



LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

Week Ending March 12, 2021

Congress

Thursday afternoon, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan (ARP), his \$1.9 trillion COVID supplemental spending bill. The bill passed both the House and the Senate on Party-line votes. The House's second vote took place on Wednesday, when they approved the revised version passed by the Senate last weekend, which costs about \$66 billion less than the original package, according to the CBO.

Appropriators continue to do background work on building the FY22 budget. The President's proposed budget is not expected to reach the Hill until sometime in May. In the meantime, House appropriators are already submitting their ideas for Community Funding projects, which are the newest version of earmarks.

In the Senate, Appropriations Committee chair Sen. Leahy (D-VT) is on board for bringing back "directed funding." He told reporters he would be willing to divide the amount so used with Republicans, should they choose to participate. However, committee ranking member Sen. Shelby (R-AL) noted the caucus would have to reverse its 2019 permanent ban on earmarks.

Tuesday evening, the House unanimously passed the VA Vaccine Act, which would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide the COVID-19 vaccine to all caregivers enrolled in VA programs and to veterans living abroad who use the Foreign Medical Program. The bill continues to give priority to veterans enrolled in the VA to receive health care, although lawmakers have made clear they would like to have the VA vaccinate all veterans regardless of enrollment status. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) has introduced similar legislation in his Chamber.

House Armed Services Committee (HASC) chair Rep. Smith (D-WA) issued a statement on Tuesday that he is "glad" the Biden Administration is willing to work with Congress to review authorities under the existing authorizations for the use of military force (AUMF). Smith said the 2002 AUMF should be repealed, and the 2001 AUMF needs "serious reforms."

House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Defense Supply Chain Task Force

The HASC has formed a new task force to examine the Defense supply chain. Headed by Rep. Slotkin (D-MI) and Rep. Gallagher (R-WI), the group will take three months to identify supply chains with a national security importance and figure out how to ensure they are resilient in the face of crises. The goal is to have legislative language ready to insert into the next National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which usually gets marked up in the late spring or early summer.

The lawmakers have already asked the Pentagon to identify its critical supply list, vulnerabilities, and chokepoints in the supply chains, and what legislative steps would be needed to build resilience against future shocks.

At the start of the pandemic, the nation's reliance upon China for almost all medical supplies, from the mundane (masks and gloves) to the sophisticated (ventilators) was thrust into the spotlight. China immediately stopped most shipments abroad, as their population needed the supplies. Slotkin called this experience "searing", and said it should be prevented for future emergencies. Gallagher went further, charging that China "weaponized" key supply chains at a time of global need.

Slotkin said the White House has already taken action to improve domestic manufacturing and sourcing through executive orders. The task force will be looking at what Congress needs to do.

Gallagher said he is less focused on turning the government into a solely "buy American" purchaser. Rather, he wants to find a balance between what must be made domestically, what can be secured from allies, and where risks can be taken with a broader network of partners. The focus of this effort will not be on acquisition reform, both lawmakers emphasized.

Upcoming Hearings

- On Monday , March 17, at 10:00 AM, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing: "Advancing Effective U.S. Policy for Strategic Competition with China in the Twenty-First Century."
- On Thursday, March 18, at 2:00 PM, House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health Hearing: "Beyond Deborah Sampson: Improving Healthcare For America's Women Veterans In The 117th Congress." TAL will submit a Statement for the Record.
- On Thursday, March 18, at 10:00 AM, a Joint House and Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs Hearing on VSO Legislative Presentations. First Panel: Veterans of Foreign Wars. Second Panel: American Veterans, Fleet Reserve Association, Gold Star Wives of America, National Congress of American Indians, and National Association for Black Veterans.
- On Thursday, March 18, at 1:00 PM, House Foreign Affairs hearing: "A Year Out: Addressing International Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic."

Grassroots

The National Legislative Division (NLD) uses VoterVoice as its advocacy platform for connecting American Legion members with members of Congress. From March 8 to March 12 thirteen (13) members subscribed to receive action alerts while zero (0) unsubscribed. There are now 25,134 members and supporters signed up to receive action alerts.

As part of Washington Conference, NLD has launched a VoterVoice Campaign focused at The American Legion Family asking them to share with their Members of Congress The American Legion's Legislative Agenda and the time and date of the Commander's Testimony. Please share the following link with your entire network and encourage everyone to participate!

<https://votervoicenet.com/AmericanLegion/Campaigns/81356/Respond>

Legislative AARs

- On Monday, March 8, NLD staff attended a VSO Meeting on VBA Claims, Appeals, and Legislative Concerns.
- On Tuesday, March 9, NLD staff attended a webinar titled “Civic Education and America's Civic Crisis” hosted by the Educating for American Democracy initiative, an effort that convened a diverse and cross-ideological group of scholars and educators to create a “Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy”— guidance and an inquiry framework that states, local school districts, and educators can use to transform teaching of history and civics to meet the needs of a diverse 21st century K–12 student body. Read the Roadmap [here](#).
- On Tuesday, March 9, NLD staff attended a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on “United States Indo-Pacific Command.” Testifying was Admiral Philip S. Davidson, USN, Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command. Hearing webpage is [here](#).
- On Wednesday, March 10, NLD staff attended a Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing on “Military Toxic Exposures: The Human Consequences of War.”
- On Wednesday, March 10, NLD staff participated in a conference call with VSO partners and the Women Veterans Task Force, a project of the House Veterans Affairs Committee.
- On Wednesday, March 10, NLD staff attended a Readiness Subcommittee and Military Personnel Subcommittee joint hearing on “Privatized Military Family Housing: Update on Implementation of Housing Reforms.”
- On Wednesday, March 10, NLD staff attended a Quincy Institute webinar titled “Taps for America's empire of bases? Reducing the U.S. global footprint.” The Biden administration is conducting a “Global Posture Review” meant to ensure that the worldwide presence of U.S. military forces is “appropriately aligned with our foreign policy and national security priorities.” This review offers an opportunity to change the way the United States deploys its forces, currently scattered on 800-some overseas bases. Momentum is growing to close hundreds of those bases and bring troops home, as proposed by experts across party lines in a new [open letter](#). More information and a recording is [here](#).
- On Thursday, March 4, NLD staff attended a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the “Final Recommendations and Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service.” Congress created the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service in the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act. The commission was to consider whether the US still needs the Selective Service, and how to bolster an ethos of service among the country’s young people. Written testimony and recording is [here](#).
- On Friday, March 12, NLD staff attended a House Appropriations hearing on VA women’s healthcare. Watch the hearing [here](#).
- On Friday, March 12, NLD staff attended a Brookings Institute webinar on the topic of the needs of women veterans.

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