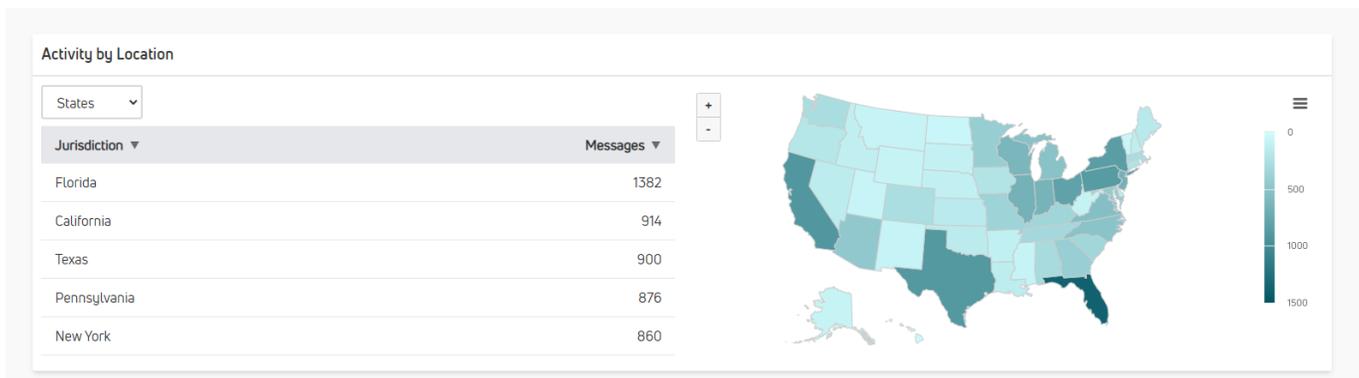


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GRASSROOTS ALERT: TAKE ACTION TO SUPPORT VETERANS EXPOSED TO TOXIC HAZARDS

This week, The American Legion National Headquarters sent out an alert to NLC members and Legislative Action Center subscribers to [call on their Senators](#) to pass H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act. In five weeks, **17,288** messages were sent to Senators. Florida, California, and Texas had the largest share of total messages sent to their respective Senators. This can be seen in the graphic below:



This campaign will be the top legislative priority of The American Legion until the Senate votes on it around June 7 or 8. National Commander Paul Dillard has visited Minnesota, Georgia, Alaska, South Dakota, and Indiana on a [multi-state tour](#) to spread awareness of the PACT Act. Earlier this month, he held a [press conference](#) where he urged Legionnaires to take action and press their senators to vote yes on this critical piece of legislation.

Status updates will be shared weekly, and Legionnaires are encouraged to disseminate this campaign far and wide.

[TAKE ACTION NOW](#)

CONGRESS

As the US death toll from COVID-19 reached one million this week (according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)), the House has yet to pass another related supplemental spending bill. Senate leaders have told reporters they are waiting for the House to act. House leaders are now saying they are waiting for the Senate.

The Senate did pass another Ukraine supplemental spending bill in its last vote for this week. The House had passed it previously, but Sen. Paul (R-KY) held it up for a week in his Chamber. The bill now goes to the President.

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The Senate will be in session next week, while the House is in a District Work Period. However, the rise of remote hearings will allow for a number of House committees to hold hearings from home.

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS HEATH ROBINSON HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS (PACT) ACT

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) and ranking member Sen. Moran (R-KS) on Wednesday announced an agreement to support the House-passed PACT Act.

Previously, Moran and his Republican colleagues hesitated to support the legislation due to the cost and fears of overwhelming the VA's benefits and health care systems. The statement announcing the agreement did not indicate what changed GOP lawmakers' minds. Veterans service organizations (VSOs) and other advocates have been lobbying heavily for the bill, which the House passed in March on a bipartisan basis (although only 34 Republicans voted in favor).

The PACT Act expands VA health care eligibility to 3.5 million post-9/11 veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxins. It adds 23 service presumptions for the health effects from toxic exposures, including hypertension due to Agent Orange. It also expands areas in which veterans exposed to Agent Orange would qualify for service presumptions.

The legislation also provides funding for 31 major leases Congress has previously authorized. The funding has been stalled in Congress because of the way CBO scores them for budgetary planning purposes.

Finally, the legislation provides additional resources for the VA to bolster both claims processing and the provision of health care in order to manage the increased number of eligible veterans.

The Senate intends to vote on the legislation around June 7 or 8. If the House needs to vote (due to the Senate changing language in its bill), Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) has promised prompt floor action.

A Pentagon spokesman said on Thursday that Defense Secretary Austin speaks with VA Secretary McDonough about this topic on a regular basis. He did not indicate whether the two Departments have yet created a plan for identifying all service members who were exposed to burn pits and would be eligible for VA services under this legislation

VETERANS-RELATED LEGISLATION

Congress has a tradition of passing a bevy of veterans-related bills just before Memorial Day. On Tuesday, the House passed ten bills:

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- ***S 3527**, allowing the VA to transfer the name of facilities to other, similar facilities
- ***S 1760**, naming the CBOC being built in Oahu, Hawaii, the Daniel Kahikina Akaka VA CBOC
- ***S 2514**, naming the Provo Veterans Center in Orem, Utah, the Col. Gail S. Halvorsen “Candy Bomber” Veterans Center
- **HR 7500**, FY22 VA Major Medical Facility Authorization Act
- **HR 5754**, Patient Advocate Tracker Act
- **HR 6604**, Veterans Eligibility to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act
- ***S 2687**, Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act of 2021
- **HR 7375**, VA to allow for electronic fund transfer for educational assistance to foreign institutions of higher education
- **HR 6376**, Student Veteran Work Study Modernization Act
- **HR 7153**, VA Principles of Benefits Automation Act

On Wednesday, the House passed an additional nine bills:

- **HR 5738**, Lactation Spaces for Veteran Moms Act
- **HR 7335**, MST Claims Coordination Act
- **HR 6961**, Dignity for MST Survivors Act
- **HR 6064**, requiring the VA to have NASEM review examinations of those who submit claims to the VA for compensation for mental and physical conditions linked to MST
- **HR 2724**, VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act
- ***S 4089**, Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program Restoration and Recovery Act
- **HR 6052**, VA OIG Training Act
- ***S 2533**, MAMMO for Veterans Act
- ***S 2102**, Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas SERVICE Act

The listed bills with an asterisk (*) have already passed the Senate, and are now headed to the President to be signed into law.

\$30B UKRAINE PACKAGE HEADS TO BIDEN’S DESK

The Senate voted 86-11 Thursday to approve a \$40 billion Ukraine aid package that would replenish U.S. stockpiles of weapons transferred to Ukraine, as well as allocate billions of dollars to help the Ukrainian government continue operating and provide humanitarian assistance. President Biden is expected to immediately sign the legislation, which exceeds his \$33 billion request to Congress.

The House passed the legislation overwhelmingly earlier this month by a vote of 368-57. The bill would authorize the transfer of American weapons and equipment to Ukraine and provide \$9 billion to replenish depleted U.S. weapons stockpiles. It would also provide nearly \$9 billion for continued operations of the Ukrainian government and \$4 billion in international disaster assistance.

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Congress last week to pass the bill by Thursday if the U.S. wanted to continue sending aid to Ukraine at the current pace. The

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administration had predicted that the \$100 million leftover in presidential drawdown authority—which allows the Pentagon to send weapons from its own stockpile — would last through the middle of May. Eleven Republican senators led by Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) voted against the measure.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, May 24, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) will hold a hearing titled "Hearings to examine pending calendar business."

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.

NLC Vice Chairman Jensen, Washington

This week, we are excited to recognize NLC Vice Chairman Jensen for meeting with staff from the office of Representative Larsen (D-WA) to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act and obtaining support from Senator Cantwell (D-WA) and Senator Murray (D-WA).

Thank you, Chairman Skinner!

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.

MEETINGS

- On Monday, May 16, NLD Staff conducted an introductory meeting with the House Small Business Committee Majority Staff.
- On Monday, May 16, NLD Staff met with the Senate Small Business Committee staff to discuss concerns with the passage of S. 3564, the Veterans Entrepreneurship Act, out of Committee. Staff received word that several "poison pill" amendments would be proposed in a Wednesday markup, dividing the Committee from what otherwise would be a bipartisan vote.
- On Tuesday, May 17, NLD Staff sent messages to all of the Senators on the Small Business Committee to share the American Legion's support for S. 3564. NLD Staff then received word that the poison pill amendments would be withdrawn before Wednesday's hearing.
- On Tuesday, May 17, NLD Staff attended a House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties hearing titled "Examining Potential Reforms of Emergency Powers." Written testimony and video can be found [here](#).

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- On Wednesday, May 18, NLD Staff monitored the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity legislative hearing. The American Legion's state for the record (SFR) can be found [here](#).
- On Wednesday, May 18, NLD Staff spoke with the Republican National Committee (RNC) about a Veterans Forum they are planning for next week at the Villages in Florida. They extended an invitation for a Legion representative to talk about the benefits of Legion membership and our advocacy goals. The invitation was shared with the Florida National Legislative Council Vice Chairman.
- On Wednesday, May 18, NLD Staff participated in the Afghanistan allies' coalition working group meeting to receive updates on efforts to get remaining Afghans who worked with the US military during the Afghanistan war out of the country and the latest developments with assisting those already in the US to integrate into their new communities.
- On Wednesday, May 18, NLD Staff met with staff from SVAC to discuss the VA's Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission and a legislative proposal to reform VA's infrastructure planning process.
- On Wednesday, May 18, NLD Staff participated in an Afghanistan allies' coalition working group meeting to work on advancing legislation called the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would facilitate the settlement of our Afghan allies in the US.
- On Wednesday, May 18, NLD Staff attended a House Homeland Security titled "Examining DHS's Efforts to Combat the Opioid Epidemic." Written testimony is [here](#) and the video is [here](#). The hearing provided an opportunity to learn more about the Department of Homeland Security's efforts and challenges in combatting the opioid epidemic, and Transnational Organized Crime.
- On Thursday, May 19, NLD Staff attended a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation hearing titled "The Ukraine Crisis: Implications for U.S. Policy in the Indo-Pacific." The hearing focused on the ramifications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for a potential conflict over China and Taiwan. Written testimony is [here](#) and the video is [here](#).
- On Thursday, May 19, NLD Staff met with the office of Rep. Jenniffer González-Colón (R-PR) to discuss legislation to expand TRICARE in the US territories.
- On Thursday, May 19th, NLD Staff spoke with *GI Jobs* magazine about the Legion's education priorities, specifically the GI Bill Parity Act.
- On Thursday, May 19, NLD Staff met with Representative Greg Murphy (R-NC). Congressman Murphy sits on the House Ways and Means Committee but expressed his interest in taking on a more active role in sponsoring veterans legislation after the recent House passage of his Veterans Eligibility to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act.
- On Friday, May 20th, NLD Staff met with SVAC Majority Staff to discuss VA's AIR Commission.

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