

National Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ALERT: TELL YOUR SENATORS TO SUPPORT THE STRONG VETERANS ACT

Our most sacred responsibility, as a nation and as veterans, is to care for our fellow men and women who have served this nation with honor. The American Legion has long had a "Buddy Check Week," asking our Legionnaires to conduct veteran outreach as part of their daily routine. The American Legion's "Buddy Check" program has been an excellent tool for membership, and we strongly support legislation that expands this program to VA.

"S.544 - the Buddy Check bill is now included as a provision in H.R. 6411 - the STRONG Veterans Act of 2022. This legislation is a comprehensive veterans' mental healthcare package that passed the House in July 2022. Amongst other provisions, it would:

- Expand eligibility for Vet Center services
- Require additional studies into veteran mental health research
- Mandate a review of the training for the Veterans Crisis Line responders
- Expand VA's Peer Specialist Support Program

It is now awaiting action in the Senate. The American Legion proudly supports this legislation and asks that you contact your Senators and tell them to support H.R. 6411 - the STRONG Veterans Act today!

TAKE ACTION NOW!

CONGRESS

The new fiscal year starts next week, and Congress has yet to unveil continuing resolution (CR) language, much less vote on it. Next week, due to Rosh Hashanah (Jewish new year), both the House and the Senate will have only three legislative days to prevent a government shutdown on October 1. They do not currently plan to meet the first week in October, as Yom Kippur (Jewish Day of Atonement) falls on Wednesday.

Last week, negotiations appeared to be underway to have the CR go until mid-December. Some Republican lawmakers are now holding out for a January expiration date, which would allow them greater leeway in setting budget priorities should they gain the majority in either or both Chambers.

Sen. Manchin (D-WV) continues to insist on having his energy permitting language included in the CR. Congressional leaders seem optimistic that additional support for Ukraine will be included, although possibly not the full \$11.7 billion requested by the White House. With the recent hurricanes hitting Puerto Rico, some disaster aid may also be included.

The Administration has requested more money for COVID testing, vaccines, therapeutics, and the general public health response. However, President Biden's comments on 60 Minutes that the pandemic is over

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combined with general Republican sentiment that enough money has been spent on that puts in doubt whether the CR will include this funding.

In several hearings this week, Pentagon officials informed lawmakers that ongoing recruiting efforts and sexual assault prevention reforms rely upon long-term, stable funding. One official suggested that Congress might consider providing two-year funding for recruiting to enable the Pentagon to purchase advance medial buys. Department of Veterans Affairs officials also told lawmakers that the electronic health record modernization (EHRM) project and other information technology programs are harmed by delayed budgets.

This week, Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) announced his Chamber will take up the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in October. This announcement took many by surprise, as it was assumed lawmakers would stay home for October due to the looming elections.

LEADER MCCARTHY & RANKING MEMBER BOST VETERANS ROUNDTABLE



The American Legion testified at a Republican roundtable to discuss veteran-related issues.

On Tuesday, The American Legion participated in a Veteran Leadership Roundtable hosted by House Minority Leader McCarthy (R-CA) and House Veterans Affairs Committee Ranking Member Bost (R-IL). The roundtable brought Congressional leaders together with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) for a conversation about issues that America's veterans are currently facing.

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The discussion focused on priorities for veterans and their families moving forward, including meeting the needs of veterans as they transition out of the military, improving care and benefits for veterans struggling with toxic exposure in light of the enactment of the Honoring Our PACT Act, and supporting veterans with mental health concerns. Other members of Congress present were Reps. Bergman (R-MI), Mann (R-KS), Moore (R-AL), Miller-Meeks (R-IA), and Ellzey (R-TX), all of whom presently serve on the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC).

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH TESTIFIES ON ACCESS TO CARE STANDARDS

On Wednesday, September 21, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) held hearing to discuss the highly anticipated Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) report on access to timely care. The Committee specifically discussed the community care referral process and how long this process takes. Other topics included mental healthcare wait times, additional hiring at call centers, and surgery scheduling conflicts. To watch the hearing, click this [link](#).

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PASSES SENDS 13 BILLS TO FULL HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On Wednesday, September 21, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (HVAC) held a full Committee markup, advancing 13 bills that will increase accessibility to mental health care and resources, promote equitable access to reproductive healthcare services for all veterans, and ensure that veterans transitioning from service to civilian life are fully and holistically supported and able to access comprehensive benefits.

The list of bills passed out of the Committee can be found below:

1. H.R. 6273 – VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Project Act of 2021 (Rep. S. Lee)
2. H.R. 3793 – Supporting Families of the Fallen Act (Rep. Roy)
3. H.R. 8888 – Food Security for All Veterans Act (Rep. Peltola)
4. H.R. 8852 – End Veteran Hunger Act of 2022 (Rep. Jacobs)
5. H.R. 8875 – Expanding Home Loans for Guard & Reservists Act (Rep. Ryan)
6. H.R. 2800 – WINGMAN Act (Rep. Perry)
7. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Pappas to H.R. 8510 – Strengthening Whistleblower Protections at the Department of Veterans Affairs Act (Rep. Pappas)
8. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Bost to H.R. 5918 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs repays members of the Armed Forces for certain contributions made by such members towards Post-9/11 Educational Assistance (Rep. Banks)
9. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Brownley to H.R. 1957 – Veterans Infertility Treatment Act of 2021 (Rep. Brownley)

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10. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Levin to H.R. 4601 – Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (Rep. Levin)
11. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Takano to H.R. 3304 – CARS for Vets Act (Rep. Fletcher)
12. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Takano to H.R. 2521 – DOULA for VA Act of 2021 (Rep. Lawrence)
13. A.N.S. offered by Rep. Takano to H.R. 7589 – REMOVE Copays Act (Rep. Takano)

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON MILITARY RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The Senate Armed Services Committee's Personnel Subcommittee met on Thursday, September 22, to discuss the status of military recruiting and retention efforts across the military.

All of the Military Services, both active duty and reserve components, face severe problems with recruiting. In its FY23 budget request, the Army asked for a lower authorized end strength because they cannot meet previously set goals.

The Air Force announced this week it will fall short by between 1,500 and 2,000 Airmen for each component of the Reserve and National Guard.

Young Americans' propensity to serve has dropped to historic lows. This comes at a time when only about a quarter of all young people are even eligible to serve, due to educational shortcomings, legal problems, and medical issues. Obesity has come to be considered a national security issue, as it prevents so many from entering the military. Committee members on both sides of the aisle expressed concerns about the public's inaccurate view of life in the US Armed Forces. Ranking Member Tillis (R-NC) said that the media, veterans, and even Members of Congress are spreading disinformation about the military, portraying it as a dangerous and toxic workplace.

SENATE COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2022 INCLUDES PAY OUR COAST GUARD PROVISION

On Wednesday, September 14, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee passed the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022. The bill includes a provision that ensures that Coast Guard servicemembers get paid in the event of a government shutdown. This provision is strongly supported by The American Legion and the National Legislative Division is working diligently to ensure it remains in the final version of the bill, which is expected to get added to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in October. In addition, this legislation will also help mitigate devastating climate-related events, invest in climate resilient Coast Guard infrastructure at places like Sturgeon Bay and will increase support for childcare, housing, and education.

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AFGHAN ADJUSTMENT ACT

Two dozen veterans service organizations (VSOs) are pressing to have the Afghan Adjustment Act added to the CR. This legislation would create a pathway for eligible Afghans already in the United States to apply for lawful permanent residence after clearing additional background checks. The legislation would also provide assistance by fixing the Special Immigration Visa (SIV) process for the tens of thousands of Afghans who helped the United States during the war and who have been evacuated out of that country, but remain overseas.

Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, nearly 80,000 refugees were evacuated from that country. In addition to the uncertainties faced by those still in other countries, those who are in the US only have humanitarian paroles. This allows them to stay in the US for a year or two, and prevents them from building stable lives, according to the many immigration groups that have joined the VSOs in supporting this legislation.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Thursday, September 29, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) will hold a hearing titled "Veteran Suicide Prevention: Capitalizing on What Works and Increasing Innovative Approaches."

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.

Tim Poxson, Michigan

This week, we are excited to recognize Tim Poxson from the Department of Michigan for meeting with Rep. Slotkin (D-MI) at a local high school in Lansing, Michigan. Mr. Posxon and Rep. Slotkin discussed updates on veteran-related legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Posxon!

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.