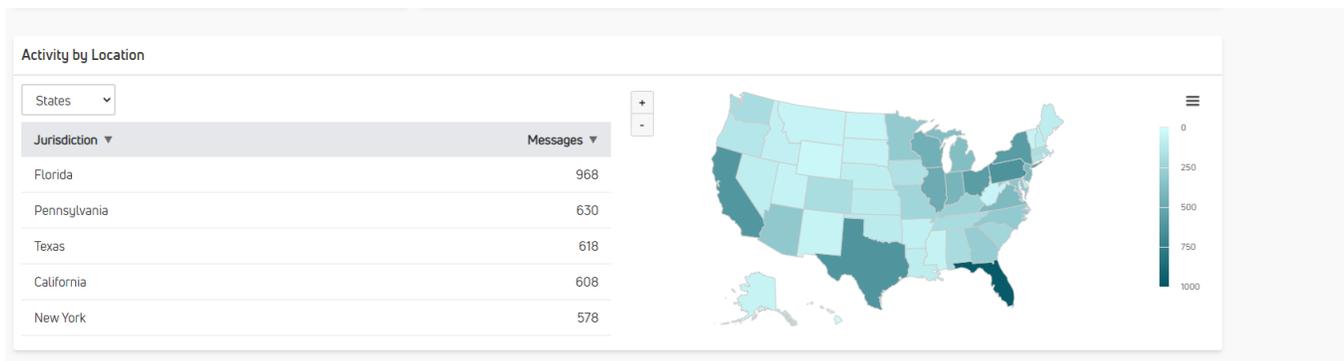


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GRASSROOTS ALERT: TAKE ACTION TO SUPPORT VETERANS EXPOSED TO TOXIC HAZARDS

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 two weeks, **11,714** messages were sent to Senators. Florida, Pennsylvania, 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 acts on this critical piece of legislation. National Commander Paul Dillard has visited Minnesota, Georgia, Alaska, and South Dakota on a [multi-state tour](#) to rally Legion advocacy on the PACT Act, and will be traveling to Indiana next week where he will hold a press conference to discuss the issue.

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

[TAKE ACTION NOW](#)

AMERICAN LEGION CONDEMNS FOR-PROFIT CLAIMS COMPANIES THAT PREY ON VETERANS

American Legion Deputy Director for Benefits and Claims Services Marty Callaghan testified April 27 at a congressional hearing focused on ensuring quality representation during the process of filing a claim for veterans' benefits. You can watch the full hearing [here](#). Initiating a claim for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits can feel daunting and overwhelming. The American Legion provides experienced personnel to assist veterans with their claims free of charge. VA-accredited attorneys and agents provide vital services and work in close coordination with The American Legion and other veterans service organizations to ensure veterans have qualified representation for more complex cases. They provide critical services to veterans, including assistance in obtaining key information to prevail in a claim or appeal.

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Their legal skills and training enable them to provide the “appropriate legal analysis for written arguments, with current citations to recent precedent-setting court opinions, to assist veterans in navigating VA’s complex and evolving claims and appeals system,” according to written testimony from The American Legion.



American Legion Deputy Director for Benefits and Claims Services, Marty Callaghan, testifies at a Congressional hearing focused on ensuring quality representation during the process of filing a claim for veterans' benefits.

Veterans are facing a serious and growing threat to the claims process as unaccredited, for-profit claims companies that charge for their services prey on veterans, Callaghan told the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (HVAC) Subcommittees on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Oversight and Investigations.

“These companies often charge veterans five or six times the amount of whatever future increase in monthly benefits they receive — violating the intent of federal regulation, which prohibits

the payment of fees based on future benefits compensation,” he said.

Because these companies are not accredited by VA, their activities cannot be monitored by VA’s Office of General Counsel. They do not work in the best interests of our veterans, said Callaghan.

“In their contractual language, some of these companies carefully limit their own responsibilities, making it clear they are not responsible for the actual filing of VA claims,” he said. “They avoid responsibilities that may require any substantial effort. They do not like to involve themselves with pending claims because, as one contract stated, pending claims add a ‘substantial additional workload ... these cases are typically a mess and extremely time consuming and we prefer to avoid them at all cost.’”

This, says Callaghan, makes it overwhelmingly clear these unaccredited companies want to make as much money as they can, while doing as little work as possible without considering the veterans.

“Providing claims assistance should not be about the money,” Callaghan told lawmakers. “It should be about service to veterans and their families. The American Legion has been assisting the veterans’ community for more than a century, and we are thoroughly invested in that community. Our dedication goes far beyond filling out some paperwork.”

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Callaghan commended VA for recently launching a Fraud Protection Campaign to protect veterans from these for-profit companies, but noted there is much more to be done to protect veterans from profiteering organizations who refuse to abide by VA regulations.

The unaccredited, for-profit companies fail to comply with VA and professional guidelines and inflict serious financial harm on veterans due to the fees they charge.

“They are taking millions of dollars from families who do not deserve such loss,” said Callaghan. “Their quality of life must not suffer from the greed of others. Unaccredited claims companies are bad for our veterans, bad for their families, and bad for our country. What message do we send to the veterans’ community by allowing these companies to grow rich from VA benefits?”

To find an accredited American Legion service officer in your area, please visit www.legion.org/serviceofficers.

CONGRESS

The White House has submitted supplemental spending requests for \$22 billion to fight the ongoing COVID pandemic and for \$33 billion to provide more support to embattled Ukraine. When asked, President Biden said he does not care if Congress passes the measures together or separately, “but we need them both.”

House and Senate Appropriations Committees kept busy this week, with multiple hearings each day. House Appropriations Committee chair Rep. DeLauro (D-CT) called together her Senate counterpart and the top Republican lawmakers on the committees for a “Four Corners” meeting to start negotiating topline spending amounts. No decisions have been reported, but at least they are reportedly talking.

House Armed Services Committee chair Rep. Smith (D-WA) says his committee will mark up the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on June 22. Subcommittees are aiming to hold their markups the week of June 6. The goal, as usual, is to have the full House pass the legislation before the August recess. The Senate Armed Services Committee has not yet announced its schedule.

On Wednesday, House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) chair Rep. Takano (D-CA) introduced the Reduce and Eliminate Mental Health Outpatient Veteran Copays (REMOVE Copays) Act. The legislation, HR 7589, would eliminate all copays for a veteran’s first three outpatient mental health appointments each year within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system, including community referrals.

Before adjourning for the weekend Thursday, the Senate confirmed, by voice vote, Frank Calvelli to become Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for space acquisition and Krystyn Jones to become the Air Force Comptroller, or Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for financial management. The Senate also approved all pending military nominations at the desk.

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HOUSE SENDS UKRAINE MILITARY AID LEND-LEASE BILL TO BIDEN'S DESK

The House passed Legion-supported legislation on Thursday establishing a lend-lease program to make it easier for the U.S. to send military aid to Ukraine, with the measure now headed to President Biden for his signature. The Ukrainian Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act would make it easier to provide support to Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia's invasion, which has entered its third month.

The bill passed by a vote of 417-10, with all 10 no votes coming from Republicans. The Senate passed the legislation by voice vote earlier this month as part of a deal to end permanent normal trade relations with Russia and Belarus, as well as a bill to ban Russian oil imports.

The bipartisan bill, first introduced by Sens. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Ben Cardin (D-Md.) in January, was aimed at streamlining power that the president already has under the Arms Export Control Act to lend and lease defense equipment when it is in the best interest of U.S. national security.

"Ukrainian forces have demonstrated unbelievable strength and bravery, and we must again serve as the arsenal of democracy and ensure they have the full range of resources necessary to defend their sovereignty," Cornyn said in a statement following passage of the bill.

"This legislation will be a game-changer for Ukraine, and I'm grateful to my House colleagues for recognizing its importance and quickly sending it to the President's desk," he continued.

Passage of the bill came hours after Biden on Thursday sent a request to Congress for \$33.4 billion in additional assistance to Ukraine, including more than \$20 billion in security assistance for Ukraine and other military aid. The request also includes \$8.5 billion for economic assistance and \$3 billion in humanitarian assistance and food security funding.

This wouldn't be the first time the U.S. implemented a lend-lease program help its partners. Prior to entering World War II in 1941, Washington established one to help Great Britain and other allies during World War II while not actively fighting in the war.

The legislation comes as Russia's invasion of Ukraine drags into its third month. Washington has provided Ukraine with over \$4 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden administration, including about \$3.4 billion since the invasion began on Feb. 24.

TOXIC EXPOSURES

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) published an interim final rule this week establishing service presumption for nine rare respiratory cancers. Having found a "biological plausibility" there is a link between airborne hazards and the development of these diseases, the VA is removing the requirement that

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veterans prove their cancer occurred due to exposures during military service. These cancers are so rare, the VA expects that only about 100 veterans have previously filed claims for these conditions.

The nine cancers are: squamous cell carcinoma of the larynx; squamous cell carcinoma of the trachea; adenocarcinoma of the trachea; salivary gland-type tumors of the lung; large cell carcinoma of the lung; salivary gland-type tumors of the lung; sarcomatoid carcinoma of the lung; and typical and atypical carcinoid of the lung.

Veterans with these conditions can immediately file claims for VA care and benefits under the new rule.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, May 3, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) will hold a hearing titled, "Hearings to examine the VA workforce, focusing on assessing ways to bolster recruitment and retention."
- On Tuesday, May 3, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense will hold a hearing titled, "Hearings to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2023 for the Department of Defense."
- On Tuesday, May 3, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing titled, "Hearings to examine Department of State authorization, focusing on strengthening US diplomacy for the 21st century."
- On Wednesday, May 4, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee will hold a hearing titled, "Hearings to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2023 and advance appropriations requests for fiscal year 2024 for the Department of Veterans Affairs."

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

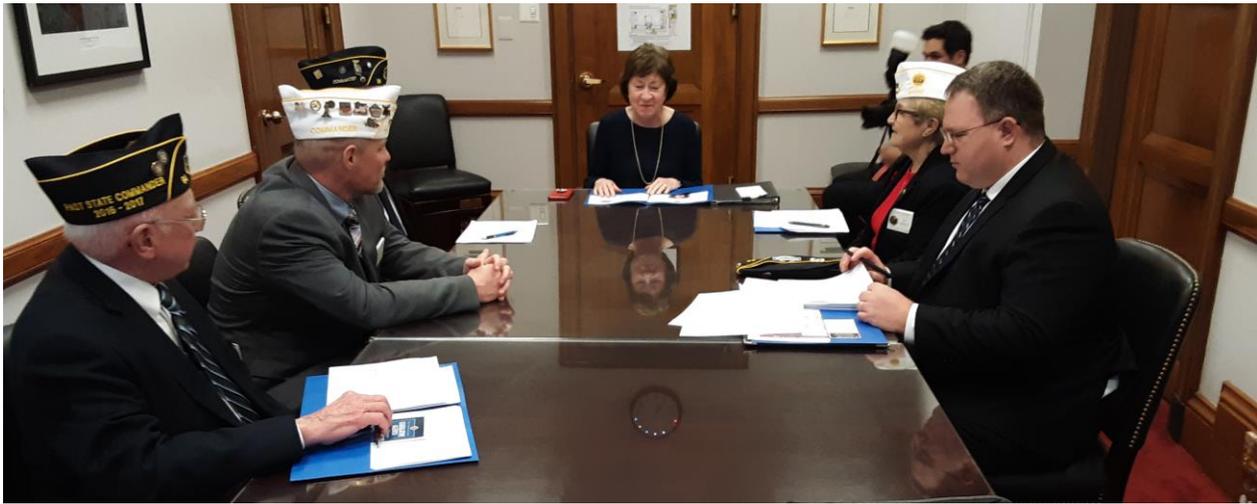
In an effort to recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we will spotlight an individual every week. These individuals demonstrate exceptional grassroots activism by meeting with/contacting their Congressional Representative/Senator to advocate for veterans. Efforts like these truly make a difference and give veterans a voice in Congress.

Commander Debra Couture, Maine

This week, we are excited to recognize Commander Debra Couture for meeting with staff from the office of Senator Collins, to discuss HR 3967 - the Honoring Our PACT Act. After the meeting, Commander Couture sent a follow-up email to the staffer to thank him for his time and provide more background information on the PACT Act to give to Senator Collins.

Thank you, Commander Couture!

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Legionnaires from the Department of Maine meet with Senator Collins (R-ME).

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, April 25, NLD Staff participated in a VSO weekly meeting to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Monday, April 25, NLD Staff participated in preparing testimony for a hearing held by the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) titled, "At What Cost? - Ensuring Quality Representation in the Veteran Benefit Claims Process." You can watch the hearing [here](#).
- On Monday, April 25, NLD Staff participated in a Military Quality of Life Roundtable organized by the National Security Division.
- On Tuesday, April 26, NLD Staff attended a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing titled: "Review of the FY 2023 State Department Budget Request."
- On Tuesday, April 26, NLD Staff monitored a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization hearing regarding EHRM.
- On Wednesday, March 27, NLD Staff met with TriWest, a healthcare alliance based in Phoenix, to discuss legislative solutions for mental health and suicide prevention.
- On Wednesday, April 27, NLD Staff participated in the VSO call to discuss legislative strategies for the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Wednesday, April 27, NLD Staff accompanied Marty Callaghan, the American Legion's Deputy Director of Benefits and Claims Services, to testify before Congress for the House Veterans Affairs DAMA Subcommittee hearing titled, "At What Cost? - Ensuring Quality Representation in the Veteran Benefit Claims Process." This hearing focused on the administration and oversight of unaccredited companies filing claims for veterans.

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- On Wednesday, April 27, NLD Staff attended a U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC) Town Hall which discussed Ukraine and America's Global Leadership. You can watch the video [here](#).
- On Thursday, April 28, NLD Staff participated in a meeting to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act press conference, which will be held during the 2022 Spring NEC Meetings.
- On Thursday, April 28, NLD Staff participated in a VSO meeting to discuss legislative strategies in the Senate to pass the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Thursday, April 28, NLD Staff monitored a full House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) hearing on the FY2023 VA budget.
- On Friday, April 29, NLD Staff participated in a meeting with the House Veterans Affairs DAMA Subcommittee Minority Staff on VA policies and the infringement of veterans' 2nd Amendment rights and potential legislative solutions.
- On Friday, April 29, NLD staff met with Rep. Wexton's (D-VA) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Friday, April 29, NLD Staff attended an event hosted by the Atlantic Council titled: "Will the US again be the arsenal of democracy? A conversation on lend-lease for Ukraine with US Senators Ben Cardin and John Cornyn." Video is [here](#).
- On Friday, April 29, NLD Staff met with Sen. Toomey's (R-PA) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.

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