

National Legislative Division Weekly

CONGRESS



Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)

Both the House and Senate return to town next week.

For over a year, concerns have been raised about the mental state of Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), with some alleging she is showing signs of confusion and possibly dementia. The 89-year old was hospitalized in March after developing shingles. She has yet to return to DC, missing dozens of votes on the floor, where Democrats only have a two-vote majority. In addition, Feinstein sits on the Judiciary Committee, where Democrats have a one-vote majority. Her absence is preventing the committee from advancing judicial nominees for votes by the full Senate.

This week, Feinstein asked Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) to temporarily appoint another Senator to take her committee seat until she can return to DC. Schumer's office says he will submit a request to the full Senate next week. Without unanimous consent, this could turn into a complex procedural headache for Democratic leadership.

Feinstein has only asked to be replaced on the Judiciary Committee. She also serves on the Appropriations Committee, which plans to be passing spending bills mid-summer. Should Feinstein still be absent, Democrats may need to replace her on that committee, as well.

On Thursday, the FBI arrested Jack Teixeira, a 21-year old member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, for leaking highly classified documents in an online gaming chatroom. It highlights previously recognized shortcomings in how the Department of Defense (DoD) manages such information, and the vetting process for awarding security clearances.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) EMPLOYEE MISCONDUCT

On Wednesday, House Committee on Veterans Affairs chair Rep. Bost (R-IL) released a statement charging that the VA is not using tools provided by Congress to root out employee misconduct and poor performance. Bost has written to VA Secretary McDonough about the Department no longer using authorities to more rapidly fire employees under the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, signed into law in 2017. The letter gives an April 21 deadline for the Secretary to determine whether the VA has sufficient authority to remove problematic employees such as the one referenced.

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In his statement, Bost focused on allegations that a “toxic supervisor” continues to work at Loma Linda VA Medical Center more than three years after an investigation resulted in recommendations they be removed. Bost charged that “bad employees are still employed by VA and accountability is being swept under the rug.”

The committee has held two hearings on this topic so far this year. Bost has also questioned McDonough about a recent Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) decisions limiting the Department’s ability to fire hybrid employees.

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.

Scott Maddrea, Virginia

This week, we are excited to recognize Scott Maddrea from the Department of Virginia for organizing a roundtable discussion with Rep. Wittman (R-VA) at American Legion Post 186 in Chesterfield County, Virginia. The roundtable served as a space for Congressman Wittman to share his veterans-related work, hear directly from constituents, and allow veterans to express their concerns and ask questions about their Veterans Affairs benefits and care.

Following the roundtable, Congressman Wittman stated: “The First District is home to many of our nation’s veterans, and as such, veterans’ priorities are a top priority for me as their Representative in Washington. Our service men and women have earned great respect through sacrifice and hardship, and we have a responsibility to uphold the efficient delivery of

the benefits they earned. I’m grateful for the opportunity to speak with our veterans at today’s roundtable about the challenges they are facing and how I can work on their behalf to ensure their voices are heard, represented, and supported in Washington and through constituent services. I also thank the representatives from American Legion Post 186 for their collaboration with today’s event and the incredible work they do in providing care and benefits assistance to our veterans. I look forward to our continued work together to ensure veterans receive the care, benefits, and access to opportunities they deserve for their service to our nation.”



Legislative Council Chairman Oertel, Rep. Wittman (R-VA), and Mr. Maddrea.

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Approximately two dozen veterans attended, including Department Commander (and Legislative Council Chairman Rick Oertel), Post 186 Commander Billy Heflin, and Chesterfield County Sheriff Karl S. Leonard.

Incredible work, Mr. Maddrea!

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, April 18, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) will hold open and closed hearings to examine the posture of the Department of the Navy in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2024 and the future years defense program.
- On Tuesday, April 18, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health will hold a legislative hearing.
- On Tuesday, April 18, the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence Subcommittee will hold a hearing titled "The Homeland Security Cost of the Biden Administration's Catastrophic Withdrawal from Afghanistan."
- On Tuesday, April 18, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense will hold a hearing to examine proposed budget estimates for fiscal year 2024 for the Air Force and Space Force.
- On Tuesday, April 18, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing titled "Combatting a Crisis: Providing Veterans Access to Life-saving Substance Abuse Disorder Treatment."
- On Tuesday, April 18, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will hold a hearing titled "Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request for the Coast Guard."
- On Tuesday, April 18, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies (MilConVA) will hold a budget hearing titled "Fiscal Year 2024 Request for Navy and Marine Corps Military Construction and Family Housing."
- On Tuesday, April 18, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a legislative markup hearing.
- On Wednesday, April 19, the House Veterans' Affairs Oversight and Investigation Committee will hold a legislative hearing.
- On Wednesday, April 19, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will hold a hearing titled "Department of the Army Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request."
- On Wednesday, April 19, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of Homeland Security will hold a budget hearing titled "Fiscal Year 2024 Request for the U.S. Coast Guard."

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- On Wednesday, April 19, the Senate Appropriations MilConVA Subcommittee will hold a hearing to examine proposed budget estimates for fiscal year 2024 for military construction and family housing.
- On Wednesday, April 19, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold a hearing to examine veterans consumer protection, focusing on preventing financial exploitation of veterans and their benefits.
- On Wednesday, April 19, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) will hold a legislative hearing.
- On Thursday, April 20, the House Appropriations MilConVA Subcommittee will hold a budget hearing titled "Fiscal Year 2024 Request for Air Force and Space Force Military Construction and Family Housing."