

National Legislative Division Weekly

CONGRESS

The House was not in session this week. Neither the House nor the Senate will be in session next week.

On Thursday, the Senate voted 61-34 to confirm Lester Martinez-Lopez to be Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs). This comes as Acting ASD(HA) Seileen Mullen is running out of time to be in the acting role. Martinez-Lopez was nominated about 18 months ago.

The Senate Appropriations Committee set up its subcommittees this week. Sen. Tester (D-MT) chairs the Defense Subcommittee, with Sen. Collins (R-ME) as ranking member. The rest of the subcommittee consists of Sen. Durbin (D-IL), Sen. Feinstein (D-CA), Sen. Murray (D-WA), Sen. Reed (D-RI), Sen. Schatz (D-HI), Sen. Baldwin (D-WI), Sen. Shaheen (D-NH), Sen. Murphy (D-CT), Sen. McConnell (R-KY), Sen. Murkowski (R-AK), Sen. Graham (R-SC), Sen. Moran (R-KS), Sen. Hoeven (R-ND), Sen. Boozman (R-AR), and Sen. Capito (R-WV).

Sen. Murray chairs the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (Milcon) Subcommittee, with Sen. Boozman as ranking member. The rest of the committee members are Sen. Reed, Sen. Tester, Sen. Schatz, Sen. Baldwin, Sen. Heinrich (D-NM), Sen. Coons (D-DE), Sen. Manchin (D-WV), Sen. Peters (D-MI), Sen. McConnell, Sen. Murkowski, Sen. Hoeven, Sen. Collins, Sen. Rubio (R-FL), Sen. Hagerty (R-TN), and Sen. Fischer (R-NE).

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO), on Wednesday, announced the Treasury Department will run out of cash between July and September. That puts special pressure on Congress to pass legislation to raise the debt ceiling in light of their traditional month-long August recess.

As House Republicans try to decrease federal spending, or cap it at FY22 levels, many Senators, including some prominent Republicans, are pointing to the recent Chinese surveillance balloon to defend not cutting defense spending.

Thursday morning, the Senate VA Committee reported [eight bills](#) related to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to the full Senate. A ninth, the [CAREERS Act](#), is being negotiated with GOP committee members.

Sen. Feinstein (D-CA) officially announced this week that she will not run for another term. She has been plagued in recent months with questions on her mental fitness after a series of gaffes where she forgot things and colleagues said she was no longer as sharp as she had been. Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) is expected to file to run for Feinstein's seat by the end of the month.

RENEWED PUSH IS ON TO HELP HUNGRY MILITARY FAMILIES

Original Article: [Renewed push is on to help hungry military families](#) (CQ Roll Call)

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Lawmakers from both parties and in both chambers say they are mounting a new push this year to revise laws that are keeping perhaps tens of thousands of hungry military families from receiving federal assistance.

Based on the latest Defense Department survey of U.S. troops, some 286,800 in the active-duty force — or nearly one in four military servicemembers — experience “low food security.” Of those, an estimated 120,000 are faced with “very low food security,” meaning they periodically eat less, miss meals or lose weight, the survey indicated. The figures do not count the spouses or children of those troops, nor do the numbers include reservists and their families.

Despite the apparently widespread extent of the problem, only a tiny portion of needy servicemembers are being reached by federal assistance programs that are meant for lower-income citizens, according to recent analyses by both CQ Roll Call and research groups. That is because of the way two programs — one in the Defense Department and the other in the Agriculture Department — are constructed, some lawmakers say.

Specifically, in determining a service member’s eligibility for either program, his or her so-called basic allowance for housing counts as income — unlike in many other federal aid initiatives. That arcane rule is excluding most of those who need help from getting it, anti-hunger advocates and numerous lawmakers say.

On Thursday in the Senate, Democrat [Tammy Duckworth](#) of Illinois and Republican [Lisa Murkowski](#) of Alaska will introduce a bill to change one of these programs: the Agriculture Department’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP — formerly known as food stamps.

Their [legislation](#), which is expected to become part of this year’s farm bill debate, would remove the requirement that a service member’s housing allowance be counted toward income under the SNAP program. An effort by anti-hunger advocates to make the change on the 2018 Farm Bill ([PL 115-334](#)) fell short.

Duckworth has personal experience with military families in need, as she grew up in one. Her family relied on food stamps for a while when she was growing up. She later became an Army Blackhawk helicopter pilot, lost both her legs in combat and earned a Purple Heart.

“From the time I was a young cadet and a young lieutenant, outside every military base there were the tattoo parlors and the pawn shops, and now there are the food pantries,” Duckworth said in an interview.

2023 WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

The American Legion's Washington Conference will be back in person in 2023. This event allows our organization’s leadership to meet with elected officials to discuss legislative initiatives and priorities important to Legion members and their families. It also provides a forum that allows Legionnaires to hear

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from senators, representatives, and officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as they address our members at the conference.

- The Legislative Agenda is [here](#).
- Hill Visit Toolkit is [here](#).
- Know Before You Go is [here](#).

To learn more information, please click [here](#).

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.

Greg Eirich, Wisconsin

This week, we are excited to recognize Greg Eirich from the Department of Wisconsin for meeting with the office of Rep. Grothman (R-WI). Mr. Eirich introduced himself had an introductory meeting with Congressman Grothman's Chief of Staff. During the meeting, Mr. Eirich shared the Legislative Agenda and discussed the Be the One campaign.

Thank you, Mr. Eirich!

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

There are no hearings next week.