

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ACTION UPDATES

protect the brave men and women who fought by our sides, please click [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. If you would like to contact your representatives in support of H.R. 542, H.R. 3848, and H.R. 3581, you can visit our [grassroots actions center](#) to identify and email your elected official.

**The American Legion supports the Pay our Troops Act and encourages all Legionnaires to contact their members of Congress and ask them to support the legislation. Click [here](#) to reach out today.**

### HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SUBPOENAS VA

Just a few months after House Republicans [launched an investigation](#) into the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) for mishandling sexual harassment claims, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) [voted to subpoena VA](#) officials for any documents related to the whistleblowers' claims.

According to a report by HVAC, two whistleblowers from the VA's Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion (ORMDI) reported that ORMDI senior management were sexually harassing employees. One whistleblower had received "[suggestive and aggressive messages](#)" from ORMDI Chief of Staff Archie Davis. Upon refusing Davis's advances, Mr. Davis retaliated against the whistleblower and began maligning her in the office. Furthermore, no disciplinary actions were taken against Mr. Davis and other offenders when reports of their behavior were made. Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL-12), pictured below, [said the evidence](#) of VA's negligence was "damning."



Prior to the investigation, Chairman Bost [wrote a letter to VA Secretary Denis McDonough](#) asking for the Secretary to list relevant VA policies, the number of sexual harassment and abuse of authority claims that were submitted to ORMDI since 2021, and a variety of communications related to harassment within ORMDI. However, the Chairman claimed that he had not received a response and sent a new letter a month and a half later.

HVAC published an update on [December 15, 2023](#) claiming that the VA failed to "proactively investigate the situation", which led to the Committee's own investigation and subsequent vote for a subpoena. Of the four ORMDI officers accused by whistleblowers, two resigned in light of the investigation, including the Assistant Secretary of Human Resources.

## National Legislative Division Weekly

As stated by Chairman Bost during the January 11<sup>th</sup> hearing, subpoena orders are not taken lightly. According to his [opening statement](#), his resolution to issue a subpoena is the first passed by HVAC since 2016. 22 out of the 25 members of HVAC voted in favor of the subpoena, displaying the overwhelming, bipartisan resolve to put an into sexual harassment and abuse of power.

### HUD FACES CONGRESSIONAL PRESSURE TO PROTECT VETERANS

As temperatures across the nation drop this week and Americans are forced indoors, the House Financial Services Committee's hearing about housing development could not have been timelier. While they discussed the rising costs of housing and other issues, committee members expressed concern about the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) efforts to house veterans.

Committee Chairman Patrick McHenry (R-NC-10) quickly guided the conversation to the adequacy of veteran housing program in his opening statement, [saying that HUD's](#) "mistreatment of disabled veterans seeking housing is exacerbating the veterans' homelessness crisis." He went on to speak of a charity in his district called [Purple Heart Homes](#), which aims to build and renovate homes to be accessible for disabled veterans (pictured to the right). The charity contacted the Chairman saying that [HUD's Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\) program](#) was incorrectly disqualifying many disabled veterans. The flaw stemmed from the use of 3 incongruent definitions of "income" by HUD and other federal agencies.



While Secretary Fudge did not initially acknowledge the complaint of Chairman McHenry, he continued to question her about veterans' income validation. In response, the [Secretary pushed back](#) saying "Number one: The median income is determined by Congress; it is not determined by us. Number two: most of the problems with housing don't really come from HUD. The problem with the VA disability generally is a problem of Treasury."

Although she declined to place full responsibility on HUD, Secretary Fudge agreed that the discrepancy in defining income was, in fact, causing issues for many people seeking CDBG. While the answer did not

## National Legislative Division Weekly

seem to satisfy the Chairman, Ranking Member Maxine Waters (D-CA-43) said that any discrepancy in federal definitions was the responsibility of Congress to resolve.

After discussing the effects of a government shutdown on citizens seeking affordable housing, Congressman Sherman (D-CA-32) turned the hearing's attention back to veterans and income calculation, specifically for disabled veterans. Specifically, Congressman Sherman wants service-connected disability payments to not count towards income. By excluding these payments from the calculations, more veterans would qualify for affordable housing programs. The Congressman points out that the Internal Revenue Service and other agencies do not include service-connected disability payments for this very reason.

Secretary Fudge assured the Congressman that she is working on a legislative proposal to fix this issue, and Mrs. Sherman said he was drafting a solution as well. However, he expressed doubt that Congress was well functioning enough to pass either person's bill.

### 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.

#### Al Klingele, Department of New York

I would like to congratulate Al Klingele, Department of New York as Legionnaire of the Week.

Mr. Klingele met with the office of Representative Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY-21) to discuss both nation-wide and local issues. During the productive conversation, Mr. Klingele and staffers talked about the necessity for cost-of-living-adjustments for local junior servicemembers before speaking about national legislation, including PACT Act and support for caregivers. Mr. Klingele will continue to advise the office as a member of the veterans' roundtable.

Mr. Klingele, thank you for the time you've dedicated to representing veterans in your district and across the United States.

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

After observing Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Monday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, LegDiv Staff spent the week preparing for Washington Conference and working with our ally organizations on legislative strategy.

## National Legislative Division Weekly

LegDiv staff prioritized scheduling speakers for Commander's Call, the Know Before You Go session, and the Legislative Commission meeting. We also finalized awards for Distinguished Public Service and Grassroots Advocacy. On top of Washington Conference tasks, LegDiv staff worked with peer organizations and Hill staff to track and update the status of key bills.

As part of our ongoing grassroots efforts, NLD staff will be traveling to posts around the country 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

There are no relevant hearings scheduled for the upcoming week.