

National Legislative Division Weekly

THREE MARINE CORPS LIVES LOST AFTER FATAL CRASH

Sunday, August 27th, three Marines were killed and twenty more were injured when their aircraft crashed on Melville Island off the Australian coast during a training exercise. According to reports, five other Marines are in Royal Darwin Hospital in serious condition. The Associated Press reports that the soldiers were flying the Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey, commonly known as the Osprey, when the tragic accident occurred. According to a report made by Seth Robson for *Stars and Stripes*, the Marine Corps blamed a faulty clutch for the accident and is conducting a formal investigation.

In a press release on Monday, the Marine Corps identified the three fallen soldiers as Corporal Spencer R. Collart of Virginia, Captain Eleanor V. LeBeau of Illinois, and Major Tobin J. Lewis of Colorado.

Corporal Collart was twenty-one years old and had been promoted to the rank of Corporal in February of this year. The young gentleman received National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and Sea Service Deployment Ribbon.

Captain LeBeau was a member of the Marine Corps since 2018 and was promoted to Captain in March of this year. The twenty-nine-year-old pilot was a recipient of the National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and Sea Service Deployment Ribbon.

Finally, Major Lewis had just surpassed fifteen years of service to the Marine Corps. He was promoted to Major in 2008. Major Lewis received two Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Navy Unit Commendation, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and four Sea Service Deployment Ribbons. He was thirty-seven years old when he passed.

It is with a heavy heart that the American Legion extends its deepest condolences to the families of Corporal Spencer Collart, Captain Eleanor LeBeau, and Major Tom Lewis, as well as the brave servicemembers who also suffered in the tragedy on Melville Island. These soldiers have made the ultimate sacrifices to defend our nation, and we are forever indebted to their bravery and selflessness. May the fallen rest in peace and in glory.

THE 104TH NATIONAL CONVENTION CONGRESSIONAL LANDSCAPE REPORT

On August 31st, 2023, the 104th National Convention came to a close. Legionnaires, Sons of the American Legion, and American Legion Auxiliary members met at the Charlotte Convention Center to celebrate the achievements of our military, our veterans, and of The American Legion. The Legislative Division hosted both the Legislative Commission Meeting and the Legislative Convention Committee. We want to extend our thanks to the Commissioners, Committee Members, and our volunteers who work tirelessly to help us pass legislation that enhances the quality of life for servicemembers and their families.

National Legislative Division Weekly

Senior Legislative Associate John Kamin compiled a congressional landscape and outlook report for our Legislative Commission. As our stakeholders and our main supporters, we would like to ensure that you are updated on our affairs as the 118th Congress Reconvenes this month. For this reason, I have included the congressional landscape and John's projections for the legislation we are currently tracking.

CONGRESSIONAL LANDSCAPE

Passage of the Honoring Our PACT Act in 2022 brought with it significant funding concerns for VA that cast a shadow over veterans' legislation in the 118th Congress. The Congressional Budget Office has articulated in legislative cost estimates that any additional legislation that impacts veterans suffering from toxic exposure will carry mandatory spending offsets. This, along with a divided Congress, means significantly lower expectations for passing large pieces of veterans' legislation in the first session of the 118th Congress.

SUMMARY OF BILLS BY LIKELIHOOD OF PASSAGE

From likely (4) to unlikely (1):

- 4 S. 378/H.R. 1204 – Camp Lejeune Legislation (Protecting Veterans from Predatory Actors (VA&R))
- 4 H.R.1669 – *VET-TEC Authorization Act of 2023* (VE&E)
- 4 H.R. 1606– *Veterans Entrepreneurship Training Act of 2023*(VE&E)
- 4 H.R. 1277 – *The Military Spouse Hiring Act* (National Security)
- 3 S. 141 – *Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act* (VA&R)
- 2 H.R. 932 – *To repeal the authorizations for use of military force against Iraq* (National Security)
- 2 H.R. XXX *VA Home Loan Transferability* (VE&E)
- 2 H.R. 592 – *Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization Improvement Act* (VA&R)
- 2 H.R. 1282 – *Major Richard Star Act* (VA&R)
- 2 S. 928 – *Not Just A Number Act* (VA&R)
- 2 S. 1315 – *Veterans' Health Empowerment, Access, Leadership, and Transparency for our Heroes Act* (VA&R)
- 2 H.R. XXX – *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act* (VE&E)
- 2 S. 2327– *Afghan Adjustment Act* (National Security)
- 2 H.R. 2537 – *Basic Allowance for Housing Restoration Act* (National Security)
- 1 H.R.1139 – *GUARD VA Benefits Act* (VA&R)
- 1 H.R. 2693 – *Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2023* (National Security)
- 1 S. 497 – *Military Family Nutrition Access Act* (National Security)

GOP DEBATE – NATIONAL SECURITY POSITIONS

On August 23rd, 2023, the Republican Party held the first debate for the 2024 presidential campaign. Former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchison, former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, former Vice President Mike Pence, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Vivek Ramaswamy, former South Carolina Senator Nikki Haley, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum

National Legislative Division Weekly

engaged in heated discussion on issues such as reproductive rights, government debt, education, and a myriad of national security topics.

Aid for Ukraine

One key topic of the evening's debate was defense funding for Ukraine. The candidates varied in their perspectives with Vivek Ramaswamy and Governor Ron DeSantis taking the most isolationist positions, expressing that the United States Armed Forces do not have responsibility to other nations' security. On one hand, DeSantis explained that American defense in Ukraine should be contingent on European participation on the warfront; On the other hand, Ramaswamy was much more hardline in his views, stating that Ukraine should not be a priority for American national security and any participation would strengthen a Sino-Russian alliance. Ultimately, both candidates promised to re-gear funds that were allocated to Ukraine to strengthening southern border patrol in the United States.

Governor Nikki Haley, in contrast, championed United States involvement on the behalf of Ukraine. She expressed that she would provide support to Ukraine since it is an ally and a key stronghold against Russia. In the grand scheme of the defense budget, according to Haley, the money provided to Ukraine does not affect the ability of the United States to protect its homeland security.

Similarly, Governor Chris Christie advocated for American intervention, claiming that "if we don't stand up against this type of autocratic killing in the world, we will be next." Vice President Mike Pence echoed the United States' role as an international protector. The former vice president reflected on the Reagan Doctrine, comparing our involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian War to the United States' intervention in stopping the spread of communism in the 1980s.

Chinese Military Deterrence

The candidates were then asked about Chinese deterrence and military threat. Governor Burgum began by advocating for the presence of anti-ship missiles around Taiwan and a "peace through strength" tactic. Burgum, however, quickly diverted to the question into a discussion of migration control, saying we need to reinforce our border agents and show strength at the U.S.-Mexico border. When faced with the topic of China, Senator Tim Scott did not provide an answer on Chinese military engagement or deterrence. Instead, Scott followed the queues of Burgum and focused on southern border patrol in the United States.

U.S. Border Security

With the candidates clearly steering the discussion towards homeland security, the moderators brought up recently released images of suspected cartel members crossing the U.S.-Mexico border with rifles. The candidates were then asked if they consider this action an invasion and "whether they would authorize lethal force along the border."

Governor Hutchison, who worked to deter border-crossings and cartel activity while in the Bush administration, said he absolutely believed lethal force was necessary to stop cross-border drug trafficking. Hutchison, however, also said that cooperation with Mexico was necessary; "The military,"

National Legislative Division Weekly

according to the former governor, “has to be limited in its use” and the United States must instead rely on rule of law before turning to force.

DeSantis also advocated for the authorization of lethal force at the border, labeling drug traffickers at the U.S.-Mexico border as foreign terrorist organizations. In response to past criticisms from DeSantis, Pence proudly claimed that the Trump-Pence administration reduced illegal immigration and asylum abuse by 90%. He focused largely on his role in securing funding for a border wall and negotiating the remain-in-Mexico policy. Finally, Pence expressed his agreement with Hutchison’s strategy of cooperation and economic pressure.

The question posed to Christie focused on how he would handle the presence of migrants already in the United States. The former New Jersey Governor said that those who crossed illegally cannot be rewarded, nor should they receive any benefits that should go to migrants who are “following the law... to pursue the American Dream.”

Christie’s comments were the last position shared on any topic of national security or foreign policy in this debate. The next Republican Primary Debate will be held September 27th, 2023. The Democratic National Convention has not scheduled any primary debates.

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.

Manuel Vega, California

This week, we are excited to name Manuel Vega of California the Legionnaire of the week. As part of his clear dedication to grassroots advocacy, last month Mr. Vega met with the Senator Kirsten Gillibrand’s office to review two American Legion resolutions regarding the Richard Stayskal Medical Malpractice Act of the NDAA of FY2020.

Mr. Vega, your efforts are greatly appreciated by the Legislative Division of the American Legion.

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.

National Legislative Division Weekly

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Wednesday, November 6th, The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations will hold hearings to examine AUKUS to examine deepening security partnerships with Australia and the United Kingdom.
- On Wednesday, November 6th, The Senate Committee on the Judiciary will hold hearings to examine pending nominations.
- On Thursday, November 7th, The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works will hold hearings on the implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, considering perspectives from the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act.
- On Thursday, November 7th, The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs will examine the nominations of Robert G. Taub, of New York, to be a Commissioner of the Postal Regulatory Commission, and Tanya Monique Jones Bosier, Danny Lam Hoan Nguyen, and Kenechukwu Onyemaechi Okocha, to be Associate Judges of the Superior Court of D.C.