

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

This week, The American Legion is urging Congress to pass the [Love Lives On Act](#) (S. 1266 / H.R. 3651). Currently, Gold Star Spouses under the age of 55 are forced to choose between remarriage and their survivor benefits. To ensure that surviving spouses can be married without repercussions, you contact your representatives in support of S. 1266 or H.R. 3651 by [clicking here](#).

Last session, three critical bills passed 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.

The American Legion has released its legislative agenda for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. To review our priorities, you can check out our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

On Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, the [Military Construction, Veterans' Affairs, and Related Agency \(MilCon-VA\)](#) appropriations passed through Congress as part of the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024](#). The MilCon-VA appropriations provides full funding for veterans' medical care, directs funding to state veterans' homes and VA research, and provides \$2 billion more than what was requested by the President for military construction. These projects will be focused largely in the Pacific theatre and on improving barracks. Additionally, over \$336 million will be allocated for child development centers and another \$88.6 million is allocated to the expansion of Arlington Cemetery.

To sign up for alerts, find legislation, and browse some of The American Legion's priorities, please visit our [Grassroots Actions Center](#).

### THE NATIONAL COMMANDER'S TESTIMONY BEFORE TO CONGRESS



National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer

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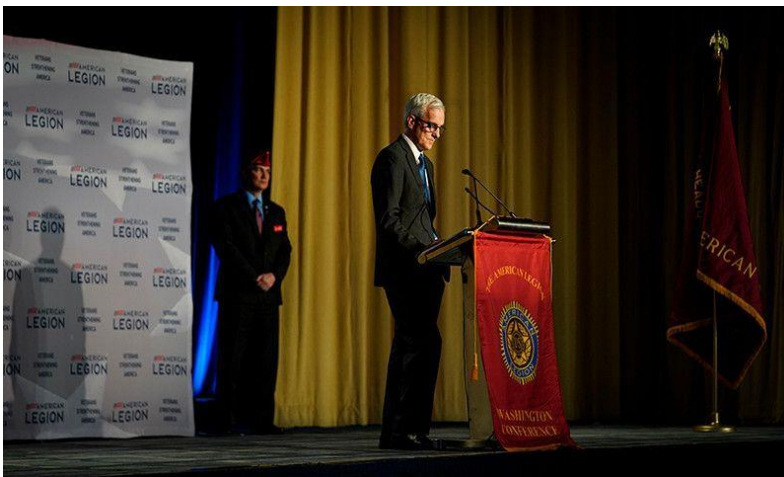
The American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer will testify before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs March 13 in the nation's capital.

If you would like to watch the testimony, **you may tune in [here](#) at 10:00am ET on Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>** to watch a live stream of the testimony.

National Commander Seehafer is expected to touch on issues such as the Legion's Be the One veteran suicide prevention program and how both committees can assist that effort, the importance of Buddy Checks, the need to criminally punish unaccredited companies that prey on veterans and their families by charging exorbitant fees for services on claims, and improvements to the military's Transition Assistance Program.

Following his oral testimony, Seehafer will engage in a question-and-answer session with members of the committees. Commander Seehafer will be joined by Executive Director Chanin Nuntavong, Legislative Director Julia Mathis, Veterans' Affairs & Rehabilitation Director Tiffany Ellett, Veterans' Employment and Education Director Joe Sharpe, Legislative Chairwoman Patricia Harris, Veterans' Affairs & Rehabilitation Chairman Autrey James, and Veterans' Employment and Education Jay Bowen.

## THE LEGION'S 2024 WASHINGTON CONFERENCE



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough at the 2024 Commander's Rally

During the last week of February, Legionnaires from across the country travelled to Washington, D.C. for the 2024 Washington Conference. The Conference week kicked off with a variety of commission meetings, including for the National Security, Veterans' Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R), and Veterans' Employment and Education (VE&E) Commissions. These meetings were the site of great discussion and a wealth of information from experts in the field.

The VE&E Commission hosted a variety of panel discussions, including a discussion on homelessness awareness and prevention. During the discussion, the panelists emphasized the importance of interagency and community cooperation. Clifton Lewis, the former executive director of U.S. Vets, said, "You have to connect with the community partners. You have to have strong relationships with each partner in the community and make sure that if any veteran falls into homelessness at any point in time from any of [the] agencies that you work with, they will refer him to you." The Director of Grants and Training at the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service Maria Temiquel echoed Lewis's thoughts. According to Temiquel, the support and

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cooperation from Legion posts is critical to the Department of Labor and VA in their efforts to prevent homelessness.

While the VE&E Commission continued discussions on topics such as mental health and educational assistance, the [VA&R Commission](#) hosted conversations about suicide prevention, safeguarding veterans' benefits, claims, and appeals with leadership from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). One of the key topics brought up by Chairman Autrey James was continued research on emerging therapies for PTSD and depression. The Deputy Under Secretary for Health Dr. Steve Lieberman told Legionnaires that suicide prevention continued to be the top priority of the Veterans Health Administration. With this concern in mind, Dr. Lieberman claims VA has become the "leader in the country in researching suicide prevention related depression, related to PTSD, and related to many other factors."

As for the [Legislative Commission](#), members received briefings from staff on key legislation for their visits to Capitol Hill. Staff from the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee also joined the commission to discuss what House and Senate priorities were, and how the Legion can help. Billy Van Saun, counsel to majority staff on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and American Legion member, emphasized the need to improve access to and quality of care for veterans in rural areas. On the other hand, Katie Flynn who works for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee majority staff, spoke of the importance of community care access and oversight, among many other topics.

With such critical knowledge at their disposal and a wonderful send-off from the Secretary of VA Denis McDonough, Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Legionnaires took to the Hill to share The American Legion's priorities. On VoterVoice, Legionnaires reported over 180 meetings during Washington Conference and the week following.

Just to name a few of our outstanding advocates, Mr. Scott Maddrea of Virginia spoke with Congressman Rob Wittman (R-VA-1) to coordinate support for VA dental benefits and is helping to get the word out about the Congressman's mobile office hours at American Legion Post 186. Representing Ohio, Cindy



Legionnaire Lee Hinkleman and Senator Chuck Schumer

Boehnlein and Suzette Heller attended multiple meetings with lawmakers across the state to share American Legion and Auxiliary priorities.

Finally, Mr. Lee Hinkleman of New York spoke with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), focusing on many bills which have passed the House but have yet to be held for a vote in the Senate. Particularly, Senator Schumer and Mr. Hinkleman discussed the importance of the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act and strategies for moving the bill through the Senate. For his legislative efforts, Mr. Hinkleman received a proclamation from Senator Schumer, recognizing him for his induction in the New York State Veterans Hall of Fame and his steadfast support to the people of New York.

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### 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.

#### Robert Kraemer, Kentucky

Congratulations to Robert Kraemer, Department of Kentucky!

In the week after Washington Conference came to a close, Robert maintained his advocacy efforts and met with Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY-6) in his home state of Kentucky. While attending the Congressman's Quarterly Veteran Coalition Meeting, Robert made sure to speak directly to Rep. Barr about the Legion agenda and concerns he had the local level. During their discussion, Mr. Kraemer expressed his deep concern about predatory and illegitimate actors who are targeting veterans.

Robert, thank you so much for your work this week. We look forward to hearing more about grassroots actions in the state of Kentucky!

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](mailto:kryan@legion.org).

### LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

Legislative Division (LegDiv) Staff focused heavily on logistics and scheduling for the Commander's Testimony to the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. This entailed continued editing of oral and written statements, reviewing key testimonies from other organizations, coordinating travel and events for Legion leadership, and working with congressional staff to draft questions.

In the midst of these tasks, LegDiv Staff helped prepare statements for the record for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and met with peer organizations to discuss the Fy2025 NDAA. In their spare time, LegDiv Staff continued to do legislative outreach and aid in bill reviews.

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](mailto:grassroots@legion.org) or [ejohnson@legion.org](mailto:ejohnson@legion.org).

### UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

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On Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at 3:00pm ET, the House Armed Service Committee Subcommittee on Strategic Forces will hold a hearing on the U.S. and Adversary Hypersonic Capabilities. As of Thursday, February 7<sup>th</sup> at 12:00pm, no link to watch was shared.

On Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am ET, the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Cyber, Information Technologies, and Innovation will hold a hearing titled “Too Critical to Fail: Getting Software Right in an Age of Rapid Innovation.” As of Thursday, February 7<sup>th</sup> at 12:00pm, no link to watch was shared.

***On Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am ET, the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing to receive the legislative presentation of The American Legion. The hearing can be livestreamed [here](#).***

On Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup> at 10:30am, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing titled “U.S. Strategy in the Pacific Island Region.” The hearing can be livestreamed [here](#).

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](#)