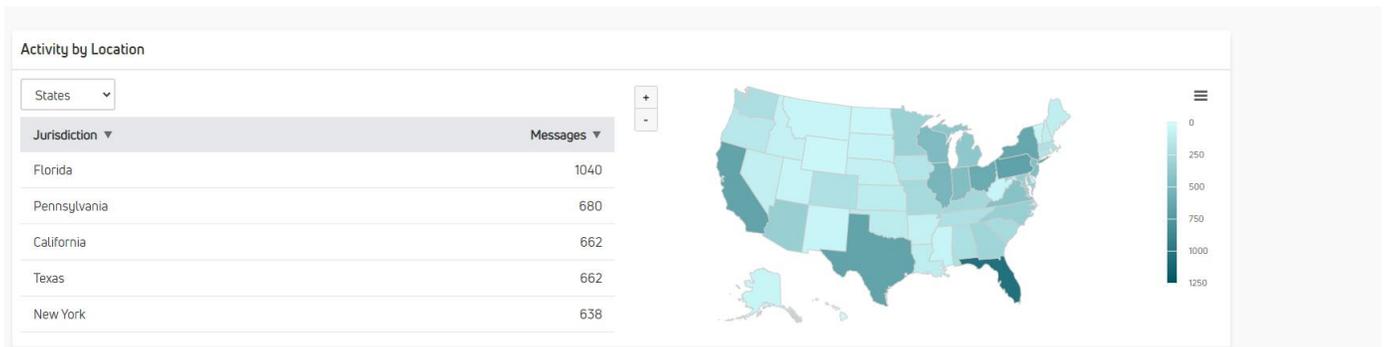


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GRASSROOTS ALERT: TAKE ACTION TO SUPPORT VETERANS EXPOSED TO TOXIC HAZARDS

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 four weeks, **13,784** messages were sent to Senators. Florida, California, and Pennsylvania 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 acts on this critical piece of legislation. 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. Last week, 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

On both sides of Capitol Hill, appropriators were hard at work. Dozens of hearings were held on every aspect of the federal budget in an attempt to write and pass appropriations bills on time this year. House Appropriations Committee chair Rep. DeLauro (D-CT) on Tuesday indicated that leaders of the House and Senate committees are deep into negotiations on topline spending amounts. While it is too early to predict what the final numbers might be, the Defense budget will most certainly be higher than what the Administration requested.

The House Armed Services Committee released its markup schedule this week. Subcommittee markups (which tend to last between 6 and 20 minutes) will take place on June 8 and 9, and the full committee markup on June 22.

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The Senate, as expected, failed to move the Women's Health Protection Act forward, which would have codified abortion access as basic health care. The Chamber also failed to move the newest supplemental to provide military assistance to Ukraine, due to opposition by Sen. Paul (R-KY). The Senator wants to include a provision to have the Afghanistan Special Inspector audit the funds spent helping Ukraine. However, the underlying bill already requires both DoD and the State Department to conduct such audits, and other legislation provides for a Ukraine-specific inspector.

The House already passed the \$40 billion Ukraine aid package.

CONGRESS EXCLUDES PROTECTIONS FOR AFGHAN EVACUEES IN UKRAINE BILL

Congress left out of a Ukraine-focused supplemental spending bill a White House proposal to grant Afghan evacuees permanent protections in the U.S., leaving roughly 36,000 of them in legal limbo.

The move deals a blow to advocates who have spent months urging protections for those who were evacuated from Afghanistan last August but do not qualify for special immigrant visas.

The organization #AfghanEvac, which has worked to secure relief for Afghans, has met with the White House and with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle for months to push for the provisions. The Biden administration asked Congress to include the language in the Ukraine bill.

Shawn VanDiver, a Navy veteran and the founder of the group, has said there has been bipartisan support for the measures, which are known as the Afghan Adjustment Act but have not officially been introduced as a standalone bill.

"The work here isn't close to done," VanDiver tweeted Tuesday. "We know who blocked this and will press ever harder to get it done."

The proposal would apply to the tens of thousands of Afghans who do not qualify for the narrow parameters of the Special Immigrant Visa program, reserved for Afghans who directly assisted the U.S. during the 20-year conflict.

These evacuees received temporary humanitarian parole when they entered the U.S., a status granted to immigrants without visas for pressing humanitarian reasons. But they can only attain lawful permanent residency if they apply for asylum through the backlogged system, with average wait times that stretch for more than four years.

Under consideration

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The provisions were under consideration for inclusion in the Ukraine spending bill as late as Tuesday. Advocates pushed for inclusion of the provisions in acknowledgment that they would be difficult to move as a standalone bill.

There are a dwindling number of must-pass bills on the agenda before the midterm elections in November, leaving few opportunities to pass the Afghan policy as part of a broader bill.

Ultimately, the Afghan proposal was stymied by Republican concerns about vetting as well as senators' desire to move billions of dollars in Ukraine aid as quickly as possible.

"I do think it's really important to keep the Ukrainian aid program an aid package about Ukraine, not adding anything to it — even something like the Afghan program that I might support," Ohio Republican Sen. Rob Portman said last week.

Portman, the ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, said he had concerns about vetting and screening of Afghan evacuees. He cited an inspector general report from earlier this year suggesting that a few dozen Afghan evacuees were not fully vetted using available Defense Department data, and that some of those individuals could not be located.

Iowa Republican Sen. Joni Ernst signaled concern with screening procedures she said were not tough enough to keep out people affiliated with terrorist organizations. "I've said I can't support the Afghan bills unless those are worked out," Ernst said.

Even Democrats who had played a key role in developing the proposal, such as Delaware Democratic Sen. Chris Coons, were wary of anything that could slow down the Ukraine funding bill, which the House passed Tuesday night.

"I am clear that we can't slow down the Ukraine assistance package, and so I agree with the president's timeline and objective in terms of getting this done no later than next week," Coons said.

The omission of the provisions prolongs a period of uncertainty for thousands of Afghans who cannot safely return to Afghanistan.

They include Afghans who are extended family members of special immigrant visa recipients and do not qualify as direct dependents, as well as Afghans who supported education, journalism or women's rights and would face persecution under Taliban rule.

Those Afghans are eligible for protection and some refugee benefits under humanitarian parole for a period of up to two years. They are also eligible for Temporary Protected Status, which includes work authorization and protection from deportation, for a period of 18 months plus any extensions the Biden administration decides to grant.

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However, those protections do not provide a pathway to citizenship, and could change under a future presidential administration.

“It’s like living in a hotel,” VanDiver said of the current temporary protections. “An American value is the ability to place down roots.”

Also left out of the Ukraine package was a separate White House proposal that would aim to “undercut Russia’s innovative potential” by making it easier for Russian STEM professionals to work in the U.S.

The proposal would have eliminated a requirement that Russian advanced degree holders seeking employment in STEM industries have an employer sponsor in the U.S. before applying for an employment-based visa.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, May 17, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies will hold a hearing titled “FY23 VA Electronic Health Record Modernization Budget Hearing.”
- On Wednesday, May 18, the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a legislative hearing. TAL will submit a State for the Record (SFR). You can watch the hearing [here](#).
- On Wednesday, May 18, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies will hold a hearing titled “Navy and Marine Corps Installations and Quality of Life Update.”
- On Wednesday, May 18, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship will hold a hearing titled “Oversight of Immigrant Military Members and Veterans.”
- On Wednesday, May 18, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies will hold a hearing titled “Hearings to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2023 for military construction and family housing.”

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.

Chairman Skinner, Idaho

This week, we are excited to recognize Chairman Skinner for meeting with staff from the office of Senator Crapo (R-ID) to discuss The American Legion’s legislative agenda. At the end of the meeting, Chairman Skinner and Rich Kearsley presented the staff with a signed baseball from the Badnits along with a winners medal and several pins.

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“They were very happy to get the momentos from our World Series Champions. I maintain a close relationship with the congressional staffers and they come to my monthly meeting of all the VSOs in the area. They are always willing to help us and any Veterans they can.”

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 9, NLD Staff participated in a VSO weekly meeting to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Monday, May 9, NLD Staff participated in a VSO weekly meeting to discuss the Major Richard Star Act to discuss the disparate impact on veterans. The participants specifically discussed the issue of a concurrent receipt.
- On Tuesday, May 10, NLD Staff prepared for a VSO webinar presentation for Senate staffers to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Tuesday, May 10, NLD Staff met with Rep. Pfluger’s (R-TX) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss H.R. 7524, the ACES Act, which would direct the Secretary of the VA to work with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to study the incidence of and mortality of cancer among individuals who served in the Navy, Air Force, or Marine Corps as aviators and aircrew.
- On Tuesday, May 10, NLD Staff participated in a VSO call to discuss legislative strategies for the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Tuesday, May 10, NLD Staff met with Rep. Bilirakis (R-TX) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Major Richard Star Act and legislative strategies.
- On Wednesday, May 11, NLD Staff participated in a VSO Information Brief on the Honoring Our PACT Act for Senate staffers.
- On Wednesday, May 11, NLD Staff monitored a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) hearing titled “Hearings to examine the quality of care in the VA and private sector.”
- On Wednesday, May 11, NLD Staff monitored a House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies hearing titled “Impacts of VA’s Research Efforts on Veterans.”
- On Thursday, May 12, NLD Staff met with SVAC Majority staff to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Thursday, May 12, NLD Staff met with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to discuss the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Troops to Teachers Program management.
- On Thursday, May 12, NLD Staff participated in a Four Corners Congressional call on veterans homelessness legislation.

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- On Thursday, May 12, NLD Staff monitored a House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing titled “Innovative Care Delivery at VA: Partnering to Improve Infrastructure and Operational Efficiency.”
- On Friday, May 13, NLD Staff participated in a Republican roundtable to discuss solutions to protect veterans from VA policies that infringe on veterans’ 2nd Amendment rights without due process of the law.
- On Friday, May 13, NLD Staff participated in a VSO meeting to discuss legislative strategies for the Major Richard Star Act.
- On Friday, May 13, NLD Staff met with Rep. Massie’s (R-KY) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Friday, May 13, NLD Staff met with the California Coalition of Community Colleges to discuss GI Bill certification issues related to the Roe-Isaakson Act.

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