

National Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ALERT: TELL CONGRESS TO PAY OUR TROOPS

The American continues to support the *Pay Our Troops Act* (H.R. 5641), which currently has 113 bipartisan cosponsors. With the government only narrowly avoiding shutdown twice for fiscal year 2024, it is critical that we ensure our troops have peace of mind and timely pay regardless of when appropriations bills are finalized.

Additionally, we are giving our support to the *Keep Our Border Agents Paid Act* (S. 2999), which would ensure that U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement are paid in the event of a government shutdown.

Finally, Congress is running out of time to pass the *Afghan Adjustment Act* (H.R. 4627 / S. 2327). The American Legion urges Congress to act quickly and uphold our promise to our Afghan allies who fought bravely against the Taliban. To contact your representative and encourage them to support the *Afghan Adjustment Act*, you can click [here](#).

The American Legion supports the Pay our Troops Act and encourages all Legionnaires to contact their members of Congress and ask them to support the legislation. Click [here](#) to reach out today.

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON EXPERIMENTAL SUICIDE PREVENTION

The struggle to access mental health care has long plagued the veteran community and contributed to the death of many who have served our country. Over the past twenty years, suicide rate among veterans has consistently been double that of the nonveteran population. This crisis demands the undivided attention of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), lawmakers, and medical researchers alike. This week, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee took the initiative to review an experimental new treatment that could save the lives of our servicemembers.

Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA-1), pictured right, commenced the hearing on psychedelic assisted therapy treatment in the battle against suicide. While Rep. Miller-Meeks made it clear that the subcommittee on Health did not believe in the legalization or uncontrolled use of psychedelics, she voiced her optimism about the treatment and the possible success of psychedelic assisted therapy. The treatment entails the professional and controlled use of MDMA, ketamine, psilocybin, and LSD to trigger neurochemical corrections in patients with post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideations, or other conditions that were previously deemed "treatment resistant." In the hearing, Dr. Carolyn Clancy of the



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Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) assured representatives that the treatment had only been tested under highly controlled and safe conditions with the supervision of trained staff.

Although the treatment is still in the trial phases, Dr. Isle Wiechers of VA encouraged veterans to speak to their VA providers about the efficacy of these treatments and the possibility of participation in trial. Moreover, in response Representative Jack Bergman (R-MI-1), Dr. Clancy ensured that VA would continue to fund research on psychedelic assisted therapy until the treatment is FDA-approved. Bergman also implored the panel to ensure that, after FDA approval, implementation and training of therapists occurs efficiently and without delay.

As the hearing went on, the panelists and the congressmen discussed the possible limitations of the treatment. Currently, it is unclear whether these treatments need to be lifelong to be effective or if a limited number of controlled psychedelic exposure is sufficient. Moreover, as pointed out by Rep. Greg Murphy (R-NC-3), researchers need to identify other conditions or medicines that might preclude a veteran from engaging in psychedelic assisted treatment.

The American Legion has prioritized mental health and suicide prevention as a key issue during the 118th Congress. The Legion has specifically encouraged Congress to help increase access to alternative therapies by providing financial and legislative support for VA suicide-prevention outreach and mental-health research. As the 118th Congress marches forward, we hope that the Veterans' Affairs Committees continue to support research of safe and effective therapies for suicide prevention.

If you are interested in watching this hearing, a recording can be found [here](#).

CONGRESS BUYS TIME FOR APPROPRIATIONS

Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA-4), pictured below, saw his two-tiered continuing resolution (CR) move to the President's desk this week. With this triumph, the new Speaker overcame the cameral and partisan divides that have killed many appropriations bills this year.



The House of Representatives passed the unprecedented, two-deadline bill on November 14th. Because the bill received relatively strong favor in the House, and Senate leadership voiced support for the bill prior to the vote, many political experts were optimistic about the legislation's success in the Senate.

By Wednesday evening, the United States Senate demonstrated overwhelming support for the CR and effortlessly sent it to the desk of President Biden. The President will sign the bill into law no later than

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midnight on Saturday, November 17th, providing Congress with two extra months to negotiate and pass the 12 federal spending bills for FY2024.

This staggered approach to funding will provide some government agencies with 2023-level funding through January 19th, 2024, and other agencies with 2023-level funding through February 2nd, 2024. This approach allows Congress time to coherently prioritize some bills over others. The bills which must be passed by January 19th include the *Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act*, the *Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act*, the *Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act*, and the *Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act*.

The CR was a sign of congressional compromise, a trait which seemed to have disappeared during Congress's original push for a CR in September. While the bill did not include any of President Biden's requests for supplemental aid for Ukraine and Israel, provisions which were largely supported in the Senate, it also did not include the major cuts or policies that have been popular in the House of Representatives. As stated by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), the CR is "a good first step and a very good omen for the future."

SENATE TAKES ACTION ON MILITARY PROMOTIONS

In an effort to advance military promotions that have been in limbo since early this year, the Senate Rules Committee voted in favor of a maneuver to bypass Senator Tommy Tuberville's (R-AL.) block.

By passing what is known as a "standing order resolution", the Rules Committee allowed the Senate to approve the pending military promotions en masse, with the caveat that each is approved by a majority of 60 Senators. The standing order temporarily overturns the use of unanimous consent in the Senate, which was the mechanism that allowed Senator Tuberville, pictured right, to bring the entire Chamber to a standstill on the matter.



Now, with over 400 military promotions heading to the Senate floor for approval, the question remains of whether there are 60 votes in favor of the promotions. Senate Democrats, led by Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), are firmly against Tuberville's hold, and frustration is growing among members of Sen. Tuberville's own party. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) lamented, "Unfortunately, our colleague has chosen instead to exert his leverage on career military officers." Despite the growing dissatisfaction on both sides of the aisle with Tuberville's tactics, it is unclear whether Majority Leader Schumer will be able end the backlog.

The American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer has written to Senators Schumer and McConnell, urging the two lawmakers to find a solution to fill the military vacancies. Commander Seehafer

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warns that “inaction risks innumerable consequences” for the wellbeing and national security of the United States. If you would like to read the Commander’s entire letter, please click [here](#).

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.

Terry Schow, Utah

It is a pleasure to name Terry Schow, Department of Utah as the Legionnaire of the Week.

On Veterans’ Day, Terry spoke with Representative Blake Moore (R-UT-1) and members of his office about many key issues for Veterans. Not only did the gentlemen discuss funding for veterans’ centers and claims regulations, but they also spoke about the Be The One Campaign and veterans’ mental health care. Terry also made invited the Congressmen to a Utah Jazz basketball game where the Department of Utah was holding a Be The One Initiative.

Terry, thank you for taking the time to speak with Representative Moore and make sure his office is aware of Legionnaire’s 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 me at kryan@legion.org.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

This week, the Legislative Division (LegDiv.) spoke with the office of Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) about the reintroduction of three bills supporting veterans who are immigrants and reconfirmed the Legion’s continued support the legislation.

On Wednesday, LegDiv. staff also attended a fireside chat with congressional leaders on how to improve quality of life for servicemembers.

The team also took time this week to begin solidifying the run of events for the 2024 Washington Conference.

Finally, LegDiv. staff continued to meet with advocates on the Hill and other VSOs to ensure that the Legion’s priorities were met.

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As part of our ongoing grassroots efforts, NLD staff will be traveling to posts around the country 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

There are no upcoming hears scheduled in the House of Representatives or the Senate.