AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

July 19, 2024

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *Major Richard Star Act*! 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. To review our priorities, you can check out our Advocacy Toolkit.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

August 24-28, 2024 – The American Legion's 105th Annual National Convention! Held this year in New Orleans, this is the Legion's largest annual meeting. Here, you can learn from each other's creative solutions for success and challenges like those of your own Department. You do NOT need to be a delegate to attend! Reach out to your Department Headquarters or Adjutant to register and reserve a hotel room if you are interested in attending! You can find more information about convention, look over the calendar of events, and more here.

FEMALE VETERANS OF HEAVIER COMBAT FACE MORE CHRONIC PAIN, AS DO SPOUSES BACK HOME

This article's original publication can be found here.

A medical study of long-term chronic pain in combat veterans found troubling results for two groups of women: not only were women who faced heavy combat overseas more likely to develop chronic pain later in life, but so were female spouses back home whose husbands faced higher levels of violence.

The new study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association or JAMA, analyzed chronic pain diagnoses for women who deployed into combat zones and female dependents of U.S. troops who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan from 2006 to 2013, the height of combat rotations for both wars. Researchers then compared incidents of chronic pain to similar groups whose deployments or spouse's deployments were between 2014 to 2020, when troops saw less combat frequency.

"The main takeaway from the study is that heightened rigors of deployment, as we saw during the combination of the Iraq war troop surge and the troop surge that followed in Afghanistan, has an outsized effect on the development of chronic pain conditions down the road in active-duty service women," said Andrew Schoenfeld, the lead researcher. "But then also, this was the surprising part, an even higher magnitude when looking at the women who are civilian dependents of active-duty service members."
The findings suggest a stronger link between the mental health tolls of combat and chronic pain, even for those not directly exposed to combat, like military spouses. Researchers also found that chronic pain was more likely for those with previous behavioral health issues.

According to John Hopkins Medicine, chronic pain is defined as “long standing pain that persists beyond the usual recovery period or occurs along with a chronic health condition, such as arthritis.” Chronic pain can come in waves or be continuous and “may affect people to the point that they can’t work, eat properly, take part in physical activity, or enjoy life.”

According to the study, active-duty women in combat between 2006 and 2013 were 53% more likely to develop chronic pain. The risk for junior enlisted women was even higher with researchers finding they were 95% more likely to develop chronic pain symptoms.
While women in combat are “exposed to stresses of war” which includes risk of injury or death, Schoenfeld said it’s “understandable how there may be a higher risk associated with all those factors for the development of chronic pain.” But with dependents, researchers “were not expecting to see comparable or even the same signals,” he said.

Why study chronic pain in servicemembers?

Chronic pain is one of the leading causes of disability in the working-age population and affects as many as 100 million Americans. In the U.S., typical treatment for chronic pain involves opioids which can lead to substance abuse, dependence and addiction, resulting in annual costs as high as $635 billion, according to the study.
The prevalence of chronic pain is higher among U.S. veterans and those exposed to combat compared to their civilian peers.

Injured servicemembers returning from combat deployments in the Middle East coincided with the rise of pain medication prescriptions across the U.S. In 2009, military physicians wrote nearly 3.8 million prescriptions for pain medication which was more than four times more than 2001. In 2007, chronic opioid use peaked In the Army. However, more recently, studies have shown that prescribed opioid use is going down. A 2021 study that analyzed Military Health System data found “a significant decline” in opioid prescriptions for pain management.

Researchers recommended that officials target support services to service members and dependents with the greatest risk of developing chronic pain “including those from lower socioeconomic strata or individuals with behavioral health conditions.” They also said their recommendations could apply to civilian

women exposed to firearm injuries or mass casualty events and spouses or partners of individuals who experience similar traumas.

MARGARET KABAT SWORN IN AS VA'S NEXT CHIEF OF STAFF

The article's original publication can be found here.

Today, Margaret "Meg" Kabat was sworn in as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' chief of staff. In this senior leadership role, Chief of Staff Kabat will serve as the top advisor to the VA Secretary and Deputy Secretary and provide strategic leadership to the organization.

Chief of Staff Kabat — who has served as VA's principal senior advisor since January 2022 and senior advisor for families, caregivers, and survivors from January 2021 to January 2022 — brings to the role more than 25 years of experience serving Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. A licensed clinical social worker, she has played critical roles at VA in advancing efforts on expanding care for women Veterans, supporting caregivers, surpassing goals in getting Veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing, implementing the PACT Act, and expanding eligibility for those with Other Than Honorable discharge from service. Partly thanks to her leadership, VA is now delivering more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before —and Veterans report trusting VA at record rates.

"Meg is a tireless advocate for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors — and we're thrilled that she's going to be helping lead VA in this critical role," said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. "As our next chief of staff, she will undoubtedly continue to positively impact our organization and ensure we deliver on the most sacred mission there is: serving America's Veterans."

"On behalf of VA, my immense gratitude goes out to Kimberly Jackson for her excellent service and steadfast commitment to this nation and its Veterans," added **Secretary McDonough**.

"Serving Veterans, their caregivers, and their loved ones has been the greatest privilege in my career, and I am honored to continue driving our mission forward as VA's next chief of staff," said **VA Chief of Staff Margaret Kabat**. "As the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran and the granddaughter of a World War I and a World War II Veteran, I carry our mission close to my heart. I am so very grateful

to President Biden and Secretary McDonough for entrusting me with this great responsibility."

Learn more about Chief Kabat.

HOW THE SENATE NDAA WOULD AID LICENSE PORTABILITY FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

This article's original publication can be found here.

The Senate version of the FY 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes a critical provision aimed at supporting military families, addressing the challenges faced by military spouses in licensed or credentialed professions when they relocate across state lines.

This MOAA-supported provision would clarify previous changes to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) that were designed to ease these burdens, but fell short in execution by failing to require the issuance of a license in the new state.

Companies are reluctant to hire someone without an in-state license. The provision would require states to consider an out-of-state license valid if the spouse submits a proper application, and it would mandate states issue "a

license of similar scope" no more than 30 days after receiving that application, among other fixes.

Why is this update so important? With our uniformed services digging out of a recruiting crisis, addressing military spouse unemployment has the attention of Congress and DoD leaders. The notion that "we recruit the servicemember and retain the family" must be more than just a talking point. MOAA appreciates the resources and funding invested in addressing spouse employment, but the decade-plus 20% unemployment rate requires additional policy solutions.

This PCS season, military families will face many challenges. Getting a new "home" state to accept a professional license should not be one of them. A provision in the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 amended the SCRA and requires states to recognize spouses' valid professional licenses from other states (except for law licenses) when executing a military-mandated move. While well-intentioned, this language added to the SCRA mostly added confusion … for military spouses and for states. It did not mandate that the new state issue a license to the military spouse, for example, resulting in inconsistencies in applying the law.

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.

Marquis Palmer, California

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

Marquis reached out requesting updates on H.R. 2693—*Pay Our Coast Guard Act*, since the last action taking on this bill was in April 2023. He contacted Leslie Parker, the Director of Member Services and Coalitions and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. He also contacted Congressman Mark Takano to keep him up to date on his requests and the continued interest and support for this bill.

Thank you, Marquis, 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 paper 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

WELCOME to Chris Perillo, our new Legislative Associate! Chris comes to us from Long Island, NY and graduated from the University of Albany, SUNY. He commissioned from Officer Candidate School as a Field Artillery Officer in the National Guard and has been serving since February 2021. We are excited to have him on our team!

The National Legislative Council training session was held July 17th and Grassroots Program Manager Eric Johnson provided valuable information on how to connect more frequently with you member of Congress on the issues that matter to veterans, and ways to amplify The American Legion's position on national legislative issues. This training will be held quarterly via Zoom.

We have been preparing for National Convention in New Orleans August 24-28th. The **Legislative Commission meeting will be held on Saturday August 24th at 9am** and we look forward to hearing from Chairwoman Harris and Chairman Oertel. There will be two continuing education classes on Grassroots Outreach. Check the Convention website for schedules!

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of Friday, July 19, 2024, the following hearings are scheduled:

- July 22, 2024, at 4:30 PM EST, HVAC and Subcommittee on Technology Modernization hearing on “Report Card: Assessing Electronic Health Record Modernization at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center”
- July 23, 2024, at 10:00 AM EST, HVAC and House Small Business Subcommittee on Contracting and Infrastructure joint hearing on “Leveling the Playing Field: Examining the Landscape of Veteran Owned Small Businesses.”
- July 23, 2024, at 1:00 PM EST, HVAC Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Markup of pending legislation.
- July 23, 2024, at 1:30 PM EST, HVAC Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs on “Is the Veterans Benefits Administration Properly Processing and Deciding Veterans Claims?”

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