

National Legislative Division Weekly

TELL CONGRESS: PASS THE AFGHAN ADJUSTMENT ACT

In the summer of 2021, our soldiers and Marines heroically evacuated tens of thousands of Afghan allies who fought with us against the Taliban. Now it's time for Congress to honor this nation's promise to our Afghan allies with real and lasting safety through the [bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act](#).

Since July 2021, more than 70,000 at-risk Afghans have been relocated to the United States and have entered on what is called, “[humanitarian parole](#)” - allowing them to *temporarily* stay and work in the U.S. for up to two years. Despite fleeing from the Taliban, there is currently no direct pathway for lawful permanent residency and stability in the U.S. for most of our new Afghan neighbors. Without an adjustment act that creates this path, most Afghans would be forced to navigate the backlogged, complex and paperwork-intensive asylum process. Access to qualified and affordable legal representation, loss of critical documentation and required evidence during the hurried evacuation, the impact of trauma, and backlogs in processing create significant barriers that make the immigration process seem insurmountable.

The only viable pathway to protection for Afghans is the passage of the recently introduced Afghan Adjustment Act (H.R.8685/S.4787) which would provide our new Afghan neighbors with access to a more streamlined and efficient lawful permanent residency process.

This legislation echoes adjustment acts that Congress historically passed for every other generation of U.S. wartime evacuees.

Act Now! Tell Congress they MUST pass this critical legislation and ensure that this country keeps its promise to those who served our country's military.

[TAKE ACTION NOW](#)

GOP CRITIC OF VISA PROGRAM FOR AFGHANS HAS VETERANS GROUPS FRETTEING OVER ITS FUTURE

The original Stars and Stripes article, written by JP Lawrence, is [here](#).

A Republican senator's latest moves against a program that provides visas to interpreters who worked with U.S. forces in Afghanistan could spell doom for it, some advocates and aides say.

Lawmakers this week are debating a provision in the annual defense budget that would extend the Special Immigrant Visa program beyond 2023.

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Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) has raised objections that could kill the program, Jeff Phaneuf, advocacy chief at the Virginia-based nonprofit No One Left Behind, said in a statement Wednesday.

“Ensuring the continuation of this program is critical to keep our promise to those who stood shoulder to shoulder with U.S. troops on the battlefield,” Phaneuf said, adding that thousands of translators remain in Afghanistan and are seeking the visas.

The Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program resettles translators and their family members who face risks to their lives because of their previous work with the U.S. Currently, anyone who applies by Dec. 31, 2023, will be considered.

A spokesman for Grassley declined to comment on the senator's position but said the matter is part of ongoing negotiations, in which various lawmakers have concerns.

"It seems there are a number of objections, from both the House and Senate minority," George Hartmann, deputy communications director Grassley, said in an email Wednesday.

Grassley is the ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over the SIV program. He has objected to it in the past and tried repeatedly to limit its scope, The Daily Beast reported in 2018.

He has taken issue with what he considers “lax standards” in the program and has sought to include stipulations that only Afghans who were classified as a translator or interpreter can apply for an SIV, according to The Daily Beast.

Grassley represents a “significant hurdle” to the program’s survival, said a congressional staffer who is familiar with the negotiations but is not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

“Barring something rather extraordinary, the provision probably doesn't get included and the SIV program would effectively stop at the end of 2023,” the staffer told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

But the program has survived previous objections by Grassley, noted Lawrence Montreuil, Legislative Director at The American Legion. He downplayed the foreboding expressed by the congressional staffer.

“We're frustrated by his opposition, but we're not overly concerned that Sen. Grassley will succeed,” Montreuil said Wednesday, adding that if the program ends up in a dire predicament, The American Legion and other groups will lobby for it.

The U.S. welcomed some 74,000 Afghans after the fall of the American-backed government to the Taliban in August 2021. About half of them are eligible for SIVs or have applied, a senior administration official said in 2022.

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The SIV program has seen case delays lasting years because of understaffing and a reliance on outdated technology, [a State Department inspector general report in 2020](#) said.

The debate comes amid advocacy for another bill, the Afghan Adjustment Act, which provides permanent legal status to Afghans outside the SIV program or the asylum system.

The bill faces opposition by some Republicans, who say the security procedures in it are not stringent enough.

CONGRESS

Both the House and the Senate remain in recess.

Reports emerged this week of quiet talks already underway for Congress to raise the debt ceiling during the lame duck session in November and December. The Republicans are widely expected to gain the majority in the House (if not also the Senate). GOP leaders are sure to use the need to raise the debt ceiling to force the Biden Administration to agree to major spending reforms, most likely in Medicare and Social Security. Raising the debt ceiling during the lame duck session would remove that threat for at least another year.

Some news outlets are reporting there is already some bipartisan support for doing this in the Senate, where at least 10 Republicans would have to join all of the Democrats to pass such a measure. Last time around, in December 2021, 14 Republicans voted in favor of raising the debt limit.

Early voting has already begun for the midterm elections around the country but, of course, no winners are clear yet.

THE APPLICATION FOR THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL IS NOW OPEN

With the midterm elections a month away, The American Legion is beginning the process of rebuilding its National Legislative Council for the 118th Congress. Interested candidates may submit their applications [at this webpage](#) for their departments' consideration. Legionnaires are encouraged to submit their applications before the Nov. 8 election. Thank you to those who have already applied!

The National Legislative Council (NLC) is a 535-member group designated to serve as direct liaisons to every member of the U.S. Congress. Approved in Resolution 45 by the National Executive Committee in 1975, the council's aim is to "propagate an interest in a furtherance of the legislative goals of The American Legion and to serve as a medium for disseminating information and developing an understanding with our elected representatives." Learn more about the council [in this story](#).

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Members of the NLC are relied on to reinforce The American Legion's overall legislative efforts, particularly at times when immediate and personal contact with lawmakers is necessary – typically referred to as “grassroots contact.”

They routinely email, write, and/or call lawmakers and their staff regarding veterans legislation. Members should strive to visit the lawmaker’s local office at least once per month to discuss issues that will directly impact The American Legion’s legislative goals.

Members work to:

- Promote an interest in and a furtherance of The American Legion’s legislative goals.
- Serve as a liaison for disseminating information to elected lawmakers and staff.
- Develop and maintain strong working relationships with elected lawmakers and staff.
- Disseminate information on proposed and adopted veterans legislation to posts and members of the Legion within the congressional district.

Position requirements include:

- Current member of The American Legion
- Experience working with public relations and/or elected officials is a plus.
- Excellent verbal and written communications skills are necessary.
- Comfortable speaking and making presentations to larger groups.
- Ability to use social media.
- Ability to represent The American Legion and veterans to various groups and organizations.
- Ownership of an email account and internet access is required.
- Personal relationship with the member of Congress to whom they are assigned, senior staffers in their office, or willingness and ability to establish relationships with them.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

In an effort 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.

Kelli Harmon, North Carolina

This week, we are excited to recognize Kelli Harmon from the Department of North Carolina for meeting with Rep. Murphy (R-NC) in Outer Banks, North Carolina. Ms. Harmon and Rep. Murphy discussed the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (FY23 NDAA) and opening VA to all World War II veterans. Ms. Harmon said that Rep. Murphy agreed to support and sent additional information to his legislative staff.

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Thank you, Ms. Harmon!

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 me at kisaacson@legion.org.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

Congress is out of session next week; there will be no hearings.