



September 6, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support 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](#).

MILITARY RECRUITMENT PANEL TO LEGION: "HELP WHERE YOU CAN"

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

Young people who tend to get their information in 15-second social media bursts on mobile phones need to see, hear and learn from real veterans about the true benefits of

military service in order to improve recruitment into the U.S. Armed Forces, according to panelists who spoke Wednesday in New Orleans at the 105th National Convention of The American Legion.



“We are facing a national recruiting crisis for a whole lot of reasons,” 15th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith said in the onstage session before thousands of American Legion members. “But the fact is, like it or not, you, myself – those who have served – are the ones right now standing in the breach between us and a national draft.”

To preserve and maintain an all-volunteer force, he explained, “requires us to go out and tell our story, to be the example in our communities, to perpetuate the best of what it is we have done. What it gave me – that sense of discipline, that sense of understanding, that sense of small team – that matters.”

All military service branches except the U.S. Marine Corps and Space Force have struggled to hit recruitment goals in recent years, some falling short, due to a range of reasons. Among the most commonly stated problems: physical fitness, behavioral issues, media and public perceptions of service and propensity to serve, based on family lineage. It all leads up to an oft-stated figure: that only about 23% of those who wish to enlist actually qualify for service. And others just don’t understand the value of military commitment or its long-term rewards, nor are they learning it often enough from veterans.

“The thing that always struck me about the military, whatever branch it was, is the connection between brothers and sisters in arms,” said panelist U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Danny Basham. “You’re not going to get that anywhere else. No corporation is going to

give that to you. It's a brotherhood and sisterhood that you enjoy. We can't take that for granted. I think the Legion does a great job of that."

"The more we talk about it, and I think, more importantly, the more we are examples of it in our communities is how that story gets told," Smith said.

The panel was a diverse mix, all of whom extolled the virtues of military service and the frustrating difficulty of convincing young people to take that path. "It's critical that we bring the next generation within our ranks," said the Hon. Patrick Murphy, first veteran of the war in Iraq elected to Congress and former Under Secretary for the Army, who served as moderator for the panel discussion. He framed the session as a national "call to service" where American Legion members can play a big part.

In addition to Smith, the panelists included U.S. Air Force veteran Ethan Brown, senior military fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency; Sgt. Maj. Allen Goodyear, Marine Corps Recruiting Command; and U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. for Analytics and Production Danny Basham.

"Service never stops," said Brown, an author and researcher on the post-Global War on Terrorism era. "We never stop being ambassadors or representatives. The challenge is on all of us in this room, and the sub-units we represent, when we all go back to our systems and Legions. Find those veteran success stories, and we have to overcome that broken-veteran stigma, in order to be an extension of our recruiting brothers and sisters."

Brown referenced the 1957 book "The Soldier and the State" by Samuel Huntington that warned of "societal fatigue" about military service and how that parallels today's situation after the longest war in U.S. history, the Global War on Terrorism. "We see some of those same problems that he identified in his groundbreaking work manifesting today, in particular the civil-military dynamic. Young Americans are reluctant to serve in a military capacity because of how they perceive the military and its role within the state today. This is due to societal fatigue after a 20-year war."

Media – social and otherwise – also contribute to perceptions on separate ends of the U.S. ideological spectrum that either deride military service as being too "woke" or too "radical."

"The single most important, tactile issue in the recruiting crisis is the politicization of U.S. military and the American body politic," Brown said. "There's buzz phrases like 'the military has gone woke' or 'it's full of radical ideologies.' Both of these are straw-man arguments. Whether they are accurate or not does not matter. It is the perception that they are (that is) damning to the men in uniform that I'm sharing this panel with and the men and women who work for them, who are trying to get that next generation of Americans to serve this country."

Brown explained that Congress directed the Department of Defense to launch a study into the prevalence of radical ideologies in the military and the results were that

servicemembers “were pretty much commensurate with the rest of the United States. It’s almost like the U.S. military is a microcosm of American society. Who knew?”

He said one goal, beyond other obstacles to enlistment, should be to restore public trust in military service and understanding of its value. “Rebuilding the public faith in the military and its role in a democracy is a critical factor if we are going address this problem,” he said. “It’s not a simple solution. It’s a comprehensive one. It requires efforts by the military to realign itself for the world that we live in; the federal government to align resources and policy to support the military, to adapt to the new world that we live in; it requires communities and community leaders; and most importantly it requires us, as individual actors in a democracy, to take part in rebuilding that trust.”

The panelists made several suggestions about how the Legion can improve the situation, including:

- Connecting directly with recruiters in their communities and helping them make connections with schools.

- “Create opportunities to inspire, advocate and support the recruiting effort,” Goodwin prescribed.

- “See how you can help recruiters get their foot in the door,” Basham said.

- “Let’s not lead with victimization,” Murphy said. “Be a civic asset. It’s going to set you up on a path to greatness in your life.”

Smith made the point that 77% of successful Navy recruitment comes from military blood lines. “That’s wonderful in some aspects – heartwarming – but if you want to enfranchise a nation in the future of your military, we have to find people who have never served, who understand that through the military, you can change your family’s destination in one generation. If you come in and you work hard, and you achieve, you will set your kids and your progeny up for success ... In addition to those who have families that have served, we need to find many more who haven’t.”

“Service never stops,” Brown said. “You never stop being a part of your community. There’s always places where we can engage ourselves – youth sports, assisting at public schools with physical education or civics education. There are so many more things that each and every one of us can do to take that individual responsibility for rebuilding that trust in the institution that is the U.S. military.”

This is not a small problem, Smith suggested in the discussion. “If we don’t stand up right now, there won’t be another generation on this stage in 30 years looking out at another audience talking about the same thing. Our national destiny is at stake. That’s what this is about. So, please listen and help where you can.”

AIR FORCE VETERAN FROM OAKDALE, CONN., ELECTED NATIONAL COMMANDER OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

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

James A. LaCoursiere, Jr. was elected national commander of the nation's largest veterans organization today during The American Legion's 105th national convention. An Air Force veteran, LaCoursiere has been a longtime field representative for The American Legion Department of Connecticut's Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund, which assists veterans and their families.

LaCoursiere has held many leadership positions at The American Legion post, department (state) and national levels. He is a member of American Legion Post 91 in Moosup, Conn. He has also served as a national vice commander, Connecticut state commander, and chairman of the organization's national legislative commission.

LaCoursiere is married to his wife, Lisa, and has two children (Patrick and Meghan), and three stepchildren (Jason, Kaylene and the late Johnathan).

Born to a military family in Honolulu, LaCoursiere attended Montville High School where he played junior varsity football, varsity football and varsity track.

As national commander, LaCoursiere is strongly committed to raising awareness for The American Legion's "Be the One" efforts to prevent veteran suicide.

HOUSE REPUBLICANS SUBPOENA SECRETARY BLIKEN FOR TESTIMONY ON US WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

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



House Republicans have issued a subpoena demanding testimony from [Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#) as they wrap up a sprawling yearslong investigation into the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

[Rep. Michael McCaul](#), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, sent a subpoena letter late Tuesday ordering Blinken to appear before the committee by Sept. 19 or face a contempt of Congress charge.

“You served as the final decision maker for the department on the withdrawal and evacuation,” McCaul wrote.

He added that three years later, Blinken is “in a position to inform the Committee’s consideration of potential legislation aimed at helping prevent the catastrophic mistakes of the withdrawal, including potential reforms to the Department’s legislative authorization.”

Matthew Miller, a State Department spokesman, said Blinken is unable to testify on the dates proposed by the committee as he will be traveling for diplomatic work the majority of September. He claimed the committee denied “reasonable alternatives” to the subpoena date.

“The Secretary has testified before the Congress on Afghanistan more than 14 times — more than any other Cabinet-level official,” Miller said, adding that four of those times were directly before the Foreign Affairs committee at the request of McCaul. “It is disappointing that instead of continuing to engage with the Department in good faith, the Committee instead has issued yet another unnecessary subpoena.”

The subpoena for Blinken's testimony is the [latest in a series of moves by McCaul](#) and other [House Republicans](#) over the last 18 months to hold the Biden administration accountable for what they have called a “stunning failure of leadership” after Taliban forces [seized the Afghan capital of Kabul](#), far more rapidly than U.S. intelligence had foreseen as American forces pulled out.

The committee is expected to summarize its work in an investigative report to be released Monday, amid the contentious presidential election where Republican nominee Donald Trump has tried to elevate the withdrawal from Afghanistan as a campaign issue.

While the GOP report is expected to place blame on President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, who is now the Democratic nominee for president,

independent watchdog reports over the last three years have documented a much more nuanced and bipartisan case for which administration was at fault.

A 2022 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, concluded it was decisions made by both President Donald Trump and Biden to pull all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan that were key factors in the collapse of that nation's military.

That report mirrors assertions made by senior Pentagon and military leaders in the aftermath of the withdrawal. Military leaders have made clear that their recommendation was to leave about 2,500 U.S. troops in the country, but that plan was not approved.

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.

Albert Klingele, New York

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

Albert attended a press conference in New York where Representative Nicole Malliotakis was speaking. When the press conference was over, he stuck around and discussed many different bills with the Congresswoman and her staff that deal with veterans, including the Elizabeth Dole Act, Major Richard Star Act, and Pay our Coast Guard Act. He also brought up issues specific to the Staten Island area. In response, Representative Malliotakis said that she is always working to protect the local VA Hospital and medical services and facilities.

Thank you, Albert, 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

The Legislative Division is finally back in Washington, D.C. after an eventful week at the National Convention in New Orleans. We welcome James LaCoursiere as the new National Commander for 2024-2025!



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, September 6, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, September 10 at 10:00 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Full Committee Oversight Hearing titled “*Accountable or Absent?: Examining VA Leadership Under the Biden-Harris Administration*”
- Tuesday, September 10 at 3:00 PM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Oversight hearing titled “*Mission Transition: Evaluating Mental Health Support Programs for Separating Servicemembers*”
- Wednesday, September 11 at 10:00 AM EST: House Veterans Affairs Committee – Subcommittee on Health Legislative Hearing
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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](#)