

## 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](#).

### DOD CHALLENGED TO INCREASE MODERNIZATION EFFORTS



On March 13<sup>th</sup> 2024, the [Ronald Reagan Institute](#) released its second annual National Security Innovation Base (NSIB) Report Card.

The Institute describes the report card model as a more holistic yet streamlined approach to “measure the collective impact of this critical yet largely uncoordinated ecosystem” of defense strategy. Just like in the classroom, an “A” grade denotes best in class performance while and “F” is described as a “catastrophic area of weakness.”

Here is how the United States performed under the Ronald Reagan Institute's grading system:

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Defense Modernization	D
Innovation Leadership	A-
Pull-through for Broader National Priorities	B
Customer Clarity	D
Innovation Capital	B
Private Sector Innovator Base	B
Public/Civil Innovation Base	C+
Government Alignment	C+
International Alliances and Partnerships	C
Talent Base	D

As displayed clearly from these results, the United States’s national security apparatus is in need of critical improvement. Interestingly enough, the United States performed extremely well in innovation leadership, innovation capital, and private sector innovation. Experts are now left wondering why these strides in research & development (R&D) are not translating to defense modernization, an area where the United States is lagging far behind its benchmark.

The Ronald Reagan Institute conceptualizes Defense Modernization into a two-fold definition. Firstly, defense modernization is measured by the success with which NSIB innovations are converted into U.S. national security capabilities. Secondly, the measure of modernization is dependent on how effectively the United States adapts to new models for acquisition. While use of commercial technology is trending upwards in a few areas, NSIB sectors across the board are struggling to act on innovation and technological advancement.

To bridge this gap, the Institute recommends that DOD and Congress work together to provide full funds to the Replicator and Collaborative Combat Aircraft initiative, which is a cost-effective technology to deploy drones. Researchers also encourage DOD to provide steady and predictable aid to the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) which stores critical information, data points, and resources that benefit NSIB development at DOD.

The full list of recommendations require Congress to cooperate for funding and oversight of these projects. With continual gridlock hindering lawmakers’ capabilities, the Reagan Institute and other national security officials will need to be steadfast in their advocacy.

## DEFENSE SECRETARY TO OVERRIDE CONGRESSIONAL DEADLOCK FOR UKRAINE FDUNDING

On his first international trip since his hospitalization, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III visited the Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany to meet with other defense officials in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group. The group is composed of more than 50 countries who support Ukraine’s defense against Russian aggression.

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On Tuesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, Secretary Austin addressed attendees, vowing that the United States will continue to support Ukraine's efforts to quash Russia's military advances. "I leave here full determined to keep U.S. security assistance and ammunition flowing," says Austin. This claim comes in the midst of a congressional deadlock blocking the necessary funds from being authorized.

The House of Representatives is delaying a bill that would authorize over \$60 billion for Ukrainian assistance that has already passed the Senate. The hold has caused The White House, the Department of Defense, and some lawmakers to scramble to provide our allies with the necessary resources.



Secretary Austin and Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov

To override Congress, the Pentagon identified a way to save approximately \$300 million in its contracts, which will be diverted to Ukraine. This decision is heavily scrutinized as DOD is reported to be \$10 billion overdrawn, and an estimated \$10 billion is needed to fully replenish Ukrainian arms stocks. According to some experts, the current inability of the United States to provide adequate funds to Ukraine is leaving other European allies skeptical.

Alternatively, some members of Congress began gathering signatures for a discharge petition, which would force the House to hold

a vote on the aid package. To succeed, the lawmakers pushing for the petition will need to get 218 signatures, a tall order given the ideological divides and razor-thin margins of the House.

At a press conference on Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup>, Germany, France, and Poland reiterated their support for Kyiv's defense. Germany pledged an additional €500 million (\$543 million) on Tuesday and expressed gratitude for Secretary Austin's efforts in the face of congressional difficulties.

### 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.

#### John Graham, New Hampshire

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

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Mr. Graham, along with Department Commander Leo Paquin and American Legion Auxiliary National Executive Committee member Terri Ouellette, met with Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and her veterans' affairs staffer. In Mr. Graham's report, he shared that Senator Hassan was eager to look into the Guard and Reserve Parity Act and a senate companion for HR 105, the TBI and PTSD Treatment Act.

Finally, Mr. Graham confirmed in his report that the Senator reiterated her support for Coast Guard parity, as well as for the full implementation of the PACT Act.

Thank you, Mr. Graham, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities. And thank you to Commander Paquin, and NECman Ouellette for your advocacy and hard work.

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

This week, Legislative Division (LegDiv) Staff worked with VE&E Staff on statement for the record for a hearing that took place on March 20<sup>th</sup>.



Invitation to the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony Honoring the Ghost Army of WWII

LegDiv Staff also continued work on bill reviews and lobbying priorities that have been of great importance this session. This includes work on the Toxic Exposure Fund, implementation of the Deborah Sampson Act, and VA home loan access.

Staff traveled to Capitol Hill multiple times this week. Testimony books were delivered to members of HVAC and SVAC, and the Distinguished Public Service Award was delivered to Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). In the midst of other meetings with congressional offices, LegDiv Staff accompanied National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer to a Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony.

The Ceremony honored the Ghost Army of World War II. The Ghost Army was a tactical deception unit of the US Army. Using fake equipment, trick radio transmissions, and illusions, the Ghost Army was critical in deceiving the Axis powers.

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).

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### UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at 5:00pm ET, no hearings are yet scheduled for the coming weeks.

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](#)