AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

June 13, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to request support for *House Bill 1815!* This bill will provide a one-time bailout for veteran homeowners who are struggling to make their mortgage payments and are in delinquent status, facing foreclosure or a short sale of their property. If implemented, this bill will help veterans maintain homeownership and financial stability, enhance the effectiveness of the VA's housing assistance, and contribute to the overall market stability by reducing foreclosure rates. *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.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The American Legion's 106th National Convention is from August 22-28 in Tampa Bay, Florida. To stay up to date on information, schedules, and more, go to the information page here.

AMERICAN LEGION TESTIFIES TWICE ON KEY VETERAN LEGISLATION

This article's original publication can be found here

American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Director Cole Lyle testifies during the House Veterans Affairs Committee Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing. Photo by Sarah Silbiger

American Legion voices support for shielding veterans from fraud and human errors, holding VA staff accountable and more.

American Legion representatives testified twice June 11 on Capitol Hill on behalf of the nation's veterans, servicemembers and their families.

American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Director Cole Lyle expressed the organization's support for a series of bills under consideration by the House Veterans Affairs Committee's (HVAC) Oversight & Investigations Subcommittee.

Among the bills under consideration that the Legion supports:

• H.R. 984, which would amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide timely equitable relief to an individual who suffers a loss based on an administrative error by the Secretary, and for other purposes. "With the implementation of the PACT Act and record volume of claims submitted, the risk of human error has grown," Lyle said. "Veterans should not bear the financial or psychological burden of mistakes beyond their control."

• H.R. 1663, Veterans Scam and Fraud Evasion (VSAFE) Act of 2025. Veterans are 40% more likely to fall victim to scams, Lyle noted.

• H.R. 3185, Personnel Integrity in Veterans Affairs Act of 2025. "This legislation rightly balances due process with the need to maintain trust in the VA workforce," he said. "We

must hold ourselves to the same standards of honor and integrity we expect from those we serve."

• H.R. 3482, Veterans Community Care Scheduling Improvement Act.

• H.R. 3494, VA Hospital Inventory Management System Authorization Act.

In conclusion, Lyle told the subcommittee, "Our veterans do not ask for special treatment. They only ask for the care and benefits they earned delivered with competence, integrity and compassion. The bills under discussion today move us closer to that standard."

Also on June 11, American Legion Senior Policy Associate Andrew Petrie testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity on pending legislation affecting education, financial stability and housing for servicemembers, veterans and their families. Among the bills under consideration that the Legion supports:

• H.R. 1965: Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act, which under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program would increase the yearly book and supplies stipend for veteran students from $1,00 to $1,400.

• DRAFT: Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act, which would increase the monthly housing stipend under the Post9/11 Educational Assistance Program for individuals who pursue programs of education solely through distance learning on more than a half-time basis.

• H.R. 2791: To amend title 38, United States Code, this legislation would increase the maximum amount of Department of Veterans Affairs Home Loan Guaranty entitlement from 25 percent to 150 percent to enable veterans to achieve homeownership and expand access to stable housing.

• DRAFT: To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for homelessness benefits to ensure that servicemembers who were discharged under other than honorable conditions, excluding those separated by reason of a dishonorable discharge or General Court Martial sentencing, are included and not excluded from lifesaving assistance.

Lyle will also testify at a hearing that starts at 2:15 p.m. June 12 at the HVAC Health Subcommittee hearing. Watch the **livestream here.**

HOUSE PANEL PUSHES AHEAD $453 BILLION FUNDING PLAN FOR VA NEXT YEAR

This article's original publication can be found here

House Republican appropriators early Wednesday advanced a $453 billion budget plan for Veterans Affairs next year despite hours of objections from Democrats that looming reforms at the department could blunt the impact of the record funding levels for veterans programs.

The plan — which now moves to the full House for consideration — is the first portion of the annual federal budget approved by either chamber's appropriations committee.

But despite the typical bipartisan nature of the veterans bill, the 36-27 approval vote from the panel came after nearly 12 hours of grueling, contentious debate, with dozens of Democratic amendments rejected by the Republican majority.

The budget bill (which also includes $18 billion for military construction projects) is an increase in total VA program and benefits spending of more than $83 billion, or about 22%, from the fiscal 2025 approved levels.

But nearly all of that boost is in mandatory funding, tied up in medical programs and veterans benefits payouts. Discretionary funding — money for new program starts and support services — would rise to about $134 billion, up about 4% but about $1 billion less than what the White House requested in its fiscal 2026 budget plan.

Still, Republican leaders praised the measure as an important step forward in providing promised care and support to veterans.

"We have an obligation to ensure our veterans get the benefits and care they've earned," said Rep. John Carter, R-Texas and chairman of the appropriations' panel's subcommittee on veterans issues. "This bill does that, while also addressing other issues affecting veterans, including homelessness, mental health services and taking care of our women veterans."

The plan includes $34 billion for community care programs, which allow veterans to receive medical treatment at private-sector clinics paid for by taxpayer funds. That's up nearly 55% from this year's community care funding levels, prompting accusations of privatization from committee Democrats.

"By transferring record funding from VA medical services into community care, this bill pushes veterans into private care, even though veteran polls and studies show that

when given the option, veterans want to receive their medical care at VA," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla. and ranking member of the committee's veterans panel.

"We should invest more in VA, provider recruitment and retention incentives, increase benefits counselors and adjudicators, not ignore veterans wishes and speed recklessly into privatization."

Democratic lawmakers attempted to reallocate some of those funds through amendments, but those efforts were rebuffed. They also objected to provisions in the bill blocking abortion counseling and services at VA, halting department efforts to reduce its workforce by roughly 80,000 workers in coming months, and ending support options for some minority groups.

However, the committee did adopt one amendment by Rep. Lauren Underwood, D-Ill., that would block any reductions in staffing at the Veterans Crisis Line and other VA suicide prevention programs.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., said during Tuesday's debate that she hopes the appropriations package will see significant changes before a full chamber vote later this summer, particularly since White House officials have yet to release a detailed budget plan for the department next year.

House leaders have not yet announced when that vote will take place. Both the House and Senate will need to negotiate a full budget for the federal government before a compromise package can be signed into law. The new fiscal year starts on Oct. 1.

Veterans Affairs leaders have seen regular budget increases annually for more than 20 years, even amid frequent congressional and White House efforts to reduce federal spending.

In fiscal 2001, the VA budget — both mandatory and discretionary — totaled just $45 billion. In 2011, it was about $125 billion. In fiscal 2023, the total topped $300 billion for the first time.

If approved, the fiscal 2026 VA budget would surpass $400 billion in spending, marking an increase of more than 900% over the last 25 years.

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.

Darrel Maddux, Washington

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

Darrel met with Congressman Michael Baumgartner's staff to make arrangements for the Congressman to speak at the Department Convention that is being held in Spokane Valley, Washington in July. Darrel gave copies of legislation that the American Legion wants passed and reviewed and discussed the legislation. The Congressman's staff were only aware of one of the bills. They also had a long discussion of the roll out problems of the new test computer system at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane. They also discussed the problems with the availability of VSO's in the counties in northeastern Washington. The Congressman has been aware of these issues and is giving his full support to help find answers to this problem. Finally, the staff appointed Darrel to Congressman Baumgartner's Veterans Advisory Committee.

Thank you, Darrel, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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 6/12, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Wednesday, June 18, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services, Full Committee Hearing -- "*OPEN/CLOSED: To receive testimony on the Department of Defense budget request for Fiscal Year 2026 and the Future Years Defense Program"*

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