Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

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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.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS WORKING IN BALTIMORE

This article's original publication can be found here.

The Army Corps of Engineers has a tentative timeline of restoring access to the Port of Baltimore to "normal capacity" by the end of May, it said in a statement Thursday night. Also, the Corps said engineers plan to open a channel 280 feet wide and 35 feet deep by the end of April to allow barge container service and some vessels that move automobiles and farm equipment to pass the wreckage of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed March 26 when it was struck by a container ship.

"These are ambitious timelines that may still be impacted by significant adverse weather conditions or changes in the complexity of the wreckage," Army Corps of Engineers Lt. Gen. Scott A. Spellmon said in a news release. Spellmon is the Corps' commanding general. Rain and lightning in the Baltimore area this week prevented crews from operating cranes to lift shipping containers and parts of the bridge onto barges, the Key Bridge Response Unified Command said.

The news came on the eve of Democratic President Joe Biden's visit Friday to inspect the massive salvage effort to help the port recover from the bridge collapse.

Until Thursday night, officials had declined to specify a timeline for restoring normal access to the port.
"This evening's announcement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that they've outlined a tentative timeline sends a strong message to the City of Baltimore and our entire country," Mayor Brandon Scott said in a statement. "Some of the best engineering minds in the world and our most important resources have been made available for this critically important project."

The container ship struck one of the bridge's support piers, sending the spans plunging into the Patapsco River and blocking the channel. Six men who were working on the bridge repairing potholes are presumed dead. Divers have recovered two of their bodies from the area, which is clogged by the damaged ship and the wreckage of the bridge.

"This ambitious timeline proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers offers a level of clarity and certainty that Baltimore needs to hear so we can collectively plan for continued recovery efforts -- related to both our economy and our infrastructure," Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat, said in a statement. "Now we have a target. We must do everything we can to meet that target."

Temporary 11- and 14-feet-deep channels that pass under remaining parts of the Key Bridge were opened this week to allow a handful of smaller barges and tugboats out of the port.
"I'm grateful to have a timeline that will help guide our recovery and response at the local level," Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski Jr., a Democrat, said in a statement. "I am confident that they have the best people and resources at their disposal to meet this timeline."

Seven commercial ships and four military ships that support the overseas deployment of U.S. military forces have been stuck in the port since the 984-foot container ship Dali collided with the bridge.
Spellmon credited "the exhaustive work" of the Key Bridge Response Unified Command -- which is led by the Corps, the Coast Guard, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Maryland Transportation Authority and the Maryland State Police -- in making progress toward the ultimate goal.

"Thanks to the exhaustive work of the Unified Command during the last two weeks, including underwater surveys and detailed structural analysis of the wreckage, we've developed a better understanding of the immense and complex work that lies ahead," Spellmon said in the statement. "A fully opened federal channel remains our primary goal."

AMERICAN LEGION

Legislative Division Weekly

AIR FORCE OSPREYS IN JAPAN REMAIN GROUNDED

This article's original publication can be found here.

The Air Force is still not flying Osprey aircraft in Japan despite getting the green light to lift a monthslong flight hold following a deadly crash off the country's southern coast, but the Marine Corps has put its aircraft based there back in the skies. Rebecca Heyse, an Air Force Special Operations Command spokeswoman, told Military.com on Tuesday that none of the service's units have resumed flying the Osprey yet.

In contrast, the Marine Corps' 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, which is based in Okinawa, quickly moved to fly its MV-22s, announcing a return to flight status on March 14 -- less than a week after the hold was lifted, according to a statement released the same day. The aircraft -- which is flown by the Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force -- was allowed to return to flight in early March after Naval Air Systems Command and the V-22 Joint Program Office announced that they had discovered a new and not fully understood mechanical failure as part of the investigation into the Nov. 29 Air Force Osprey crash off the coast of Yakushima Island that left eight airmen dead.

The Navy doesn't have any Ospreys permanently stationed in Japan. A Navy spokesperson told Military.com on Tuesday that its CMV-22Bs based in San Diego, California, have begun the process of returning to flight. Officials who allowed the aircraft to return to flight argued that data analysis led to the decision to deem the Osprey safe -- while refusing to disclose any information about what part failed or any major details on procedural changes that were made as part of the grounding being lifted.

"We have high confidence that we understand what component failed, and how it failed," Marine Col. Brian Taylor, the V-22 program manager, told reporters in a briefing in early March. "I think what we are still working on is the 'why,'" Taylor said, noting that "this is the first time that we've seen this particular component fail in this way."

The Air Force's more cautious approach evokes parallels to how the public discovered the other yet-to-be resolved issue with the aircraft in 2022.
In August 2022, the Air Force briefly grounded its fleet of Ospreys after they experienced a series of hard clutch engagements that worried leaders in the service.

However, the very next day, the Marine Corps said not only that its Ospreys would keep flying but that its pilots could handle the issue, which it has known about for years. The hard clutch problem is an issue with the Osprey's complex system of clutch assemblies that are supposed to enable one engine to fly the aircraft in the event of an engine failure. However, in some instances -- at least 15 mishaps -- those clutches have failed.

Military.com reported one such mishap with an Air Force Osprey that could have become fatal in 2017. Despite assurances from the Marine Corps that the problem was under control, the clutch issue became deadly in June 2022 when one of its Ospreys crashed in the California desert, killing five Marines.
After that incident was investigated, Taylor also argued that data analysis of some of the more recent incidents involving the clutch led his office to conclude that replacing a critical component -- the input quill assembly -- more frequently was 99% effective despite skepticism from a Marine Corps widow of one of the pilots.

Now, the Marine Corps is again saying it has utmost confidence in the aircraft. "The flight clearance by our NAVAIR, our adherence to proven operational risk management practices, our confidence in this amazing aircraft, and our faith in the professionalism of our pilots, crew and maintenance teams undergird our decision to return the Osprey to service," the 1st MAW said in its statement.

The Marine Corps is also very dependent on the Osprey. It owns nearly 350 aircraft, compared to the Air Force's roughly 50 airframes.

Lt. Gen. Karsten Heckl said in February that the Corps has seen "dramatic impacts" from the flying halt, while 1st MAW's commander, Maj. Gen. Eric Austin, said the Osprey is "key to the success" of his unit.
In the March statement, Austin said the Osprey "plays a central role in our ability to campaign, to respond in time of crisis, and ultimately to partner with our allies and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force, which also flies the Osprey, also resumed flights last week, according to a report from Japan Times.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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Joseph Burns, New York

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

Mr. Burns met with Congressman Andrew Garbarino (R-NY-02) in Turlock, CA. In Mr. Burn’s report, he shared that he discussed the US Coast Guard and the GI Bill Parity Act, as well as the Major Richard Starr Act. These are all key Legion priorities!

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

Legislative Division Weekly

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LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

FAREWELL to Katherine Ryan! Our energetic Legislative Coordinator has been promoted to Policy Analyst for the National Security Division and will transfer Monday April 8th. Please keep in touch with us at grassroots@legion.org!

WELCOME to our newest Legislative Associate Patrick Johnston. Patrick is a Navy veteran, and will work on veterans' economic opportunities, education, and employment legislation.

Legislative staff in DC participated in several meetings on Capitol Hill this week, including with staff from the offices of Representatives Issa, Foxx, Schultz, Van Orden, Cartwright, and Ciscomani, as well as Senators Lujan, Rubio, and Sullivan. We also worked with staff of the Senate Veteran Affairs Committee to discuss upcoming legislation on education issues and veteran homelessness.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

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UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As Friday, April 5th, at Noon ET, the following hearings are scheduled:
April 9th: HVAC - VA Supply Chain Modernization
April 9th: SASC - DoD Budget Request Testimony
April 10th: HVAC – Disability Assistance and memorial Affairs Subcommittee on Pending Legislation
April 10th: SVAC – Ensuring Equity for Women Veterans at VA
April 10th: House Appropriations – Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the United States Army
April 10th: House Appropriations – Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the United States Navy and Marine Corps
April 10th: HASC – U.S. Military Posture and National Security Challenges in Europe

April 10th: HASC – U.S. Cyber Command Budget Request
April 10th: House Appropriations – Budget for Army Military Construction
April 11th: - Testimony on United States European Command and United States Transportation Command
April 11th: HASC – Member Day Hearing on NDAA
April 11th: HASC – Joint SPF-RDY Hearing
April 11th: HASC – A Review of Defense Intelligence to Counter China
April 11th : HVAC – Oversight Hearing on Budget Requests
April 11th: House Appropriations- Budget Hearing for Navy & Marine Corps
April 12th: HASC – FY25 Budget Requests for Missile Defense and Missile Defeat Programs

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

Legislative Division Weekly

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NEW CHAIR NAMED FOR HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS

Congressman Tom Cole (R–OK-4th) has been selected to chair the House Appropriations Committee after Congresswoman Kay Granger (R-TX-12th) recently stepped down. Rep. Cole has served on the House Appropriations Committee for many years and is seen as a respected conservative voice in Washington. Serving as chairman of the Appropriations Committee is an important and powerful committee assignment, and is a vital role in the battle for limited federal funding each year.

Cole received unanimous support this week from the House GOP Steering Committee for the assignment. His first task is to assign the subcommittee chairs, and then get to work on the FY25 funding bills. He has already highlighted Defense, MilCon-VA, and Homeland Security bills as the Committee priorities.

AMERICAN LEGION

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HOUSE GOP LEADERS WORK ON GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

This article's original publication can be found here.

Speaker Mike Johnson and GOP Whip Tom Emmer tried to meet into the night with many of the 19 Republicans who tanked a key procedural vote on the reauthorization of a controversial surveillance program.

The defeat on the floor Wednesday was the fourth failed procedural vote in the last six months since Johnson took the speakership. The issue at hand: A measure to reauthorize and change Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, allowing the intelligence community to gather and sort the communications of foreign targets without a warrant.

Johnson could bring the surveillance bill's rule back up for a vote Thursday, but the outcome of those evening meetings with FISA critics are not yet clear. The collapse of the FISA measure followed former President Donald Trump's social media push for lawmakers to kill the bill. That adds to the growing list of congressional priorities that Trump has scuttled in recent months, from the bipartisan border agreement in the Senate to Ukraine aid and now FISA. Johnson's trip to Mar-a-Lago on Friday will follow a bruising week in the House.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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Todd McKinley, Tennessee

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

Mr. McKinley met with Congresswoman Diana Harshbarger (R-TN-01) in Kingsport, TN. In Mr. McKinley's report, he shared that he discussed VA funding and the presumptive conditions not spelled out in the PACT Act. These are key Legion priorities!

Thank you, Mr. McKinley, 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

Legislative Division staff in DC attended the Sea-Air-Space 2024 convention put on by the Navy League. Legion staff were able to listen to talks by members of the House Armed Services Committee, hear the Secretary of the Navy speak to the future of Naval warfare and the status of the industrial base, and interact with leaders from the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, as well as peers at non-profits and for-profit organizations that interact in the veteran and defense space.

Legislative Division staff also met with a delegation from the Ukraine to speak about how to set up a veterans memorials and benefits for their own war dead and survivors. Several staff members sat in on the HVAC DAMA hearing, and the SVAC hearing on women veterans. Our Legislative Director also attended a joint Blue Star Families/With Honor reception at the Willard Hotel on Wednesday.

Your DC team attended meetings on Capitol Hill to discuss the Richard Star Act with Rep. Harshbarger's staff and met with staff from several Senate offices on S.3636 (Hire Veterans Act).

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

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AMERICAN LEGION

Legislative Division Weekly

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As Thursday, April 11th, at Noon ET, the following hearings are scheduled:

Senate Armed Services – Full Committee: Air Force FY25 Budget Request
April 16, 9:30 a.m., 216 Hart Bldg.

House Veterans' Affairs - Subcommittee on Health: Pending Legislation
April 16, 3 p.m., 360 Cannon Bldg.

House Veterans' Affairs - Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity: Pending Legislation
April 16, 1 p.m., 360 Cannon Bldg.

House Veterans' Affairs - Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations: Pending Legislation
April 17, 9:30 a.m, 360 Cannon Bldg.

House Veterans' Affairs - Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity: Pending Legilsation
April 17, 1:00 p.m.., 360 Cannon Bldg.

Senate Armed Services – Subcommittee on Personnel: DoD Pharmacy Program
April 17th, 3:00 p.m., G50 Dirksen Bldg.

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee: Pending Legislation
April 17th, 3:30 p.m., 418 Russell Bldg.

Senate Armed Services – Subcommittee on Air Land: Army Modernization and FY25 Budget Request
April 17th, 4:00 p.m., 232 Russell Bldg.

House Veterans' Affairs — Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity: Field Hearing on Transitioning Service Members
April 19, 11 a.m., Western Technical College, 400 7th St., North Lacrosse, Wis.

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

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Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact their elected representatives to fight back against predatory Claims Sharks! The American Legion wants the return of criminal penalties enforced against these non-accredited violators *Go to the Action Center to quickly email a letter of support to your member of Congress.*

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DEMOCRATS HELP ADVANCE FOREIGN AID BILLS

This article's original publication can be found here.

The House Rules Committee late Thursday night advanced a package of foreign aid bills — but only with help from Democrats who, in a rare move, supported the procedural vote amid opposition from a trio of hard-line Republicans.

The panel voted 9-3 to adopt the rule, which governs debate for the legislation, with Reps. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), Chip Roy (R-Texas) and Ralph Norman (R-S.C.) opposing the effort.

The successful vote allows the full House to vote on the rule and open debate on three foreign aid bills — sending assistance to Israel, Ukraine and allies in the Indo-Pacific — plus a fourth that includes other national security priorities, such as a TikTok ban.

Rule votes — in committee and on the floor — are typically mundane, party-line occurrences, with the members from the majority party backing the rule and lawmakers in the minority party voting against it. But with conservatives voting against the rule out of opposition to Ukraine aid and the exclusion of border security measures, Democrats crossed the aisle to back the procedural vote.

The rule for the foreign aid legislation allows votes on specific amendments to the Ukraine, Indo-Pacific and national security measures. The Israel bill, however, will not have any amendments considered.

Also included in the rule is language that says if the House approves each of the four bills — they will receive separate floor votes — they will be merged together and sent to the Senate as one package.

Thursday night's successful rule votes mark a crucial hurdle cleared for the foreign aid package, which has faced intense criticism from hard-line Republicans since Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) unveiled the outline for his plan Monday.

The legislation includes $26.38 billion for Israel, $60.84 billion for Ukraine and $8.12 billion for allies in the Indo-Pacific. The fourth national security bill features a ban of TikTok in the U.S. if the platform's parent company does not sell it, language to send some of the new Ukraine aid in the form of a loan, and a provision that allows the administration to use seized Russian assets to help cover the costs of Ukrainian reconstruction.

The bipartisan vote, however, could land Johnson in more hot water with his right flank. Hard-line conservatives have been up in arms with Johnson's propensity to cut deals with Democrats over the criticism of Republicans — a dynamic that has become necessary in the narrowly divided House, but one that continues to incense conservatives.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) filed a motion to vacate — the same mechanism used to oust former Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) — against Johnson late last month, but she has not said when she plans to force a vote on the resolution.

Massie announced earlier this week that he would be signing on to the legislation as a co-sponsor.

House GOP leadership also teed up a vote on a separate border bill Thursday meant to appease hard-liners who were frustrated that Johnson's foreign aid package excluded provisions to address the situation at the southern border.

The House will consider that bill under suspension of the rules process Friday, which eliminates the need to first pass a procedural rule but also requires two-thirds support for passage.

Leadership initially tried to move the bill through regular order, but opposition from conservatives on the Rules Committee scuttled those plans.

AMERICAN LEGION

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FY25 Budget Request for the VA

On April 11th, the House Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing to consider the Administration's FY25 budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As usual, that request included FY26 advanced funding numbers, as well. Secretary Denis McDonough was the witness.

For FY25, the VA's total request is *$369.3 billion*. This includes both mandatory and discretionary funding, as well as collections and the Recurring Expenses Transformational Fund (RETF). This is a $32.9 billion, or 9.8%, increase above the previous year.

The discretionary request is $134 billion, with $4.4 billion from medical care collections and $307 million from the RETF. That is an $8.9 billion, or 6.2%, decrease. The mandatory request is $235.3 billion, with $24.5 billion from the Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF). This represents an increase of $41.8 billion, or 21.6%, above FY24.

The decrease in discretionary spending comes from the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) caps. Regardless, the VA says this amount will fully fund care and benefits for all 9.1 million enrolled Veterans.

The FY26 advanced medical care funding request includes $131.4 billion in discretionary funding and $22.8 billion in mandatory TEF funding. The rest of the FY26 advanced funding request is $222.2 billion to fund Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) programs.

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Jay Bowen, Colorado

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

Mr. Bowen met with staff from Congressman John Hickenlooper (D-CO) in Denver, CO. In Mr. Bowen's report, he shared that he discussed key Legion priorities and presented a copy of the TAL legislative agenda for this year!

Mr. Bowen also serves as chairman for The American Legion's Veteran Employment & Education Division commission.

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

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LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

Legislative Division staff conducted Grassroots Training for the Department of California during their Legion College session this week! Thank you to Legionnaire Chris Yates for organizing the training and letting us present this important information.

Our legislative staff met with representatives from Rep. Garbarino and Senator Lee's offices to discuss ongoing priorities and seek their support for legislation that expands veteran hiring. In addition, the team attended coalition meetings to advocate for issues such as passing the Richard Star Act, recognizing the work of the "Hello Girls" of World War I, Military Sexual Trauma treatment and prevention, and VA's National Standards of Practice. Our team continues to work on strengthening our relationships with other organizations that are working alongside us to fight for veterans, while being a trusted resource on the Hill for both members and staff.

Legislative Associate Jake Corsi ran in the Boston Marathon on Monday and finished in the top 2%! His time was 2:36:40. Congratulations, Jake!

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

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

Legislative Division Weekly

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, April 19th, at Noon ET, there are no hearings scheduled in the House or Senate Veterans Affairs or Armed Services Committees for next week.

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

View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here

Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact their elected representatives to support the VET-TEC Authorization Act! The American Legion supports this crucial legislation that will train veterans to obtain high-paying technical jobs. *Go to the Action Center to quickly email a letter of support to your member of Congress.*

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NONPROFITS TAKE HIT IN HOUSE EARMARK RULES

This article's original publication can be found here.

House appropriators have made it more difficult for members to secure fiscal 2025 earmarks for some social services programs in their districts, according to new guidance Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, R-Okla., announced Thursday.

Nonprofits are now blocked from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Economic Development Initiative grant program, which is where lawmakers of both parties turned after earmarks were banned completely from the Labor-HHS-Education bill last year.

Republicans took issue with earmarks that aided the LGBTQ community that House Democrats had sought in the Transportation-HUD bill last year, and Cole has said he wants to eliminate "political" earmarks.

"Similar to previous reforms made in this Congress, this change aims to ensure projects are consistent with the community development goals of the federal program," Cole said Thursday in a letter to lawmakers announcing the new ban.

Earlier this month Cole began sounding out colleagues on the potential tweak that would bar nonprofits from receiving "community project funding" under the HUD grant program, as CQ Roll Call first reported. Cole also rolled out an aggressive timeline for offices to submit their project requests, with a May 3 deadline. Offices are then required to post their requests online by May 17, in keeping with the program's transparency rules.

Under the new guidance for the EDI account, only state, local and tribal governments are eligible, along with public colleges and universities. EDIs, which receive grants out of HUD's Community Development Fund, were the largest single source of earmarks in final fiscal 2024 appropriations, at nearly $3.3 billion. Two-thirds of that amount, or $2.2 billion, originated in the House, CQ Roll Call found. Roughly $800 million of those earmarks went to nonprofits including shelters for victims of domestic violence, food banks and Habitat for Humanity grants to build homes for those in need. The change sets the House up for a collision course with the Senate, which allows earmarks in both the Labor-HHS-Education bill and for nonprofits under the EDI account in the Transportation-HUD bill.

House Appropriations ranking member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., called the change a "seismic shift" that would block funding for YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs and other critical community programs. She said members of both parties would suffer. "In order to accommodate the extreme Republican wing, Republicans are trying to root out any help for the LGBTQ+ community," she said in a statement. "They are willing to hurt their own religious organizations, seniors and veterans." DeLauro vowed to undo the shift in the next Congress if Democrats control the House.

The guidance also keeps in place the Labor-HHS-Education ban that former House Appropriations Chairwoman Kay Granger, R-Texas, put into place last year, along with continuing the bans for the Financial Services and Defense bills. Cole had expressed a desire to bring back Labor-HHS-Education earmarks to give the House greater leverage with the Senate in final appropriations negotiations, but he had said it was likely too late in the process to make such a major change.

"We don't have a lot of time this year to be messing around with format," Cole said earlier this month. "We're going to see what we can do to tweak it."

BIDEN SIGNS UKRAINE, ISRAEL FOREIGN AID BILL

This article's original publication can be found here.

President Biden on Wednesday signed the $95 billion emergency foreign aid package, calling out "MAGA Republicans" for the holdup to send aid to Ukraine.

"It's a good day for America, it's a good day for Europe, and it's a good day for world peace," Biden said when announcing he signed the legislation. "It's going to make America safer, it's going to make the world safer, and it continues America's leadership in the world and everyone knows it."

The Senate approved a package that includes $61 billion for Ukraine, $15 billion in military aid for Israel, $9 billion in humanitarian aid for Gaza and other war-torn areas and $8 billion in security assistance to deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific on Tuesday after the House passed a package of bills this weekend.

"To my desk, it was a difficult path. It should have been easier, and it should have gotten there sooner. But in the end, we did what America always does; we rose to the moment, came together and we got it done," Biden said.

"For months, while MAGA Republicans were blocking aid, Ukraine's been running out of artillery shells and ammunition. Meanwhile, Putin's friends are keeping him well supplied," he added, calling out Iran, North Korea and China for helping Russia ramp up air strikes.

Biden noted there were reports of cheers from Ukraine as they watched the House vote in support of its military operation Saturday, adding "it's not like they don't understand what we've done."

The president said the U.S. will start sending equipment to Ukraine "in the next few hours" from the U.S. stockpile. He noted the U.S. will replenish its stockpile by making equipment at home, which he argued in turn creates jobs.

And, he noted the "vital" support the legislation provides for Israel and said his commitment to Israel is "ironclad."

"We will always make sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself against Iran and the terrorists it supports," he said, adding the aid intends to prevent Iran from carrying out the "destruction it intended 10 days ago."

Biden said the bill "significantly" increases humanitarian assistance, sending $1 billion in aid to Gaza, adding that Israel "must make sure all this aid reaches the Palestinians in Gaza."

Passage of the legislation comes as Biden faces increasing pressure from other Democrats, activists, Arab and Muslim Americans, and young people to call for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza. Hundreds are protesting on college campuses this week, with demonstrations at Columbia University leading to arrests and the school making classes remote for the rest of the semester.

The president on Wednesday also noted the foreign aid package doesn't include border security, which was part of the initial $111 billion national security package requested by Biden last year.

"It should have been included in this bill, and I'm determined to get it done for the American people," Biden said.

The legislation also includes language to force the Chinese owner of TikTok to divest from the popular app, which more than 140 million Americans use, or face a ban within the United States.

Biden noted the bill passed through bipartisan measures and said that during the time of division, Congress has been able to come together "on the critical issues."

Legislative Division Weekly

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.

Tom Core, Arizona

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

Mr. Core met with Congressman Eli Crane (R-AZ) in Wickenburg, AZ. In Mr. Core's report, he shared Congressman Crane visited American Legion Post 12 to discuss veteran issues with the Wickenburg area community. Congressman Crane mentioned all the great work being done at Legion Post 12, and then discussed recent testimony by Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough.

Thank you, Mr. Core, 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

This week the Legislative Division staff attended several meetings on key issues including the Veterans Justice Commission briefing on military transition, meeting on chaplain retirement issues, and the VETT Act Strategy meeting. The Leg Div staff prepared for the upcoming Modern Day Marine Convention next week, including the Congressional Breakfast happening Thursday morning. The staff met with various Congressional staff to advocate for key bills that the Legion supports for the 118th Congress, working to get the bi-partisan support necessary for successful votes.

Leg Div staff continued to review the FY25 NDAA and VA/MilCon Bills to develop supporting positions to communicate to the House Appropriations Committee as hearings continue. Grassroots outreach took center stage as the Program manager drafted up several new campaigns for important legislation. We all worked to refine the draft products for Spring NEC meeting May in Indy, and continued producing the letters and quotes of support for legislation that the Legion and its members endorse.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Legislative Division Weekly

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

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, April 26th, at Noon ET, the following hearings are scheduled:

April 30th, 2:30pm – Senate Armed Services Personnel SubCommittee, Testimony on DoD efforts to provide pharmaceuticals to servicemembers

May 1st, 2:00pm - Senate Armed Services Readiness and Management Support SubCommittee, testimony on the current readiness of the Joint Force

May 1st, 4:30pm - Senate Armed Services Seapower SubCommittee, testimony on the Navy and Marine Corps Budget

May 2nd, 9:30am - Senate Armed Services Committee, testimony on worldwide threats

May 16th, 9:30am – Senate Armed Services Committee, testimony on the Department of the Navy

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

May 1st, 3:30pm – Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Review of Department of Veterans Affairs Budget

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

View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here