AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

August 2, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act!* The American Legion urges the passage of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (HR8371), but some in Congress stand in opposition of this landmark legislation. This is a comprehensive veteran's package that includes many important provisions! *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far.* ***Go to the Action Center to quickly email a letter of support to your members 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.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

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AMERICAN FLAGS SHOULD BE BORN IN THE USA NOW TOO, CONGRESS SAYS

This article's original publication can be found here.

Soon, Old Glory will have to be born in the land of the free and not merely flying over it.

Congress has passed a proposal to require the federal government to purchase only American flags that have been completely manufactured in the U.S. The U.S. imports millions of American flags from overseas, mostly from China, and the sponsors of the proposal said it's time for American flags to originate in the country they represent.

Supporters of the proposal, led by Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine and Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio, said the change is more than just symbolic — they believe it will support American jobs and manufacturers while preserving the nation's most recognized banner.

“The American flag serves as a symbol of our identity, resolve, and values as one people. To honor its significance, the federal government should only use flags entirely manufactured in the United States,” Collins said.

Supporters of the proposal said Monday that they expect the measure to be signed into law soon. It was sent to President Joe Biden on Thursday.

Federal rules currently require the government to buy flags that contain half U.S.-made materials, supporters of the proposal said. The rule change, called the “All American Flag Act,” requires government-purchased flags to be produced entirely with American-made materials as well as manufactured in the U.S.

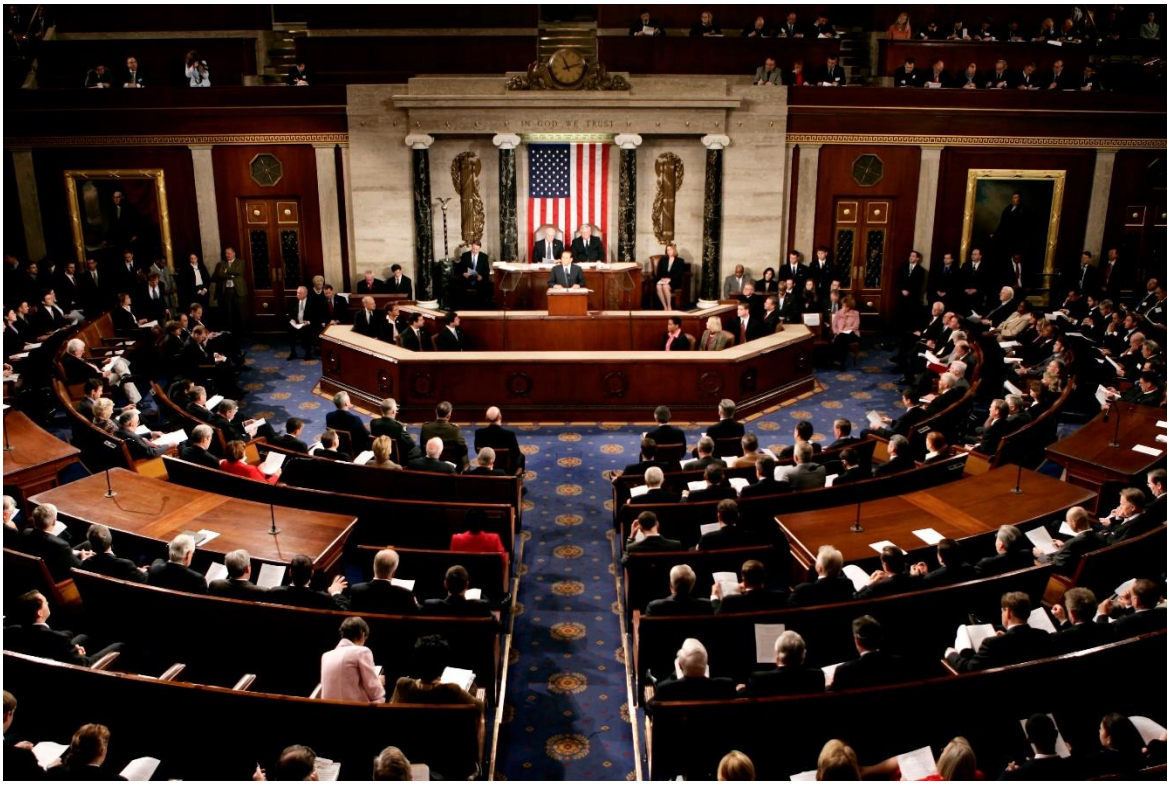
The value of U.S. flag imports in 2015 was well over $4 million, according to federal data. The vast majority of those imports came from China, supporters of the rule change said.

In 2017, the U.S. imported some 10 million American flags, and 99.5% of them came from China, supporters of the proposal said. Those figures include all American flags imported into the country and not just those purchased by the federal government. Collins and Brown have been pushing for American flags to be manufactured in the U.S. for several years. Previous efforts to change the rules to require U.S.-made flags found success in the U.S. Senate but stalled when they reached the House of Representatives.

VETERAN BENEFITS FIX FACES HOLDS, UNLIKELY TO MOVE THIS WEEK

The article's original publication can be found here.

Senators were preparing to leave town for the August recess without plugging a nearly $3 billion hole in veterans benefits funding when efforts for a speedy fix were held up Wednesday. Advocates for a funding fix, including senior senators from both parties, were hoping to pass legislation to fill the shortfall by unanimous consent before the Senate adjourned for the week. But those plans came unglued after several senators made it clear they would object to swift passage.



Several senators have placed holds on the measure to wage objections over increased spending, said Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., the Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member who supports the funding fix. "We have those who put holds on every bill and they haven't lifted them yet," Moran said, adding he doesn't expect any unanimous consent request to be made before September.

Approximately 7 million veterans and their beneficiaries risk not receiving pension and other benefits as scheduled on Oct. 1 if the funding is not provided by Sept. 20, Department of Veterans Affairs officials have told lawmakers. The agency is facing an increase in demand for services following the implementation of a 2022 law (PL 117-167) expanding access to health and other benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances while serving overseas, which the VA has said led to the shortfall.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., said Wednesday that he wants a hearing on the topic to be scheduled, and would object to a unanimous consent request to pass the bill until that hearing is on the calendar. “All of a sudden we come up $3 billion short,” he said. “Let’s have a hearing about it and find out why we are short. I’m not against giving them the money, but we shouldn't just give them a blank check.”

Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jon Tester, D-Mont., said he would agree to hold a hearing, though Tuberville said Wednesday night he had not yet received a commitment on when that would occur. Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee also has a hold on the bill, a Republican aide familiar with the situation said. Lee’s staff did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., asked for a briefing with Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough in a letter to Tester. The letter, signed by Tuberville and four other Republican senators, states that a hearing must be scheduled immediately, and cannot wait for the Senate to return in September. “The American people, and especially our veterans, deserve a government operating with full transparency and integrity,” the GOP senators wrote in their letter, dated Wednesday. “They expect results, not a blank check to further bureaucratic mismanagement.”

Tester said in a statement that he plans to schedule an oversight hearing but stressed that the bill needs to move forward now. “I strongly urge my colleagues not to play politics with the money to pay for veterans’ benefits,” he said. “These benefits must be paid regardless of any hearing, and we have an obligation to provide veterans certainty now by passing this funding bill immediately.”

Tester is a co-sponsor of the bill introduced by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, that would backfill a roughly $2.3 billion shortfall facing VA compensation and pensions, plus $597 million for readjustment benefits. They are considered the two most vulnerable Democratic incumbents this November.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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John C. Hendrick, Arkansas

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

John, the National Legislative Commission Vice Chairman of Arkansas worked diligently to help flip one of the most obstinate opposers of the Afghan Assistance Amendment to the NDAA. Because of the tremendous grassroots efforts made by John and the rest of the Department of Arkansas, Senator Cotton changed his opinion and is now in support of the AAAA.

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

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UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, August 1, 2024, there are **NO** upcoming hearings scheduled. The House and the Senate have begun their summer recesses; their sessions will commence September 9th.

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SVAC hearings can be viewed at: Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
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SASC hearings can be viewed at: Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services

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From: Grassroots Manager
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] - Weekly Newsletter (8/9/2024)
Date: Friday, August 9, 2024 5:03:41 PM

AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

August 9, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *Contract Our Veterans Act of 2024!* This act would require the DoD to work with certain veteran-owned small businesses in procurement contracts. This act would create around 40,000 new Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses. *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far.* ***Go to the Action Center to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.***

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register and reserve a hotel room if you are interested in attending! You can find more information about convention, look over the calendar of events, and more here.

AMERICAN LEGION CALL ON DoD, CONGRESS TO PROTECT OUR TROOPS

This article's original publication can be found here.

American Legion National Commander Daniel Seehafer called on the Department of Defense (DoD) and Congress to upgrade security to protect U.S. servicemembers following rocket attacks by an Iranian-backed militia group against American forces housed at al-Asad Air Base in Iraq.

"We were horrified to learn that some of our servicemembers were wounded when they came under rocket fire from terrorist groups operating in the region," Seehafer said. "Together we pray for the recovery of our troops and our thoughts are with their families. At the same time, we call on members of Congress and DoD leadership to exhaust all resources to protect our forces from further attack. Additionally, we must work with Iraqi partners to ensure the safety and security of all personnel."

Seehafer also applauded Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's recent decision to

relocate ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers and destroyers to the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean. The strategic move is an effort to deter a wider regional conflict and to respond to any threats faced by U.S. troops and allies in the region.

“During my visit to Naval Station Rota in Spain in May, I saw firsthand how the brave sailors of the USS Bulkeley trained and prepared to respond to threats in the region,” he recalled. “I have full confidence in their abilities to protect and defend our troops and national interests in the region.”

BOTH VP PICKS ARE MILITARY VETERANS

The article’s original publication can be found here.

The next commander in chief will have a military veteran as their vice president.

With Vice President Kamala Harris’ selection of Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz as her running mate on Tuesday, both major party candidates have picked a veteran to join their ticket. Walz spent 24 years in the Nebraska and Minnesota Army National Guards.And former President Donald Trump picked former Marine JD Vance, now a freshman senator, to be his running mate last month.

“I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: The Post-9/11 generation of veterans is ascendant in America today,” Allison Jaslow, the CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, said in a statement following the Walz announcement. “We applaud Vice President Harris for heeding our call and choosing a post-9/11 veteran to join her in her candidacy to be Commander-in-Chief. And notably, someone who served in, and led troops, in the enlisted ranks.” Walz enlisted at 17. Harris, in her social media announcement, said Walz used his GI Bill benefits to go to college and become a teacher.

Walz was a congressman before he was governor, and Politico reports he was the highest-ranking enlisted soldier to serve in Congress at the time.Vance, the Ohio senator, became the first post-9/11 veteran on a major party presidential

ticket when he was announced as Trump's running mate. Vance served in the Marines from 2003 to 2007 and was deployed to Iraq.Walz and Vance are the first veterans on a White House ticket since the late Sen. John McCain in 2008.

And either one will be the first veteran to serve as president or vice president since George W. Bush, who was a lieutenant in the Texas Air National Guard.All veterans don't see eye to eye on national security issues, Jaslow told The National Desk last month. But it's valuable having a veteran in that position, someone who understands how decisions in Washington impact real troops on the ground.

SPOTTED ON CAPITOL HILL!

While attending meetings with congressional staffers, one of the members of the legislative division staff spotted *this* award in Rep. D'Esposito's office, presented by

Rockville Centre Legion Post 303!

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Marquis Palmer, California

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

Marquis, along with other Legionnaires, attended a town hall held at the Riverside City College Auditorium and spoke with Rep. Mark Takano. The town hall was focused on issues, both local and federal, that directly affected his constituents, so Marquis asked about VA legislation, such as H.R. 2693 (Pay Our Coast Guard Act). He mentioned how the last action taken on this Bill was months ago, and urged Rep. Takano to consider the importance of the Act. Below is a photo of Rep. Takano speaking, photographed by Marquis!

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

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AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

August 16, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *Hello Girls Congressional Gold Medal Act!* These women worked in forward areas and faced the same shelling, strafing, poison gas, and other dangers faced by the Doughboys and were paid by the Army. Despite their oaths to the nation and compliance with orders, they were considered "civilian contractors." *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far.* ***Go to the Action Center to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.***

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VETERANS AND LAWMAKERS LOBBY IN BIPARTISAN PUSH FOR MDMA THERAPY

This article's original publication can be found here.

More than a half century after federal regulators banned most psychedelic compounds, the Food and Drug Administration is nearing a decision on a novel treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder that pairs talk therapy with MDMA, the club drug commonly known as Ecstasy or Molly.

The decision, which is expected in the coming days, has generated a groundswell of lobbying by veterans groups, researchers and members of Congress from both parties. Eighty lawmakers signed letters to the Biden administration this week, urging the F.D.A. to approve the application by the drug company Lykos Therapeutics.

The campaign was prompted in part by an expert panel's overwhelming rejection in June of Lykos's application, because of what participants said were flaws in the company's clinical trials and insufficient data.

"We have a mental health crisis and a suicide epidemic, with thousands of military veterans taking their own lives every year," said Representative Jack Bergman, Republican of Michigan and a former Marine Corps general who helped organize the

letter's 60 backers in the House. "I would just ask the F.D.A. to consider the negative ramifications of them not taking action, which means more veterans will die needlessly." The lobbying campaign, unusual for a prospective new drug, underscores the high stakes and intense emotions surrounding psychedelic medicine, a field that has been growing in recent years as the country's top universities race one another to establish psychedelic research institutes.

The passions — and the millions of dollars in private investment flooding the field — have been buoyed by a growing body of data suggesting that compounds like LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and MDMA can have significant therapeutic effects on hard-to-treat mental health conditions like depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. The federally prohibited substances are listed as Schedule I drugs that have "no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse."

According to the most recent study cited in the Lykos application, more than 86 percent of participants who took MDMA experienced a measurable reduction in the severity of their PTSD symptoms, and 71 percent improved enough that they no longer met the criteria for a diagnosis. Of those who took the placebo, 69 percent improved and nearly 48 percent no longer qualified for a PTSD diagnosis, according to the company's data.

Perhaps most striking was that the benefits of MDMA therapy endured six months after the final, three-dose regimen, the study found.

"I'd argue that these benefits are better than any psychiatric medication that has been discovered in the history of psychiatry," said Dr. David Rabin, a neuroscientist and psychiatrist who conducts clinical trials on psychedelic compounds and is not affiliated with Lykos.

But the path toward approval has been bumpy, with advisers to the F.D.A. noting several shortcomings in Lykos's application and in gaps in the data the company had submitted. The panel, which voted 10 to 1 against the application, cited a number of concerns, including Lykos's failure to collect detailed data on MDMA's potential for abuse, its possible cardiac risks and what panelists said were the challenges of standardizing the treatment's psychotherapy component.

Although not considered a traditional psychedelic, MDMA, or midomafetamine, is a synthetic compound that fosters self-awareness, feelings of empathy and social connectedness.

Should it win F.D.A. approval, federal health authorities and the Justice Department would have to follow certain steps to reclassify the drug to a lower level than the current Schedule I ban, much like the process now underway with cannabis.

The Drug Enforcement Administration could also set production quotas for the drug's ingredients, as it does with the stimulant medications used to treat ADHD.

The F.D.A. could issue a more limited approval requiring Lykos to closely monitor its MDMA-therapy program and report any adverse effects to the agency. It could also require the company to undertake additional studies, a decision that would most likely add years to the approval process. The agency could simply postpone a final decision and ask Lykos to provide additional data. Such a determination, known as a Complete Response Letter, is likely to be confidential.

...

Postponing approval could cast a chill over the entire field.

"We need the big biotech funds to be investing in psychedelics, and a no vote would validate why many of them have been sitting on the sidelines until now," said Dustin Robinson, the managing principal of Iter Investments, which focuses on psychedelic companies.

The F.D.A. does not comment on impending decisions, but experts say the political sensitivities surrounding MDMA are especially daunting given the high-profile support from veterans groups. The agency is also undoubtedly mindful of regulatory failures, including criticisms of its own shortcomings, that helped fueled the nation's opioid crisis.

What no one disputes is the urgent need for new treatments for PTSD. Heroic Hearts Project, an organization that helps veterans obtain psychedelic treatment at clinics outside the United States, has more than 1,000 veterans on a waiting list.

Juliana Mercer, a board member with the organization and a Marine Corps veteran, said she and other supporters worried that the unconventional nature of psychedelic therapies was dampening the application's prospects at the F.D.A.

"We just want to make sure that the stigma associated with MDMA doesn't influence their decision," she said. "It would be a shame for stigma to keep a lifesaving treatment from millions of people."

AIR FORCE SAYS RESTORING NUKES ON SOME B-52S WOULD COST $4.5 MILLION

The article's original publication can be found here.

The Air Force estimates it would cost about $4.5 million to restore nuclear weapon capabilities on approximately 30 B-52 bombers, a calculation that follows proposals from Congress to assess shoring up the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal in the coming years.

The House and Senate armed services committees included the recommendation in their respective defense policy bills for fiscal 2025. The bombers in question had previously been equipped with the ability to carry nuclear weapons but were converted to conventional aircraft about 10 years ago to comply with a key U.S.-Russia arms control treaty known as New START.

That agreement, which sets limits on both countries' nuclear arms capabilities, is set to expire in 2026. Proponents of the recommendation say that serious negotiations with Russia aren't likely and the U.S. needs to prepare for a future without the same restrictions.

Brian Knight, deputy senior materiel leader in the Air Force's B-52 bomber program office, said Tuesday the service is prepared to meet the timelines proposed in the bill, which calls for the conversions to begin within a month after the treaty limits lift in 2026. The process is estimated to be completed by 2029.

"The work itself, I'm not going to get into the details other than to say, we know how to do it and it's relatively easy," he told reporters during an Air Force Life Cycle Industry Day conference in Dayton, Ohio.

The Air Force operates a fleet of 76 B-52s, which have been in operation since 1976. The bomber was designed to carry nuclear and conventional weapons, but in 2015, the service modified 30 aircraft to a conventional-only status under New START.

Opponents of the policy proposal — including the House Armed Services Committee's top Democrat Rep. Adam Smith of Washington — worry that making plans now to increase the U.S. nuclear stockpile could complicate future treaty negotiations.

Smith said in June, when the House's bill passed, that the conversion process could interrupt ongoing efforts to modernize the aging B-52 fleet, which is on track to get a slate of upgrades in the coming years to keep it flying into the 2050s – and potentially until 2060.

"The Department of Defense is not interested in doing this," Smith said. "They're currently trying to extend the life of the B-52s out to 2050, which they think they can do. This would be another expense to that."

Knight said the service could likely perform the conversions during planned depot maintenance. Brig. Gen. Erik Quigley, the service's program executive for bombers, said in the same briefing this week that while the workload would be manageable, it would require some adjustments to the program's depot schedule, which is usually set two years in advance.

"It would just take some planning to make sure that we got that into the flow," Quigley said.

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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 attended the American Legion Post 280 (Chesapeake) back-to-school day. At this event, Rep. Jen Kiggans (VA-02) met with students who were receiving supplies from the post.

Thank you, Frederic, and Post 280, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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am. This meeting will include elections for chairman and secretary, as well as reviews of resolutions and legislation.

Due to the Legislative staff attending convention, there will be no Weekly Newsletters sent on August 23rd or August 30th. They will return to their regularly occurring distribution schedule beginning Friday, September 6th.

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