

National Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

The American Legion is urging Congress to include vital language in the Defense Supplemental to support our Afghan allies. To support the Legion's efforts and protect the brave men and women who fought by our sides, please click [here](#).

Recently, three critical bills began picking up speed in the House of Representatives: The [*Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act of 2023*](#) (H.R. 542), the [*HOME Act of 2023*](#) (H.R. 3848), and the [*COPE Act*](#) (H.R. 3581) bill. If the Senate agrees to pass this Legion-backed legislation, Congress has an opportunity to provide indispensable support for our Nation's veterans and their family caregivers. If you would like to contact your representatives in support of H.R. 542, H.R. 3848, and H.R. 3581, you can visit our [grassroots actions center](#) to identify and email your elected official.

The American Legion supports the Pay our Troops Act and encourages all Legionnaires to contact their members of Congress and ask them to support the legislation. Click [here](#) to reach out today.

VETERAN HOMELESSNESS ON THE RISE

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released its Annual Homeless Assessment Report. According to HUD's findings, [homelessness among veterans has risen over 7%](#) in the past year.

Although the number of homeless veterans has decreased significantly over the past decade, the number of veterans without stable housing has increased by an estimated 2,445 since 2022. According to the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), the increase could be contributed to [the increased burden of housing](#) expenses estimated that the number of cost-burdened homeowners was at its highest in the past decade, and that the number of cost-burdened renters hit 21.6 million, which is an all-time high. the number of cost-burdened homeowners was at its highest in the past decade, and that the number of cost-burdened renters hit 21.6 million, which is an all-time high.



VA also cited the end of Covid-19-era emergency shelter services as a possible cause for the spike in homelessness among veterans. These programs were [complemented](#) by policies that prevented evictions during the pandemic, which are also becoming less and less common. Between 2021 and 2023 alone, the number of evictions filed [increased by almost 79%](#).

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In the face of these economic challenges, VA and Congress have worked proactively to ensure that veterans face a little fallout as possible. This year, VA set a goal to engage with 28,000 unsheltered veterans. By October the department had surpassed this milestone by 6,500. VA also helped ensure that 93.1% of Veterans who returned to homelessness were rehoused or on the path to rehousing. By surpassing these goals, VA did critical work to mitigate the economic and social changes that have occurred over the past years. But, until all veterans have access to safe and stable housing, the work is not done.

This year, Congress has taken its own steps to ensure that veteran homelessness is eradicated. A variety of bills have been introduced in both the House and the Senate to make sure that servicemembers have the resources and access they need for reliable and safe housing. Most recently, the House passed Representative Lori Chavez-Deremer's (R-OR-5) Housing Our Military Veterans Effectively Act, which the Senate has received and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Members of Congress have also introduced a variety of bills to increase economic opportunity for veterans and help secure home loans, easing the burden of today's housing costs. Recently, Representative Pat Ryan (D-NY-18) introduced the Legion-supported Expanding Home Loans for Guard and Reservists Act, ensuring that activated reservists could easily receive home loans through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Legion also supported Representative Sharis Davids' (D-KS-3) SERV Act which requires the Small Business Administration to report on how many veterans are able to access credit through the organization.

As we move in to the second session of the 118th Congress, ending veterans' homelessness remains at the forefront of our agenda and we encourage Congress to pass these bills to the President's desk.

SENATE STRUGGLES TO APPROVE 2024 FUNDS FOR UKRAINE

The White House announced that Ukraine will receive \$1 billion from the United States at the end of the month. The funds, which Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord describes as "vitaly needed", could be the last aid sent to Ukraine if the Senate remains in gridlock.



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Because of Senatorial infighting regarding immigration policy and Ukraine assistance, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) delayed holiday recess and the Senate continued to work on Monday, December 19th. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT), Senator Kyrsten Sinema (Ind.-AZ), and Senator James Lankford (R-OK) were tasked with negotiating a package that would satisfy both growing concerns about the border and continued funding for Ukraine. However, by Tuesday morning, Sen. Lankford said that the negotiators are “clearly not going to have text complete this week.”

The standstill comes just a week after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy traveled to the United States to procure more financial and tactical support. In his appeal to the White House, President Zelenskyy said that the funds would allow Ukraine to gain critical leverage over Russian air offensive. In his words, the country “who controls the skies also controls the war’s duration.”

However, some politicians are becoming more skeptical about American involvement with Ukraine’s defense and are unlikely to approve continued funding unless they receive something favorable in return. In this case, that would be reinforcement of asylum permissions and border patrol.

In negotiations, Senators who are largely opposed to funding for Ukraine agreed to consider it in exchange for increased immigration controls. This would include a more streamlined process for deportation and lessening the obligation to perform asylum screenings prior to deportation.

Despite the seeming disconnect between border control and support for Ukraine in the Senate, The American Legion believes that both tenets are critical to our national security; it is in the interest of the American people that Senators look past these arguments to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our servicemembers and civilians. In the words of National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer, “Let’s be steadfast in our support for America. Lend our voices to the chorus of those voicing support for our military. Call on Congress to lead, not squabble.”

As threats to our global posture continue to arise, The American Legion asks that Congress acts swiftly to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our nation in the coming year.

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.

Frederic Kinkin, Virginia

Mr. Kinkin, for your ongoing advocacy and crucial congressional relationships, it is an honor to name you Legionnaire of the Week.

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Mr. Kinkin met with Representative Jenn Kiggans and her staff this week in the Congresswoman's Virginia Beach Office. Mr. Kinkin discussed the importance of Be The One as a legislative priority, and extended Rep. Kiggans an invitation to the Department of Virginia's Be The One Symposium in March.

Mr. Kinkin has developed a wonderful working relationship with Rep. Kiggans' office and we applaud the good work you have done this year.

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 kryan@legion.org.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

This week, the Legislative Division (LegDiv) began finalizing plans and timelines for Washington Conference in February. LegDiv staff also worked with other divisions to build a strategy and agenda for the second session of the 118th Congress.

On Monday, LegDiv hosted other veteran service organizations and senior staff from the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to discuss toxic exposure and potential solutions.

As part of our ongoing grassroots efforts, NLD staff will be traveling to posts around the country to provide **grassroots training** tailored to the hosting department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org or ejohnson@legion.org.

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

There are no hearings scheduled for the remainder of the year.