

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ALERT: OPEN THE VA TO ALL WII VETERANS!

This Thursday, The American Legion National Headquarters sent out a grassroots alert to NLC members and Legislative Action Center subscribers encouraging members to call on their legislators to pass the *WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility Act*. The bill was introduced in both chambers, and it is important that it passes before the end of the year. All Legionnaires are encouraged to contact their legislators and share any testimonials with Legion staff for further highlighting.

### [TAKE ACTION NOW](#)

### THE AMERICAN LEGION TESTIFIES AT HOUSE HEARING “REMOVING BARRIERS TO VETERAN HOME OWNERSHIP”



American Legion Director of Veterans Employment and Education, Joseph Sharpe, testified on Dec. 8 before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity on the barriers veterans face on the path to homeownership.

Specifically, Mr. Sharpe testified that the bias against homebuyer using a VA home loan is seen in current market data and realtor surveys."

*Director of Veterans Employment and Education, Joseph Sharpe, testifies at HVAC hearing regarding veteran home ownership.*

If you would like to read more about Mr. Sharpe's testimony, click [here](#).

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### ANNUAL HOLIDAY RECEPTION

The American Legion hosted its annual holiday reception on Dec. 8. The event was supported by With Honor, a cross-partisan organization that is dedicated to promoting and advancing principled veteran leadership in order to recude polarization.

SVAC Chairman Tester (D-MT) made an appearance and gave a brief speech to celebrate this year's legislative accomplishments and reiterate his support for The American Legion.

He specifically applauded The American Legion's efforts expand access to VA healthcare benefits for veterans who have been exposed to toxic hazards while on active duty.

Chairman Tester concluded by saying that his door is "always open" for help to push veteran affairs legislation.

Other attendees included fellow VSO members, HVAC and SVAC professional staff, and many other members of the veteran community. Guests enjoyed veteran-owned brewery tasting, political themed cocktails, and food.



*Chairman Tester (D-MT) spoke at the event and expressed his support for The American Legion and veteran community.*

### CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE

Facing a December 15 deadline to raise the national debt ceiling, Senate Minority Leader McConnell (R-KY) agreed to allow a process that enables the Senate to act with a simple majority of votes this one time. He had previously insisted that Democrats add the debt ceiling to their reconciliation package, which remains mired in gridlock.

Thus, Tuesday night, the House passed a measure to change the Senate rules for raising the debt ceiling, and to delay cuts to Medicare provider payments due to go into effect in the coming weeks. On Thursday, McConnell marshalled sufficient GOP support to invoke cloture on the motion, with a 64 to 36 vote. Proving that they can move quickly when they desire, by the evening, the Senate voted 59 to 34 to actually allow the simplified measure (yes, the Senate has a lot of procedural votes).

The final vote to pass the measure, however, will not take place until next week in both the House and the Senate.

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Also on Tuesday, the House passed the negotiated version of the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Many provisions in the original versions of the bill were dropped to gain Republican support. These include no requirement for women to register with the Selective Service (even though it was in both the House and the Senate version); assurances of honorable discharges for COVID vaccine refusers; and fewer changes to the military justice system surrounding sexual assault and equity, among many other provisions. As a result, while the bill passed the House on a 363-70 vote, more Republicans voted for it than Democrats.

The Senate is expected to vote on the negotiated version of the bill next week, with cloture invoked on Thursday of this week. While Senators are technically allowed to offer amendments, everyone is fervently hoping they refrain.

The FY22 NDAA would authorize \$768.1 billion in defense spending, \$25 billion more than requested by President Joe Biden. The compromise bill (S 1605), worked out by leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services committees, incorporates elements of the version (HR 4350) that passed the House in September and the legislation (S 2792) approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee in July. The bill would authorize a \$740 billion base budget for the Defense Department, \$27.8 billion for nuclear weapons programs under the Department of Energy and \$368 million for defense-related activities in other departments.

Provisions in the bill for which The American Legion advocated and supports include:

- Saving the Troops to Teachers program. TAL story [here](#).
- Afghanistan commission: The bill also includes a proposal to create an independent Afghanistan War Commission to look at the complete history of U.S. government failures over two decades of conflict. Anyone who was in a decision-making or policymaking role related to Afghanistan would be ineligible to serve on the 16-member panel, so it would not include any former generals, anyone who served in Congress at any time during the war or any former senior administration officials whose portfolios included Afghanistan.
- Military justice revised: The NDAA that the House passed in September would have empowered special prosecutors in the services to make decisions now reserved for military commanders on whether to prosecute sexual and related offenses. The final measure does that while covering more crimes, such as murder and kidnapping, in addition to sexual crimes, and it would make sexual harassment a crime in the military. Moreover, the special prosecutors would be more independent of the chain of command than in the original House bill. Under the final measure, commanders would have the power to convene courts-martial, but the new prosecutors' offices would be the ones to decide whether or not to bring charges and whether to actually go to trial.
- GWOT Memorial is now authorized to be located on the National Mall. Previously, it was only authorized somewhere in the DC area outside of the Mall.
- Prohibits the DoD from dishonorably discharging servicemembers that aren't vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Chaplains Memorial Preservation Act to update the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish chaplain memorials at Arlington National Cemetery.

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### APPROPRIATIONS PRESSURE

House Appropriations Committee chair Rep. DeLauro (D-CT) has been quite vocal in her frustration that Republican appropriators are not coming to the negotiating table to craft FY22 spending bills. The current continuing resolution (CR) expires in February, but she does not want to wait until the last minute (again) to take action.

Democrats overwhelmingly favor passing an omnibus to fund the entire fiscal year. However, some Republican lawmakers have floated the idea of keeping the federal government on a full-year CR, under the argument that this saves money. That action would prevent President Biden's efforts to increase spending on domestic programs. However, it would result in a reduction in the military's spending power, and would prevent the Pentagon from starting many of its modernization efforts. A full-year CR would hamper government operations across the board, of course. For the Department of Veterans Affairs, it would pose difficulties in expanding claims processing operations and create the risk of community care programs running out of money.

The House Appropriations Committee is trying to put more public pressure upon Republicans to act. The committee has created a public-facing clock counting the number of days without a Republican offer (as of Thursday, the clock indicated 38 days).

This week, the committee also started distributing to the press letters written by various special interest groups emphasizing the need for spending bills rather than a full-year CR.

### UPCOMING HEARINGS

- There are no upcoming hearings for the remainder of the year.

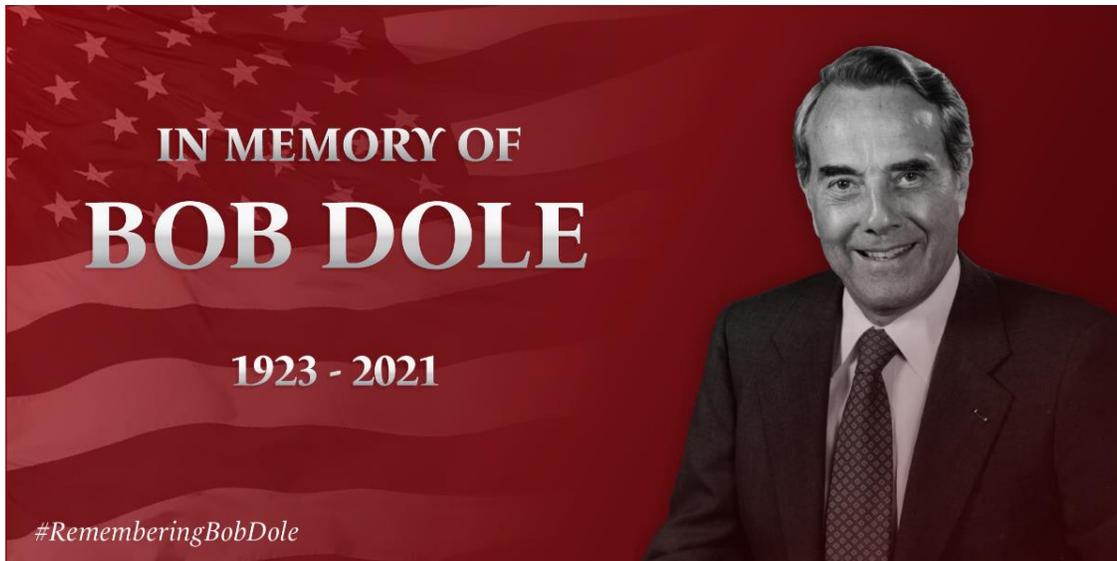
### MEETINGS

- On Monday, December 6, NLD Staff visited the Reserve Officers Association along with First Degree to do a walk-through of the reception venue for TAL's Holiday Reception.
- On Monday, December 6, NLD Staff attended a VSO meeting with HVAC staff and SVAC staff discussing VA's caregiver program.
- On Monday, December 6, NLD Staff participated in a round table discussion with representatives from the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs on the implementation of the presumptive process and toxic exposure.
- On Monday, December 6, NLD Staff met with Rep. Kilmer's (D-WA) office to discuss a bill that would build tiny homes for veterans.

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- On Monday, December 6, NLD Staff attended an event hosted by the CATO Institute titled, “Congress and War: Reclaiming Article I Powers” featuring U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT). More information and video is [here](#).
- On Tuesday, December 7, NLD Staff attended a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing titled, “U.S.-Russia Policy.” Written testimony and video is available [here](#).
- On Tuesday, December 7, NLD Staff conducted a virtual orientation for the new Legislative Chairman on the staff’s ongoing legislative work.
- On Tuesday, December 7, NLD Staff met with VA and other VSOs to discuss the new toxic exposure presumptive process.
- On Tuesday, December 7, NLD Staff attended a four corners Veterans Committee call on veterans education. The call focused on the bipartisan agreement to pass the REMOTE Act, which would extend COVID emergency protections to GI Bill students.
- On Wednesday, December 8, NLD Staff attended a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing titled, “Future of U.S. Policy on Taiwan.” Written testimony and video is available [here](#).
- On Wednesday, December 8, NLD Staff met with Higher Learning Advocates (HLA) to discuss S. 864, the Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students Act of 2021.
- On Wednesday, December 8, NLD Staff hosted TAL’s Annual Holiday Reception.
- On Wednesday, December 8, NLD Staff attended Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing on the nomination of Mr. Kurt DelBene to be an assistant VA Secretary for information and technology.
- On Wednesday, December 8, NLD Staff attended the Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors of The Citizens Flag Alliance.
- On Thursday, December 9, NLD Staff were honored to attend the viewing of Sen. Bob Dole lying in state in the Capitol Rotunda on behalf The American Legion. Great appreciation to the Speaker for including us. Really beautiful tribute.
- On Thursday, December 9, NLD Staff conducted it’s “Legislative Chairman’s Quarterly Call” with all members of the Legislative Commission and National Legislative Council Vice Chairmen.
- On Thursday, December 9, NLD Staff hosted a meeting with Sen. Ernst’s (R-IA) office and a Professional Staff Member on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health to discuss S.544, the Buddy Check bill.
- On Thursday, December 9, NLD Staff met with Sen. Booker’s (D-NJ) office to discuss his sponsorship of the *Vet Centers for Mental Health Act*.
- On Thursday, December 9, NLD Staff attended a four corners Veterans Committee call on veterans homelessness. Staff shared recent updates with the homeless population encamped at the West LA VA campus.
- On Friday, December 10, NLD Staff met with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee professional staff to discuss pending legislation affecting burial benefits for Guard and Reservists. .
- On Friday, December 10, NLD Staff attended an event hosted by Defense Priorities titled, “Refusing to choose: Did the Global Posture Review fail?” More information about the 2021 Global Posture Review is available [here](#) and [here](#). Video is [here](#).

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**Lawrence Montreuil, Legislative Director**  
**The American Legion**  
**(202) 263-2981**