AMERICAN LEGION

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.*

The American Legion family's support for Bill HR 2413, the *Dental Care for Veterans Act*, is crucial due to the significant impact it can have on improving the health and well-being of our nation's veterans. This bill aims to expand and improve dental care services for veterans who are eligible for VA health care.

Dental care is a vital aspect of overall health, yet many veterans currently do not have access to comprehensive dental services through the VA unless they are 100% disabled, have a service-connected dental condition, or meet other specific criteria. This leaves a substantial number of veterans without adequate dental care, which can affect their quality of life and overall health.

The *Dental Care for Veterans Act* seeks to address this gap by establishing a phased approach to expand dental services to all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system within five years of enactment. This expansion would prioritize veterans with service-connected disabilities and low-income veterans, gradually opening access to dental care for all enrolled veterans.

By supporting this bill, the American Legion family can advocate for better health outcomes for veterans, addressing a critical area of need that can improve veterans' quality of life and overall health. Access to proper dental care not only helps prevent serious dental issues but can also contribute to better overall health by reducing the risk of related systemic health problems. Therefore, the American Legion's support for HR 2413 is instrumental in advancing the well-being of our veterans and ensuring they receive the comprehensive care they deserve.

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.

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ANOTHER SPEAKER SHOWDOWN?

This article's original publication can be found here.

With a House floor showdown looming next week, Speaker Mike Johnson warned that a vacancy in the chamber's top spot would be a "dangerous gambit."

"I think it's wrong for the Republican Party. I think it's wrong for the institution. I think it's wrong for the country," Johnson told guest host Alice Stewart during an interview with SiriusXM's "The Laura Coates Show," adding that there needs to be a "functioning Congress."

Johnson appears poised to defeat Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's ouster attempt, which she has vowed to trigger a vote on next week. Two Republicans have joined her in wanting to oust Johnson: Reps. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) and Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.). A third, Rep. Warren Davidson (R-Ohio), has indicated that he will vote against tabling the motion.

With his single-digit majority margin, that is enough for Johnson to need to rely on help from Democrats, who have indicated they will help him keep the speaker's gavel after he passed long-stalled Ukraine aid last month.

"They're doing that spontaneously on their own. I've not requested any of it, but I think their calculation is … that we don't need another three weeks where we functionally close the government because we don't have a speaker in place," he said.

Help from Democrats could drive up the number of Republicans who at least vote with Greene to prevent her ouster resolution from being pigeonholed. Massie predicted that at least a dozen Republicans will vote against tabling the resolution — a move meant to show Johnson he won't have the votes to be speaker in January if Republicans keep the majority.

Asked at a press conference this week if forcing the vote would highlight GOP divisions and play into the hands of Democrats, Greene called the idea "bullshit."

"That little narrative that you echoed is a lie. That comes from the Republican establishment that Republican voters are ready to take a sledgehammer to and destroy. They're fed up with it," she said.
It's less than clear that Democrats will save him repeatedly if Greene or someone else tries again. The ouster threat is likely to hang over Johnson for the rest of the year, with lawmakers increasingly acknowledging that they will need to wait until January to change the one-person motion-to-vacate threshold.

HOUSE AND SENATE WORKING ON ISRAELI INVITATION

This article's original publication can be found here.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) is poised to join Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) in inviting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to deliver an address to Congress, despite tensions between the Israeli leader and many Democrats over the ongoing war in the Middle East.
Johnson told The Hill this week that he sent Schumer a draft invitation around a month ago, but the Senate leader has been sitting on it since.

"I sent a letter draft, because it's a bicameral invitation letter, it's been sitting on Chuck Schumer's desk. As far as I know he has not cosigned it yet," Johnson said, adding that it was sent "probably a month ago."

But now, Schumer is ready to sign on, according to his office.

"He intends to join the invitation, the timing is being worked out," the Senate leader's spokesperson told The Hill. The Hill was first to report on Johnson's draft invitation and Schumer's plan to sign it.

Netanyahu's visit — if it does materialize — is sure to spark outrage among liberals, who have strongly criticized the prime minister's handling of the Israel-Hamas war and the growing number of civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip.

It will also come amid a tense moment in the relationship between Schumer — the highest-ranking Jewish official in U.S. history — and Netanyahu, after the Senate leader called for new elections in Israel to replace the longtime conservative leader.

Schumer in a speech on the Senate floor said Netanyahu had "lost his way," comments that the Israeli prime minister called "totally inappropriate."

Johnson first floated the idea of inviting Netanyahu to the Capitol in March, after it was brought up during a closed-door House GOP conference meeting. The next day, however, he said he would "certainly" extend an invitation.

"I would love to have him come and address a joint session of Congress," Johnson told CNBC's "Squawk Box" in an interview. "We'll certainly extend that invitation."

Schumer at the time said "I will always welcome the opportunity for the Prime Minister of Israel to speak to Congress in a bipartisan way."

"Israel has no stronger ally than the United States and our relationship transcends any one president or any one Prime Minister," he added in a statement.

Invitations for foreign leaders to address Congress are typically extended on behalf of Congressional leaders. There are not, however, formal procedures for inviting foreign leaders to address Congress, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Netanyahu last addressed Congress in 2015, a speech that put a spotlight on the long-running tensions between liberals Democrats and conservative Netanyahu. A number of Democrats skipped the event in protest of the Israeli leader, who utilized his time in the Capitol to criticize then-President Obama over the Iran nuclear deal.

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.

Lena Heredia-Perez, Florida

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

Lena met with Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) in Lady Lake, FL. In Lena's report, she shared that Senator Rubio visited American Legion Post 347 to meet with two dozen veterans to discuss the growing homeless veteran population, the VA claims processing times, dental care for veterans, and the Expanding America's National Cemetery Act.

Thank you, Lena, 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 Weekly

This week the Legislative Division staff met with staff from the offices of Senator Tuberville (Alabama), Senator Tillis (North Carolina), and Senator Brown (Ohio). We also met with staff from the House Veterans Affairs Committee and communicated with outside organizations about shared legislative priorities.

Your Legislative Division staff spent some time at the Modern Day Marine event in Washington, DC. We were able to connect with active-duty Marines about the benefits of membership in The American Legion, talk about partnerships with veteran-focused non-profits, and interact with senior military leadership including the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the Secretary of the Navy.

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

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UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, May 3rd, at Noon ET, the following hearings are scheduled:

May 7th, 10:00am – House Veteran Affairs Committee (Economic Opportunity Sub), Oversight Hearing

May 8th, 3:00pm – Senate Armed Services Committee (Personnel Sub), testimony on military and civilian personnel programs in the DoD

May 8th, 4:00pm – Senate Armed Services Committee (AirLand Sub) testimony on Air Force modernization

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

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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SHAKEUP IN HOUSE?

This article's original publication can be found here.

Less than six months out from Election Day, the 10 most vulnerable House members are a mix of Republicans and Democrats, including two progressives facing tough primary challenges.

The other eight members to make the list will be battling to keep their seats in November. Taking over the No. 1 spot — after its occupant in our November ranking was expelled from the House — is New York Republican Rep. Brandon Williams. His district saw some of the greatest changes after New York's Democratic-controlled state legislature approved new maps in February.

Fellow New Yorkers Anthony D'Esposito and Mike Lawler remain on the list, as does California Rep. John Duarte. Returning is fellow California Rep. Mike Garcia. And joining the list for the first time this cycle are Democrats Don Davis of North Carolina and Matt Cartwright of Pennsylvania.

With 22 members representing districts that would have voted for the opposite party's presidential nominee in 2020, there are members who narrowly missed this list but could find themselves on it as the campaign progresses. Arizona GOP Rep. Juan Ciscomani is sure to have a competitive rematch against Democrat Kristen Engel. Ciscomani had significantly more outside support than Engel did in 2022, according to OpenSecrets, but Democrats have signaled that could change this year. On the other side, Republicans hope that Alaska's ranked-choice voting system won't be a roadblock again to ousting Democratic Rep. Mary Peltola in a state that then-President Trump won by 10 points in 2020.

Reps. Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush, both progressives, join the list at the fifth and sixth spot due to the competitive primaries each face. Bowman and Bush, who are both aligned with Justice Democrats, face Democratic candidates who have outraised them. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee also endorsed both George Latimer in New York and Wesley Bell in Missouri, as did the Democratic Majority for Israel, and progressives are bracing for outside spending by pro-Israel groups in both races.

But there are other members facing serious primary challenges. In Texas, Rep. Tony Gonzales is in a runoff election later this month. Virginia Rep. Bob Good, the chair of the House Freedom Caucus, appears to be in serious trouble. Cardinal News reported Wednesday that an internal poll taken by his primary challenger, state Sen. John McGuire, showed him with a 14-point lead over Good. In both Gonzales' and Good's cases, there are Republican House colleagues backing their opponent, a somewhat unusual twist in the campaign.

In New Jersey, freshman Rep. Rob Menendez faces a June Democratic primary challenge from Hoboken Mayor Ravi Bhalla. Menendez has maintained institutional support that his father, Sen. Bob Menendez — who tops our list of the most vulnerable Senate incumbents — lost after he was indicted last year. But after a federal judge barred the state's primary ballot design, which gave preferential placement to candidates who had the support of county chairs as the younger Menendez did, he could have a more difficult path to securing renomination.

Another member who could join the list in the coming months is Texas Rep. Henry Cuellar, who was indicted last week alongside his wife on charges that he took $600,000 in bribes from the government of Azerbaijan and an unnamed foreign bank headquartered in Mexico City.

National Republicans could take another look at Cuellar's seat in the 28th District, which he won by 13 percentage points two years ago. Republicans Jay Furman and Lazaro Garza are the two candidates in a runoff election later this month after no candidates reached a 50 percent threshold during the March primary.

The complete list can be found here.

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SPEAKER SEAT SECURE FOR NOW

This article's original publication can be found here.

The House overwhelmingly voted to table Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's attempt to oust Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday night, with nearly all Republicans and most Democrats coming to Johnson's rescue.

The final tally was 359-43, with 11 Republicans and 32 Democrats voting against the motion to table Greene's resolution. Seven Democrats voted "present."

Greene, R-Ga., made her long-telegraphed move against Johnson after reading a lengthy litany of complaints about his tenure in office, which began in late October, on the floor. She offered her resolution to declare the office of the speaker vacant during a break in other legislative business.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., tried to dispense with the clerk's formal reading of the resolution on the floor, which is typically done by unanimous consent. Is this case, there was an objection and the entire resolution was read out.

Then Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., a onetime speaker contender himself, offered his motion to table Greene's resolution.

Greene has said that Johnson is a "Democrat speaker" and is particularly upset that Johnson brought to the floor compromise fiscal 2024 appropriations legislation and a war supplemental package that included aid for Ukraine.

Greene initially introduced the measure after the passage of the second of the two appropriations packages, leading to weeks of speculation of if and when she would make her move.

But former President Donald Trump intervened and tried to persuade Greene to back down, according to reports, leading to speculation that the situation might be defused.

It had appeared that Greene and her ally Thomas Massie, R-Ky., had put their effort on pause Tuesday, after meetings with Johnson on Monday and Tuesday in which they delivered four "requests" to the speaker. They were joined by Arizona's Paul Gosar, the only other Republican to publicly back the effort.

The trio is asking that Johnson only bring legislation to the floor that has the support of a majority of the conference; oppose any additional Ukraine aid; defund the office of special counsel Jack Smith; and include a 1 percent across-the-board spending cut in a continuing resolution that will be needed past Sept. 30 if all fiscal 2025 appropriations bills are not passed in time.

Johnson, however, said he is not negotiating with Greene and her allies.

In a statement posted on his social media account after the vote Wednesday, Trump offered praise for both Greene and Johnson, but said he opposed the motion to vacate, arguing it would "negatively affect everything!"

Though only a handful of Republicans have come out against Johnson, that would have been enough if Democrats took the same approach they did in October and voted to oust former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

But when Congress returned from its recess last week, Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., and his two deputies put speculation to rest by declaring they would vote to table Greene's motion to vacate. "At this moment, upon completion of our national security work, the time has come to turn the page on this chapter of Pro-Putin Republican obstruction," Jeffries, Whip Katherine M. Clark, D-Mass., and Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar, D-Calif., said in their statement.

And Greene has not secured much support from her Republican colleagues; though 10 other Republicans joined her in voting against the motion to table on Wednesday, it's not clear how many of those would actually vote to sack Johnson if Greene's motion to vacate the office actually came to a vote.

A vast majority of the conference wants to avoid the chaos of last October, when McCarthy became the first speaker ever removed from office under a motion to vacate.

"I do think it's a distraction to put a lot of energy in this, when other problems are out there," Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Mont., said. "I would prefer we focus on the border, focus on the Israeli problem with ammunition, focus on what we can do rather than these leadership distractions."

Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Calif., who is in a tight reelection race, said a motion to vacate is divisive. "This type of drama right now is an unnecessary tactic," he said. "I think she's depreciated the value of it to zero."

In October, eight Republicans, led by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., joined with every Democrat to oust McCarthy. Gaetz moved against McCarthy after he put a "clean" stopgap spending measure on the floor.

That kicked off a three-week period in which the House was paralyzed as three different Republicans — Scalise, Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, and Majority Whip Tom Emmer, R-Minn., were all nominated by the conference but blocked by a group of dug-in opponents.

That paved the way for Johnson's dark horse candidacy and out-of-nowhere ascension to the speakership. Since then, he has negotiated with Democrats to avoid a government shutdown and fund the government for fiscal 2024, and moved additional aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

Johnson's decision to move funding for allies appears to have played a major role in Democrats' move to protect him. The speaker had stated he needed changes to the country's immigration and border enforcement laws to move Ukraine aid, but ended up bringing legislation to the floor without border provisions.

Since Greene's intent became known, there have been rumblings among GOP critics that it was time for those seeking to remove Johnson — and potentially trigger more instability within their party and in Congress — to face consequences, such as removal from committees.
Greene has said that doesn't bother her, considering Democrats did that when they were in control and it didn't dent her political popularity. Nonetheless, talk of consequences continued up through the vote on Wednesday night.

"I think that remains to be seen," said Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., who himself was briefly a candidate for speaker last October.

Aside from Greene, Massie and Gosar, other Republicans who voted "no" on the motion to table Wednesday night included Andy Biggs and Eli Crane of Arizona; Eric Burlison of Missouri; Warren Davidson of Ohio; Chip Roy of Texas; Alex X. Mooney of West Virginia; Barry Moore of Alabama; and Victoria Spartz of Indiana, who was coming off a tough primary win in the Hoosier state on Tuesday night.

"I appreciate the show of confidence from my colleagues in this misguided effort," Johnson told reporters after the vote. "I intend the do the right thing, what I was elected to do, and I'll let the chips fall where they may."

"In my view, that is leadership. And that's what's called for in the times in which we live."

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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Ralph Bozella, Colorado

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

Ralph met with Congressman Joe Neguse (CO) in Longmont, CO. In Ralph's report, he shared that Congressman Neguse attended a Vietnam War Erra Commemoration ceremony at Post 32. More than 50 were in attendance, and the power and influence of The American Legion was observed by Congressman Neguse.

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

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LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

The American Legion National Executive Committee met in the Indianapolis HQ this week, and the Legislative Director was in attendance.

In the DC office, the rest of the Legislative Division staff met with allies to discuss the Richard Star Act and the Hell Girls Gold Medal, as well as issues like homelessness among the veteran population.

The team also met with staff from the offices of Rep Van Drew (NJ), Rep Levin (CA), Sen Hassan (NH), and Senator Scott (FL), as well as the House Veterans Affairs Committee staff.

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.

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Legislative Division Weekly

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, May 10th, at 9:00am, the following hearings are scheduled:

May 13th, 11:00am – House Veterans Affairs Committee (Health Sub), Field Hearing "Iowa: A Leader in Veteran healthcare Innovation"

May 14th, 4:30pm – House Veterans Affairs Committee (Technology Modernization Sub), VA Office of Information and technology Budget Request

May 15th, 3:30pm – Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Frontier Health Care

May 15th, 4:00pm – Senate Armed Services Committee (Airland Sub), Army Modernization

May 16th, 2:00pm – House Veterans Affairs Committee (Oversight and Investigations Sub), Ensuring VA's Security

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 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
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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-

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."

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."

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Todd McKinley, Tennessee

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

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.

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Legislative Division Weekly

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

View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here

AMERICAN LEGION

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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.

HOUSE ADVANCES $884 BILLION DEFENSE BILL

This article's original publication can be found here.

The House on Wednesday night advanced an $883.7 billion defense policy bill for fiscal 2025. It provides a 20% pay boost to junior enlisted troops while pushing back against the Defense Department's shipbuilding and Air Force procurement plans.

The Armed Services Committee voted 57-1 to advance the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act to the House floor after considering more than 700 amendments during a roughly 12-hour markup. Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., cast the single vote against the legislation.

The bill adheres to the spending caps from last year's debt ceiling deal, allowing a 1% increase over the $874.2 billion FY24 defense policy bill.

"This bill is also the product of hundreds of hours of oversight done by all members and staff over the past few months," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Ala., said ahead of the committee vote. "It is a good bill that will help revitalize the defense industrial base and build the ready, capable, and lethal fighting force we need to deter China and our other adversaries."

The legislation would incrementally fund a second attack submarine for FY25 against the Pentagon's wishes, block certain aircraft retirements and maintain restrictions on downsizing the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The Navy, citing industrial base delays, only asked for one Virginia-class submarine for FY25 in a break from the two-per-year cadence. But the defense bill provides $1 billion toward funding for the second submarine and intends to provide additional funds for the vessel in future fiscal years.

Meanwhile, the bill would procure 58 F-35 fighter jets for FY25, 10 less than the Pentagon requested amid growing congressional frustration with manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Ma., floated – then withdrew – an amendment that would have authorized the defense secretary to seize intellectual property from Lockheed Martin and open it up to competition, taking aim at the F-35′s software problems.

Moulton was not able to hold a vote on the amendment after a Congressional Budget Office cost determination but that didn't stop lawmakers from excoriating Lockheed Martin.

"We all know that the F-35 program is behind schedule," said Moulton. "It's way over budget grossly and it's not delivering the programs ready to fight that we need."

Several Republicans, including Reps. Morgan Lutrell of Texas as well as Carlos Gimenez and Cory Mills of Florida, also said they may support Moulton's efforts in the years ahead.

But Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the top Democrat on the committee, cautioned that "it's no small thing for the government to confiscate intellectual property."

"In law, we would possibly have to compensate them for that, which would be really, really, really expensive," said Smith.

Additionally, the bill would block the Air Force's effort to retire 32 Block 20 F-22 Raptors, also made by Lockheed Martin, through FY27. It would also pause the Air Force's plans to retire 26 F-15E Strike Eagles, made by Boeing.

The bill also prevents efforts to retire the B83 nuclear gravity bomb, which is at least 80 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, and requires the military to deploy at least 400 intercontinental ballistic missiles.

It also establishes a chief talent management officer at the Pentagon to improve recruitment, retention and workforce development for military personnel and civilian employees alike.

The committee also adopted an amendment that would automatically register all male U.S. residents ages 18 to 26 into the Selective Service amid a drop in mandatory registrations from eligible individuals in recent years. The committee adopted the amendment from Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, D-Pa., by voice vote.

The committee also voted down multiple amendments. For instance, it overwhelmingly voted 46-11 against an amendment from Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., that would have abolished the requirement for military services and combatant commands to submit annual unfunded priorities lists to Congress.

They also struck down 48-10 an amendment from Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., that would have banned the transfer of cluster munitions to Ukraine.

This year's committee draft of the authorization bill had a specific focus on military quality of life issues, after panel lawmakers spent the last 15 months reviewing ways to address frequent complaints among troops and family members.

"No service member should have to live in squalid conditions. No military family should have to rely on food stamps to feed their children," said Rogers. "And no one serving this country should have to wait weeks to see a doctor or a mental health specialist.

"This bill will go a long way toward fixing that."

The measure contains a dramatic overhaul of the military's pay tables, giving a pay bump of nearly 20% to junior enlisted troops next year. The move would bring almost every service member's base pay to more than $30,000 a year, a move lawmakers hope will limit the financial strain on younger military families.

The authorization bill also includes increases to troops' housing allowances (bringing them up to 100% of regional housing costs) and expands eligibility for the military's Basic Allowance for Subsistence stipend.

And lawmakers also inserted language in the defense bill improving pay and benefits for Defense Department child care workers, to help with recruiting and retention of those posts.

Those reforms are included alongside a 4.5% pay raise for all troops next year, which would be the third consecutive year of increases of more than 4% for the military.

Not including that salary hike, the cost of the quality of life reforms total about $4.2 billion, a significant section of the constrained authorization bill total. But supporters said the moves are needed now to ensure that the services can keep pace on recruiting and retention issues.

The Senate Armed Services Committee is scheduled to take up its version of the legislation in June.

CHINA BEGINS LARGE MILITARY EXERCISE

This article's original publication can be found here.

China launched new military exercises around Taiwan, scrambling jets and sending ships out for patrols just days after the self-governing island nation swore in a new pro-U.S. president who Beijing criticized for escalating tensions in his inaugural address.

The military drills, code-named Joint Sword 2024A, will run from Thursday to Friday, according to state-run Chinese news agency Xinhua. The exercises involve the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Rocket Force, which is involved with nuclear and conventional missile management for the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

A PLA spokesperson said the drills will involve ships and aircraft around Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a press briefing Thursday that Beijing was seeking to "strongly punish" the "separatist forces."

"All Taiwan independence separatist acts will be hit head-on by more than 1.4 billion Chinese people, and all Taiwan independence separatist forces will be hit hard in the face of the historical trend of China's complete reunification," Wang said, per Xinhua.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense condemned the new exercises as "jeopardizing peace and stability."

"We seek no conflicts, but we will not shy away from one. We have the confidence to safeguard our national security," the ministry wrote on social media platform X.

Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te, campaigned on closer relations with the U.S., with his January victory dealing a major blow to Beijing.
The U.S. has unofficial relations with Taiwan but supports the nation with arms and has congratulated Lai on his victory.

Though his ruling government is closer to Washington, Lai is advocating to maintain the status quo of Taiwan, which means not calling for independence.

In his Monday inauguration speech, Lai hailed that the island nation "is a sovereign, independent nation in which sovereignty lies in the hands of the people."

"The future of cross-strait relations will have a decisive impact on the world," he said. "This means that we, who have inherited a democratic Taiwan, are pilots for peace. Our government will uphold the Four Commitments, neither yield nor provoke, and maintain the status quo."

He also called for China to "cease their political and military intimidation against Taiwan."
China condemned the speech and called it a confession of Taiwanese independence.

AMERICAN LEGION

Legislative Division Weekly

ARMY VETERAN TO SERVE AS CAPITOL ARCHITECT

This article's original publication can be found here.

Thomas Austin, an Army veteran and former director of engineering at Arlington National Cemetery, has been named the new architect of the Capitol and will assume the role on June 24, the congressional commission tasked with filling the position announced Wednesday.

Austin will permanently fill the role that was vacated when President Joe Biden removed J. Brett Blanton in February 2023. The architect is responsible for the maintenance, operation, development and preservation of the Capitol complex. Architects of the Capitol are appointed to serve a term of 10 years.

"The Architect of the Capitol plays a vital role in welcoming millions of visitors to our Capitol and ensuring it is a functional workplace," the commission said in a joint statement. "Thomas Austin has managed construction projects and facilities of all sizes, maintained one of our nation's most hallowed landmarks, and served our country in the military. We are confident that with his extensive experience, Thomas Austin will be an adept and capable Architect of the Capitol."

Austin is currently a senior program manager for a construction consulting firm and in the past was chief of the Facility Programs Division for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. He retired from the Army in 2023 as a colonel after serving nearly three decades in engineering and leadership roles, including overseas in Afghanistan and Iraq, according to the joint statement. He's a licensed professional engineer and certified construction manager.

He will helm an Architect of the Capitol office that for years has been mired in controversy.
An inspector general report released in 2022 found Blanton had misused his government-issued vehicle, abused his authority and wasted close to $14,000 in taxpayer funds. Blanton remained in office for months following the report, but after a tense House Administration hearing early in the 118th Congress, was fired by Biden.

Several other top officials were removed in the wake of Blanton's firing. And in the past year, former employees have filed a series of discrimination complaints painting a picture of what they said was a dysfunctional and hostile workplace.

Chere Rexroat, a chief engineer at the agency, stepped in as acting architect following Blanton's departure. In February, Rexroat announced she'd return to her previous role. The AOC's Chief of Operations Joseph DiPietro has stepped in as acting architect since.

Austin's appointment is the first since the passage of legislation in December that authorized a congressional commission to appoint and remove an AOC by a bipartisan, majority vote. In the past, the president appointed architects based on recommendations from Congress.

That commission included House and Senate leadership and the chairs and ranking members of the Senate Rules and Administration, House Administration and Senate and House Appropriations committees.

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.

Gene Toohey, Texas

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

Gene recently met with staffers from Congressman Keith Self's office in Greenville, TX. In Gene's report, he shared that they discussed the issue of veteran patient care in the Greenville CBOC.

Thank you, Gene, 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. We also had meetings with the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Democrat and Republican staffers, attended an event with the Disabled Veterans of America in support of our disabled veterans, attended a Veteran employment panel, and participated in a Women Veterans' VSO working group discussion.

We conducted meetings with Congressman Adam Smith, Representative Jared Golden' 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. We also worked with other divisions of The American Legion to coordinate efforts and expand the voice of Veterans in DC!

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

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, May 23rd, at 9:00am, the following hearings are scheduled:

June 4th, 10:15am – House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Oversight Hearing

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
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AUTOMATIC SELECTIVE SERVICE REGISTRATION

This article's original publication can be found here.

A new plan from House lawmakers would automatically register men for a potential military draft when they hit age 18, avoiding potential legal consequences connected to failing to file the paperwork at the proper time.

Language included in the House Armed Services Committee's draft of the annual defense authorization bill would mandate the automatic registration of all males between ages 18 and 26 living in America in the Selective Service System, the federal database used for a military draft in case of a national emergency.

The system hasn't been used for that purpose for 52 years, but men who fail to register can face a host of legal consequences, including forfeiture of eligibility for federal programs and possible jail time.
But the number of individuals who have skipped registering has increased in recent years, in large part because registration options were removed from the federal student loan process two years ago. That had accounted for nearly a quarter of all registrations in prior years.

Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, D-Pa., sponsored the automatic registration language and called it both a money-saving and common-sense reform.

"By using available federal databases, the [Selective Service] agency will be able to register all of the individuals required and thus help ensure that any future military draft is fair and equitable," she said during debate on the idea Wednesday night.

"This will also allow us to rededicate resources — basically that means money — towards reading readiness and towards mobilization … rather than towards education and advertising campaigns driven to register people."

The Selective Service System costs roughly $30 million a year. Lawmakers have proposed a number of reforms to the database in recent years, including adding women and completely eliminating the agency altogether, but none have made it through Congress.

The latest proposal was approved unanimously by the committee but still must advance through the full House and Senate before it can become law. The authorization bill, which contains a myriad of military budget and policy priorities, is expected to be finalized by the two chambers sometime this fall.

MANCHIN REGISTERING AS INDEPENDENT IN WV

This article's original publication can be found here.

Sen. Joe Manchin is registering as an independent, according to a person familiar with the matter — a move that is sure to stoke speculation he could run for Senate or governor without a party affiliation this fall.

A longtime Democrat, Manchin's decision comes ahead of a deadline for filing as an independent in West Virginia. He'll have several more weeks to decide whether to run for his Senate seat or mount a bid for his old job as governor. The move is no guarantee he will run for either office, however.

Manchin previously announced he would not run for reelection, a move that essentially ceded his seat to Republicans. But Democrats have held out hope he'd make a last-minute decision to run as an independent, and Friday's move is sure to increase pressure on him to do so. Gov. Jim Justice, a Manchin rival, won the GOP primary and is heavily favored in November.

State Republicans are divided after a fierce primary in the governor's race, which Attorney General Patrick Morrisey won. Manchin defeated Morrisey in the 2018 Senate race. Manchin is friends with the Democratic nominee Steve Williams, but he would likely be a more viable general election candidate.

Manchin will be the fourth independent in the Democratic Caucus and has long flirted with leaving a party he thinks is far too liberal. In recent interviews, he's said his biggest fear is a future Senate that weakens the filibuster, a move he opposed last Congress.

West Virginia is one of the most conservative states in the nation, so either bid would be challenging for Manchin. But running as an independent would be easier than running as a Democrat in the deep-red state. And Manchin is a talented retail politician who has won both offices in the past.

Manchin likes to stay in the mix both nationally and regionally and may ultimately decide against running for anything. He turned down an independent presidential bid, for example, after considering one for months.

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Frederic Kinkin, Virginia

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

Frederic recently met with Congresswoman Jen Kiggans's during a 2nd Congressional District Service Academy information night in Virginia. In Frederic's report, he shared that he was invited to participate as a panelist due to his relationship with Rep. Kiggan's office and staff.

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

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LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

We had a short week due to the Memorial Day holiday, and Congress was in recess this week. The Legislative Division staff took this opportunity to focus on drafting letters of support for MilCon/ VA FY25 appropriation bill and NDAA FY25 bill, and we continued preparing testimony for the House Veteran Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Hearing scheduled for June 12th, where VE&E will testify in person.

We also supported VE&E's efforts to invite members of Congress to the 80th Anniversary of the GI Bill reception on June 20th. The LegDiv staff has been working on the plans for the upcoming National Convention in August, and we continued to review various bills and lobby for those with Legion support, work on outreach and grassroots efforts, and perform other administrative functions.

And as always, we worked with other Government Affairs Divisions of The American Legion to coordinate efforts and expand the voice of Veterans in DC!

Legislative Division Weekly

Look for a National Legislative Council meeting to be announced this month!

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