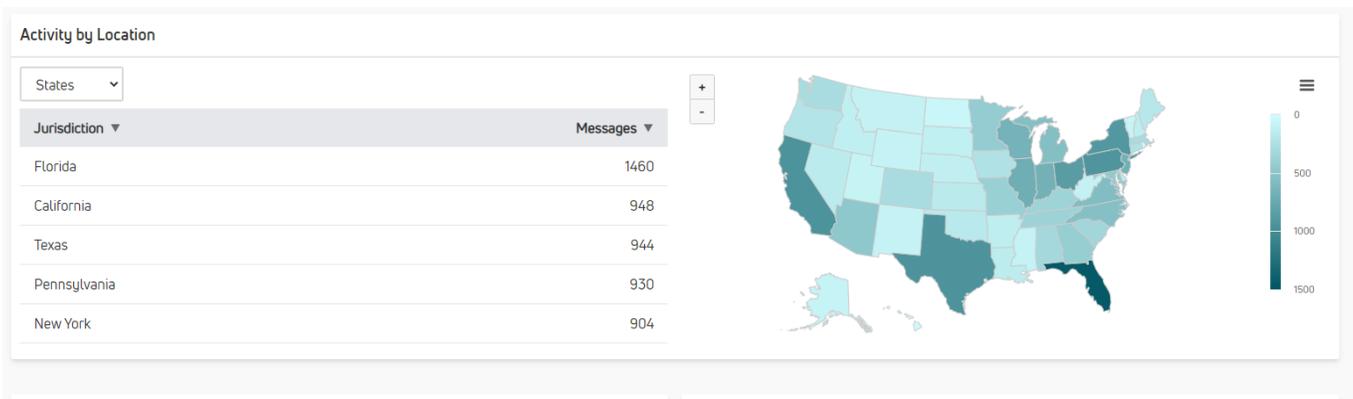


# National Legislative Division Weekly

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

This week, The American Legion National Headquarters sent out an alert to National Legislative Council (NLC) members and Legislative Action Center subscribers to [call on their Senators](#) to pass H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act. In six weeks, **18,250** 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 6 or 7. 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.

This week National Legislative Division (NLD) Staff met with Senate Minority Leader McConnell, Senator Paul, and Senator Ernst to urge them to vote “YES” on the PACT Act.

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

**[TAKE ACTION NOW](#)**

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### THE AMERICAN LEGION PRESENTS SENATOR ERNST THE DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD



*On Wednesday, May 25, The American Legion presented the Public Service Award to Senator Ernst (R-IA).*

Every year, The American Legion presents the Distinguished Public Service Award to recognize lawmakers for their public service career and their commitment to the welfare of America's veterans and their families. This year, The American Legion presented the award to Senator Ernst (R-IA). Senator Ernst is an Army National Guard veteran who served as a Company Commander in Kuwait and Iraq, leading 150 Iowa Army National Guardsmen during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). She retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Iowa Army National Guard after 23 years of military service.

After being elected as the first female combat veteran to serve in the United States Senate in 2014, Ernst became a champion for veterans by introducing the Buddy Check Week Act and garnering support for the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act, which was signed into law through last year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). After the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, Senator Ernst developed a strategy to evacuate Special Immigrant Visa holders who remain in Afghanistan. She also led the bipartisan effort to make substantial reforms to prevent military sexual assault.

## CONGRESS

The Senate passed by unanimous consent, HR 4591, the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act. This bill, already passed by the House, requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to report more fully on the costs of the electronic health record modernization (EHRM) program. The bill was authored by the chair of the House subcommittee with direct oversight of the project, Rep. Mrvan (D-IN).

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) on Wednesday tried to get Shereef Elnahal approved as the VA's Under Secretary for Health via unanimous consent on the Senate floor. Sen. Scott (R-FL) stopped the effort, saying he does not trust that any of President Biden's nominees are qualified. Tester challenged the junior Senator from Florida, pointing out that he did not attend the confirmation hearing or take an opportunity to ask questions. Tester, visibly angry at this point, warned Scott not to go to Memorial Day events and claim to be a friend of veterans. The exchange concluded with Tester advising Scott to "look in the mirror" to see why the Senate is dysfunctional.

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## TOXIC EXPOSURES

SVAC chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) and ranking member Sen. Moran (R-KS) on Monday released their version of the Honoring Our PACT Act. The Senate version contains the bulk of the House-passed versions concerning expanding veterans' access to VA care for health conditions resulting from burn pit and toxic exposures; increasing research into these issues; and setting forth a list of 23 new service presumptions related to Agent Orange and to burn pits and airborne exposures. VA Secretary McDonough praised the legislation for codifying the Department's new process for establishing service presumptions.

The Senate version also authorizes 31 major medical leases for the VA which have been held up on technical problems in Congress for up to a decades. A related provision changes how the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) would consider those kinds of leases in order to prevent this from happening in the future.

The Senate bill further includes additional hiring and pay authorities to help the VA recruit and retain personnel. Many of those provisions cover things McDonough has said would be helpful when he testified before Congress. This includes the ability to pay larger relocation, hiring, and retention bonuses, and authority to waive aggregate caps on awards and bonuses for VA employees. Other provisions enable the VA to improve the hiring and management of human resources personnel, with a requirement that the Department submit a report to Congress on this part of the workforce.

Just before adjourning for the next week, Schumer filed cloture on the Honoring Our PACT Act, dealing with VA's coverage of toxic exposed veterans. If the Senate passes this bipartisan agreement, the House could either request a conference to resolve the differences, or simply pass the Senate version.

## UPCOMING HEARINGS

Congress is out of session next week. There will be no hearings.

## MEETINGS

- On Tuesday, May 24, NLD Staff gave an update on the Honoring our PACT Act at the Training Tuesday webinar.
- On Tuesday, May 24, NLD Staff met with House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) majority staff to discuss upcoming education oversight legislation.
- On Tuesday, May 24, NLD Staff participated in a VSO meeting to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Tuesday, May 24, NLD Staff participated in the VSO call to discuss legislative strategies to pass the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Wednesday, May 25, NLD Staff met with members of the Japanese Embassy to discuss military quality of life issues for service members and veterans who reside in Japan as well as a variety of security concerns in the pacific theater.
- On Wednesday, May 25th, NLD Staff along, with the Chairwoman of the National Legislative Council (NLC), met with the office of Representative Murphy (R-NC) to discuss a variety of

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veterans and defense related issues. Represented Murphy has the largest Marine Corps base on the east coast, Camp Lejeune, in his district.

- On Wednesday, May 25, NLD staff met with Chairman Smith's (D-WA) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Major Richard Star Act, which corrects the concurrent receipt problem affecting disabled veterans. Combat-injured veterans forced into early retirement by their injury are not receiving their vested longevity pay. Reducing retirement pay because of a disability is an injustice. The Major Richard Star Act will correct this injustice.
- On Wednesday, May 25, NLD Staff met with Senator Ernst (R-IA) to discuss various veteran legislative priorities as well as give her TAL's Distinguished Public Service Award.
- On Thursday, May 26, NLD Staff met with Kentucky state representatives to discuss legislative strategies to pass the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Thursday, May 26, NLD Staff met with the office of Senator Paul (R-KY) to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Thursday, May 26, NLD Staff with Minority Leader McConnell (R-KY) to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Thursday, May 26, NLD Staff met with staff from the office of Senator Duckworth (D-IL) to discuss possible military naturalization language to be included in the FY23 NDAA.
- On Thursday, May 26, NLD Staff met with staff from the office of Representative Lee (D-CA) to discuss possible Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) repeal language to be included in the FY23 NDAA.
- On Friday, May 27, NLD Staff met with staff from the office of Senator Graham (R-SC) to discuss the Afghan Adjustment Act.
- On Friday, May 27, NLD staff participated in the VSO call to discuss legislative strategies for the Major Richard Star Act.
- On Friday, May 27, NLD staff met with Sen. Crapo's (R-ID) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.

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