



## LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

Week Ending March 5, 2021

### **Commander Oxford testifies before Joint House and Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs hearing**

During a Washington Conference conducted almost exclusively virtually, American Legion National Commander James W. “Bill” Oxford was able to testify before members of Congress on March 4.

But much of that testimony focused on the very reason the hundreds of American Legion Family members normally in the nation’s capital for the conference were forced to participate via their PCs, laptops, phones and other mobile devices: a year-long global pandemic that changed the way day-to-day life is conducted.

And Oxford, now in his second year as national commander because of the cancellation of the 2020 American Legion National Convention, was able to share with members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs how members of the American Legion Family responded to the pandemic.

“American Legion posts would be forced to close their buildings in the days and months ahead,” Oxford said, referencing the start of the pandemic, which coincided with The American Legion’s 2020 Washington Conference. “Many of our wartime veteran members lost their jobs. Some lost businesses or their homes.

“Many of us lost loved ones, colleagues and friends to COVID-19 or its effects – both physical and psychological.

“But the American Legion Family did not lose focus on the mission at hand, nor did we lose faith in our ability to strengthen America at a time of great uncertainty and stress.”

[Read more on Legion.org](https://www.legion.org)

### **Legislative Commission discusses four campaigns to be leaders on**

The American Legion’s Legislative Commission met virtually March 1 for the annual Washington Conference to discuss legislative priorities for the 117th Congress, which included four legislative campaigns.

The four campaigns – citizenship for honorable service; addressing toxic exposure and burn pits; peer support; and addressing the forever war – are areas that “we (The American Legion) want to be

leaders on,” said American Legion Legislative Division Director Lawrence Montreuil, during the meeting.

### **Contact your congressional representatives**

You can contact your representative through our campaigns located on our [Legislative Action Center](#). Be sure to share The American Legion’s legislative priorities using the Legislative Agenda when you contact their office. While you are there be sure to sign up for our legislative alerts so you can stay up to date on all of The American Legion’s legislative campaigns.

[Read more about the campaigns on Legion.org](#)

### **Congress**

It now appears President Biden will send his FY22 budget proposal to Congress in mid-to-late April. Appropriators are preparing for a later than usual start to the budget process. Lawmakers can already sign up on-line to submit spending priorities in general and, more specifically, the new community spending projects which are the most recent iteration of earmarks. A group of Republican lawmakers have promised to fight against this move, with legislation already introduced in both Chambers. Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee have submitted a letter to the White House asking for a three to five percent increase in defense spending in this budget.

Several lawmakers are again trying to replace the current Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) with updated language. A Pentagon spokesman says the Department of Defense (DoD) is eager to discuss the issues with Congress.

The Senate took up the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Thursday afternoon. This is President Biden’s \$1.9 trillion coronavirus stimulus package. It continues to lack any Republican support. Before the Senate could embark on a long vote-a-rama, Sen. Johnson (R-WI) refused to waive reading of the 628-page piece of legislation. This means that any actual work on the document will be delayed into Thursday night, as the reading is expected to take about ten hours. The only ones really affected by this are the clerks who will be taking turns doing the reading, and Senate staff who will be experiencing yet another round-the-clock work cycle. After the Senate finishes with the bill, it will go back to the House for a final vote on the new version.

### **Extremism in the military & veteran communities**

The Pentagon has released guidance for commanders and leaders conducting day-long stand downs to address extremism within the ranks. Secretary of Defense Austin ordered the exercise last month to ensure all service members understand their oath of service, and to give them the chance to discuss their experiences with extremism and White supremacy in the ranks.

During hearings before the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees (HVAC and SVAC), most veterans service organizations (VSOs) said they have been monitoring the Department of Justice lists of people arrested and charged with attacking the Capitol on January 6. Should they find a member, they intend to expel that individual. None reported having had that happen yet.

On Thursday, HVAC Chair Rep. Takano (D-CA) announced a new investigation into extremist groups targeting veterans for membership. This will build on last year's investigation into disinformation on social media platforms that target veterans.

### **Upcoming Hearings**

- On Wednesday, March 10, at 3:00 PM, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Hearing will be on Military Toxic Exposures: The Human Consequences of War.
- On Wednesday, March 10, at 11:00 AM, the House Armed Services Committee will be on a Full Committee Hearing on "National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Indo-Pacific".
- On Wednesday, March 10, at 4:45 PM, the House Armed Services Committee on Subcommittees on Readiness and Military Personnel Joint Hearing: "Privatized Military Family Housing: Update on Implementation of Housing Reforms".
- On Thursday, March 11, at 4:00 PM, the House Armed Services Committee on Subcommittee on Military Personnel Hearing: "Military Criminal Investigative Organization Reform Recommendations from the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee".
- 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.

### **Grassroots**

The National Legislative Division (NLD) uses VoterVoice as its advocacy platform for connecting American Legion members with members of Congress. From March 1 to March 4 thirteen (13) members subscribed to receive action alerts while zero (0) unsubscribed. There are now 25,035 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://votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Campaigns/81356/Respond>

### **Legislative AARs**

- From Monday, March 1 to Thursday March 4, NLD Staff participated in the 2021 61<sup>st</sup> Washington Conference.
- On Monday, March 1, NLD staff participated in a Legislative Commission Meeting for the 2021 Washington Conference.
- On Tuesday, March 2, NLD staff participated in a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Global Security Challenges and Strategy.
- On Tuesday, March 2, NLD staff participated in a 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, 4 Corners/VSOs student veteran conference call.

- On Thursday, March 4, NLD staff participated in Joint House and Senate VSO Legislative Presentation with the American Legion National Commander, James W. “Bill” Oxford, for the National Commander’s Testimony.
- On Friday, March 4, NLD staff participated in a VSO Caregiver Meeting conference call.

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