



August 16, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *Hello Girls Congressional Gold Medal Act!* These women worked in forward areas and faced the same shelling, strafing, poison gas, and other dangers faced by the Doughboys and were paid by the Army. Despite their oaths to the nation and compliance with orders, they were considered “civilian contractors.” *The American Legion supports this legislation, and we appreciate all the emails you have sent so far. **Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members 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 is available online. To review our priorities, you can check out our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

August 23-29, 2024 – The American Legion’s 105th Annual National Convention! Held this year in New Orleans, this is the Legion’s largest annual meeting. Here, you can learn from each other’s creative solutions for success and challenges like those of your own Department. You do NOT need to be a delegate to attend! Reach out to your Department Headquarters or Adjutant to register and reserve a hotel room if you are interested in attending! You can find more information about convention, look over the calendar of events and more [here](#).

VETERANS AND LAWMAKERS LOBBY IN BIPARTISAN PUSH FOR MDMA THERAPY

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



More than a half century after federal regulators banned most psychedelic compounds, the Food and Drug Administration is nearing a decision on a novel treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder that pairs talk therapy with MDMA, the club drug commonly known as Ecstasy or Molly.

The decision, which is expected in the coming days, has generated a groundswell of lobbying by veterans groups, researchers and members of Congress from both parties. Eighty lawmakers signed [letters](#) to the Biden administration this week, urging the F.D.A. to approve the application by the drug company [Lykos Therapeutics](#).

The campaign was prompted in part by an expert panel's [overwhelming rejection](#) in June of Lykos's application, because of what participants said were flaws in the company's clinical trials and insufficient data.

"We have a mental health crisis and a suicide epidemic, with thousands of military veterans taking their own lives every year," said Representative Jack Bergman, Republican of Michigan and a former Marine Corps general who helped organize the

letter's 60 backers in the House. "I would just ask the F.D.A. to consider the negative ramifications of them not taking action, which means more veterans will die needlessly." The lobbying campaign, unusual for a prospective new drug, underscores the high stakes and intense emotions surrounding psychedelic medicine, a field that has been growing in recent years as the country's top universities race one another to establish psychedelic research institutes.

The passions — and the millions of dollars in private investment flooding the field — have been buoyed by a growing body of data suggesting that compounds like LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and MDMA can have significant therapeutic effects on hard-to-treat mental health conditions like depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. The federally prohibited substances are listed as Schedule I drugs that have "no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse."

According to the most [recent study](#) cited in the Lykos application, more than [86 percent of participants](#) who took MDMA experienced a measurable reduction in the severity of their PTSD symptoms, and 71 percent improved enough that they no longer met the criteria for a diagnosis. Of those who took the placebo, 69 percent improved and nearly 48 percent no longer qualified for a PTSD diagnosis, according to the company's data.

Perhaps most striking was that the benefits of MDMA therapy endured six months after the final, three-dose regimen, the study found.

"I'd argue that these benefits are better than any psychiatric medication that has been discovered in the history of psychiatry," said Dr. David Rabin, a neuroscientist and psychiatrist who conducts clinical trials on psychedelic compounds and is not affiliated with Lykos.

But the path toward approval has been bumpy, with advisers to the F.D.A. noting several shortcomings in Lykos's application and in gaps in the data the company had submitted. The panel, which voted 10 to 1 against the application, cited a number of concerns, including Lykos's failure to collect detailed data on MDMA's potential for abuse, its possible cardiac risks and what panelists said were the challenges of standardizing the treatment's psychotherapy component.

Although not considered a traditional psychedelic, MDMA, or midomafetamine, is a synthetic compound that fosters self-awareness, feelings of empathy and social connectedness.

Should it win F.D.A. approval, federal health authorities and the Justice Department would have to follow certain steps to reclassify the drug to a lower level than the current Schedule I ban, much like the process now [underway with cannabis](#).

The Drug Enforcement Administration could also set production quotas for the drug's ingredients, as it does with the stimulant medications used to treat ADHD.

The F.D.A. could issue a more limited approval requiring Lykos to closely monitor its MDMA-therapy program and report any adverse effects to the agency. It could also require the company to undertake additional studies, a decision that would most likely add years to the approval process. The agency could simply postpone a final decision and ask Lykos to provide additional data. Such a determination, known as a Complete Response Letter, is likely to be confidential.

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Postponing approval could cast a chill over the entire field.

"We need the big biotech funds to be investing in psychedelics, and a no vote would validate why many of them have been sitting on the sidelines until now," said Dustin Robinson, the managing principal of [Iter Investments](#), which focuses on psychedelic companies.

The F.D.A. does not comment on impending decisions, but experts say the political sensitivities surrounding MDMA are especially daunting given the high-profile support from veterans groups. The agency is also undoubtedly mindful of regulatory failures, including criticisms of its own shortcomings, that helped fueled the nation's opioid crisis.

What no one disputes is the urgent need for new treatments for PTSD. [Heroic Hearts Project](#), an organization that helps veterans obtain psychedelic treatment at clinics outside the United States, has more than 1,000 veterans on a waiting list.

Juliana Mercer, a board member with the organization and a Marine Corps veteran, said she and other supporters worried that the unconventional nature of psychedelic therapies was dampening the application's prospects at the F.D.A.

"We just want to make sure that the stigma associated with MDMA doesn't influence their decision," she said. "It would be a shame for stigma to keep a lifesaving treatment from millions of people."

AIR FORCE SAYS RESTORING NUKES ON SOME B-52S WOULD COST \$4.5 MILLION

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

The Air Force estimates it would cost about \$4.5 million to restore nuclear weapon capabilities on approximately 30 B-52 bombers, a calculation that follows proposals from Congress to assess shoring up the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal in the coming years.



The House and Senate armed services committees included the recommendation [in their respective defense policy bills](#) for fiscal 2025. The bombers in question had previously been equipped with the ability to carry nuclear weapons but were converted to conventional aircraft about 10 years ago to comply with a key U.S.-Russia arms control treaty known as New START.

That agreement, which sets limits on both countries' nuclear arms capabilities, is set to expire in 2026. Proponents of the recommendation say that serious negotiations with Russia aren't likely and the U.S. needs to prepare for a future without the same restrictions.

Brian Knight, deputy senior materiel leader in the Air Force's [B-52 bomber program office](#), said Tuesday the service is prepared to meet the timelines proposed in the bill, which calls for the conversions to begin within a month after the treaty limits lift in 2026. The process is estimated to be completed by 2029.

"The work itself, I'm not going to get into the details other than to say, we know how to do it and it's relatively easy," he told reporters during an Air Force Life Cycle Industry Day conference in Dayton, Ohio.

The Air Force operates a fleet of 76 B-52s, which have been in operation since 1976. The bomber was designed to carry nuclear and conventional weapons, but in 2015, the service modified 30 aircraft to a conventional-only status under New START.

Opponents of the policy proposal — including the House Armed Services Committee’s top Democrat Rep. Adam Smith of Washington — worry that making plans now to increase the U.S. nuclear stockpile could complicate future treaty negotiations.

Smith said in June, when the House’s bill passed, that the conversion process could interrupt ongoing efforts to modernize the aging B-52 fleet, which is on track to get a slate of upgrades in the coming years to keep it flying into the 2050s – and potentially until 2060.

“The Department of Defense is not interested in doing this,” Smith said. “They’re currently trying to extend the life of the B-52s out to 2050, which they think they can do. This would be another expense to that.”

Knight said the service could likely perform the conversions during planned depot maintenance. Brig. Gen. Erik Quigley, the service’s program executive for bombers, said in the same briefing this week that while the workload would be manageable, it would require some adjustments to the program’s depot schedule, which is usually set two years in advance.

“It would just take some planning to make sure that we got that into the flow,” Quigley said.

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.

Frederic Kinkin, Virginia

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

Frederic attended the American Legion Post 280 (Chesapeake) back-to-school day. At this event, Rep. Jen Kiggans (VA-02) met with students who were receiving supplies from the post.

Thank you, Frederic, and Post 280, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress on ***The Veteran's Role in Supporting the Military?*** Check out our [information papers](#) 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.

Register for Action Alerts today at
<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION ACTIVITIES

We have been preparing for National Convention in New Orleans August 23rd-29th. At convention, the Legislative Commission and Committee will meet. On Saturday, August 24th, the Legislative Commission will meet from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm. The meeting will contain a statement from Chairwoman Harris including the legislative landscape for the 118th Congress, as well as a report from Chairman Oertel. We will also hear from a panel of Veteran Affairs Committee staff, including Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS). On Sunday, August 25th, the Legislative Committee meeting will occur from 9:00 am – 11:00

am. This meeting will include elections for chairman and secretary, as well as reviews of resolutions and legislation.

Due to the Legislative staff attending convention, there will be no Weekly Newsletters sent on August 23rd or August 30th. They will return to their regularly occurring distribution schedule beginning Friday, September 6th.



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, August 16, 2024, there are **NO** upcoming hearings scheduled. The House and the Senate have begun their summer recesses; their sessions will commence September 9th.

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

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

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)

