

LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION
Daniel Seehafer, Wisconsin, Chairman
Lawrence Montreuil, Virginia, Director

This report covers the activities of the Legislative Commission from Aug. 26, 2021, through Aug. 26, 2022. During this period, the Commission met one time to review the legislative program and to make recommendations to the National Executive Committee. Reports of these meetings are contained in the published proceedings of the National Executive Committee.

PURPOSE, PERSONNEL, AND ORGANIZATION

The Legislative Commission represents The American Legion before the Congress of the United States on all legislative matters in which The American Legion is officially interested. The commission also assists the National Executive Committee in formulating an appropriate legislative program for each session of Congress. The commission consists of 35 members and five National Executive Committee liaisons.

To further assist the commission in its work, the National Executive Committee created the National Legislative Council in 1975, composed of Legionnaires whose judgment and advice are respected by their members of Congress. There is one council member for each member. A chairman heads the council and is assisted by a vice chairman in each department. The chairman, vice chairmen and general membership of the council are appointed by the national commander upon recommendation by the departments.

The professional staff of the commission (the Legislative Division) concentrates on implementing the legislative mandates of The American Legion; these mandates are expressed in resolutions adopted at the annual national convention and by the National Executive Committee at each of its regularly scheduled meetings. The Legislative Division is located in Washington, D.C., and consists of the director, a senior legislative associate, two legislative associates, a legislative associate/grassroots coordinator and an administrative assistant. The director and associates are registered lobbyists and submit semi-annual lobbying reports to Congress; in addition, the Legion submits quarterly reports on legislation on which our organization lobbies Congress. Because The American Legion is a federally chartered organization, an annual report is also prepared and submitted to Congress.

117th Congress, 2nd Session

The Second Session of the 117th Congress began on Jan. 3, 2022. In November, Congress passed the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R.3684). Although it was much smaller than the original \$3.5 trillion frameworks, it retained a key provision that allocated \$65 billion to expand broadband access throughout the country. Expansion of broadband services has been essential to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is able to leverage telehealth and other broadband-dependent health-care modalities to ensure that veterans, especially those located in rural communities, have increased access to care.

On March 15, President Biden enacted Public Law (P.L.) 117-35, the omnibus spending measure for fiscal year (FY) 2022. The overall bill contains \$1.5 trillion to fund the operations of the federal government until Sept. 30, 2022. VA received a total of \$112.2 billion in discretionary funding for the remainder of FY22, in addition, to advance appropriations of \$111 billion (discretionary) and \$161 billion (mandatory) for FY23, which begins on Oct. 1.

The package includes \$882 million for the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program and \$4.9 billion for VA Community Care. It also includes the VA Nurse and Physician Assistant RAISE Act, which was introduced by Rep. Underwood (IL), and will allow advanced-practice registered nurses and physician assistants an increase in salary to combat record-high turnover rates among VA health-care workers.

On March 28, President Biden released the FY23 budget request. The requested budget calls for \$5.8 trillion and has significant increases in non-defense spending. It includes \$1.6 trillion in discretionary funding, which is nearly a 9-percent increase from FY22. \$135 billion of this discretionary funding is for VA, 20 percent more than the previous year's funding.

In July, the House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). It includes a number of Legion legislative priorities which are elaborated upon in the National Security section of this report below. The full Senate has not yet considered its version of the FY23 NDAA bill; it is likely to do so in November.

On Aug. 8, President Biden signed the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act into law. The Senate first passed the PACT Act in June, but unfortunately a technical error with the workforce provisions created a delay that forced Congress to vote on the bill again. When the Senate had the opportunity to allow cloture to be invoked, which would end debate over the legislation, 25 senators who previously supported the bill voted to continue debate over the bill, thus delaying final passage. A deal was made to allow senators to vote on amendments, thus clearing the way for the PACT Act to pass the Senate 86-11. This historic and bipartisan legislation creates a scientific framework for future presumptive conditions, a concession of exposure, and service presumptions for toxic exposures across the last five decades, increasing access for an estimated 3.5 million veterans to receive care and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

On Aug. 9, President Biden signed the CHIPS and Science Act, which seeks to increase the supply of semiconductors and promote research and development of advanced technologies in the United States.

On Aug. 16, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act. The Inflation Reduction Act works to reduce the deficit by reforming the corporate tax and increasing funding to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). It also reforms prescription drug pricing and increases environmental protections.

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

The American Legion has provided input on 143 pieces of veteran health-care legislation and testified seven times before the Senate and the House of Representatives on topics surrounding veterans' health care. Specifically, the Legislative Division has focused on issues related to toxic exposure, mental health, suicide prevention and women veterans. However, the Legislative Division monitors many other topics including the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program, VA's Community Care Program, caregivers, long-term care, VA sexual harassment, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, minority veterans and a variety of other issues.

The American Legion has testified and submitted statements for the record (SFR) several times before the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on a variety of veteran health-care subtopics. On Oct. 13, 2021, The American Legion submitted an SFR for HVAC's Health Subcommittee hearing on pending legislation. Topics included VA's Solid Start Program, VA's Governor's Challenge and the Veterans Justice Outreach Program. to name a few. Later the next month

on Nov. 17, 2021, VA&R Director Katie Purswell testified before HVAC's DAMA Subcommittee on military sexual trauma.

On March 30, 2022, Deputy Health Policy Director Tiffany Ellett testified before HVAC's Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee on pending legislation related to VA supply chain management, minority veterans, VA inclusion and diversity efforts, and community care oversight. Later in 2022, on September 29, VA&R Health Policy Analyst Kenneth Harman submitted an SFR to HVAC's Health Subcommittee for their suicide prevention hearing. The American Legion was also invited to join several roundtable discussions with other large VSOs hosted by HVAC's Women Veterans Task Force.

Given the comprehensive nature of previous legislation signed into law, The American Legion continually monitors its implementation to ensure veterans receive their congressionally mandated and earned care. These bills include P.L. 116-171 – *the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act*, P.L. 116-315 – *the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act*, P.L. 117-21 – *the Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act*, P.L. 117-37 – *the PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act*, and P.L. 117-135 – *the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans Act*.

Mental health and suicide prevention continue to be a priority for both The American Legion and Congress in this space. To this end, The American Legion has focused these efforts on advocating for alternative therapies, peer support and timely access to traditional care. Most importantly, The American Legion has vociferously lobbied in support of H.R. 6411 – *the STRONG Veterans Act*, a veteran mental health omnibus package containing dozens of provisions from standalone pieces of legislation The American Legion has supported. These provisions include authorizing VA to create an annual VA Buddy Check Week, ensuring VA medical centers have at least one full-time minority veteran coordinator, updating the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, and expanding specific scholarships and loan repayment programs for VA mental health providers, among many other provisions.

In the alternative therapy space, The American Legion has supported increasing access to hyperbaric oxygen therapy and medicinal cannabis through legislation such as H.R. 2916 – *the VA Medical Cannabis Research Act*, H.R. 5977 – *the States Reform Act*, and H.R. 6991, which would establish a VA policy on medicinal cannabis. To improve VA peer support services, The American Legion has supported H.R. 4575 – *the Veteran Peer Specialist Act*, which would demand VA make permanent the program that establishes at least two peer specialists in patient-aligned care teams at VA medical centers to promote the use and integration of mental health services. In addition, The American Legion continues to advocate for S.544 – a bill requiring VA to incorporate an annual Buddy Check Week as a standalone. In October 2021, it passed through the Senate and is now awaiting action in the House. Additionally, The American Legion has supported H.R. 5073 – *the Revising and Expediting Actions for the Crisis Hotline for Veterans Act*, H.R. 6273 – *the VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Project Act*, and H.R. 7116 – *the 9-8-8 Implementation Act*.

Expanding VA health-care eligibility for WWII veterans continues to be a priority for The American Legion. Two bills to achieve this goal have been introduced – H.R. 5562 and S.1040. Since the last national convention, H.R. 5562 was included in an HVAC hearing and markup where, in November 2021, it was ordered to be reported by voice vote favorably. Since then, the Legislative Division has actively worked to get this legislative text included in the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act language.

Improving the provision of dental health-care services to veterans at VA is a goal of The American Legion. This is why The American Legion has supported H.R. 914 – *the Dental Care for Veterans Act* and S.3017 – *the Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act*. Both pieces of legislation

seek to expand eligibility for veterans for VA dental care based on factors such as service-connected disability, prisoner of war status, financial need or VA health-care eligibility.

Increasing access to care for rural veterans continues to be a priority. The American Legion has supported H.R. 3730 - *a bill to establish a VA Advisory Committee on U.S. Outlying Areas*, H.R. 5941 - *the Fairness for Rural Veterans Act*, and H.R. 7414 - *the RURAL Veterans Act*. These pieces of legislation aim to require VA to establish an Office of Rural Recruitment to improve health-care professional recruitment at VA, provide priority consideration for the granting of state home facility grants to nursing homes located at least 100 miles away from an existing facility, and establish a committee which gives guidance to VA on matters relating to veterans in U.S. territories.

The American Legion has also lobbied to expand VA Vet Center services. As a part of this effort, The American Legion has endorsed H.R. 3674 - *the Vet Center Support Act*, H.R. 5543 - *the Vet CENTERS for Mental Health Act*, and S.2924 - *the Vet Center Outreach Act of 2021*. These pieces of legislation seek to require VA to report on VA mental health care furnished to veterans in states that have a ratio of one Vet Center per 100,000 veterans, mandate VA ensure the number of Vet Centers in certain states is increased by at least one if VA determines the state meets specified requirements, and have VA take specific action to provide information on Vet Centers to servicemembers who are transitioning to civilian life.

Women veterans' issues remain a top priority for the Legislative Division. To this end, The American Legion has supported legislation such as H.R. 4218 - *the Women Veterans Report Act*, H.R. 5212 - *the Improving Oversight of Women Veterans' Care Act*, and H.R. 7508 - *the Improving Specialty Care for Women Veterans Act*. These legislative efforts seek to require VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans to report annually on VA's women veterans' programs and activities, mandate VA submit an annual report to Congress on women veterans' access to gender-specific services under arrangements entered into by VA with non-VA providers, and authorize VA to implement a recruitment, retention and training program for women-veteran specialty care providers.

The American Legion has remained active in participating in conversations within the VSO community regarding VA's Federal Supremacy Project, which is currently in the process of implementing a National Standards of Practice (NSP) for VA physicians and health-care professionals. In October 2021, The American Legion sent a letter to HVAC's Health Subcommittee leadership requesting a hearing on VA's implementation of NSP and concerns regarding the impact these standards would have on veterans' quality of care and inadequate VSO and stakeholder inclusion in VA rulemaking. Since then, the Legislative Division has met with the office staff of Rep. Greg Murphy and Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, both of whom are physicians who serve on HVAC, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology to discuss the issue.

The American Legion has provided input on 86 pieces of legislation under the HVAC DAMA subcommittee's jurisdiction and testified three times before the Senate and the House of Representatives on topics surrounding veterans' benefits and health care.

The issue of concurrent receipt has imposed an unjust offset upon disabled veterans. Currently, over 50,000 medically retired veterans are denied their full retirement pay and disability compensation. The Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S. 344) would repeal this offset, allowing these combat-injured disabled veterans to receive both their retirement pay and their disability compensation. Cosponsors for this legislation have grown to 299 co-sponsors in the House and 63 in the Senate. These widespread bipartisan and bicameral cosponsors are a direct result of our Legionnaires' engagement with members

of Congress on this issue. The Senate will look to vote on this legislation by including it in the NDAA through the amendment process.

The 117th Congress demonstrated its ability to work together in a bipartisan and bicameral manner by passing the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act (S. 3373). The PACT Act creates concessions of exposure, a scientific framework, and establishes presumptive conditions for a wide range of toxic exposures from the Vietnam War to the present, making it easier for veterans to obtain care and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. American Legion National Commander Paul E. Dillard advocated relentlessly for the bill traveling across the country and speaking about the effects of burn pits and Agent Orange on sick veterans and their families. Our digital grassroots campaign for the PACT Act was the most successful digital campaign for The American Legion. Commander Dillard was on hand at the White House for the bill signing and thanked all the 1.6 million Legionnaires that stepped up and advocated for our sick veterans.

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Since September 2021, The American Legion has testified four times before the House of Representatives on veterans employment and education, and submitted one statement for the record. The National Legislative Division has broadened American Legion advocacy for veterans employment into six separate areas: improving the transition assistance program, improving the VA Home Loan program, addressing veteran homelessness, financial protections against predatory lenders, prioritizing veterans in federal contracting and improving the GI Bill.

The American Legion continued to monitor the extension of emergency protections for GI Bill housing payments in connection with the COVID pandemic. With many schools announcing plans to continue virtual learning for the spring 2022 semester, many veterans were at risk of losing their in-person housing allowances unless their COVID emergency protections were extended beyond Dec. 21. Less than 48 hours from the deadline with pressure from The American Legion, Congress passed the Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions Act (REMOTE Act), which extended housing allowances for virtual learning to June 2022.

While this legislation protected thousands of veterans whose schools returned to virtual environments for the spring 2022 semester, a long-term answer must still be established for unforeseen contingencies. To prevent any future pandemics or national emergencies from affecting veterans' education benefits, The American Legion continues to advocate for passage of H.R.7939, the Student Veteran Emergency Relief Act of 2022. This legislation would extend the technical language specified in the REMOTE Act protections for all cases when the president declares a state of emergency, or when the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines there is an emergency for purposes of the laws administered by the secretary.

The American Legion's advocacy for veteran-owned small businesses has continued to encourage Congress to compel federal agencies to prioritize veterans in federal contracting. While all federal agencies are required to comply with prime and subcontracting quotas to SDVOSBs as mandated by Public Law 106-50, VA has been able to consistently exceed its quota. Many attribute this to its employment of the Vets First Contracting Program, which streamlines procurement preference for Service-Disabled Veteran (SDVOSB) and Veteran (VOSB) Owned Small Businesses. To protect this best-practice as VA moves to migrate from its own acquisition program Med/Surg Prime Vendor (MSPV 2.0) to the Department of Defense Logistics Agency's (DLA) MSPV program, the National Legislative Division is working with congressional offices to draft legislation making Veterans First Contracting Program a requirement for the

Department of Defense (DOD) to allow for competition restricted to Service-Disabled Veteran (SDVOSB) and Veteran (VOSB) Owned Small Businesses.

NATIONAL SECURITY

In the time period between the 2021 and 2022 national conventions, the Legislative Division's National Security team has focused on legislation to assist Afghans with temporary status to apply for permanent legal residency, and to improve and update the Special Immigrant Visa process for Afghans who served alongside U.S. servicemembers; legislation that would improve naturalization procedures for non-citizens in the Armed Forces and provide protections from deportation for non-citizen veterans; the Legion reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine; legislation that repeals outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMFs); legislation to improve military quality of life for U.S. servicemembers; and the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act as a vehicle for Legion legislative priorities. Each of the above are addressed in more detail below. Eleven bill reviews were completed of legislation that falls within the purview of the National Security Commission.

Through Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), as of the end of December 2021, the United States welcomed more than 76,000 Afghans in the aftermath of the ending of the war in Afghanistan. They were flown to the States and assigned to a U.S. military base where they went through medical screening, received vaccinations and awaited word on where they would be resettled. As per the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) December 2021 Report on OAW, DHS estimates that 36,433 of those 76,000 Afghan evacuees remain in legal limbo because they do not have a clear path to green card status (such as a pending SIV application).

In the wake of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the surge of applications for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, The American Legion tapped into its grassroots network to engage Congress on providing staff support. On Aug. 25, the National Legislative Division sent a message to all members of the National Legislative Council urging congressional offices to establish SIV pipelines with the State Department to help fleeing refugees. On Sept. 30, 2021, President Biden signed a continuing resolution (CR) that included the Legion-supported *Welcoming Evacuees Coming from Overseas to Mitigate Effects of Displacement Act of 2021*, also known as the *WELCOMED Act* into law. The CR included \$1.68 billion for Afghan resettlement. Because Afghan refugees had to be resettled so quickly into the United States under humanitarian parole, many were not eligible for the government benefits America provides refugees entering through traditional processes like the SIV program. The *WELCOMED Act* provides Afghan refugees on humanitarian parole with the benefits they need to start a life in the United States.

On March 15, 2022, the Biden administration announced new immigration protections for individuals from Afghanistan, including the 76,000 Afghan refugees who have come to the United States since last summer's military withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Department of Homeland Security granted temporary protected status (TPS) to certain Afghans for 18 months. To qualify, individuals must have lived in the United States since March 15, 2022. TPS will provide additional protections and assurances to trusted partners and vulnerable Afghans who supported the U.S. military, diplomatic and humanitarian missions in Afghanistan over the last 20 years. While TPS offers temporary protection from deportation for Afghans already in the United States, it is not a durable solution. TPS is a temporary benefit that does not lead to lawful permanent residency or provide access to any other immigration status.

As of April 2022, The American Legion was working with members of Congress on the introduction and passage of legislation that will allow Afghans paroled into the United States as part of Operation Allies Welcome to apply for a green card one year after arrival to provide them with a path to citizenship and improve and update the Special Immigrant Visa process. These efforts came to fruition with the introduction on Aug. 9, 2022, of the Afghan Adjustment Act in the House (H.R.8685) and Senate (S.4787).

Modeled after bipartisan bills that Congress has passed in the wake of other humanitarian crises, including the Vietnam War, the Afghan Adjustment Act would:

- Allow Afghans on humanitarian status who submit to additional vetting to apply for permanent legal status. For these Afghans, the primary options under current law to gain permanent status are through our asylum system or the burdensome SIV process;
- Expand the SIV program to include four previously omitted groups, including the Female Tactical Teams of Afghanistan, the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command, the Afghan Air Force and the Special Mission Wing of Afghanistan;
- Establish a task force to develop and implement a strategy for supporting Afghans outside the United States who are eligible for SIV status, and require the Department of State to respond to congressional inquiries about SIV applications.

On Aug. 10, 2022, The American Legion and other advocates gathered in Washington, DC, for a press conference to urge Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act. Legion staff delivered remarks emphasizing The American Legion's strong support for this legislation, saying that not only is it the right thing to do, but it is also a matter of national security.

Regarding non-citizen immigrant servicemembers and veterans, The American Legion believes all non-citizen immigrant veterans should be afforded every opportunity to complete the process toward citizenship before exiting the military and that civilian opportunities should also be bolstered for veterans and their family members. The American Legion has testified on this issue several times earlier in the 117th Congress, once in a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing and once in a House Veterans' Affairs hearing. The American Legion again advocated for these veterans and servicemembers in a statement for the record submitted to the House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship for a June 29, 2022, hearing on the oversight of immigrant military members and veterans. In the statement, The American Legion expressed support for two bills to address the issues.

In the House, we support H.R. 7946, the Veteran Service Recognition Act of 2022. This legislation would prevent the deportation of veterans by making the naturalization process easier for active-duty servicemembers, establishing a review process for non-citizen veterans, servicemembers and their families, and creating an opportunity for deported veterans to obtain legal permanent resident status. In the Senate, we support the S.2265, the Veterans Visa and Protection Act of 2021. Among other things, it would prohibit the deportation of certain non-citizen veterans, establish a visa program through which deported veterans may enter the United States as legal permanent residents and allows non-citizen veterans in the United States who are ordered for removal to adjust their immigration status to that of a legal permanent resident, enable legal permanent residents to obtain naturalization through military service, and extend military and veterans benefits to those who were deported who would otherwise be eligible for those benefits.

The National Legislative Division has continued its advocacy to address the end of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan by replacing outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF) and urging Congress to re-establish its oversight of foreign policy decision-making. In the House, The American Legion supports H.R.3261, which would repeal the 1991 AUMF for military action against Iraq, and H.R.256, which repeals the AUMF for military action against Iraq in 2002. In the Senate, The American Legion supports S.J.Res.10, which would repeal both the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs against Iraq. The American Legion also supports broader bipartisan legislation that aims to restore the balance of power between the president and Congress by reclaiming congressional oversight of arms sales, emergency declarations and the use of military force. In the House, The American Legion is working on passage of H.R.5410; the *National Security Reforms and Accountability Act* and in the Senate, S.2391; the *National Security Powers Act of 2021*.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, prompted enormous attention on Capitol Hill. On Feb. 28, 2022, The American Legion's National Executive Committee passed an emergency resolution

calling for “peaceful conflict resolution in Ukraine,” and opposing combat operations for U.S. troops unless certain conditions are fulfilled. According to Resolution 1: Statement on Ukraine, The American Legion will not support related U.S. combat operations unless the president clearly explains why such operations are in “our vital national interests” and mission guidelines are established to include a clear exit strategy. The resolution also states that the organization’s support for such a mission be contingent on congressional authorization for the use of military force and that American forces be commanded only by U.S. officers. The resolution also makes clear that the organization would not support combat deployments of U.S. troops “in defense of non-NATO member countries,” because of Russia’s actions.

The statement was shared with every congressional office that day.

In Congress, a broad, bipartisan coalition of lawmakers urged the president to not send U.S. troops into Ukraine, or declare war, before receiving authorization from Congress. President Biden has not dispatched troops to Ukraine following Russia’s invasion and has said he does not intend to do so, but announced sanctions on Russia, as well the delivery of lethal and non-lethal aid to Ukraine.

On April 28, 2022, the House of Representatives passed S.3522: *Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022*, Legion-supported legislation establishing a lend-lease program to make it easier for the United States to send military aid to Ukraine. It would make it easier to provide support to Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia’s invasion, which had entered its third month. The Senate passed the legislation by voice vote earlier in April as part of a deal to end permanent normal trade relations with Russia and Belarus, as well as a bill to ban Russian oil imports.

The National Legislative Division has increased its focus on improving military quality of life for U.S. servicemembers. Over the last several months, Legislative staff have had meetings with the offices of Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Rep. Nikema Williams (D-GA) regarding efforts to reduce housing costs for active-duty servicemembers and their families. Legislative solutions to this issue include increasing the housing supply on-base and off-base, and modifying the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to reflect the regions servicemembers reside in more adequately. The American Legion is also beginning to engage with staff and other organizations on food insecurity within the military by improving the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA).

In July 2022, the House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which essentially authorizes all Pentagon and National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) weapons, salaries and support, and outlines the U.S. national security strategy for the year ahead. This year’s House-passed version of the bill was more than 1,300 pages long and authorizes more than \$850 billion for spending on defense programs at the Department of Defense, Department of Energy and other defense-related programs, including about \$50 billion for nuclear weapons. A total of 1,220 amendments were offered to the bill. In the end, the House Rules Committee permitted votes on 650 amendments, mostly of them in *en bloc* groups of amendments adopted by voice votes. Among the Legion-supported amendments adopted were ones that:

- Expands eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs hospital care, medical services and nursing home care to include veterans of World War II who are not already covered.
- Require the Department of Defense to annually report to the House Armed Services Committee the numbers of noncitizen servicemembers, their immigration status and the annual naturalization numbers of those serving.
- Authorize the president to award the Medal of Honor to E. Royce Williams for acts of valor beyond the call of duty during the Korean War on Nov. 18, 1952, while a member of the U.S. Navy.
- Repeals the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq.
- Repeals the 1991 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution.
- Repeals the 1957 Authorization for Use of Military Force in the Middle East.

- Expresses the Sense of Congress that Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMFs) should include a sunset provision. Specifically: (1) the inclusion of a sunset provision or reauthorization requirement in authorizations for use of military force is critical to ensuring Congress's exercise of its constitutional duty to declare war; and (2) any joint resolution enacted to authorize the introduction of United States forces into hostilities or into situations where there is a serious risk of hostilities should include a sunset provision setting forth a date certain for the termination of the authorization for the use of such forces absent the enactment of a subsequent specific statutory authorization for such use of the United States forces.
- Requires the State Department to surge capacity to process Afghan special immigrant visas and P1, P2 visa applications. "Surge capacity" can include sending additional consular personnel to embassies and consulates in the region processing Afghan visas.

As of September 2022, the full Senate has not yet considered its version of the FY23 NDAA bill; it may do so in September. The National Legislative Division is working with Senate offices to offer the above Legion-supported amendments as part of the Senate version with the aim of keeping as many of them as possible in the final version of the bill that passes Congress and reaches the president's desk.

AMERICANISM

During the second session of the 117th Congress, The American Legion continues looking for additional co-sponsors for H.R.4212, the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021, which would amend the United States Flag Code to reflect current, accepted patriotic practices. The American Legion passed Resolution No. 19: Flag Code Amendment in 2016 to codify these patriotic practices.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The American Legion has worked with Sen. Joni Ernst (IA) and Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18) to introduce legislation requiring VA to establish a "Buddy Check Week" for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans. As part of Buddy Check Week, VA would be mandated to publish an online script for veterans to use to conduct peer wellness checks, conduct online and in-person training, and increase staffing on the Veterans Crisis Line.

H.R. 3405 is the House version, has 35 bipartisan co-sponsors, and was referred to the HVAC Health Subcommittee on Aug. 2, 2021. S.544 is the Senate version, has 23 bipartisan co-sponsors, and passed the Senate on Oct. 7, 2021. It is now awaiting action in the House. Additionally, it has been included as a provision in H.R. 6411 – *the STRONG Veterans Act*, which is a veteran mental health omnibus bill. H.R. 6411 passed the House on June 23, 2022, and is now awaiting action in the Senate.

Since then, the Legislative Division has sent out several email blasts and action alerts to Capitol Hill veterans policy staffers through Congressional Quarterly and Voter Voice in support of S.544 and H.R. 6411. Furthermore, on Sept. 29, 2022, during an HVAC Health Subcommittee hearing on suicide prevention, The American Legion submitted a statement for the record where we discussed the need for a VA Buddy Check Week.