AMERICAN LEGION

# LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

September 6, 2024

## WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support to *Fix the VA Funding Shortfall!* This bipartisan effort aims to remedy the nearly $15 billion combined deficit over this fiscal year and the next. This is crucial to protecting the benefits that so many of our brothers and sisters depend on. Let your voices be heard in Congress, and let them know that veterans' benefits are not up for debate. *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.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress is available online. To review our priorities, you can check out our Advocacy Toolkit.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**March 2-5, 2025 –** The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated here.

## MILITARY RECRUITMENT PANEL TO LEGION: "HELP WHERE YOU CAN"

*This article's original publication can be found here.*

Young people who tend to get their information in 15-second social media bursts on mobile phones need to see, hear and learn from real veterans about the true benefits of

military service in order to improve recruitment into the U.S. Armed Forces, according to panelists who spoke Wednesday in New Orleans at the 105th National Convention of The American Legion.

“We are facing a national recruiting crisis for a whole lot of reasons,” 15th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith said in the onstage session before thousands of American Legion members. “But the fact is, like it or not, you, myself – those who have served – are the ones right now standing in the breach between us and a national draft.”

To preserve and maintain an all-volunteer force, he explained, “requires us to go out and tell our story, to be the example in our communities, to perpetuate the best of what it is we have done. What it gave me – that sense of discipline, that sense of understanding, that sense of small team – that matters.”

All military service branches except the U.S. Marine Corps and Space Force have struggled to hit recruitment goals in recent years, some falling short, due to a range of reasons. Among the most commonly stated problems: physical fitness, behavioral issues, media and public perceptions of service and propensity to serve, based on family lineage. It all leads up to an oft-stated figure: that only about 23% of those who wish to enlist actually qualify for service. And others just don’t understand the value of military commitment or its long-term rewards, nor are they learning it often enough from veterans.

“The thing that always struck me about the military, whatever branch it was, is the connection between brothers and sisters in arms,” said panelist U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Danny Basham. “You’re not going to get that anywhere else. No corporation is going to

give that to you. It's a brotherhood and sisterhood that you enjoy. We can't take that for granted. I think the Legion does a great job of that."

"The more we talk about it, and I think, more importantly, the more we are examples of it in our communities is how that story gets told," Smith said.

The panel was a diverse mix, all of whom extolled the virtues of military service and the frustrating difficulty of convincing young people to take that path. "It's critical that we bring the next generation within our ranks," said the Hon. Patrick Murphy, first veteran of the war in Iraq elected to Congress and former Under Secretary for the Army, who served as moderator for the panel discussion. He framed the session as a national "call to service" where American Legion members can play a big part.

In addition to Smith, the panelists included U.S. Air Force veteran Ethan Brown, senior military fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency; Sgt. Maj. Allen Goodyear, Marine Corps Recruiting Command; and U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. for Analytics and Production Danny Basham.

"Service never stops," said Brown, an author and researcher on the post-Global War on Terrorism era. "We never stop being ambassadors or representatives. The challenge is on all of us in this room, and the sub-units we represent, when we all go back to our systems and Legions. Find those veteran success stories, and we have to overcome that broken-veteran stigma, in order to be an extension of our recruiting brothers and sisters."

Brown referenced the 1957 book "The Soldier and the State" by Samuel Huntington that warned of "societal fatigue" about military service and how that parallels today's situation after the longest war in U.S. history, the Global War on Terrorism. "We see some of those same problems that he identified in his groundbreaking work manifesting today, in particular the civil-military dynamic. Young Americans are reluctant to serve in a military capacity because of how they perceive the military and its role within the state today. This is due to societal fatigue after a 20-year war."

Media – social and otherwise – also contribute to perceptions on separate ends of the U.S. ideological spectrum that either deride military service as being too "woke" or too "radical."

"The single most important, tactile issue in the recruiting crisis is the politicization of U.S. military and the American body politic," Brown said. "There's buzz phrases like 'the military has gone woke' or 'it's full of radical ideologies.' Both of these are straw-man arguments. Whether they are accurate or not does not matter. It is the perception that they are (that is) damning to the men in uniform that I'm sharing this panel with and the men and women who work for them, who are trying to get that next generation of Americans to serve this country."

Brown explained that Congress directed the Department of Defense to launch a study into the prevalence of radical ideologies in the military and the results were that

servicemembers “were pretty much commensurate with the rest of the United States. It’s almost like the U.S. military is a microcosm of American society. Who knew?”
He said one goal, beyond other obstacles to enlistment, should be to restore public trust in military service and understanding of its value. “Rebuilding the public faith in the military and its role in a democracy is a critical factor if we are going address this problem,” he said. “It’s not a simple solution. It’s a comprehensive one. It requires efforts by the military to realign itself for the world that we live in; the federal government to align resources and policy to support the military, to adapt to the new world that we live in; it requires communities and community leaders; and most importantly it requires us, as individual actors in a democracy, to take part in rebuilding that trust.”

The panelists made several suggestions about how the Legion can improve the situation, including:

- Connecting directly with recruiters in their communities and helping them make connections with schools.

-“Create opportunities to inspire, advocate and support the recruiting effort,” Goodwin prescribed.

- “See how you can help recruiters get their foot in the door,” Basham said.

- “Let’s not lead with victimization,” Murphy said. “Be a civic asset. It’s going to set you up on a path to greatness in your life.”

Smith made the point that 77% of successful Navy recruitment comes from military blood lines. “That’s wonderful in some aspects – heartwarming – but if you want to enfranchise a nation in the future of your military, we have to find people who have never served, who understand that through the military, you can change your family’s destination in one generation. If you come in and you work hard, and you achieve, you will set your kids and your progeny up for success … In addition to those who have families that have served, we need to find many more who haven’t.”

“Service never stops,” Brown said. “You never stop being a part of your community. There’s always places where we can engage ourselves – youth sports, assisting at public schools with physical education or civics education. There are so many more things that each and every one of us can do to take that individual responsibility for rebuilding that trust in the institution that is the U.S. military.”

This is not a small problem, Smith suggested in the discussion. “If we don’t stand up right now, there won’t be another generation on this stage in 30 years looking out at another audience talking about the same thing. Our national destiny is at stake. That’s what this is about. So, please listen and help where you can.”

## AIR FORCE VETERAN FROM OAKDALE, CONN., ELECTED NATIONAL COMMANDER OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

*The article’s original publication can be found here.*

James A. LaCoursiere, Jr. was elected national commander of the nation's largest veterans organization today during The American Legion's 105th national convention.
An Air Force veteran, LaCoursiere has been a longtime field representative for The American Legion Department of Connecticut's Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund, which assists veterans and their families.

LaCoursiere has held many leadership positions at The American Legion post, department (state) and national levels. He is a member of American Legion Post 91 in Moosup, Conn. He has also served as a national vice commander, Connecticut state commander, and chairman of the organization's national legislative commission.

LaCoursiere is married to his wife, Lisa, and has two children (Patrick and Meghan), and three stepchildren (Jason, Kaylene and the late Johnathan).

Born to a military family in Honolulu, LaCoursiere attended Montville High School where he played junior varsity football, varsity football and varsity track.

As national commander, LaCoursiere is strongly committed to raising awareness for The American Legion's "Be the One" efforts to prevent veteran suicide.

## HOUSE REPUBLICANS SUBPOENA SECRETARY BLIKEN FOR TESTIMONY ON US WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

*The article's original publication can be found here.*

House Republicans have issued a subpoena demanding testimony from Secretary of State Antony Blinken as they wrap up a sprawling yearslong investigation into the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

Rep. Michael McCaul, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, sent a subpoena letter late Tuesday ordering Blinken to appear before the committee by Sept. 19 or face a contempt of Congress charge.

“You served as the final decision maker for the department on the withdrawal and evacuation,” McCaul wrote.

He added that three years later, Blinken is "in a position to inform the Committee’s consideration of potential legislation aimed at helping prevent the catastrophic mistakes of the withdrawal, including potential reforms to the Department’s legislative authorization.”

Matthew Miller, a State Department spokesman, said Blinken is unable to testify on the dates proposed by the committee as he will be traveling for diplomatic work the majority of September. He claimed the committee denied “reasonable alternatives” to the subpoena date.

“The Secretary has testified before the Congress on Afghanistan more than 14 times — more than any other Cabinet-level official,” Miller said, adding that four of those times were directly before the Foreign Affairs committee at the request of McCaul. “It is disappointing that instead of continuing to engage with the Department in good faith, the Committee instead has issued yet another unnecessary subpoena.”

The subpoena for Blinken's testimony is the latest in a series of moves by McCaul and other House Republicans over the last 18 months to hold the Biden administration accountable for what they have called a “stunning failure of leadership” after Taliban forces seized the Afghan capital of Kabul, far more rapidly than U.S. intelligence had foreseen as American forces pulled out.

The committee is expected to summarize its work in an investigative report to be released Monday, amid the contentious presidential election where Republican nominee Donald Trump has tried to elevate the withdrawal from Afghanistan as a campaign issue.

While the GOP report is expected to place blame on President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, who is now the Democratic nominee for president,

independent watchdog reports over the last three years have documented a much more nuanced and bipartisan case for which administration was at fault.

A 2022 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, concluded it was decisions made by both President Donald Trump and Biden to pull all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan that were key factors in the collapse of that nation's military.

That report mirrors assertions made by senior Pentagon and military leaders in the aftermath of the withdrawal. Military leaders have made clear that their recommendation was to leave about 2,500 U.S. troops in the country, but that plan was not approved.

## 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.

# Albert Klingele, New York

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

Albert attended a press conference in New York where Representative Nicole Malliotakis was speaking. When the press conference was over, he stuck around and discussed many different bills with the Congresswoman and her staff that deal with veterans, including the Elizabeth Dole Act, Major Richard Star Act, and Pay our Coast Guard Act. He also brought up issues specific to the Staten Island area. In response, Representative Malliotakis said that she is always working to protect the local VA Hospital and medical services and facilitites.

*Thank you*, Albert, 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.

## 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 papers 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***

## LEGISLATIVE DIVISION ACTIVITIES

The Legislative Division is finally back in Washington, D.C. after an eventful week at the National Convention in New Orleans. We welcome James LaCoursiere as the new National Commander for 2024-2025!

## UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, September 6, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, September 10 at 10:00 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Full Committee Oversight Hearing titled "*Accountable or Absent?: Examining VA Leadership Under the Biden-Harris Administration"*
- Tuesday, September 10 at 3:00 PM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight hearing titled "*Mission Transition: Evaluating Mental Health Support Programs for Separating Servicemembers"*
- Wednesday, September 11 at 10:00 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Health Legislative 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
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

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

September 13, 2024

## WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for H.R. 9468, which aims to *Fix the VA Funding Shortfall!* This bipartisan effort aims to remedy the nearly $15 billion combined deficit over this fiscal year and the next. This is crucial to protecting the benefits that so many of our brothers and sisters depend on. Let your voices be heard in Congress, and let them know that veterans' benefits are not up for debate. *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.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress is available online. To review our priorities, you can check out our Advocacy Toolkit.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**March 2-5, 2025 –** The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated here.

## CONGRESS MOVES TO FIX VA BUDGET GAP, BUT TIME IS RUNNING OUT

*This article's original publication can be found here.*

Congressional leaders have a deal in place to patch a nearly $3 billion shortfall on Department of Veterans Affairs funding that risks endangering benefits payments as soon as next month, but veterans advocates said they are reluctant to celebrate until the final details are worked out.

“When we see votes that are yes and then the dollars are actually sent to the [Treasury Department], then that will relieve our sense of urgency,” said Pat Murray, legislative director for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. “A proposed solution is not enough, we need an actual solution.”

VA officials have warned that because of increased medical care and benefits applications in recent months, the department’s budget is roughly $2.9 billion short for this fiscal year and about $12 billion short in projected fiscal 2025 needs.

The funds for next year likely will be negotiated as part of a broader federal budget package to be completed sometime this fall.

But VA leaders on Tuesday testified before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee that without a solution to the other funding gap by Sept. 20, some benefits checks to veterans and dependents could be delayed in October.

At a rally outside the VFW offices on Wednesday morning, dozens of veterans advocates warned those late checks could be disastrous for veterans.

“This financial crisis will affect disability compensation, caregiver compensation, community care payouts, everything,” said Julia Mathis, legislative director for the American Legion. “Every day that we get closer to September 20 is another 24 hours of uncertainty for thousands of veterans whose financial lives depend on this.”
Lawmakers on the House committee indicated Tuesday that they were working behind the scenes to help solve the problem, while at the same time expressing concerns that VA officials did not detect the funding shortfall sooner.

Congressional sources on Wednesday confirmed House leaders will move forward with a measure introduced by Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Calif., which would cover the budget gap for VA operations this month. A vote is expected on the legislation early next week.

That would give the Senate just a day or two to advance the legislation ahead of the Sept. 20 deadline. If a senator objects to the quick passage, it could push the final passage past that date or derail the whole measure.

Advocates say they plan to spend the next week lobbying lawmakers to make sure that doesn’t occur.

“The VA needs more money,” said Brian Kelly, president of the Military Officers Association of America. “It doesn’t matter who you want to point the finger at for that, the fact is that our veterans need their benefits paid out.”

“Any interruption in the VA’s ability to pay veterans may have devastating consequences on this community and may erode trust and confidence in the institutions who have pledged to support and care for those who have served.”

Lawmakers must also negotiate a separate extension for the full federal budget by Sept. 30 or risk a partial government shutdown. That potential funding lapse would have limited impact on VA services, however, because Congress regularly approves much of the department’s budget a year in advance.

## SENATORS ASSEMBLING MANAGER’S PACKAGE TO KEEP NDAA MOVING

*The article’s original publication can be found here.*

The Senate will probably not debate its fiscal 2025 National Defense Authorization Act this year, but senators said this week they are not done changing the measure before talks with the House on a final version get going in earnest.

Senators are assembling a manager's package of amendments that both sides agree would become part of the Senate's substitute NDAA, Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, confirmed in a brief interview. Reed has said previously he doesn't think the Senate will have time this year for a full debate and passage of the annual NDAA.

Instead of a formal conference between House and Senate negotiators, lawmakers will instead informally iron out differences between the Senate Armed Services Committee bill (S 4638), with the manager's package included, and the House-passed measure (HR 8070).

That process is launched every year at the staff level long before both chambers have passed their NDAAs. But, by all accounts, those talks will not enter the home stretch this year until after the November election.

"We need the time," Reed said. "In the meantime, we're working with the House to get some bearings on where they're going and where we're going."

It is not yet clear what fraction of the 1,126 amendments filed to the Senate bill will make it into the manager's package.

Aides to Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Benjamin L. Cardin, D-Md., have said they expect the annual State Department authorization measure, the text of which has yet to be released, to be one amendment included in Reed's manager's package.

Meanwhile, Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., a member of the Armed Services Committee, said numerous amendments "that are fine with both sides" have already been cleared for the manager's package.

"So we kind of know there is a universe there of things that are really popular," Kaine said.

Rep. Mike D. Rogers, R-Ala., the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said this week he has been expecting the Senate to approve a manager's package that would put the finishing touches on that chamber's opening bid in the bicameral talks.

"We've done this, I think, twice out of the last three years," Rogers said of the informal conference process. "It's not the way we ought to do it, but it's the way we've had to do it."

Rogers predicted final action on the bicameral NDAA would be a late December event.

## THIS WEEK ON CAPITOL HILL

This week, National Commander James Lacoursiere visited Washington, D.C. to attend an event at the WWI Memorial and meet with members of Congress! During his time here this week, he spoke with Sen. Reed (RI) and Rep. Courtney (CT). He was also joined by Joseph Navarette, the Sons of the American Legion National Commander.

## 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.

# Terry Schow, Utah

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

Terry spoke to Representative Blake Moore and his staff last week. They talked about multiple Legion priorities, including the VA funding shortfall, veteran suicide issues, funding for veterans' mental health, and improving and funding Vet Centers.

*Thank you*, Terry, 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.

## 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 papers 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***

## LEGISLATIVE DIVISION ACTIVITIES

This week, the Legislative Division had the pleasure of escorting James LaCoursiere around D.C. for a trip full of meetings with Congress, tours of the Capitol Building, and events at the WWI Memorial.

## UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 1:00 PM on Friday, September 13, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Monday, September 16 at 9:00 AM EST: House Armed Services Committee – Full Committee Hearing titled "*Fielding Technology and Innovation: Industry Views on Department of Defense Acquisition"*

- Wednesday, September 18 at 10:00 AM EST: House Armed Services Committee – Full Committee hearing titled "*The Findings and Recommendations of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy*"
- Wednesday, September 18 at 10:15 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Oversight Hearing: "*Examining VA's Challenges with Ensuring Quality Contracted Disability Compensation Examinations*"
- Wednesday, September 18 at 2:30 PM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing titled "*Dial 988 +1: Examining the Operations of the Veterans Crisis Line"*
- Wednesday, September 18 at 3:00 PM EST: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – "*Providing for Veterans: Addressing Current and Future VA Budget Challenges*"
- Thursday, September 19 at 9:00 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing: "*VA's Open Cash Register: Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Revenue Operations*"
-

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

# LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

September 20, 2024

## WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for H.R. 7543 – *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act!* This legislation aims to rectify GI Bill inequality for National Guard and Reserve servicemembers. *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.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress is available online. To review our priorities, you can check out our Advocacy Toolkit.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**March 2-5, 2025 –** The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated here.

# CONGRESS MUST FUND OUR MILITARY PROPERLY

*This article's original publication can be found here.*

Dear American Legion Family members and friends,

The shenanigans we're seeing play out on Capitol Hill are more than typical political bickering. They are endangering our national security, military readiness, and other core issues for veterans, servicemembers and their families.

In short: We're less than two weeks away from a government shutdown as Congress is unable to pass spending legislation before a new fiscal year begins Oct. 1. Our elected representatives are looking at yet another stopgap measure, a continuing resolution (CR) which is akin to placing a bandage on a wounded body part that requires major surgery.

There are numerous reasons why passage of a CR would gravely impact America. Among them:

**Military readiness and operations**: A CR would be disruptive in several ways, compromising military response operations to worldwide threats, reducing readiness training and putting the brakes on maintenance fixes, while simultaneously empowering known enemies.

**Delayed pay for troops**: Active-duty personnel and reservists could experience delays in receiving hard-earned pay raises, negatively impacting morale and financial stability, especially in the current economic climate. Imagine being a young servicemember and having to talk with a spouse or partner about which bills to pay, just because Congress is mired in a political standoff.

**Border security**: Already stretched thin, border protection agencies could face staffing shortages and resource limitations, increasing their vulnerability to illegal activities and security threats.

**Recruitment challenges**: The armed forces are already faced with challenges when it comes to recruiting the best and the brightest. As the standoff takes its toll, potential recruits' enlistment bonuses could be halted, risking that they forego military service due to financial uncertainty. Additionally, current servicemembers could choose to not re-enlist, creating talent shortages in areas critical to national security.

Those are among the scenarios we will be facing with a CR, instead of a fully funded fiscal year. But there is still time for Congress to do the right thing.

Our members of Congress must push aside their political posturing, focus on completing the mandated task at hand and doing what is right for America, its military members and their families. I am calling on Congress to pass an actual spending bill on time to ensure our military is properly funded throughout this fiscal year.

National Commander
James LaCoursiere Jr.

# HOUSE PASSES $3B VETERANS FUNDING PATCH AS REPUBLICANS SCOFF AT MASSIVE VA SHORTFALL

*The article's original publication can be found here.*

The House passed an emergency spending bill Tuesday night to boost veterans funding by almost $2.9 billion amid Biden administration warnings that VA benefits are at risk this month.

While that multi-billion-dollar infusion has bipartisan support, a follow-on tranche could be harder fought. The Department of Veterans Affairs expects a much larger shortfall over the next year, and Republicans aren't agreeing upfront to filling the funding gap as they prepare to play hardball over government spending totals after Election Day.

Republicans blame the VA's funding gap on budget mismanagement by the Biden administration, while also acknowledging that the VA has been providing health care and disability benefits to more veterans since Congress cleared a bill in 2022 to expand services to those exposed to toxic substances.

"But this isn't smoke and mirrors. There are more veterans, there are more benefits. These are good things," said Rep. Mike Garcia (R-Calif.), the bill's sponsor. "All we're asking for is the president's budget request and the congressional processes reflect the higher demands and thus the higher dollar values."

**Broader fight:** Beyond the almost $2.9 billion the House backed Tuesday by voice vote, the Biden administration estimates a shortfall of nearly $12 billion in veterans services through next fall.

The extra sum could become a conflict point this month as congressional leaders negotiate a bipartisan stopgap funding bill to keep government agencies funded beyond Oct. 1. And if the shortfall isn't remedied in that patch, it's expected to factor into negotiations later this year when congressional leaders haggle over the "topline" funding levels that set the framework for final government funding bills.

That's because VA funding typically falls under the non-defense bucket Democrats will be trying to increase, as Republican leaders argue for a higher share on the defense side of the ledger. Counting extra VA money under the domestic total would benefit GOP negotiators, while breaking it out as emergency cash would likely afford Democrats more leverage in scoring other non-defense funding.

**What's next:** Senate leaders are expected to fast-track passage of the VA patch to clear the measure for President Joe Biden's signature in the next few days. The Biden administration told lawmakers in July that the money is needed to ensure payments aren't missed on Oct. 1.

## THIS WEEK ON CAPITOL HILL

This week, there were multiple bills brought to the House floor that were considered under suspension of the rules. The following bills had the motion to reconsider laid on the table and Agreed to without objection and have thus passed in the House:

- H.R. 1432: VETT Act
- H.R. 6324: Fiscal Year VA Major Medical Facility Authorization Act
- H.R. 7777: Veterans' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act of 2024
- H.R. 7100: Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act
- H.R. 2911: Fairness to Servicemembers and their Families Act of 2024
- H.R. 4190: Restoring Benefits to Defrauded Veterans Act
- H.R. 4424: Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act
- H.R. 5464: To name the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Guntersville, Alabama, as the "Colonel Ola Lee Mize Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic
- H.R. 7342: Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024
- H.R. 7816: Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act
- H.R. 9468: Veterans Benefits Continuity and Accountability Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024

## 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.

## David Disbrow, Ohio

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

David met with Rep. Marcy Kaptur to discuss concerns about illness and cancer rates among veterans. He brought up ideas for legislation that could be created to assist

veterans affected by toxic exposures and prevent future people from being exposed. He spoke with Representative Kaptur and her staff about these issues.

*Thank you*, David, 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.

## 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 papers 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 1:00 PM on Friday, September 20, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, September 24, 2:30 PM: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Oversight Hearing: "*VA Accountability: What has Happened to Hampton*?"
- Wednesday, September 25, 10:15 AM: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Full Committee Oversight Hearing: "*Everyday Heroes: Supporting the Veteran Caregiver Community*"
- Thursday, September 26, 9:00 AM: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing: "*Ensuring Timely Access: Challenges in VA Scheduling"*
- Thursday. September 26, 1:00 PM: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight Hearing: *"Digital GI Bill in Disarray: Holding the Biden-Harris Administration Accountable for VA's Costly Mismanagement"*
-

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

# LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

September 27, 2024

## WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for H.R. 7543 – *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act!* This legislation aims to rectify GI Bill inequality for National Guard and Reserve servicemembers. *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.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress is available online. To review our priorities, you can check out our Advocacy Toolkit.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**March 2-5, 2025 –** The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated here.

# VA SURPASSEES GOAL FOR HOUSING HOMELESS VETERANS FOR FISCAL 2024

*This article's original publication can be found here.*

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has housed more than 43,000 veterans experiencing homelessness this fiscal year.**

Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that between October 2023 and August 2024, it housed 43,116 veterans experiencing homelessness, surpassing its fiscal year 2024 goal to house 41,000 veterans one month before the end of the fiscal year. VA has also ensured that 96.3% of the veterans housed so far this fiscal year have not returned to homelessness, and engaged 38,476 unsheltered veterans to ensure they have access to the housing and other wraparound services they need.

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S. has fallen by over 4% since early 2020 and by more than 52% since 2010.

"No person who has served this country should ever have to experience homelessness," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "As a result of this year's efforts, more than 43,000 formerly homeless veterans now have access to the homes that they deserve. And make no mistake: we won't rest until every veteran has a safe, stable, accessible, and affordable home to call their own."

VA has also made progress in combating veteran homelessness in the Greater Los Angeles area, providing 1,647 homeless Veterans with permanent housing so far this fiscal year — the most of any city in America (for the third year in a row) and exceeding VA's FY 2024 goals for this region by 2.6%. Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's recent Point-in Time count revealed a 22.9% reduction in veterans experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles between 2023 and 2024.

This week, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness released the federal government's first ever framework for homelessness prevention and launched a new series spotlighting local and federal efforts to prevent homelessness. Last month, VA awarded more than $800 million in grants via its Supportive Services for Veteran Families and Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem programs, and in July, awarded over $26 million in grants to support legal services for veterans facing homelessness. Additionally, last month, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and VA announced policy changes that will help more veterans receive housing assistance under the HUD-VA Supportive Housing program.

VA's efforts to combat veteran homelessness are grounded in reaching out to homeless Veterans, understanding their unique needs, and addressing them. These efforts are built on the evidence-based "Housing First" approach, which prioritizes getting a veteran into housing, then providing or connecting them with the wraparound services and supports they need to stay housed, including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more.

Every day, VA staff and VA's community partners nationwide help veterans find permanent housing, such as apartments or houses to rent or own, often with subsidies to help make the housing affordable. In some cases, VA staff and partners help veterans end their homelessness by reuniting them with family and friends.

Visit the VA.gov/homeless to learn about housing initiatives and other programs supporting veterans experiencing homelessness.

## HOUSE LAWMAKERS URGE SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVER SERVICES TO HELP DISABLED VETERANS STAY OUT OF NURSING HOMES

*The article's original publication can be found here.*

House lawmakers on Wednesday urged the swift passage of legislation to better support family caregivers and home health aides who help veterans with serious disabilities continue to live at home and stay out of institutional care.

Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., who is chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, said he soon plans to bring to the floor the Sen. Elizabeth Dole Act, which would increase funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs for noninstitutional alternatives to nursing home care.

The legislation also would address the needs of family members serving as full-time caretakers, including providing them with mental health care services, respite care, home health aide and other assistance. It was introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., in 2023, and would authorize agreements with non-VA medical and social service agencies to offer community and at-home services that are comparable to what veterans receive in nursing homes.

Expenditures for at-home care cannot exceed 65% of what the cost would be if the veteran lived in a nursing home. The change would increase the amount to 100% under the Sen. Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act.

The program provides elderly and disabled veterans — or their designated family caregiver — with a small monthly budget to pay for help with daily living activities, such as bathing, dressing and meal preparation, so they can continue to live at home.

Some veterans and their advocacy groups said there is a lack of sufficient services to support caretakers in the community.

“My husband requires supervision at all times, and I manage every aspect of his life. Our lives are full of medical appointments, countless hospital stays and the never-ending medication management,” said Vanessa Chism, caretaker for her husband, Cody, an Army veteran medically retired in 2011 after serving in Iraq.

“Cody is here physically, but I have lost my husband to traumatic brain injuries,” she said. Her husband suffers from seizures, chronic pain and cognitive impairment. But Chism said she has struggled to gain and keep access to VA-sponsored programs and services that enable her husband to live at home with her and their three children.

Bost cited new findings from the nonprofit Rand Corporation on challenges and hardships of families that are caring for veterans with serious disabilities.

The Rand study found there are more than 14 million caregivers of veterans and service members, representing 5.5% of the U.S. adult population. Most caregivers surveyed by Rand spend up to 30 hours per week providing care for veterans with illnesses and injuries from military service. Caregivers are often isolated and experience high level of stress and burnout, Bost said.

“Veterans caregivers play an unseen role in supporting loved ones. Many face emotional, financial and physical hardships,” he said.

Bost said he is hearing from constituents that they cannot find respite care after they qualify for it.

Provisions of the Elizabeth Dole Act would require the VA to award grants to improve the mental health assistance for caregivers, who might be forced to reduce work hours or end careers, he said.

Some financial help from the VA is already available through stipends, but it often falls short, Bost said.

Colleen Richardson, executive director of the VA's caregiver support program, said the VA is prioritizing respite for caregivers and has seen program use increase by more than 270% since fiscal 2022.

She said the VA funds a program called comprehensive assistance for family caregivers. The program pays a monthly stipend to family caregivers with seriously disabled veterans and provides access to health insurance through the VA's civilian health and medical program, also known as CHAMPVA.

Recipients also can receive travel reimbursement to veteran's health care appointments and qualify for 30 days of respite care per year, when it is available.

Richardson said there is assistance for veterans to hire home health aides and other caregivers who are not family members.

The VA also has started a virtual program for providing online therapy sessions for family caregivers and will complete more than 14,000 appointments this year, she said.

The Congressional Budget Office issued a report in 2023 on the costs of providing "all-inclusive" non-VA care for seriously disabled and elderly veterans to continue living at home and in their communities. Expanding in-home assistance, caretaker support and other community-based services could grow spending as much as $119 million through 2033, according to the report.

How the VA manages its budget has come under closer scrutiny by lawmakers.

Congress just passed an emergency spending measure to close a $3 billion shortfall at the VA for fiscal 2024, which ends Sept. 30.

But lawmakers also criticized the VA for not anticipating greater spending needs after passage of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act. Also known as the PACT Act, the law provides benefits to veterans who developed illnesses from burn pits, radiation and other toxic exposures during military service.

A $12 billion shortfall is projected for 2025, as the VA has enrolled thousands of additional veterans in VA health care since 2022 and provided compensation for their illnesses and disabilities connected to military duty.

More veterans who are seeking care drives a need to hire 5,000 additional workers to cover rising demand for services. The VA also anticipates higher costs for popular prescription drugs, especially for treating diabetes and obesity.

Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., said he supports Congress providing the assistance veterans need to remain at home. He described the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act as transformative for veterans and their families.

He said caregivers are an indispensable component of the complex system of support and health care that disabled veterans need.

“I too want to see this legislation enacted as soon as possible,” he said.

Takano said he also supports awarding Social Security credits to family members who are full-time caretakers for disabled relatives, which is not addressed in the bill.

Credits are based on a person’s earnings and work history over a lifetime, and are used to determine retirement benefits, Medicare coverage and other services. But they do not consider individuals who leave jobs and careers to work as full-time caretakers for disabled family members.

Takano said the VA also must be provided funding to build capacity, modernize infrastructure and meet veterans’ health care needs at its facilities.

He urged a balance of money for VA care at hospitals and clinics and non-VA care delivered at home and in the community

## THIS WEEK ON CAPITOL HILL

This week, the following bills had the motion to reconsider laid on the table and Agreed to without objection and have thus passed in the House and/or the Senate:

- H.R 522: Deliver for Veterans Act
- H.R 7323: Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserves Tuition Fairness Act of 2024

- S. 656: Veteran Improvement Commercial Driver License Act of 2023

Additionally, the following bill passed through Congress and made its way up to the President to officially become law!:

- H.R. 9468: Veterans Benefits Continuity and Accountability Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024

## 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.

## Wayne Perra, New Hampshire

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

Wayne met with the Veteran Affairs Aide from Senator Maggie Hassan's office to discuss veterans affairs and membership in the New Hampshire area. He also discussed the possibility of getting grants to augment the Department's Service Officers.

*Thank you*, Wayne, 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.

## 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 papers 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 8:00 AM on Thursday, September 26, there are NO hearings scheduled.

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