AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

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WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for the *GI Bill Parity Act!* Currently, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers only earn credit toward their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits when they mobilize and deploy for federal missions. National Guard and Reserve servicemembers activated under state orders do not accrue eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. This legislation aims to count every day spent on weekend drills, annual training, attending military school, participating in an exercise, or responding to a disaster toward GI Bill eligibility. *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.

HISTORIC BLACK FEMALE WWII UNIT RECEIVES CONGRESSIONAL HONOR

This article's original publication can be found here.

The only Black, all-female unit to serve in Europe during World War II, commonly known as the “Six Triple Eight,” was honored Tuesday with the Congressional Gold Medal, following a long-running campaign to recognize their efforts.

The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was credited with solving a growing mail crisis during its stint in England and, upon their return, serving as a role model to generations of Black women who joined the military.

They cleared out a backlog of about 17 million pieces of mail in three months, twice as fast as projected. The battalion would go on to serve in France before returning home. And like many Black units during World War II, their exploits never got the attention afforded their white counterparts — until now.

At a ceremony held in Emancipation Hall at the U.S. Capitol’s visitor center, House Speaker Mike Johnson presented the medal to the family of the unit commander, Lt. Col. Charity Adams Earley. More than 300 descendants of the women who served in the battalion were present in the crowd.

“This ceremony reflects one of the highest and most cherished traditions of our republic, one that’s roots stretch back all the way to General George Washington,” Johnson said in remarks at the event.

“The Six Triple Eight are great American patriots, loyal to a nation that, for far too long, failed to return the favor. And I’m glad to say that’s changing, and we’re doing that here today,” the House speaker continued.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader John Thune and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer delivered remarks alongside the lawmakers who co-sponsored the legislation enabling the medal. At least two dozen members of Congress were in attendance.

Kim Guise, senior curator and director of curatorial affairs at the National WWII Museum, said there are only two women living from the 855 who served in the unit. “That really shows how long this recognition took,” Guise said. “It is really important to recognize the accomplishments of these women and what they went through to serve their country in war time.”

Wisconsin Democratic Rep. Gwen Moore, who co-sponsored the legislation to award the medal to the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, called it a long-overdue honor for the women in the unit.

“These heroes deserve their dues; and I am so glad their story is being told,” Moore told The Associated Press on Monday. “I am especially honored to ensure my constituent, Ms. Anna Mae Robertson, and the many others who served with her, are recognized for their selfless service.”

In 2022, Congress voted 422-0 to bestow its highest honor on the 6888th.

“It’s overwhelming,” retired Maj. Fannie Griffin McClendon, who lives in Arizona, told The AP after the vote. “It’s something I never even thought about it.”

McClendon joined the Air Force after the military was integrated and retired in 1971. She was the first female to command an all-male squadron with the Strategic Air Command.

The 6888th was sent overseas in 1945, a time when there was growing pressure from African-American organizations to include Black women in what was called the Women’s Army Corps, and allow them to join their white counterparts overseas.

“They kept hollering about wanting us to go overseas so I guess they found something for us to do overseas: Take care of the mail,” McClendon said. “And there was an awful lot of mail. … They expected we were gonna be there about two or three months trying to get it straightened out. Well I think in about a month, in a month and a half, we had it all straightened out and going in the right direction.”

The 6888th toiled around the clock, processing about 65,000 pieces of mail in each of the three shifts. They created a system using locator cards with a service member’s name and unit number to ensure mail was delivered.

Over the years, the unit's story started to gain wider recognition. A monument was erected in 2018 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to honor them, and the 6888th was given the Meritorious Unit Commendation in 2019. A documentary "The Six Triple Eight" was made about their exploits. In 2024, Tyler Perry directed a movie for Netflix about the unit, starring Kerry Washington.

US SUPREME COURT RESOLVES PAY FIGHT IN FAVOR OF FEDERAL WORKERS WHO ALSO ARE MILITARY RESERVISTS

The article's original publication can be found here.

The U.S. Supreme Court said Wednesday that federal employees who also are in the military reserve must be paid the equivalent of their civilian salaries when called to active duty during national emergencies.

The 5-4 decision could affect hundreds of thousands of people, insuring that they don't suffer financially when they temporarily leave one form of government service for another.

The justices ruled in an appeal filed by an air traffic controller who spent about five years on active duty in the Coast Guard at a pay rate lower than what he earns as a Federal Aviation Administration employee.

Congress first adopted a differential pay statute in 2009, but the Justice Department argued that it only applied to people whose service had a strong connection to a national emergency.

The majority disagreed, finding that any reservist who is called to active duty during a national emergency bolsters the country's defenses and their salary should match what they would have made in their federal civilian jobs. Gorsuch was joined by Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, as well as Chief Justice John Roberts.

In a dissent, Justice Clarence Thomas pointed out that the country has been under one national emergency or another for decades and the majority's finding will create wider access to differential pay than Congress intended. Thomas wrote that he would have instead sent the case back to a lower court. He was joined by Justices Samuel Alito, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson.

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.

David Musser, Florida

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

David attended a town hall meeting held at American Legion Post 138 in Tampa, Florida held by Senator Ashley Moody. Secretary of the VA Doug Collins was also in attendance. At this town hall, they discussed the direction of the VA in the future as well as veterans' benefits.

Thank you, David, 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.

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the key legislation section of VoterVoice.

Register for Action Alerts today at
https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register

UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 5/1, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Monday, May 5, 3:00 PM: House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing -- "*Improving Access to External VA Care through Enhanced Scheduling Technology"*
- Tuesday, May 6, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services Full Committee Nomination Hearing -- "*To Consider the Nominations of: Mr. Anthony J. Tata to be Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; and Ms. Katherine E. Sutton to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy"*
- Tuesday, May 6, 11:30 AM: Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs -- "*Veterans at the Forefront: Secretary Collins on the Future at VA"*

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