

Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact their elected representatives to support the *Contract Our Veterans Act!* The American Legion supports this crucial legislation that will help veteran-owned businesses obtain government contracts. *Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your member of Congress.*

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress. To review our priorities, you can check out our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

VA COMMITTEE LEADERS UNVEIL BIPARTISAN VETERANS PACKAGE

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

House and Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs leaders Chairman Mike Bost (R-Ill.), Chairman Jon Tester (D-Mont.), and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), introduced H.R. 8371, *the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*. This legislation includes a number of bipartisan and bicameral proposals to reform and improve the delivery of healthcare, benefits, and services at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for veterans, their families, and their survivors.

“Since I became Chairman, I have long said that the men and women who have served and sacrificed for our nation have earned a VA that works with them – not against them,” **said Chairman Bost**. “Over the past year and a half, we have listened to veterans and stakeholders to find the gaps within VA’s services and consider commonsense legislation to improve them where we can. The bipartisan bill from my friend from Arizona, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, is a product of that work. This bill would expand economic opportunities for veterans, give veterans more choice in where they choose to live out their sunset years or receive healthcare, improve mental health support for veteran caregivers, hold VA accountable to the taxpayers and veterans they serve, and so much more. Each of these improvements will make a positive impact on veterans and their families every single day, and I look forward to passing this good bill out of the House soon.”

“In the past few years, we’ve done right by veterans by passing critical legislation like the PACT Act, but there’s still work to be done to ensure we’re fully honoring our commitment to them and their families,” **said Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Tester**. “That starts with improving the health care and benefits they earned, and I’m proud to have helped negotiate this bipartisan veterans’ package on behalf of veterans in Montana and across the nation. By improving veterans’ access to the care they need, bolstering long-term care options and assistance for homeless veterans, strengthening life-

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saving mental health services, and increasing transparency and oversight of VA's new Electronic Health Record program, this package is a common sense step towards delivering veterans and their families the kind of support they earned and deserve."

"The Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act will make critical changes to VA and provide life-saving support to veterans, caregivers and survivors across the country," **said Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Moran**. "This legislation will improve access to health care and benefits, expand long-term care programs and make it easier for veterans struggling with mental health and addiction to get needed treatment. In addition, it strengthens support for veteran caregivers in honor of a caregiver and honorary Kansan, Senator Elizabeth Dole. I applaud my colleagues in the House and Senate for coming together to support our nation's veterans and their families and I thank the veteran service organization community for their support."

BIPARTISAN GROUP OF SENATORS UNVEIL LONG-AWAITED GUIDANCE ON AI BILLS

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

A bipartisan group of senators has taken a critical step forward in regulating artificial intelligence, releasing a long-awaited, Chuck Schumer-endorsed "roadmap" for addressing AI that Congress could take up this term.

The bipartisan working group, which consists of Schumer, Sens. Todd Young (R-Ind.), Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), has been developing the report for months, looking to outline areas of AI ripe for bipartisan regulation. The quartet hosted a number of AI briefings this term for senators, hoping to educate sometimes tech-averse lawmakers.

Top line AI priorities in the report include:

- Boosting funding for AI innovation
- Tackling nationwide standards for AI safety and fairness
- Using AI to strengthen U.S. national security
- Addressing potential job displacement for U.S. workers caused by AI
- Tackling so-called "deepfakes" being used in elections, and "non-consensual distribution of intimate images"
- Ensuring that opportunities to partake in AI innovation reach schools and companies

"AI is not only complex, but it's rapidly evolving and it's so broad in its impact," Schumer said in a discussion on the report with journalists Tuesday night. "So the longer we wait, the more the gap becomes. ... We've never ever dealt with anything like this before."

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Those goals would come at a price, though. The report says the eventual goal would be to spend “at least \$32 billion per year for (non-defense) AI innovation,” as recommended by the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence in a 2021 report. But the senators emphasized that would be over a number of years.

“I think when you're talking about AI, they're going to upgrade the old message of ‘you could be penny-wise and pound-foolish,’” Rounds said. “In this case, it may very well be, you could be billions-wise and trillions-foolish.”

Schumer and the rest of the working group said the plan is to have individual committees move forward with the parts of the report relevant to their jurisdiction. The Senate majority leader also said the plan is not to wait on a larger package to come together — and instead to be flexible on moving smaller bills individually if they're ready to go.

Schumer did indicate one area of legislating that was particularly high up on the priority list: Addressing the use of AI in elections. He did not specify timing on that legislation on the floor, however. Of course, it's a huge jump from a report to passing bills through both chambers — particularly in this split Congress. The Senate is going to be largely unfriendly territory for legislating these next few months and will be gone for weeks at a time this fall. And while the group said it is hoping for buy-in from the House, the House is a bit unpredictable nowadays, to say the least.

The Senate's next deadline for must-pass legislation isn't until fall, on government funding and the farm bill, meaning AI provisions won't be able to hitch a ride on more comprehensive legislation for a while. And with the November elections just around the corner, vulnerable incumbents aren't going to be looking to vote on much. Any bills that include government spending could have particular holdups. Still, Schumer has been adamant that he'll push Congress to act on a bevy of priorities this year, AI included. And there's always the post-election lame-duck session, where finicky policy can weasel its way through.

Asked about the difficulty of passing policy in an election year, Schumer told POLITICO: “We're going to have to persuade our colleagues, but we think the arguments are overwhelming.”

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.

Todd McKinley, Tennessee

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

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Todd and National Executive Committeeman Robert “Bob” Hensley met with Congresswoman Diana Harshbarger (R-TN) in Kingsport, TN. In Todd’s report, he shared that they discussed the national Be the One campaign, the PACT Act, and the importance of protecting the benefits our veterans have earned.

Thank you, Todd, 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 us at grassroots@legion.org with the details.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

LegDiv has been meeting with Congressional Staff to discuss the impacts of the newly announced Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Act and provide feedback on The American Legion support and recommendations for the bill. The staff participated in the quarterly VSO Roundtable hosted by Minority Leader Jeffries and HVAC Ranking Member Takano, where the topics included veteran housing and education and members of Congress took note of input directly from the VSOs.

We conducted meetings with Sen Sanders’ and Sen Blackburn’s offices to discuss pending legislation, and drafted feedback on the NDAA and MILCON/VA FY25 funding bills for the Appropriations subcommittees to review. On Thursday, the staff attended a Congressional Reception at the Capitol Hill Club honoring the Louisiana Delegation, providing a little preview of the good Cajun food we are expecting during National Convention in New Orleans in August.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress on *The Veteran’s Role in Supporting the Military*? Check out our [information paper](#) in the [Legislative Toolkit](#). This is 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 or ejohnson@legion.org.

Register for Action Alerts today at <https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

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UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, May 17th, at 9:00am, the following hearings are scheduled:

May 21st, 9:30am – Senate Armed Services Committee (Strategic Forces Sub), testimony on DoD Space Activities

May 22nd, 4:45pm – Senate Armed Services Committee (Strategic Forces Sub), testimony on the DoD nuclear weapons program

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

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

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

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