

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

The American Legion is urging Congress to pass the *Love Lives On Act* (S. 1266 / H.R. 3651). Without this bill, Gold Star Spouses over 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 is also proud to support S. 3546, the *Veterans Mental Health and Addiction Therapy Quality of Care Act*. S. 3546 aims to evaluate the quality of mental health services at the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) and non-Department providers. If you would like to contact your representatives in support of this bill, H.R. 542, H.R. 3848, or H.R. 3581, you can visit our [grassroots actions center](#) to identify and email your elected official.

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 our [Advocacy Toolkit](#).

### THE LEGION CALLS FOR AFGHAN ADJUSTMENT IN DEFENSE SUPPLEMENTAL BILL

*This article's original publication can be found [here](#).*



*Legion Staff, National Security Chair Matthew Shuman, and Senator Amy Klobuchar at a press conference for Afghan Adjustment*

Today, The American Legion joined with other organizations in calling for the U.S. Senate to include legislation in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 that will adjust the status of our Afghan allies while assisting those still in Afghanistan and other countries.

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The [letter](#) was sent to Senate Majority Leader Sen. Charles Schumer and Minority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell and reads, in part, “It has been over two years since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the evacuation of over 80,000 Afghans to the United States; however, the lives of our brave wartime allies remain imperiled. Legislation providing adjustment of status for Afghans in the U.S. and support to the nearly 150,000 Afghan allies still abroad is vital, and we cannot continue to miss opportunities to include critical provisions in the few legislative vehicles available.”

Joining The American Legion in signing the letter were Veterans of Foreign Wars, Operation Recovery, No One Left Behind and With Honor. “Providing a path to permanent, legal residency has broad political support, as evidenced by bipartisan legislation like the Afghan Adjustment Act and the Afghan Allies Protection Act, as well as national polling showing nearly 90% support amongst Americans for fulfilling our promises to our Afghan allies,” the five organizations wrote. “Providing legal residency to our allies after they are fully vetted is a moral and national security imperative. Congress has failed over the last two years to pass necessary legislation. Political infighting and partisan acrimony have made passing bipartisan legislation increasingly difficult, but our allies can no longer be casualties of this inaction in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 and to support passage of the bill.”

American Legion Family members are encouraged to contact their senators and call for Afghan adjustment legislation in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 and for passage of the supplemental legislation.

The text of the [letter](#) is posted below.

"An entire generation of Afghan allies grew up believing in American ideals of freedom and democracy. Our allies are now paying for their service with bloodshed." Elizabeth Lynn, Operation Recovery

It has been over two years since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the evacuation of over 80,000 Afghans to the United States; however, the lives of our brave wartime allies remain imperiled. Legislation providing adjustment of status for Afghans in the U.S. and support to the nearly 150,000 Afghan allies still abroad is vital, and we cannot continue to miss opportunities to include critical provisions in the few legislative vehicles available. As Congress considers the defense supplemental, The American Legion, No One Left Behind, Operation Recovery, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and With Honor Action strongly support the swift passage of legislation that will adjust the status of our Afghan allies and assist those still in Afghanistan and third countries. We urge all Senators to support such legislation’s inclusion in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 and to support passage of the bill.

Providing a path to permanent, legal residency has broad political support, as evidenced by bipartisan legislation like the Afghan Adjustment Act and the Afghan Allies Protection Act, as well as national polling showing nearly 90% support amongst Americans for fulfilling our promises to our Afghan allies. Providing legal residency to our allies after they are fully vetted is a moral and national security imperative. Congress has failed over the last two years to pass necessary legislation. Political infighting and partisan acrimony have made passing bipartisan legislation increasingly difficult, but our allies can no longer be casualties of this inaction. Therefore, we strongly support the swift passage of the proposed defense supplemental package and its inclusion of Afghan adjustment.

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After two decades of service alongside American troops, there is no population in the world more deserving of American support. The nearly 80,000 Afghans who were evacuated to the United States are building new lives upon trapdoors, and the nearly 150,000 allies left behind face persecution, oppression, and, at worst, execution by the Taliban because they worked with the American military and trusted us to keep them safe. Despite their loyalty and shared sacrifices, the Afghans we evacuated during the fall of Kabul remain in a debilitating legal limbo in the United States while the Taliban hunt down their colleagues, family members, and loved ones. To correct this moral injury, we must support our Afghan allies – both those here in the United States and those trapped abroad. Thousands of lives are at stake, and so is our sacred honor as a nation.

### FINANCIAL READINESS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

As global conflicts compound and uncertainties grow about the United States' homeland security, operational readiness has a prime concern among officials in the defense community. A well-trained military with robust manpower and sophisticated equipment are all critical to developing readiness but are superfluous if military families do not have financial stability and the necessary resources to perform wartime duties.

A [2022 report by the Congressional Research Service](#) dives into the concept of financial readiness and why it is a challenge for Department of Defense (DOD) operations. On top of frequent and unpredictable relocation and employment and spouses, about half of active duty enlisted members are under the age of 26 meaning that they have had very little time to build savings.



Last week, the [House Armed Services Committee Military Quality of Life Panel](#) discussed military spouse employment, childcare, housing, and financial uncertainty as barriers to servicemembers' readiness. Much of the legislation on these topics will be found in the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). But, with the support of The American Legion, there are many lawmakers taking the initiative to create stand-alone legislation benefitting military families and operational readiness.

[The Military Family Protection from Debt Act \(H.R. 5190\)](#) was introduced by Congressman Andy Kim (D-NJ-3) in August of 2023. The bill aims to ensure that the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, which caps interest rates for servicemembers at 6%, can be extended to both military spouses and dependents. According to the [Congressman](#), "Military families sacrifice along side servicemembers when on deployment and Congress should provide them with any protections they need to be able to keep food on the table and a roof over their head." Through Resolution No. 342: Support and Strengthen the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, The American Legion is proud to support this bill, and applauds Congressman Kim's efforts to support military families.

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*The Military Spouse Hiring Act (H.R. 1277/S. 596)*, which has the support of 143 lawmakers in the House and 47 in the Senate, also aims to support the military families who are critical to the readiness of servicemembers. *The Military Spouse Hiring Act* would amend tax code, allowing business to receive the Work Opportunity Tax Credit when they hire military spouses. With frequent relocation and unpredictable timelines looming over their careers, military spouses have struggled to secure meaningful and beneficial jobs for far too long. By incentivizing employers to hire qualified military spouses, one obstacle to military family well being could be surpassed.

Along with these bills, The American Legion supports any legislation that aids military families under our resolutions. As lawmakers consider appropriations for the upcoming NDAA and prepare our military for the possible escalation of global conflict, we hope that military families are given the benefit and consideration they deserve.

### 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.

#### Henry Bassman, New Jersey

I would like to recognize Mr. Henry Bassman, Department of New Jersey, as the Legionnaire of the Week.

Because Congressman Tom Kean Jr. (R-NJ-7) will not be in the Capitol for Washington Conference, Mr. Bassman met with him last week to ensure that The American Legion's Legislative Agenda for 2024 could be represented in his work. Accompanied by Past Commander of NJ Post 322 William Rapp and NJ Department Commander Dan Channel, Mr. Bassman briefed the Congressman and his district deputy on each of the The American Legion priorities for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. According to Mr. Bassman's report, Congressman Kean is "extremely supportive of our legislative agenda."

Mr. Bassman, your actions are exemplary of the dedication and leadership for which The American Legion is known. Your efforts are greatly appreciated, and critical to the Legion's mission.

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

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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).

### UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

On Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup> at 8:30am ET, the Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party will hold a field hearing in Boston, Massachusetts titled "Growing Stakes: The Bioeconomy and American National Security." To watch this hearing, please click [here](#).

On Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am ET, the House Foreign Affairs Committee will hold a hearing titled "AUKUS Implementation and Challenges to International Security and Arms Control in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." To watch this hearing, please click [here](#).

On Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 10:15am ET, the House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing titled "VA's HR Office: Did Leaders Ignore and Perpetrate Sexual Harassment?" To watch this hearing, please click [here](#).

On Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm ET, the House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs will hold a hearing titled "Is VA Illegally Spending Taxpayer Dollars on its Compensation and Pension Programs?" To watch this hearing, please click [here](#).

On Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm ET, House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia will hold a hearing titled "Iran's Proxy in Yemen" The Houthi Threat to Middle East Stability, Global Shipping, And U.S. Servicemembers" To watch, please click [here](#).

On Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup> at 8:00am ET, the House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Technology Modernization will hold a hearing titled "Electronic Health Record Modernization Deep Dive: Can the Oracle Pharmacy Software Be Made Safe and Effective?" As of Friday, Friday 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:15am, no link has been posted to watch this hearing.

On Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am ET, the House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing titled "Artificial Intelligence at VA: Exploring Its Current State and Future Possibilities." To watch this hearing, please click [here](#).

On Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm ET, the House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a hearing titled "Sink or Swim?: A Deep Dive into the Current State of VA's Home Loan Program in a Competitive Market." ?" As of Friday, Friday 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:15am, no link has been posted to watch this hearing.