

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

The American Legion is urging Congress to include vital language in the Defense Supplemental to support our Afghan allies. To support the Legion's efforts and protect the brave men and women who fought by our sides, please click [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. If you would like to contact your representatives in support of H.R. 542, H.R. 3848, or H.R. 3581, you can visit our [grassroots actions center](#) to identify and email your elected official.

**The American Legion supports the Pay our Troops Act and encourages all Legionnaires to contact their members of Congress and ask them to support the legislation. Click [here](#) to reach out today.**

### THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AT VA



The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in both the public and private sector has been one of the defining debates of this decade. From customer service to defense and security, the applications of AI seem endless. As a result, it has been virtually impossible for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to ignore its potential uses.

Although VA established the National Artificial Intelligence Institute in 2019, its exploration of AI really took off in 2021. In the fall of that year, [VA implemented a new strategy](#) for the ethical use of AI across its operations. The department aimed to improve its efficiency, increase its intelligence capacity, and enhance research initiatives.

Since VA launched its AI initiative, the department has developed [over 300 projects](#). With the help of the

Washington, D.C. VA Medical Center (VAMC), the Department created an AI product to predict the severity of the Covid-19 virus. This model has been piloted at 12 other VAMCs. VA is also working with researchers at Stanford University to develop wearable technology that can continuously monitor vital signs and detect potential health issues.

## National Legislative Division Weekly

The innovation of VA's AI pilot projects has been nothing short of incredible, and Congress has encouraged continued development every step of the way. As 2024 began, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) put AI development and implementation at the forefront of its business.

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) hosted a roundtable to discuss the Department's advancements with the technology. While Tester continually encouraged and applauded VA's efforts, he warned of risks to "veteran data and patient safety." As they discussed potential future projects, Tester suggested new areas for research, including potential uses in rural America. Because veterans in rural areas do not always have easy access to VA medical care, the potential of AI to expand treatment options for these veterans could be critical. Moreover, Tester asked VA to explore how AI could help minimize burnout for its employees.

On Monday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) will build on the work of its peers in the Senate. The Subcommittee on Technology Modernization will hold a hearing titled "The Future of Data Privacy and Artificial Intelligence at VA." Congressmen will discuss the technology's potential and drawbacks with VA officials and receive expert insight for American Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow Shane Tews.

### SENATE DEBATES SECURITY AND BORDER ISSUES

In the Senate this week, lawmakers continued the months-long debate over security spending. With President Biden's \$100 billion request for Ukraine and Israel pitted against homeland security and border control, attempts to find compromise have not been successful.

The primary negotiators, Senator James Lankford (R-OK), Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT), and Senator Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) spent the week discussing a new deal. The proposal would create a more stringent asylum process and impose a ceiling for migrants allowed at the southern border. Asylum screenings would also be more difficult to pass under the proposed deal, and surveillance on asylum seekers would be increased. Finally, border agents would be given the ability to expel migrants when illegal crossings are on the rise. With these conditions, the negotiators hope their peers will approve more economic and humanitarian aid for our allies at war.

However, some lawmakers are unwilling to concede funding for Ukraine and Israel, even with these tougher border policies, unless humanitarian parole is restricted. Humanitarian parole is a policy which grants temporary status to specific populations, generally from war-torn or underdeveloped nations. Each parolee is considered on a case-by-case basis, must have a financial sponsor, and is allowed to stay in the United States for up to 2 years. The Biden administration has expanded this policy to increase legal immigration to the dismay of some Senators.

While senatorial infighting about parole policy stalls negotiation, our allies across the world are left without critical support. In Ukraine, the counteroffensive effort has been a grinding, uphill struggle. With no significant changes to the frontline in 2023 (depicted below) and Russian making historically aggressive

## National Legislative Division Weekly

drone attacks, Ukraine is urgently pleading with the United States and other NATO allies for increased economic aid.

While the Senate debated funds for Ukraine in the previous session, Hamas militants launched attacks on Israel in October of 2023. As a longstanding ally, the United States quickly vowed support for Israel and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). As countries across the world have become increasingly in favor of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas militants in Gaza, and warier about the implications of the war, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated Israel's "commitment to defend [their] country" as a "fundamental right".

While Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III has stressed that American support for the Israeli counteroffensive will not waver in the face of international apprehension, Senate negotiations have held the requested \$14 billion for Israel at an impasse.



Source: ISW (21:00 GMT, 19 December)

B B C

As international conflicts compound and our border policy is increasingly uncertain, the current stalemate could ironically escalate the risks being debated. National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer implored Congress to act, saying, "Congress must keep America safe and get to work."

## 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.

### Charles Young, Wisconsin

We would like to recognize Charles Young, Department of Wisconsin as the Legionnaire of the week.

Mr. Young spent time with Congressman Scott Fitzgerald (R-WI-5). The gentlemen met to interview the Congressman's candidates for service academies. Mr. Young took this opportunity to speak with Congressman Fitzgerald about The American Legion's priorities and the importance of legislation that benefits veterans.

## National Legislative Division Weekly

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

We are very focused on finalizing the agenda for Washington Conference and producing the updated Legislative Agenda and proposed National Commander's Written Testimony documents. We have been working closely with the Divisions on their priorities and positions in order to establish the legislative plan for the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress and are confirming the attendees for Commander's Call and our Legislative Commission meeting.

The Legislative Division continues to develop relationships on Capitol Hill and work with staffers to identify and lobby key legislation. Specifically, we have spoken with HVAC and SVAC staff this week about maximizing the amount of viable legislation for veterans and military families that is signed into law.

As part of our ongoing grassroots efforts, NLD staff will be traveling to posts around the country 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

On Monday, January 29<sup>th</sup> at 3:30pm ET, the HVAC Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a hearing titled "The Future of Data Privacy and Artificial Intelligence." A link to livestream for this hearing has not been posted.

On Tuesday, January 30<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am ET: HVAC will hold a hearing titled "The One Percent: Supporting America's Surviving Military Family Community." A link to livestream for this hearing has not been posted.

Wednesday, Jan. 31<sup>st</sup> at 3:30pm ET: SVAC will hold a hearing to examine Vet Centers, focusing on supporting the mental health needs of service members, veterans, and their families. A link to livestream for this hearing has not been posted.