

National Legislative Division Weekly

PACT ACT UPDATE

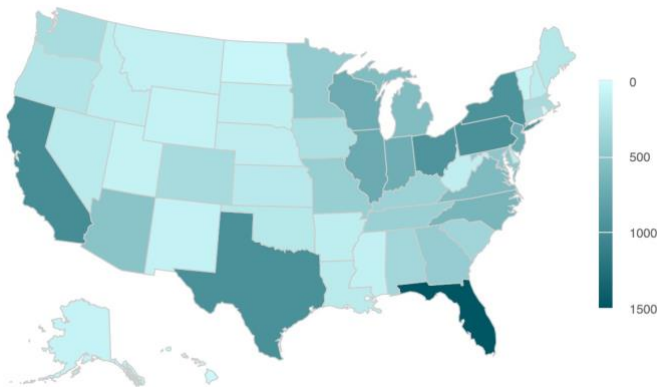


On Thursday, the Senate voted **84 to 14** to pass the Honoring Our PACT Act, which will expand access to care and benefits for over 3.5 million veterans exposed to toxins. Since the bill was modified, it will have to go back for a vote in the House before it is sent to President Biden's desk for his signature.

During this campaign, the National Commander traveled to seven states, ranging from Alaska to Georgia, to build grassroots support for the PACT Act by doing a number of media interviews and holding a [press conference](#) at National Headquarters in Indiana. After the final Senate vote, Commander Dillard released the following statement:

“Today, the U.S. Senate has saved lives and truly delivered for veterans. By passing the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act, the 117th Congress has put substance behind the phrase, ‘Thank you for your service.’”

You can read more about the Commander's statement [here](#).



Over 18,500 messages were sent to Senators across the country asking them to vote YES on the Honoring Our PACT Act.



Legislative Associate, Advait Thampi (far left), attends a press conference before the final Senate vote on the Honoring Our PACT Act.

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SENATORS TACK \$45B ONTO BIDEN'S DEFENSE BUDGET

The Senate Armed Services Committee has endorsed a \$45 billion increase to President Biden's military spending plans in its annual defense policy bill, blowing past the administration's Pentagon budget for a second straight year. The rebuke of Biden's budget plans, which occurred during the panel's closed-door markup of the National Defense Authorization Act this week, comes after lawmakers added roughly \$30 billion to the White House's previous defense spending proposal. This week's boost brings the bill's topline budget figure to \$847 billion, according to Armed Services Chair Jack Reed (D-R.I.). The goal, he said, is to counteract runaway inflation, aid Ukraine, replenish weapons sent into the fight against Russia, and fund military priorities left out of the Pentagon budget request. The committee approved the defense policy bill Thursday morning, its second day of deliberations.

Senate Armed Services' increase is the highest bid so far for military spending for the coming fiscal year. The House is expected to make its own push to increase Pentagon spending. Still, the NDAA only authorizes spending and would need to be backed up by funding legislation produced by the House and Senate Appropriations panels. Biden sought \$813 billion for national defense in his fiscal 2023 budget — including \$773 billion for the Pentagon. Roughly \$10 billion of the \$813 billion falls outside of Armed Services' jurisdiction.

But Republicans have been pushing for a substantial increase, arguing for a 3 to 5 percent increase from the current year's level above inflation. The current year's enacted level for the NDAA is \$768 billion.

Reed told reporters Thursday that historic inflation was "the first consideration" in boosting the topline. The committee chair had been negotiating a bipartisan topline deal with ranking Republican Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma ahead of the markup. Reed acknowledged that the bill's topline would likely have to be higher than Biden's request to account for high inflation, but that other needs could push that even higher. "It's everything I hoped for," Inhofe said of the topline increase.

The House Armed Services Committee, meanwhile, this week sided with Biden's budget in its version of the bill, authorizing \$773 billion for the Pentagon and \$803 total for national defense programs that are in the panel's jurisdiction. Although the panel's chair, Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), said this week that he expects that number will grow.

Bigger topline: This marks the second budget of the Biden administration, and the second year in a row that Senate Democrats have joined Republicans to add billions to the request. Despite a progressive wing that has vowed to cut defense spending, the 50-50 split in the Senate means that the majority can't pass the NDAA without Republican help, which gives the GOP leverage to force higher budgets.

Pay raise: Despite the topline boost, senators stuck with the administration's request for a 4.6 percent pay increase next year for military personnel.

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Stockpiling: The bill authorizes \$1 billion for the National Defense Stockpile to shore up military access to critical materials.

Regional defense programs: Reed said the legislation “fully invests” in the Pentagon’s Pacific Deterrence Initiative, aimed at building up the U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific to deter China, as well as the European Deterrence Initiative and the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

Honoring Inhofe: The bill is named for Inhofe, who is resigning from the Senate at the end of the 117th Congress. Inhofe has served as both chair and ranking member of the panel.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Wednesday, June 22, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will hold a hearing titled “H.R. 7900 – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.”
- On Wednesday, June 22, the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health will hold a legislative hearing.
- On Wednesday, June 22, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism will hold a hearing titled “The Biden Administration’s Policy Objectives in the Middle East and North Africa.”

MEETINGS

- This week, NLD Staff monitored the Senate Armed Service Subcommittee and Committee hearings as they approved their portions of the fiscal 2023 defense authorization bill. As usual, most of the markups were conducted in closed sessions, except for the Personnel and Readiness subcommittees. According to the lawmakers, the bill would approve a 4.6 percent pay raise for servicemembers and civilian Defense Department employees. The raise is the largest the military has seen in 20 years.
- On Monday, June 13, NLD Staff met with other VSOs to discuss the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Monday, June 13, NLD Staff met with other VSOs to discuss VBA claims, appeals, and legislative concerns.
- On Monday, June 13, NLD Staff met with other VSOs to discuss amendments to the Honoring Our PACT Act.
- On Tuesday, June 13, NLD Staff met with Gold Star Family members to discuss how to advocate for issues on Capitol Hill.
- On Tuesday, June 14, NLD Staff met with an Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) strategy group working to repeal and replace outdated AUMFs.
- On Tuesday, June 14, NLD Staff monitored the Senate Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Military Personnel markup of the FY23 NDAA.
- On Wednesday, June 15, NLD Staff spoke with the office of Rep. Issa (R-CA) about legislation to award CPT Royce Williams the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions in the Korean War.

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- On Wednesday, June 15, NLD staff attended a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity hearing titled "President Biden's Strategy to Reduce Veteran Suicide by Addressing Economic Risk Factors."
- On Wednesday, NLD Staff met with the office of Rep. Ruiz (D-CA) to discuss The American Legion's "Citizenship for Service" campaign, which aims to establish a path to citizenship for non-US citizens who honorably served in the US military.
- On Wednesday, June 15, NLD Staff attended a virtual event featuring Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), Chairman of HASC. Chairman Smith discussed the future of U.S. foreign and defense policy and solutions to some of America's biggest national security challenges. The video of the conversation is [here](#).
- On Thursday, June 16, NLD Staff spoke with the office of Rep. Waltz (R-FL) about legislation to create a Veterans First contracting program within DOD to boost service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB) contract awards.
- On Thursday, June 16, NLD Staff spoke with House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity staff about an upcoming GI Bill hearing scheduled for July 20.
- On Thursday, June 16, NLD Staff met with the office of Rep. Ruiz (D-CA) to discuss legislative strategies for the Citizenship for Service campaign.
- On Thursday, June 16, NLD Staff attended a [press conference](#) before the final Senate vote for the Honoring Our PACT Act. During the press conference, Chairman Tester (D-MT), Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY), and other Senators and advocates urged the Senate to vote yes on the PACT Act.
- On Thursday, June 16, NLD Staff attended a virtual event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) featuring the Honorable Michael Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and CIA operations officer. The discussion focused on a discussion on Russia's military efforts, Ukraine's military resistance, and opportunities for the United States and its allies and partners to assist Ukraine. More information and video are [here](#).

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