

National Legislative Division Weekly

LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION CHAIRMAN, DANIEL SEEHAFER, INTRODUCES RANKING MEMBER MORAN AT PACT ACT RECEPTION



Ranking Member Moran delivers remarks at the PACT Act Reception.



Chairwoman Hartman, Chairman Seehafer, and Chairman LaCoursiere attend the PACT Act Reception on Wednesday, September 14.



On Wednesday, September 14, American Legion co-hosted a reception on Capitol Hill to celebrate the passage of the Honoring Our PACT Act. The Honoring Our PACT Act, which was signed into law in August, gives millions of veterans who were exposed to toxins during their military service access to health care.

During the event, Legislative Commission Chairman, Daniel Seehafer, introduced Ranking Member Moran (R-KS) before he delivered his remarks. Legislative Council Chairwoman, Elizabeth Hartman, Veteran Education & Employment Chairman, Jim LaCoursiere, and Washington DC staff also attended the reception.

Other guests at the reception include Chairman Takano (D-CA), Ranking Member Bost (R-IL), and Chairman Tester.

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BUDDY CHECK INCLUDED IN OMNIBUS MENTAL HEALTH BILL

Reducing the rate of veteran suicide is at the top of The American Legion mission. Now, The American Legion is turning its attention to encouraging new comprehensive legislation that aims to improve mental health care for veterans.

H.R. 6411 — the Support the Resiliency of Our Nation’s Great (STRONG) Veterans Act of 2022 — is a comprehensive mental health package that addresses mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It calls for VA to:

- Update training for its workforce and Veterans Crisis Line staff.
- Implement pilot programs to examine Veterans Crisis Line facilitation to increase use among high-risk veterans
- Expand access to mental health care.
- Conduct studies and research on best practices.
- Provide outreach to veterans regarding mental health resources.

During The American Legion’s recent national convention, National Legislative Division staff briefed attendees at the [Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission meeting](#) on the STRONG Veterans Act. Many provisions in the STRONG Veterans Act are efforts supported by The American Legion in stand-alone bills that have now been incorporated into this mental health omnibus legislation.

Notably, it includes a provision designating a national Buddy Check Week. The American Legion launched its Buddy Check program several years ago as a way to encourage Legionnaires to conduct veteran outreach. The idea is to reconnect with veterans who may need assistance but don't know where to go or who to ask.

The American Legion worked with Congress to draft the original bill that would establish a Buddy Check Week, as well as provide educational opportunities, materials, and references for veterans to learn how to conduct personal wellness checks and require expanded resources for the Veterans Crisis Line to handle any potential increased usage during the designated week.

“Far too many servicemembers return home suffering from the invisible wounds of war,” Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman, Jon Tester, D-Mont. said in a statement. “It’s on us to make sure the Department of Veterans Affairs has the tools it needs to connect those who served with their earned support.”

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Other provisions in the omnibus bill include increasing the number of full-time equivalent employees at Vet Centers and paid mental health trainees in the VA's workforce, expanding eligibility for Vet Centers and reviewing and updating the training for Veterans Crisis Line responders and social service assistants.

CONGRESS

Almost two dozen Senate Republicans formally asked Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) this week to hold a vote on the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The letter, led by Sen. Tuberville (R-AL), invoked George Washington's words to stress the importance of civilian leadership for the military. Without the NDAA, the letter warns, "our armed services will be left directionless, lack stable funding, and be devoid of civilian Congressional oversight." Despite the oratory of the letter, the NDAA is unlikely to see Senate floor action until after the midterm elections in November. It should be noted that passing the NDAA will not provide "stable funding" for the Pentagon in the absence of full-year appropriations bills.

Capitol Hill is anxiously awaiting final language for a continuing resolution (CR), expected to last until December 16. Action on that legislation is expected to occur next week.

There are efforts in the Senate to add language from Sen. Manchin (D-WV) concerning energy permits. Progressive Democrats in the House strongly oppose this. Rep. McMorris Rogers (R-WA) raised the possibility this week of such a move gaining enough GOP support to offset the loss of Democratic votes, though. On Tuesday, Schumer told reporters he was going to add the language and the bill would pass.

Speculation arose this week about the possibility of including reauthorization of FDA user fees. That seems unlikely, given leadership's desire for a clean CR and some lawmakers' opposition to changes proposed by the FDA to existing user fee agreements. However, the current agreements expire at the end of this month. If they are not reauthorized, the FDA will have to start sending out layoff notices and much of its work will be negatively impacted in the coming weeks.

On Wednesday, the House passed by voice vote five bills related to veterans:

- HR 7846 – the Veterans' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act
- HR 5916 – the Wounded Warrior Access Act
- HR 7939 – the Student Veteran Emergency Relief Act
- HR 8260 – the Faster Payments for Veterans' Survivors Act
- HR 7735 – the Improving Accessing to the VA Home Loan benefits Act

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SENATE PANEL APPROVES TAIWAN BILL AFTER DILUTING SOME PROVISIONS



The Taiwan flag and the American flag are flown side by side.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday sent to the floor a major Taiwan security assistance bill, but not before agreeing to dilute some of the legislation's provisions that would have ordered certain enhancements to U.S. diplomatic engagement with the self-governing island.

In urging the watering down of the diplomacy language, Democrats and a few Republicans said they worried about needlessly provoking China and risking some kind of retaliation when there was little concrete benefit to be had for Taiwan, for example, in making the senior American

diplomat in Taiwan a position that requires Senate confirmation, as the original legislation would have done.

After roughly one hour of debate, the committee voted 17-5, to approve, as amended, the Taiwan policy bill (S 4428) from committee Chairman Bob Menendez, D-N.J., and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.

"The United States does not seek war," Menendez said, adding that the principal goal of the legislation was to avert an armed conflict in East Asia by strengthening Taiwan's defense capabilities enough that China would be deterred from invasion. "If we hope to have credible deterrence and maintain cross-strait stability, we need to be clear-eyed about what we are facing."

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.

Gerald Edgar, Iowa

This week, we are excited to recognize Gerald Edgar from the Department of Iowa for meeting with staff from the office of Representative Feenstra (R-IA). Mr. Edgar discussed current events with a focus on our military (active & Guard/Reserve) plus concerns for senior veterans being scammed by alleged veteran groups and related "businesses." In addition, Mr. Edgar serves on Rep. Feenstra's "Service Academy Selection Committee" and is the Legion liaison for his office.

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Thank you, Mr. Edgar!

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 kisaacson@legion.org.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, September 20, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) will hold a hearing titled "VA Major Acquisitions Failures: In Search of Solutions."
- On Wednesday, September 21, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee will hold a hearing titled "Hearings to examine the VA's electronic health record modernization, focusing on rollout, cost, and schedule."
- On Wednesday, September 21, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber will hold a hearing titled "Accountability for Atrocity Crimes Committed by Russia in Ukraine."
- On Wednesday, September 21, the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel will hold a hearing titled "Update on the Implementation of Recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military and the Establishment of the Office of Special Trial Counsel."
- On Wednesday, September 21, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) will hold a hearing titled "Hearings to examine ensuring veterans' timely access to care in VA and the community."
- On Wednesday, September 21, the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee will hold a hearing titled "Hearings to examine the status of military recruiting and retention efforts across the Department of Defense."