

National Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, The American Legion is urging Congress to pass the *Love Lives On Act* (S. 1266 / H.R. 3651). Currently, Gold Star Spouses under the age of 55 are forced to choose between remarriage and their survivor benefits. To ensure that surviving spouses can be married without repercussions, you contact your representatives in support of S. 1266 or H.R. 3651 by [clicking here](#).

Last session, three critical bills passed the House of Representatives: The [Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act of 2023](#) (H.R. 542), the [HOME Act of 2023](#) (H.R. 3848), and the [COPE Act](#) (H.R. 3581) bill. If the Senate agrees to pass this Legion-backed legislation, Congress has an opportunity to provide indispensable support for our Nation's veterans and their family caregivers.

The American Legion is also proud to support S. 3546, the [Veterans Mental Health and Addiction Therapy Quality of Care Act](#). S. 3546 aims to evaluate the quality of mental health services at the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) and non-Department providers. If you would like to contact your representatives in support of this bill, H.R. 542, H.R. 3848, or H.R. 3581, you can visit our [Grassroots Action Center](#) to identify and email your elected official.

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

KEY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS CALL FOR INVESTMENT IN MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE

In 1973, the Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird announced the end of conscription and the [beginning of America's all-volunteer force](#). Despite initial hesitancy from some Department of Defense (DOD) officials at the time, the all-volunteer force proved its effectiveness during the Gulf War and War on Terror.

Despite its tactical success, the ability to recruit men and women to join the Armed Forces began to steadily [decline in the 1990s](#). While a myriad of cultural and macroeconomic trends correlated with the military's recruitment and retention problem, [many reports note that military pay and housing](#) were considered subpar by many servicemembers. Unfortunately, these problems have persisted well into the 21st century.

In 2023, 50 years after conscription ended in the United States, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), created the [Quality of Life Panel](#) to address these long-standing issues. Representative Don Bacon (R-NE-2) was chosen as the Chairman and Representative Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA-6) serves as the ranking member. The [panel focuses on](#) "issues that impact U.S. service members and their families, including compensation, child care, housing, support programs for spouses of service members, and health care." The panel will then provide a written report to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel and "include recommended proposals for the FY2025 NDAA."

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Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL-3)

Since its creation in June of 2023, the panel has held multiple hearings and meetings with DOD officials and military families. The hearings, which covered topics from unaccompanied housing conditions and pay to child care and spouse employment, gave Congress the necessary insight to support our servicemembers and increase the attractiveness of the Armed Forces to potential recruits.

On February 16, 2024, Chairman Bacon and Ranking Member Houlahan, in conjunction with HASC Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL-3) and Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-WA-9), published their proposals for FY2025 to President Joe Biden.

The letter, which can be read [here](#), emphasizes the following as key impediments to a higher quality of life for servicemembers and their families.

- (1) poorly maintained barracks, dormitories, and single-family housing forcing service members.
- (2) insufficient pay, particularly junior enlisted members
- (3) difficulty accessing medical care
- (4) child care shortages for military families, especially in high-cost areas
- (5) uncertainty in military spouse employment

The Chairmen and Ranking Members encourage President Biden to keep these problems and potential solutions in mind as makes his budgetary requests for Fiscal Year 2025. As acknowledged by the Congressmen in this letter, work across branches of government and across party lines will be critical to ensuring that military quality of life is not overshadowed.

THE ONGOING APPROPRIATIONS FIGHT

Once again, the 118th Congress faces the 2024 appropriations packages that have been delayed since the fall of 2023.

The previous [continuing resolution \(CR\)](#) gives lawmakers until March 1st to pass 4 appropriations bills, including the Military Construction-Veterans' Affairs Bill, and March 8th for the remaining 8 bills, which includes Defense, Homeland Security, and State-Foreign Operations. With Senators returning to

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Washington, DC on Monday and Congressmen on Wednesday, the likelihood of all 12 bills becoming law seems slim.

Despite the clear challenges that lawmakers face, Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-MN-6) told reporters, “You are not going to get another continuing resolutions out of our conference.” Rep. Emmer’s declaration is supported by bicameral agreement on top-line spending numbers. But, the details of this framework remain highly contested across chamber and party lines.

According to an interview Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR-3) did with *The Hill*, FBI, IRS, and election security funds are among the most divisive issues at the moment. While these issues seem to have our government in a deadlock, many lawmakers are becoming anxious at the thought of more CRs. The House Armed Services Committee in particular is pleading with Speaker Johnson to end the cycle of CRs with impending defense cuts and debt ceiling.

The effects of partial governments are profound. The image of a divided and paralyzed government hurts domestic moral and could empower international adversaries, two symptoms that are exacerbated by the economic effects of shutdown. *Forbes* points out that a shutdown can slow the U.S.’s economic activity and “rattle financial markets” especially if it is unresolved.

The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that it would have to furlough about half of employees if a deal is not reached on funding, while the Food and Drug Administration would furlough closer to a quarter of its employees. VA and DOD can also expect furloughs, with VA halting some services like career counseling and transition assistance support.

Thankfully, VA has safeguards in place to ensure that disability payments, pensions, and medical care would continue. On the other side of the coin, currently serving members would not be paid during the shutdown, despite the continuation of their work.



LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

In an effort 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.

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Mike Bosshardt, Colorado

Mike Bosshardt is recognized as Legionnaire of the week for his enthusiasm and commitment to his duties as a member of the National Legislative Council (NLC). Mr. Bosshardt, a relatively new member of the NLC, has jumped into his role without hesitation to create a relationship with Representative Lauren Boebert (R-CO-3).

While the House and Senate were not in session this week, Mr. Bosshardt scheduled time to speak with Rep. Boebert. During the call, Mr. Bosshardt asked pointed questions about a variety of veteran-focused bills, encouraging the Congresswoman to support them. Mr. Bosshardt also gained valuable insight into the Congresswoman's agenda and voting style.

Thank you for your hard work!

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 me at kryan@legion.org.

Correction to the Grassroots Newsletter from February 9th, 2024: Dan Channel is mistakenly listed as the Commander of the Department of New Jersey. Dan Channel served the department of New Jersey as a Past Department Vice Commander.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

With Washington Conference just around the corner, Legislative Division (LegDiv) Staff was largely focused on last minute details and tasks to ensure the event was up to par. On top of managing scripts, the arrival of members of Congress, and grassroots reporting, the team made time to go to the Washington Hilton and figure out logistics.

LegDiv Staff also continued to review various bills and lobby for those with Legion support, most notably helping craft letters of support with other VSOs. Finally, LegDiv Staff worked with staff in Indianapolis to finalize details for the National Commander's testimony in March.

The Legislative Agenda for 118th Congress 2nd session was approved and is published on the website, along with other updates for Washinton Conference.

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.

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

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On Tuesday, February 27th at 10:00am ET, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Investigations will hold a hearing examining U.S. technology fueling Russia's War in Ukraine. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

On Tuesday, February 27th at 2:15pm ET, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism will hold a hearing examining Yemen and Red Sea security issues. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

On Wednesday, February 28th at 10:00am ET, the Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing examining the evolving workforce dynamics and the challenges for defense acquisition and defense industrial base personnel. The link to this hearing was not posted as of February 22nd, 2024.

On Wednesday, February 28th at 10:00am ET, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing examining Tehran's shadow army, focusing on addressing Iran's proxy network in the Middle East. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

On Wednesday, February 28th at 3:00pm ET, the Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Personnel will hold hearings to examine traumatic brain injury and blast exposure care. The hearing can be viewed [here](#). The link to this hearing was not posted as of February 22nd, 2024.

On Wednesday, February 28th at 3:00pm ET, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold hearings to examine honoring America's veterans and their families at VA cemeteries. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

Previous HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)
Previous SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)