

## Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, The American Legion is urging Congress to create a [Congressional Gold Medal for the Hello Girls of World War I](#) (S. 815 / H.R. 1572). The Hello Girls of World War I played a vital role in the Army's communication efforts yet have largely been forgotten by history.

Last session, three critical bills passed the House of Representatives: The [Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act of 2023](#) (H.R. 542), the [HOME Act of 2023](#) (H.R. 3848), and the [COPE Act](#) (H.R. 3581) bill. If the Senate agrees to pass this Legion-backed legislation, Congress has an opportunity to provide indispensable support for our Nation's veterans and their family caregivers.

The American Legion has released its legislative agenda for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. To review our priorities, you can check out our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

### DID RUSSIA EXECUTE PRISONERS OF WAR?

*This article's original publication can be found [here](#).*



Russia may have executed more than 30 recently captured Ukrainian prisoners of war over the winter months, according to reports received by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, POLITICO EU reports.

The human rights watchdog “verified three of these incidents in which Russian servicemen executed seven Ukrainian servicemen hors de combat,” according to the latest UN report on the subject.

From December to February, as President Vladimir Putin's invading Russian forces were rapidly advancing in Avdiivka, in the Donetsk region, and attempting to recapture Robotyne in the Zaporizhzhia region, dozens of execution videos were posted on social media.

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In eight of the reported cases, videos showed Russian servicemen killing Ukrainian POWs who had laid down their weapons or using other captured Ukrainian POWs as human shields.

“As of 29 February 2024, OHCHR had obtained corroborating information for one of the videos,” the report reads. “In that video, what appears to be a group of armed Russian soldiers stands 15-20 meters behind three Ukrainian servicemen who are kneeling with their hands behind their heads. After a few seconds, smoke appears from the Russian soldiers’ weapons and the Ukrainian servicemen fall to the ground.”

### TOP HOUSE GOP NEGOTIATOR STEPPING DOWN FROM POST

*This article’s original publication can be found [here](#).*

Rep. [Kay Granger](#) (R-Texas), chair of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, told GOP leadership Friday that she will be stepping down from her post.

In a letter to Speaker [Mike Johnson](#) (R-La.), Granger, who previously announced her retirement, [requested a replacement](#) “as soon as possible” to serve out the remainder of the congressional session.

“My goal for the next nine months is to return to where I began my career, as an educator. I will remain on the Committee as Chair Emeritus to lead as a teacher would, providing advice and counsel for my colleagues when it is needed,” she wrote.

“I will also continue to find ways to improve the lives of the people of the 12th District of Texas from my position on the Committee. I will dedicate my energy to helping the new Chair and our Conference achieve our goals through the appropriations process.”

The letter was made public not long after the House [passed a \\$1.2 trillion](#) government spending package for fiscal 2024, funding the departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Labor, Health and Human Services, and State, as well as general government, financial services and foreign operations.

The package combines six of the 12 annual government bills the House passed this month for the fiscal year. The measure now heads to the Senate for consideration ahead of a Friday night government shutdown deadline.

The recent announcement has already set off a race for coveted seat atop the appropriations committee. Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), head of the subcommittee that crafts funding for transportation and housing programs, threw his hat in the ring for the position [later on Friday](#).

“I have served on the Committee for the majority of my career, in a variety of different positions, and I firmly believe that those experiences will aid me going forward to do a respectable job as Chairman,” Cole said in a [statement](#).

The spending package also caps off months of tense bipartisan spending negotiations in the divided Congress, as well as intraparty fights in the House, where a group of hard-line conservatives have come out strongly against the funding package.

# DISAPPROVAL OF ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR GROWING IN UNITED STATES

*This article's original publication can be found [here](#).*

A majority of Americans now disapprove of Israel's war against Palestinian militant group Hamas in Gaza, with support dropping from 50 percent in November to 36 percent this month, according to a new poll.



The number who disapprove increased from 45 percent in November to 55 percent in March, while about 9 percent of respondents in the latest Gallup poll have no opinion on the issue.

But approval of Israel's war is divided along party lines, with 64 percent of Republicans supporting the military action in Gaza, compared to just 18 percent of Democrats.

Among independents, support for Israel's military action in Gaza dropped from 47 percent to 29 percent in the same time frame.

Protests calling for a cease-fire and to protect Palestinian lives have become commonplace across the U.S., while others say Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas, which invaded the country on Oct. 7 and killed more than 1,100 people, taking roughly 250 hostages with 100 believed to be still alive in custody in Gaza.

But the nearly six-month war shows no end in sight, even as more than 32,000 Palestinians have been killed and the United Nations is warning of a famine in northern Gaza.

Democrats are growing furious at the death toll and humanitarian crisis, especially with Arab Americans and young voters promising a protest vote at the polls in November. About 13 percent of Democrats in the primary for Michigan, a key battleground state in November, voted "uncommitted" instead of for President Biden.

The Biden administration is trying to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza while it is also taking a harder stance on the war, abstaining this week from a United Nations Security Council resolution that called for an immediate cease-fire for the next two weeks and the release of hostages. Netanyahu canceled a delegation to Washington after the vote, but the White House has since said his office had agreed to reschedule.

Biden and key members of his Cabinet are also pushing for Israel to reconsider a major ground operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians are sheltering from the war.

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### LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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.

#### Roy Santiago, California

Mr. Santiago, for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities, we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

Mr. Santiago met with Brenda Herbert from the office of Rep. John Duarte (R-CA) in Turlock, CA. In Mr. Santiago's report, he shared that he discussed The American Legion's 2024 Legislative Agenda, renaming of a Post Office after Cpl. Michael Anderson (USMC), and the creation of a 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday Coin for the Marine Corps by the Treasury Department.

Thank you, Mr. Santiago, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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 [grassroots@legion.org](mailto:grassroots@legion.org).

Interested in what the Legion is doing for **Caregivers and Survivors**? [Check out our recent two-page fact sheet](#). This could be a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact [grassroots@legion.org](mailto:grassroots@legion.org) or [ejohnson@legion.org](mailto:ejohnson@legion.org).

### LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

Legislative staff in DC participated in several meetings on Capitol Hill, including with staff from Congressman Chris Deluzio and Congressman Brad Finstad's offices, as well as staff from Senator Mike Braun's office.

Your DC staff also worked with allied organizations on issues such as the Congressional Gold Medal for the Hello Girls of World War I, and the repeal Authorization for Use of Military Force.

Several staff members attended the [HillVets Founders Night](#) in support of our friends at [HillVets](#).

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### UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at Noon ET, no hearings are yet scheduled for the coming weeks.

Previous HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

Previous SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)