

National Legislative Division Weekly

SENATE FAILS TO MOVE FORWARD WITH VETERANS PACKAGE

Last week 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.

The American Legion supports the Veterans Programs Improvement Act of 2023. Click [here](#) to urge your Senators vote YES on this bill next time it comes to the floor.

CONGRESS



House Speaker McCarthy (R-CA).

Raising the debt limit has become more urgent with this week's announcement that, as of June 1, the federal government will be unable to make all needed payments.

Last week, the House passed legislation, the Limit, Save, Grow (LSG) Act, that would raise the ceiling in exchange for restraining FY24 federal non-defense discretionary spending to FY22 levels. This would come to a cut of about 22% to much of the government's budget.

The legislation does not explicitly exempt the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This has led to a bitter fight across the Hill over whether Republicans intend to curtail spending on veterans' health care. While Republican lawmakers say they have received commitments from leadership that the VA will be protected, Democrats point out the lack of those promises in the actual legislation.

On Thursday, the Senate Budget Committee held a hearing focused on the House-passed legislation, dubbed the "Default on America" bill by Democrats.

House Democrats have started the process for a discharge petition to force a vote for another option for raising the debt ceiling. However, they are unlikely to get five Republicans to sign onto the measure in order to reach the required 218 cosponsors.

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Several GOP Senators have told reporters this week they are waiting to see what comes from the May 9 White House meeting between President Biden, House Speaker McCarthy (R-CA), and other congressional leaders. Senate Minority Leader McConnell (R-KY) has been markedly silent on the topic, apparently waiting to see what happens with the other players.

In a hearing on the LSG Act by the Senate Budget Committee on Thursday, committee ranking member Sen. Grassley (R-IA) said McConnell clearly wants to negotiate directly with the President. Grassley also derided Democrats' attacks on the LSG Act, noting that it is "clearly" just a placeholder for additional negotiations.

In the meantime, Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) has started the legislative process on two related bills. One, supported by Democrats, would simply extend the debt ceiling until after the 2024 elections. The other would allow the Senate to vote on the House Republicans' bill. According to Politico Pro, that bill could ultimately serve as

the vehicle for a bipartisan FY24 government funding deal if the Senate should pass a separate debt ceiling increase.

Reportedly, the Administration is exploring the possibility of invoking the Constitution's 14th Amendment, which states that the validity of US public debt "shall not be questioned." President Clinton had once considered this approach, but it has never been tested in the courts.

The House Appropriations Committee (HAC) will start holding subcommittee markups on May 17 and 18, with full committee markups following on May 23-25. According to CQ, the first five bills to be marked up will be Defense, Energy/Water, Homeland Security, Military Construction/VA, and Legislative Branch. Presumably, these enter the process with the highest levels of bipartisan support. In her guidance to HAC members last week, committee chair Rep. Granger (R-TX) recommended that lawmakers prepare for late evenings.

The HAC reportedly intends to set its appropriations bills in line with the LSG Act, or the FY22 enacted spending levels.

Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC) chair Sen. Murray (D-WA) says she is working with her ranking member, Sen. Collins (R-ME), to develop bipartisan spending bills, separate from what the House does and independent of debt ceiling negotiations. According to CQ, Murray's aides say the SAC could start marking up its bills as early as May 18.

The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will mark up subcommittee portions of the FY24 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on May 11, with the Readiness Subcommittee closing out the process at 8:30am May 12, a rare Friday morning event. However, these markups historically take about fifteen minutes (or less). The marathon full committee markup will occur on May 23, and likely last into the early hours of the next day.

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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.

Lee Hinkleman Sr., New York

This week, we are excited to recognize Lee Hinkleman from the Department of New York, who met with Congresswoman Stefanik (R-NY) to discuss The American Legion's legislative priorities. Afterwards, he attended a House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel hearing covering servicemembers discharged under honorable conditions for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine.

Thank you, Mr. Hinkleman!

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 9, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization will hold a hearing titled "Electronic Health Record Modernization Deep Dive: Pharmacy."
- On Thursday, May 11, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense will hold a hearing to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2024 for the Department of Defense.
- On Thursday, May 11, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will hold a hearing titled "Assessing the Shortage of United States Mariners and Recruitment and Retention Challenges in the United States Coast Guard."
- On Thursday, May 11, the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel will hold a hearing on H.R. 2670 – the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024.
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