



September 13, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for H.R. 9468, which aims to *Fix the VA Funding Shortfall!* This bipartisan effort aims to remedy the nearly \$15 billion combined deficit over this fiscal year and the next. This is crucial to protecting the benefits that so many of our brothers and sisters depend on. Let your voices be heard in Congress, and let them know that veterans' benefits are not up for debate. *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!

March 2-5, 2025 – The American Legion's 65th Annual Washington Conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel. This conference provides an opportunity for Legionnaires to meet with their respective lawmakers and hear from members of Congress and VA leadership. The National Commander will also address attendees on legislative priorities during the National Commander's Rally. More details, such as agendas and schedules, will be updated [here](#).

CONGRESS MOVES TO FIX VA BUDGET GAP, BUT TIME IS RUNNING OUT

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

Congressional leaders have a deal in place to patch [a nearly \\$3 billion shortfall on Department of Veterans Affairs funding](#) that risks endangering benefits payments as soon as next month, but veterans advocates said they are reluctant to celebrate until the final details are worked out.

“When we see votes that are yes and then the dollars are actually sent to the [Treasury Department], then that will relieve our sense of urgency,” said Pat Murray, legislative director for the [Veterans of Foreign Wars](#). “A proposed solution is not enough, we need an actual solution.”

VA officials have warned that because of increased medical care and benefits applications in recent months, [the department’s budget](#) is roughly \$2.9 billion short for this fiscal year and about \$12 billion short in projected fiscal 2025 needs.

The funds for next year likely will be negotiated as part of a broader federal budget package to be completed sometime this fall.



But VA leaders on Tuesday testified before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee that without a solution to the other funding gap by Sept. 20, some benefits checks to veterans and dependents could be delayed in October.

At a rally outside the VFW offices on Wednesday morning, dozens of veterans advocates warned those late checks could be disastrous for veterans.

“This financial crisis will affect disability compensation, caregiver compensation, community care payouts, everything,” said Julia Mathis, legislative director for the American Legion. “Every day that we get closer to September 20 is another 24 hours of uncertainty for thousands of veterans whose financial lives depend on this.”

Lawmakers on the House committee indicated Tuesday that they were working behind the scenes to help solve the problem, while at the same time expressing concerns that VA officials did not detect the funding shortfall sooner.

Congressional sources on Wednesday confirmed House leaders will move forward with a measure introduced by Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Calif., which would cover the budget gap for VA operations this month. A vote is expected on the legislation early next week.

That would give the Senate just a day or two to advance the legislation ahead of the Sept. 20 deadline. If a senator objects to the quick passage, it could push the final passage past that date or derail the whole measure.

Advocates say they plan to spend the next week lobbying lawmakers to make sure that doesn't occur.

“The VA needs more money,” said Brian Kelly, president of the Military Officers Association of America. “It doesn't matter who you want to point the finger at for that, the fact is that our veterans need their benefits paid out.”

“Any interruption in the VA's ability to pay veterans may have devastating consequences on this community and may erode trust and confidence in the institutions who have pledged to support and care for those who have served.”

Lawmakers must also negotiate a separate extension for the full federal budget by Sept. 30 or [risk a partial government shutdown](#). That potential funding lapse would have limited impact on VA services, however, because Congress regularly approves much of the department's budget a year in advance.

SENATORS ASSEMBLING MANAGER'S PACKAGE TO KEEP NDA MOVING

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

The Senate will probably not debate its fiscal 2025 National Defense Authorization Act this year, but senators said this week they are not done changing the measure before talks with the House on a final version get going in earnest.

Senators are assembling a manager's package of amendments that both sides agree would become part of the Senate's substitute NDAA, Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, confirmed in a brief interview. Reed has said previously he doesn't think the Senate will have time this year for a full debate and passage of the annual NDAA.

Instead of a formal conference between House and Senate negotiators, lawmakers will instead informally iron out differences between the Senate Armed Services Committee bill (S 4638), with the manager's package included, and the House-passed measure (HR 8070).

That process is launched every year at the staff level long before both chambers have passed their NDAA's. But, by all accounts, those talks will not enter the home stretch this year until after the November election.

"We need the time," Reed said. "In the meantime, we're working with the House to get some bearings on where they're going and where we're going."

It is not yet clear what fraction of the 1,126 amendments filed to the Senate bill will make it into the manager's package.

Aides to Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Benjamin L. Cardin, D-Md., have said they expect the annual State Department authorization measure, the text of which has yet to be released, to be one amendment included in Reed's manager's package.

Meanwhile, Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., a member of the Armed Services Committee, said numerous amendments "that are fine with both sides" have already been cleared for the manager's package.

"So we kind of know there is a universe there of things that are really popular," Kaine said.

Rep. Mike D. Rogers, R-Ala., the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said this week he has been expecting the Senate to approve a manager's package that would put the finishing touches on that chamber's opening bid in the bicameral talks.

"We've done this, I think, twice out of the last three years," Rogers said of the informal conference process. "It's not the way we ought to do it, but it's the way we've had to do it."

Rogers predicted final action on the bicameral NDAA would be a late December event.

THIS WEEK ON CAPITOL HILL

This week, National Commander James Lacoursiere visited Washington, D.C. to attend an event at the WWI Memorial and meet with members of Congress! During his time here this week, he spoke with Sen. Reed (RI) and Rep. Courtney (CT). He was also joined by Joseph Navarette, the Sons of the American Legion National Commander.



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.

Terry Schow, Utah

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

Terry spoke to Representative Blake Moore and his staff last week. They talked about multiple Legion priorities, including the VA funding shortfall, veteran suicide issues, funding for veterans' mental health, and improving and funding Vet Centers.

Thank you, Terry, 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

This week, the Legislative Division had the pleasure of escorting James LaCoursiere around D.C. for a trip full of meetings with Congress, tours of the Capitol Building, and events at the WWI Memorial.



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 1:00 PM on Friday, September 13, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Monday, September 16 at 9:00 AM EST: House Armed Services Committee – Full Committee Hearing titled “*Fielding Technology and Innovation: Industry Views on Department of Defense Acquisition*”

- Wednesday, September 18 at 10:00 AM EST: House Armed Services Committee – Full Committee hearing titled “*The Findings and Recommendations of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy*”
- Wednesday, September 18 at 10:15 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Oversight Hearing: “*Examining VA’s Challenges with Ensuring Quality Contracted Disability Compensation Examinations*”
- Wednesday, September 18 at 2:30 PM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Health Oversight Hearing titled “*Dial 988 +1: Examining the Operations of the Veterans Crisis Line*”
- Wednesday, September 18 at 3:00 PM EST: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – “*Providing for Veterans: Addressing Current and Future VA Budget Challenges*”
- Thursday, September 19 at 9:00 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing: “*VA’s Open Cash Register: Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Revenue Operations*”
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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](#)