

National Legislative Division Weekly

SENATE FAILS TO MOVE FORWARD WITH VETERANS PACKAGE

Also on Wednesday, the Senate failed to move the Veterans Programs Improvement Act of 2023 (S. 326) forward. The legislation only got 57 of the 60 votes it needed to move towards final votes. At the last minute, Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) voted against the bill in order to preserve the option for bringing it up again. The package includes three pieces of legislation requiring the VA to conduct studies and clinical trials on the effects of cannabis use on PTSD, chronic pain, and other conditions many veterans experience. The legislative package also contains legislation to improve the family caregiver program, home and community-based services, and the home loan program, especially for Native Americans.

GRASSROOTS ALERT: SUPPORT NEEDED THIS WEEK ON VETERANS' CAREGIVERS

On Wednesday, The American Legion emailed a grassroots alert that urgent action was needed to pass veteran caregiver legislation through *S. 326, the Veterans Program Improvement Act*. Unfortunately, this legislation failed to move forward – which means we need your voice now more than ever.

With no agreement over consolidating veterans legislation in the *Veterans Program Improvement Act of 2023*, the *Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act* remains a stand-alone bill: [S. 141](#). **The American Legion supports the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act, and encourages all Legionnaires to contact their Senators asking them to co-sponsor the legislation. Click [here](#) to reach out to your Senators today.**

CONGRESS

Next week, the Senate will be in session while the House holds a district work period. Several high-profile congressional delegations will be traveling around the world.

On Wednesday of this week, House Speaker McCarthy (R-CA) pushed through the 2023 Limit, Save and Grow Act to steeply cut federal domestic spending in exchange for raising the debt ceiling. The measure, which passed on a 217-215 vote (four Republicans voted against it), would result in an over 20% reduction in federal spending for FY24 and limit spending growth to 1% a year for a decade. In return, the debt ceiling would increase by \$1.5 trillion or be suspended until March 31, 2024, whichever comes first.

The bill is dead on arrival in the Senate. While few GOP Senators appear to favor passing a clean debt ceiling increase, the spending restrictions in the House measure are too extreme for most of them. A number of GOP House lawmakers are already pushing back at charges the bill would drastically cut the amount of money available for veterans' health care. Before voting for the measure, House Veterans Affairs Committee Rep. Bost (R-IL) released a statement that he has "letters of commitment" from McCarthy and other leaders that veterans' care would not be impacted. However, although the bill's language exempts the

National Legislative Division Weekly

Department of Defense (DoD) from cuts, there is no language protecting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the version passed by the House.

Although the House bill has virtually no possibility of becoming law, it does set the stage for further negotiations with the Senate, congressional Democrats, and the White House. President Biden has, several times, publicly stated that McCarthy has not brought anything to the table. With this in place, the White House now needs to make its own offer.

Appropriators in both chambers, in the meantime, are facing the almost impossible task of building FY24 spending bills without any realistic top spending amounts in place.

Wednesday morning, the Senate confirmed Joshua Jacobs as Under Secretary for Benefits for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). According to the VA, this is the first time since 2014 the Department has had a confirmed person for Under Secretary for Benefits, Under Secretary for Health, and Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs at the same time.

The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) is set to mark up its FY24 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) the last week of May, in hopes of having it on the floor the second week of June. While HASC chair Rep. Rogers (R-AL) would like to break the marathon markup into two days, this year is likely to be a repeat of going late into the night.

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TO SEND SEVEN BILLS TO THE HOUSE FLOOR

Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a Full Committee Markup, advancing seven bills that would increase transparency at VA Medical Centers, increase leadership stability at VHA, and increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities, and other issues essential to ensuring VA can deliver healthcare and benefits to America's veterans.

A full list of bills passed today can be found below:

1. **H.R. 562**, as amended - Improving Veterans Access to Congressional Services Act of 2023 (Rep. Brian Mast)
2. **H.R. 1089**, as amended - VA Medical Center Facility Transparency Act (Rep. Debbie Lesko)
3. **H.R. 366** - Korean American VALOR Act (Rep. Mark Takano)
4. **H.R. 1256**, as amended - Veterans Health Administration Leadership Transformation Act (Rep. Frank Mrvan)
5. **H.R. 1669**, as amended - The VET-TEC Authorization Act (Rep. Juan Ciscomani)
6. **H.R. 1529** - Veterans' Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (Rep. Morgan Luttrell)
7. **HR 1530**, as amended - Veterans Benefits Improvement Act (Rep. Morgan Luttrell)

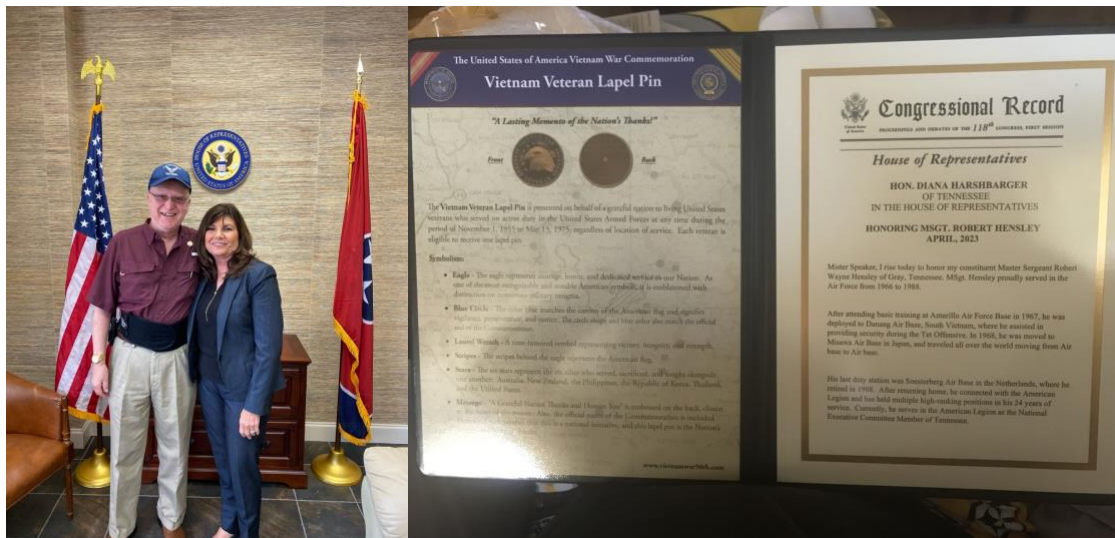
National Legislative Division Weekly

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.

Robert Hensley, Tennessee

This week, we are excited to recognize Robert Hensley from the Department of Tennessee, who was recognized by Representative Harshbarger (R-TN) for his 21 years of service in the U.S. Air Force.



Robert Hensley and Rep. Harshbarger (R-TN).

Thank you, Mr. Hensley!

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 kisaacson@legion.org.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, May 2, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) will hold a hearing to examine the posture of the Department of the Air Force in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2024 and the Future Years Defense Program.
- On Tuesday, May 2, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense will hold a hearing to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2024 for the Army.
- On Wednesday, May 3, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) will hold a hearing to examine the effectiveness of the Office of Integrated Veteran Care.

National Legislative Division Weekly

- On Thursday, May 4, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a hearing titled "All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego."