

Legislative Division Weekly

GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact their elected representatives to [pass H.R. 1413 Expanding America's National Cemeteries Act of 2023](#) to safeguard the crucial benefit of full military honors at burial for more veterans. This Act will enable VA-run national cemeteries to conduct full military ceremonies for our fallen heroes, and expand a key resource. *Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your member of Congress.*

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

The American Legion's legislative agenda for the 2nd Session of the 118th Congress. To review our priorities, you can check out our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS WORKING IN BALTIMORE

This article's original publication can be found [here](#).



The Army Corps of Engineers has a tentative timeline of restoring access to the Port of Baltimore to "normal capacity" by the end of May, it said in a statement Thursday night. Also, the Corps said engineers plan to open a channel 280 feet wide and 35 feet deep by the end of April to allow barge container service and some vessels that move automobiles and farm equipment to pass the wreckage of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed March 26 when it was struck by a container ship.

"These are ambitious timelines that may still be impacted by significant adverse weather conditions or changes in the complexity of the wreckage," Army Corps of Engineers Lt. Gen. Scott A. Spellmon said in a news release. Spellmon is the Corps' commanding general. Rain and lightning in the Baltimore area this week prevented crews from operating cranes to lift shipping containers and parts of the bridge onto barges, the Key Bridge Response Unified Command said.

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The news came on the eve of Democratic President Joe Biden's visit Friday to inspect the massive salvage effort to help the port recover from the bridge collapse.

Until Thursday night, officials had declined to specify a timeline for restoring normal access to the port. "This evening's announcement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that they've outlined a tentative timeline sends a strong message to the City of Baltimore and our entire country," Mayor Brandon Scott said in a statement. "Some of the best engineering minds in the world and our most important resources have been made available for this critically important project."

The container ship struck one of the bridge's support piers, sending the spans plunging into the Patapsco River and blocking the channel. Six men who were working on the bridge repairing potholes are presumed dead. Divers have recovered two of their bodies from the area, which is clogged by the damaged ship and the wreckage of the bridge.

"This ambitious timeline proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers offers a level of clarity and certainty that Baltimore needs to hear so we can collectively plan for continued recovery efforts -- related to both our economy and our infrastructure," Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat, said in a statement. "Now we have a target. We must do everything we can to meet that target."

Temporary 11- and 14-foot-deep channels that pass under remaining parts of the Key Bridge were opened this week to allow a handful of smaller barges and tugboats out of the port.

"I'm grateful to have a timeline that will help guide our recovery and response at the local level," Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski Jr., a Democrat, said in a statement. "I am confident that they have the best people and resources at their disposal to meet this timeline."

Seven commercial ships and four military ships that support the overseas deployment of U.S. military forces have been stuck in the port since the 984-foot container ship Dali collided with the bridge. Spellmon credited "the exhaustive work" of the Key Bridge Response Unified Command -- which is led by the Corps, the Coast Guard, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Maryland Transportation Authority and the Maryland State Police -- in making progress toward the ultimate goal.

"Thanks to the exhaustive work of the Unified Command during the last two weeks, including underwater surveys and detailed structural analysis of the wreckage, we've developed a better understanding of the immense and complex work that lies ahead," Spellmon said in the statement. "A fully opened federal channel remains our primary goal."

AIR FORCE OSPREYS IN JAPAN REMAIN GROUNDED

This article's original publication can be found [here](#).



The Air Force is still not flying Osprey aircraft in Japan despite getting the green light to lift a monthslong flight hold following a deadly crash off the country's southern coast, but the [Marine Corps](#) has put its aircraft based there back in the skies. Rebecca Heyse, an Air Force Special Operations Command spokeswoman, told [Military.com](#) on Tuesday that none of the service's units have resumed flying the Osprey yet.

In contrast, the Marine Corps' 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, which is based in Okinawa, quickly moved to fly its MV-22s, announcing a return to flight status on March 14 -- less than a week after the hold was lifted, according to a statement released the same day. The aircraft -- which is flown by the Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force -- was allowed to return to flight in early March after Naval Air Systems Command and the V-22 Joint Program Office announced that they had discovered a new and not fully understood mechanical failure as part of the investigation into the Nov. 29 Air Force Osprey crash off the coast of Yakushima Island that left eight airmen dead.

The Navy doesn't have any Ospreys permanently stationed in Japan. A Navy spokesperson told [Military.com](#) on Tuesday that its CMV-22Bs based in San Diego, California, have begun the process of returning to flight. Officials who allowed the aircraft to return to flight argued that data analysis led to the decision to deem the Osprey safe -- while refusing to disclose any information about what part failed or any major details on procedural changes that were made as part of the grounding being lifted.

"We have high confidence that we understand what component failed, and how it failed," Marine Col. Brian Taylor, the V-22 program manager, told reporters in a briefing in early March. "I think what we are still working on is the 'why,'" Taylor said, noting that "this is the first time that we've seen this particular component fail in this way."

The Air Force's more cautious approach evokes parallels to how the public discovered the other yet-to-be resolved issue with the aircraft in 2022.

In August 2022, the Air Force briefly grounded its fleet of Ospreys after they experienced a series of hard clutch engagements that worried leaders in the service.

However, the very next day, the Marine Corps said not only that its Ospreys would keep flying but that its pilots could handle the issue, which it has known about for years. The hard clutch problem is an issue with the Osprey's complex system of clutch assemblies that are supposed to enable one engine to fly the aircraft in the event of an engine failure. However, in some instances -- at least 15 mishaps -- those clutches have failed.

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Military.com reported one such mishap with an Air Force Osprey that could have become fatal in 2017. Despite assurances from the Marine Corps that the problem was under control, the clutch issue became deadly in June 2022 when one of its Ospreys crashed in the California desert, killing five Marines. After that incident was investigated, Taylor also argued that data analysis of some of the more recent incidents involving the clutch led his office to conclude that replacing a critical component -- the input quill assembly -- more frequently was 99% effective despite skepticism from a Marine Corps widow of one of the pilots.

Now, the Marine Corps is again saying it has utmost confidence in the aircraft. "The flight clearance by our NAVAIR, our adherence to proven operational risk management practices, our confidence in this amazing aircraft, and our faith in the professionalism of our pilots, crew and maintenance teams undergird our decision to return the Osprey to service," the 1st MAW said in its statement.

The Marine Corps is also very dependent on the Osprey. It owns nearly 350 aircraft, compared to the Air Force's roughly 50 airframes.

Lt. Gen. Karsten Heckl said in February that the Corps has seen "dramatic impacts" from the flying halt, while 1st MAW's commander, Maj. Gen. Eric Austin, said the Osprey is "key to the success" of his unit. In the March statement, Austin said the Osprey "plays a central role in our ability to campaign, to respond in time of crisis, and ultimately to partner with our allies and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force, which also flies the Osprey, also resumed flights last week, according to a report from Japan Times.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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.

Joseph Burns, New York

Mr. Burns, for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities, we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

Mr. Burns met with Congressman Andrew Garbarino (R-NY-02) in Turlock, CA. In Mr. Burn's report, he shared that he discussed the US Coast Guard and the GI Bill Parity Act, as well as the Major Richard Starr Act. These are all key Legion priorities!

Thank you, Mr. Burns, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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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 us at grassroots@legion.org with the details.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

FAREWELL to Katherine Ryan! Our energetic Legislative Coordinator has been promoted to Policy Analyst for the National Security Division and will transfer Monday April 8th. Please keep in touch with us at grassroots@legion.org!

WELCOME to our newest Legislative Associate Patrick Johnston. Patrick is a Navy veteran, and will work on veterans' economic opportunities, education, and employment legislation.

Legislative staff in DC participated in several meetings on Capitol Hill this week, including with staff from the offices of Representatives Issa, Foxx, Schultz, Van Orden, Cartwright, and Ciscomani, as well as Senators Lujan, Rubio, and Sullivan. We also worked with staff of the Senate Veteran Affairs Committee to discuss upcoming legislation on education issues and veteran homelessness.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress on *Suicide Prevention & Peer Support*? Check out our information paper in the [Legislative Toolkit](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available 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. Congratulations to the Department of California for scheduling Grassroots Training during their Legion College session in April!

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As Friday, April 5th, at Noon ET, the following hearings are scheduled:

April 9th: HVAC - VA Supply Chain Modernization

April 9th: SASC - DoD Budget Request Testimony

April 10th: HVAC – Disability Assistance and memorial Affairs Subcommittee on Pending Legislation

April 10th: SVAC – Ensuring Equity for Women Veterans at VA

April 10th: House Appropriations – Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the United States Army

April 10th: House Appropriations – Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the United States Navy and Marine Corps

April 10th: HASC – U.S. Military Posture and National Security Challenges in Europe

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April 10th: HASC – U.S. Cyber Command Budget Request

April 10th: House Appropriations – Budget for Army Military Construction

April 11th: - Testimony on United States European Command and United States Transportation Command

April 11th: HASC – Member Day Hearing on NDAA

April 11th: HASC – Joint SPF-RDY Hearing

April 11th: HASC – A Review of Defense Intelligence to Counter China

April 11th : HVAC – Oversight Hearing on Budget Requests

April 11th: House Appropriations- Budget Hearing for Navy & Marine Corps

April 12th: HASC – FY25 Budget Requests for Missile Defense and Missile Defeat Programs

Previous HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

Previous SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)