

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### GRASSROOTS ACTION PRIORITIES

The American Legion continues to reinforce preparations for a possible government shutdown. National Legislative Division (NLD) Staff are continuing to monitor and advocate for the [Pay Our Troops Act](#) (H.R. 5641), which currently has 112 bipartisan cosponsors.

Additionally, we are giving our support to the [Keep Our Border Agents Paid Act](#) (S. 2999), which would ensure that U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement are paid in the event of a government shutdown.

This week, the National Legislative Division had the great honor of accompanying National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer as he met with Members of Congress from across the country and advocated on behalf of Legionnaires. National Commander Seehafer is pictured with Congressman Eli Crane (AZ-2) and Senator Tammy Baldwin (WI).



To see and participate in the Legion's legislative priorities, please visit our [Grassroots Action Center](#).

### THE LEGION PROVIDES CRITICAL INSIGHT ON TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

From enrolling in health care programs, to finding meaningful employment, to day-to-day cultural shifts, [recently separated servicemembers face a myriad of challenges](#) upon leaving the Armed Forces. To help ease the adjustment to civilian life, Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) have implemented a variety of Transition Assistance Programs (TAP). On Wednesday, October

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17<sup>th</sup>, The American Legion's own Education and Employment Policy Analyst Kevin O'Neil testified before Senate in favor of strengthening these programs.

Chairman Jack Reed (RI) of the Senate Armed Services Committee began the hearing by applauding the success of TAP up to this point but acknowledged that there is still room for improvements. Because veterans who participate in [TAP obtain long-term work more quickly after separation than non-participants](#), the Senate Committees on Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs hope to see these successes expanded to more veterans.

Policy Analyst Kevin O'Neil (pictured below) participated in the second panel of the hearing with Ryan Gallucci of Veterans' of Foreign Wars, Tom Porter of Blue Star Families, and Arthur DeGroat of Kansas State University's Office of Military and Veterans Affairs. In his opening statement, Mr. O'Neil shared his own experience of transitioning to civilian life and the uncertainty that came with separating from the Air Force. Mr. O'Neil also told Senators that 70% of veterans do not access TAP, meaning that each year there are 140,000 Veterans who do not have all the resources with which they should be provided.



As the hearing continued, O'Neil offered a variety of suggestions that would ensure TAP reaches its fullest potential. First, he emphasized the importance of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Military Life Cycle (MLC) modules. These training tools allow service members to access critical information for their transition at any time during their process of adjustment. He recommended that the Department of Labor (DOL) implement similar modules that are specific to employment and career success.

Additionally, Mr. O'Neil advocated for an application that contains VA, DOL, and Department of Defense (DOD) resources on transition assistance. Like the MLC modules mentioned above, the app would have no time restriction for use, allowing servicemembers to begin their program when it is best for them, and revisit resources as needed. An interagency program like the proposed app would limit the number of hoops recently separated servicemembers jump through to participate in TAP and consolidate key information in an easily accessible manner.

Finally, Mr. O'Neil shared the Legion's belief that transition assistance and preparation for the future should begin during service. The American Legion believes that members of the Armed Forces should never worry that military service will hinder their future education and career prospects. We thank Mr. O'Neil for representing The American Legion with such distinction. If you would like to see the hearing, a recording can be found [here](#).

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### SPEAKER DELAY CONTINUES ON CAPITOL HILL



The House of Representatives is entering its second week without a Speaker of the House, and no solution is in sight.

The function of the U.S. House of Representatives relies on the presence of a Speaker of the House. Under the current Speaker-less circumstances, lawmakers are unable to move forward with the [appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2024](#), which must be passed in less than a month. On top of this already critical issue, the House is unable to [respond to the attacks on Israel](#) which began on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October.

Although there was a faint glimmer of hope that the House would resume activity when [Rep. Steve Scalise \(R-LA-1\)](#) received the GOP nomination last week, optimism quickly faded when Scalise failed to secure the necessary 217 votes. After Rep. Scalise withdrew from the race, Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH-4) (pictured above) was selected as the alternate nominee. However, [Rep. Jordan received the same fate as Rep. Scalise](#) in a vote on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, and the House remained without a Speaker.

After his initial loss on Tuesday, Jordan and his supporters launched a campaign to sway hesitant Republicans. Activists inundated offices of GOP holdouts with [phone calls urging support for Rep. Jordan](#). Meanwhile, the Congressman himself made avid appeals for unity within his party. In an interview this week, [Jordan called on his fellow Republicans](#) to “work as unit and deal with the problems we see in this country.”

The insistent call campaign and Rep. Jordan’s plea for unity failed. In a subsequent vote on Wednesday afternoon, Rep. Jordan [lost by 2 more votes](#) than he did on Tuesday. With support for Jordan actively decreasing and no other GOP candidate in sight, some Republicans are considering [increasing the power of Speaker Pro Tempore](#) Patrick McHenry (R-NC-10). This notion has even drawn support from a few House Democrats, including Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY-8) as lawmakers on both sides of the aisle become increasingly anxious to get back to business.

Despite the possibilities of expanded authority for Rep. McHenry, there is no clear plan of action for the coming days and weeks, which are becoming increasingly chaotic with two wars and an impending

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shutdown. As national security issues mount and appropriations remain unallocated, politicians and constituents alike will remain eager for a result and for legislative action to carry on. Votes

### SENATE TO ROLL OUT THREEFOLD SUPPORT PLAN FOR ISRAEL

The Hamas offensive against Israel has shaken every corner of the globe. With [4,000 lives taken and 1 million civilians displaced](#) in the region since October 7<sup>th</sup>, the situation becomes more critical each day. President Joe Biden has voiced his support for Israel, a longstanding U.S. ally, and [left to visit Tel Aviv](#) this week.

In a strong confirmation of the United States' support for Israel, [Majority Leader Chuck Schumer \(D-NY\) \(pictured left\)](#) [announced](#) that the Senate was working closely with the Biden Administration on a three-pronged approach to support Israel: intelligence assistance, diplomatic support, and humanitarian support. With the House at a standstill, the Senate must prioritize support for Israel for the package to move quickly once the House resumes business. [Leader Schumer declared](#) that “supporting Israel must be at the top, at the front, at the center” of the Lawmakers’ attention.



The first tenet of support, intelligence, will complement deterrence measures that Department of Defense (DOD) has already implemented in the region. DOD reacted swiftly to the attacks on Israel, [providing munitions](#) to the country just days after the initial offensive. [Two aircraft](#) carriers, as well as well as a [Marine Corps expeditionary unit](#), have also been deployed to the Mediterranean to discourage Hamas’ allies. These preliminary measures are critical for [deterrence, intelligence, and reconnaissance](#) but could be strengthened with congressional support.

As for diplomatic support, the Senate has already moved to appoint a [new ambassador](#) to Israel, Jacob Lew, who will provide on-the-ground insight about Israel’s status as well as support to American Ex-pats and hostages in Gaza. Moreover, President Biden and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken traveled to the region in hopes of demonstrating support for Israel and preventing the spread of violence across the region. The details of what the Senate’s additional [“diplomatic help”](#) will look like is still unclear, but the appointment of an ambassador will be critical to this mission.

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Finally, the urgency for humanitarian aid in the region seems to be increasing by the minute. [Refugees in Gaza](#) have run out of fuel, air strikes have destroyed hospitals and entire neighborhoods. But the toll on human life overshadows all these tragedies; thousands of Israelis and Gaza residents have been killed and thousands more have been injured. While Biden has [proposed foreign aid packages](#) to Israel, Congress is unable to approve appropriations until the House elects a speaker. For this reason, Leader Schumer has made it clear that the Senate would “like to get the supplemental package moved as quickly as possible” so that it can easily pass the House when the time comes.

### LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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.

#### Rene Vanmulem, New York

For his ongoing championship for The American Legion and veterans across the country, The National Legislative Division is proud to name Commander Rene Vanmulem, Department of New York, the Legionnaire of the Week.

Adding to his impressive history of advocacy, Commander Vanmulem sat down with Congressman Joseph Morelle (NY-25) this week to discuss key pieces of legislation. Commander Vanmulem was able to confirm the Congressman’s support for the [Afghan Adjustment Act \(H.R. 4627\)](#), which has long been a priority of the American Legion. Vanmulem and the Congressman also discussed the importance of the [Pay Our Troops Act \(H.R. 5641\)](#).

Commander, we thank you for your advocacy and dedication to veterans across the world.

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, the National Legislative Division hosted National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer. Commander Seehafer was introduced to various members of Congress and received valuable insight on The Legion’s current legislative priorities.

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On Monday, The Legislative Division finalized and submitted a Statement for the Record (SFR) regarding pending legislation for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

On Wednesday, The American Legion's own Kevin O'Neil testified to the Senate committees on Veterans' Affairs and Armed Services in a hearing on transition to civilian life. Mr. O'Neil's written statement can be [accessed here](#), and the full hearing can be watched [here](#).

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

On Tuesday, October 24<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 AM EST, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs will hold a hearing on pending legislation. A recording will be posted [here](#).

On Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 AM EST, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold a hearing full Committee oversight hearing titled "Veterans Serving Veterans: The Impact of America's Businesses on Veteran Employment and Opportunity." A recording will be posted [here](#).