



November 8, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for H.R. 7543 – *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act!* This legislation aims to rectify GI Bill inequality for National Guard and Reserve servicemembers. *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far. **Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.***

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress is available online. To review our priorities, you can check out our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

February 22-26, 2025 – The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated [here](#).

National Legislative Council updates coming soon!

Election Day is November 5th, and the 119th Congress will be sworn in on January 3rd at noon! This means there will be some turnover in Congress – some members are retiring, and others will be replaced due to election results. These changes will result in some adjustments to the NLC. Legislative Division staff will be working with the NLC Vice Chairs in each Department to adjust in early December to fill gaps and realign appointees. We will then have training on January 6th for all the new NLC members so that we can hit the ground running and have an increased influence on Congress! If you are on the NLC, stay tuned for further details as we work through this process. If you are a Vice Chair, expect detailed communications from D.C. soon!

LAWMAKERS ACCUSE VA LEADERS OF EXAGGERATING BUDGET SHORTFALL

This article's original publication can be found [here](#).



House Republican leaders on Friday criticized Veterans Affairs leaders for exaggerating budget shortfall issues earlier this summer after department officials said their future funding concerns are not as serious as they predicted.

In a letter to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, House Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mike Bost, R-Ill., and the House Appropriations Committee's veterans panel Chairman John Carter, R-Texas, accused department leaders of "misinforming Congress" and "inciting a panic among veterans about their benefits being delayed or cut." They said the misleading information undermines public faith in the institution.

In September, lawmakers approved a \$3 billion stopgap spending bill for the VA after officials had warned that benefit checks could be delayed or halted on Oct. 1 — the start of the new fiscal year — if additional cash reserves were not made available to the department.

Weeks earlier, VA leaders — including McDonough — said the budget shortfall came as a result of record-high benefits approvals and medical services usage by veterans in the last fiscal year.

They also warned that Congress needed to pass another \$12 billion in funding to cover extra costs in fiscal 2025, an issue the two chambers were expected to bring up upon lawmakers' return after the election.

But earlier this week, in an update provided to congressional leaders, VA officials said they carried over roughly \$5 billion in unspent funds related to benefits accounts from last fiscal year to this fiscal year. Even without the cash infusion approved in September, the department would have held more than \$2 billion in cash reserves.

Still, VA leaders said in a memo to lawmakers that the budget infusion was needed "because if we had even been \$1 short, we could not certify our payment files and more than 7 million veterans and survivors would have had delays in their disability compensation, pension, and education benefits."

In a statement Friday afternoon, VA press secretary Terrence Hayes echoed that message.

"Out of an abundance of caution last fiscal year, VA requested additional benefits funding ... Those veterans and survivors rely on those monthly payments, and any delay could have been devastating for them and their families – and that was not a risk that we were willing to take," he said.

A VA spokesperson said that the funding was designed to avoid that kind of "worst-case scenario" and that VA carried over far less money this year than in previous years.

Still, Bost questioned whether the urgency emphasized by VA leaders in recent weeks was sincere.

"VA leaders repeatedly told us that benefits funding was on the verge of running out and veterans could be harmed," he said in a statement separate from the letter. "But it turns out that was never true."

In their update to Congress, VA leaders also said that department health care accounts are not draining as quickly as anticipated, although they anticipate still needing some extra funding to cover the additional workload on the system.

VA saw its highest level of health care appointments ever in fiscal 2024: about 127.5 million, up 6% over the previous fiscal year. More than 796,000 veterans have enrolled in VA health care over the last two years, up 37% over the previous two years.

But it is not clear if that influx of new patients will require the full \$12 billion estimated by VA planners earlier this year.

Bost and Carter in their letter lamented the “erroneous” estimates given to lawmakers in recent months and promised a full investigation into the budgeting confusion.

Congress is expected to return to Washington later this month to finish up the current session, before newly elected members are seated in January. Unfinished work includes resolving the federal budget plan for the rest of fiscal 2025. Departments are currently operating under a short-term budget extension set to expire in December.

REPUBLICANS WILL FLIP THE SENATE, CNN PROJECTS, SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER IN WASHINGTON

The article's original publication can be found [here](#).

Republicans will win the US Senate majority, CNN projects, shifting the balance of power in Washington and putting the chamber in position to boost Donald Trump's presidency.

With [several races](#) still to be declared, [Republicans now have 52 seats](#) in the chamber and will assume control under a [yet-to-be chosen Republican leader](#) when the new Congress convenes in January.

The Senate takeover was the first big success of the night for Republicans, and the destiny of the House of Representatives, where the GOP is trying to defend its narrow majority, remains up in the air.

The new GOP Senate will be in a position to back Trump's agenda and to resume the ex-president's significant reshaping of the judiciary with scores of more conservatives.

The Republican march to control started early on election night when West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice was projected to pick up the Senate seat vacated by retiring Democrat-turned-independent Sen. Joe Manchin. Democrats had stopped contesting the seat after Manchin announced he wouldn't seek reelection.

In Ohio, Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, who has served in the chamber for three terms, will [lose his reelection bid](#), CNN projects, in a state that has gone from a perennial political bellwether during his tenure to a deep red stronghold. The new Republican senator will be businessman Bernie Moreno, a vehement Trump supporter.

And early Wednesday morning, [CNN projected](#) that in Montana, Republican businessman Tim Sheehy, a retired Navy SEAL, defeated three-term Democratic Sen. Jon Tester.

Cruz and Scott cruise to reelection

In Florida, [GOP Sen. Rick Scott](#) easily dispatched a challenge from Democratic former Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, who had built her campaign partly on a backlash to the overturning of the federal right to an abortion and Florida's six-week abortion ban. Democrats had hoped that an abortion measure on the state's ballot could boost Democratic turnout, but that measure failed Tuesday night.

The party's best chance to pick up a seat had been in Texas, where national party groups made late multimillion-dollar investments into trying to unseat [GOP Sen. Ted Cruz](#). But the two-term senator will defeat Democratic Rep. Colin Allred, CNN projects, in yet another disappointment for Democrats as they chase the mirage of making inroads in the longtime Republican state.

And in Nebraska, CNN projects that Republican [Sen. Deb Fischer](#) will defeat a stronger-than-expected challenge from independent Dan Osborn, who, along with his allies, outspent Republican forces in the state. Her loss wouldn't necessarily have flipped the seat to the Democrats, since Osborn hadn't said which party he'd caucus with in Washington. But with Democrats trying to stave off a GOP majority, an Osborn win would have deprived Republicans of a seat.

Outstanding races

Democrats had always faced a prohibitive path this year in defending their narrow control of the Senate, given the incumbents facing reelection are either in states Trump had carried twice before or narrowly lost in 2020.

There are several key outstanding competitive races that have not been called.

Wisconsin Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin, who is running for a third term, is in a tight race with Republican Eric Hovde, in a state also critical to the presidential race.

In another blue wall state critical to Democrats' success up and down the ballot, two national security specialists are facing off in Michigan. Democratic Rep. Elissa Slotkin is seeking to hold the seat being vacated by retiring Sen. Debbie Stabenow. She is facing Republican former Rep. Mike Rogers, the one-time chairman of the House Intelligence Committee who left Congress in 2015.

In Pennsylvania, Democratic Sen. Bob Casey is trying to hold off a challenge from Republican Dave McCormick, who lost out on Trump's backing during the 2022 Senate primary but secured it, and the GOP nomination, this year.

The final numbers in the Senate will also have to await the result from Nevada, where first-term Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen is up against Republican Sam Brown, an Army veteran who also lost a primary two years ago for the state's other Senate seat. And in Arizona, where Democratic-turned-independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema is retiring, Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego is facing Trump acolyte Kari Lake, the 2022 gubernatorial nominee who still refuses to acknowledge her defeat in that race.

There was not much to cheer for Democrats on the Senate map on Tuesday, but Democrat Angela Alsobrooks was projected to beat Maryland's Republican former Gov. Larry Hogan, who was popular in the solidly blue state. Hogan was often critical of Trump, a stand that was challenging for him with deeply conservative Republicans in Maryland's western districts and areas close to the eastern shore. Alsobrooks will become just the fourth Black woman elected to the Senate after Democrat Lisa Blunt Rochester, the third, was projected to win Delaware's open Senate seat earlier in the night.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we will spotlight an individual every week. These individuals demonstrate exceptional grassroots activism by meeting with/contacting their Congressional Representative/Senator to advocate for veterans. Efforts like these truly make a difference and give veterans a voice in Congress.

Rafael Munoz-Cintron, Washington

Rafael, for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities, we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

Rafael met with Congressman Adam Smith's office and staff to discuss a health risk occurring at the local VA Puget Sound facility. This building is dealing with issues such as mold, water leaks, and a lack of an HVAC system. When Congressman Smith heard the concerns, the office immediately agreed that the conditions for staff and patients at this facility are unacceptable and thanked them for bringing it to their attention. Congressman Smith's office said they would continue to keep Rafael and other Legionnaires updated on the facility's progress.

Thank you, Rafael, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

If you have made a Grassroots effort and would like to be considered for next week's "Legionnaire of the Week," please fill out the Congressional Contact Report Form [here](#). You can also email us at grassroots@legion.org with the details.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress on ***The Veteran's Role in Supporting the Military?*** Check out our [information papers](#) in the [Legislative Toolkit](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org or ejohnson@legion.org.

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the [key legislation section of VoterVoice](#).

***Register for Action Alerts today at
<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>***



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 9:00 am on Friday, November 8, the following hearings are scheduled:

- November 13, 11:30 AM: HVAC Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Oversight Hearing -- "Our Nation's Hallowed Grounds: Review of America's National Cemetery Funeral Operations for Veterans and Servicemembers"
- November 19, 10:15 AM: HVAC Full Committee Oversight Hearing -- "Restoring Congressional Power Over VA After Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo"

HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)