

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### PACT ACT UPDATE



On Tuesday, the Senate voted 86 to 12 to invoke cloture on the Honoring Our PACT Act, which will expand access to care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans. A cloture vote is simply a procedural vote to limit debate on the bill and is not necessarily indicative of how the vote on the actual bill will go (more information below).

Therefore, we **urge you to continue to contact your Senators and urge them to vote YES** on the PACT Act once it comes to a final vote, which will hopefully take place sometime next week.

### [TAKE ACTION NOW](#)

### CONGRESS

On Tuesday, the Senate voted 86 to 12 to invoke cloture on the Honoring Our PACT Act, which will expand access to care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans. All of the opposing Senators are Republicans. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) and ranking member Sen. Moran (R-KS) report they are working with their colleagues on the amendment process to the bill. Thursday afternoon, Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) said “negotiations are ongoing”, but decried the possibility of “dilatory or destructive amendments” being introduced. Schumer expressed hope that the bill will pass the Senate next week.

The House has already passed the PACT Act on a bipartisan basis, and will have to take another vote on the Senate version if it differs from what they passed.

On Tuesday, the Senate confirmed Alex Wagner to become Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs on a 76 to 21 vote. He was previously vice president for strategic initiatives for the Aerospace Industries Association.

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### VETERANS LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW



*President Biden signs nine veterans-related bills into law on Tuesday, June 7.*

On Tuesday, President Biden signed nine bills into law related to veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Two of the bills address the VA's mammography screening program and women veterans' access to these services. Another bill provides the VA Inspector General with subpoena power over those who have already left the Department's employment. Lawmakers have been frustrated during several VA scandals when key players are allowed to resign or retire before their full role is investigated, and they can be held to account.

Other bills rename VA facilities. Thus, the community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) in Oahu, Hawaii will be named after Daniel Akaka, the late Senator and war hero. The Provo Veterans Center in Orem, Utah will become the Col. Gail S. Halvorsen "Candy Bomber" Veterans Center.

The RECA Extension Act of 2022 extends, by two years, the availability of compensation for radiation exposure related to nuclear weapons development. This is in addition to toxic exposure coverage expansions in the PACT Act currently still in the Senate.

### FY23 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT (NDAA) – HOUSE & SENATE ACTION

All of the House Armed Services subcommittees marked up their portions of the FY23 NDAA this week. Contentious issues will be included in the full committee mark, and will receive attention in the June 22 marathon markup.

Notably, the Military Personnel Subcommittee mark extends the period for transferring military medical research to the Defense Health Agency (DHA) by an additional year, to September 30, 2023. In addition, it allows certain functions of the Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (AMRMC) to remain within the Army, upon certification to Congress as to why the exclusion is occurring. The Army, which controls the vast majority of military medical research, has opposed the wholesale transfer of these activities to DHA from the start. Certain public health functions specific to each military service and crucial to operations may also remain in each service, rather than transferring to the DHA.

The subcommittee also placed additional, ongoing restrictions to the military services' plans to reduce the number of medical billets, as most elements of direct care move to the DHA. Lawmakers are concerned there will be insufficient numbers of civilian providers to backfill those positions and care for service members, family members and retirees. Behavioral workforce capacity also received a great deal of

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attention, with provisions to create new training programs for civilians serving in military treatment facilities and more degree-granting programs at the Uniformed Services University.

The Senate Armed Services Committee plans to hold both subcommittee and full committee markups of its FY23 NDAA next week. Holding with tradition, only the Readiness and Personnel Subcommittees will mark up in open session. The full committee markup will also be behind closed doors, and neither report nor bill language is expected to be released any time soon.

### FY23 APPROPRIATIONS

The House Appropriations Committee has released its markup schedule for the FY23 spending bills. (While the authorizers, such as the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, give permission for federal agencies to run particular programs, the appropriators actually provide the money to do so.) Subcommittee markups will start next week; all subcommittee and full committee markups will be completed by June 30. This timing could potentially allow for the full House to pass at least some appropriations bills before the August recess.

The Defense Subcommittee markup will occur next Wednesday, behind closed doors. The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (Milcon) Subcommittee will be open, on the same day. The full committee will take up the Defense bill on June 22 (yes, the same day as the NDAA markup), and the Milcon/VA bill on June 23. The subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will mark up on June 15, and the full committee will deal with that bill during the same meeting as the Milcon/VA bill.

### TAL TESTIFIES AT DEMOCRATIC SENATE STEERING COMMITTEE

On Wednesday, June 8, The American Legion's Legislative Director, Lawrence Montreuil, testified before the Democratic Senate Steering Committee to discuss The American Legion's legislative priorities. Senator Klobuchar (D-MN) moderated the event, which was attended by many notable Senators, including Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) and Chairman Tester (D-MT). During his remarks, Mr. Montreuil thanked the Senators for their leadership on the PACT Act and discussed what The American Legion would like to focus on for the rest of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. The American Legion's priorities include working on the "Citizenship for Service" campaign, which aims to pass legislation that will prevent non-American citizens who served honorably in the US military from getting deported after they leave the service. He also talked about passing the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would allow certain Afghan evacuees to apply for permanent status after one year of being paroled into the country.

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*Ranking Member Bost (R-IL) and Rep. Bergman (R-MI) visit and ATLAS pod in Springfield, VA American Legion Post.*



*FVA&R Director, Katie Purswell, speaks at a press conference to urge Senators to vote yes on the Honoring Our PACT Act.*

Schumer expressed hope that the bill will pass the Senate next week."

### OTHER EVENTS FROM THIS WEEK

On Tuesday, June 7, The American Legion met with Rep. Bergman (R-MI) and Ranking Member Bost (R-IL) at the ATLAS Pod in Springfield, VA American Legion post. During the visit, the VA demonstrated the capabilities of the on-site ATLAS telehealth pod. The ATLAS program is a public-private partnership that leverages the latest in telehealth technologies to increase veterans' access to care.

On Tuesday, June 7, Director of VA&R Katie Purswell provided remarks in the Senate press conference for the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act with Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, VSOs, and Jon Stewart. The Senate voted 86 to 12 to invoke cloture on the Honoring Our PACT Act, which will expand access to care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans. All of the opposing Senators are Republicans. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) and ranking member Sen. Moran (R-KS) report they are working with their colleagues on the amendment process to the bill. Thursday afternoon, Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) said "negotiations are ongoing", but decried the possibility of "dilatory or destructive amendments" being introduced.

### UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, June 14, the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support will hold a hearing titled "Business meeting to markup those provisions which fall under the subcommittee's jurisdiction of the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2023."
- On Tuesday, June 14, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) will hold a hearing titled "Hearings to examine the President's proposed budget request for fiscal year 2023 and proposed budget estimates for fiscal year 2024 for the Department of Veterans Affairs."

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- On Tuesday, June 14, the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel will hold a hearing titled “Business meeting to markup those provisions which fall under the subcommittee’s jurisdiction of the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2023.”
- On Wednesday, June 15, the Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a hearing titled “Reviewing President Biden’s Strategy to Reduce Veteran Suicide by Addressing Economic Risk Factors.”
- On Wednesday, June 15, the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism will hold a hearing titled “Current Status of ISIS and al Qaeda.”
- On Thursday, June 16, the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hearing titled “Ensuring Independence and Building Trust: Considering Reforms to Whistleblower Protections at VA.”

### 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.

#### Bob Hensley, Tennessee

This week, we are excited to recognize Bob Hensley from Tennessee for working tirelessly on engaging Senators Blackburn (R-TN) and Hagerty (R-TN) to vote yes on the PACT Act. Mr. Hensley went above and beyond the call of duty by following up with district offices and staffers for the Tennessee Senators and providing them with information about how many Tennessee Legionnaires and sick veterans the PACT Act would impact.

Mr. Hensley currently serves as a member of the NEC and is the Vice Commander of Post 61 in Mountain City. He keeps in regular contact with his federal and state legislators.

Thank you for all that you do, Mr. Hensley!

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](mailto:kisaacson@legion.org).

### MEETINGS

- This week, NLD Staff monitored the House Armed Service Subcommittee NDAA markup hearings as they approved their portions of the fiscal 2023 defense authorization bill, clearing the way for the full committee's annual, marathon markup of the entire bill on June 22. The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) hosts a thorough repository of FY23 NDAA resources [here](#).

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- On Monday, June 6, NLD Staff met with Rep. Gottheimer (D-NJ) to discuss The American Legion's legislative priorities as well as our targets for the FY23 NDAA.
- On Monday, June 6, NLD Staff met with Veterans Education Success (VES) to discuss quality oversight for veterans' education benefits.
- On Monday, June 6, NLD Staff attended an event hosted by the Brookings Institute titled "Taiwan's path forward: A conversation with KMT Chairman Eric Chu." More information and a video of the event are [here](#).
- On Monday, June 6, NLD Staff met with a colleague from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) to discuss advocacy for the Afghan Adjustment Act, a bill that would allow certain Afghan evacuees to apply for permanent status after one year of being paroled into the country.
- On Monday, June 6, NLD Staff lead a team of VSOs to make a final push for the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act by knocking on every Senator's door and dropping in to speak with their staff to provide information about how many sick veterans this legislation would help.
- On Tuesday, June 7, NLD Staff met with the Florida chapter of Concerned Veterans for America (CVA) to discuss efforts to repeal Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) legislation.
- On Tuesday, June 7, NLD Staff joined a Four Corners of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees call on economic opportunity. House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) staff noted that there would be a GI Bill oversight hearing scheduled for July.
- On Tuesday, June 7, NLD Staff met with Rep. Bergman (R-MI) and Ranking Member Bost (R-IL) at the ATLAS Pod in Springfield, VA American Legion post.
- On Tuesday, June 7, NLD Staff accompanied Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Director, Katie Purswell, to provide remarks at the Senate press conference for the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act. Chairman Tester (D-MT), Ranking Member Moran (R-KS), VSOs, and Jon Stewart also attended the conference.
- On Wednesday, June 8, NLD Staff attended the House Small Business Committee hearing titled "Military to Main Street: Serving Veteran Entrepreneurship."
- On Wednesday, June 8, NLD Staff, along with the National Security Director, Mario Marquez, met with former Congressman Brian Baird to hear about his work on behalf of a campaign to establish a National Museum and Center for Service, which would honor all forms of public service.
- On Wednesday, June 8, NLD Staff attended a House Foreign Relations Committee hearing titled "Resourcing U.S. Priorities in the Indo-Pacific FY23 Budget." Written testimony is [here](#) and the video is [here](#).
- On Wednesday, June 8, NLD Staff met with Chairwoman Brownley's (D-CA) Legislative Assistant to discuss women veterans' issues.
- On Wednesday, June 8, NLD Staff met with Sen. Ernst's (R-IA) Legislative Assistant to discuss ongoing veteran priorities.
- On Wednesday, June 8, NLD Staff participated in a VSO call to discuss the amendment process with SVAC staffers and the next steps for the passage of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Thursday, June 9, NLD Staff met with HVAC Economic Opportunity Subcommittee staff to discuss the quality of veterans education legislation.

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- On Thursday, June 9, NLD Staff attended a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing titled “European Energy Security: America's Role in Supporting Europe's Energy Diversification Agenda.” The hearing focused on how Russia’s war against Ukraine has affected energy prices around the world. Written testimony and video are [here](#).
- On Thursday, June 9, NLD Staff, along with the DC Executive Director and Directors of the National Security and VA&R Divisions, hosted a meeting with representatives from the Taiwanese embassy in DC. The Taiwan equivalent of the US Department of Veterans Affairs, called the Veterans Affairs Council (VAC), has opened a liaison office in DC to keep communications open between VSOs, the VAC, and Congress.
- On Thursday, June 9, NLD Staff met with Rep. McClain (R-MI) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Major Richard Star Act and how disabled veterans are harmed by the current VA policies regarding concurrent receipt.
- On Thursday, June 9, NLD Staff met with Rep. Green (R-TN) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Major Richard Star Act and how disabled veterans are harmed by the current VA policies regarding concurrent receipt.
- On Friday, June 10, NLD Staff met with SVAC Majority staff to discuss the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Friday, June 10, NLD Staff met with Rep. Fallon (R-TX) Veterans Policy Advisor to discuss the Major Richard Star Act and how disabled veterans are harmed by the current VA policies regarding concurrent receipt.

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