued delay in delivering VA services to veterans residing in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The VHA proposed that eligible veterans in the RMI utilize the VA Foreign Medical Program, which allows veterans living abroad to access reimbursement for certain covered medical care received in foreign countries. However, we made clear that this approach does not adequately address the realities on the ground in the Marshall Islands.”

Kaneko emphasized the point that the

RMI’s healthcare system “lacks many of the specialized services, medical expertise, and support systems required to meet the unique needs of veterans, particularly those with service-related conditions.

“If these services already existed locally, our veterans would not be forced to travel abroad or continue facing significant barriers to care.” Kaneko said the RMI “remains firm in its position that veterans residing in the RMI deserve meaningful and accessible VA services consistent with both the letter and spirit of the Compact.”

Kaneko was a recruiter for the US Army for much of his time in the military and expresses a feeling of personal responsibility about the provision of healthcare services.

“As a retired US Army soldier who personally recruited many Marshallese men and women into military service, this issue is deeply personal to me,” he said. “Our government will not sit idle while our veterans continue to face barriers to the benefits they were promised and earned through sacrifice and service. This is not simply a policy matter, it is a matter of trust, fairness, and honoring the enduring partnership between the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the United States.”

Karen Goldmeier Green

Akin

2001 K Street N.W. | Washington, DC 20006 | USA | Direct: [+1 202.887.4015](tel:+12028874015) | kgreen@akinqump.com | akinqump.com | [Bio](#)

This material is distributed by Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld on behalf of the Republic of Palau and Republic of the Marshall Islands. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.