

National Legislative Division Weekly

CAPTAIN LARRY TAYLOR AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR



Captain Larry Taylor, a Vietnam Veteran from Chattanooga, Tennessee, was awarded the Medal of Honor this week on September 5th, 2023.

As told by his official Army biography, Captain Taylor joined the Army in August 1966 after serving as second lieutenant in the Army Reserve. By 1967, he had found his calling as an Army Aviator and was deployed to Vietnam, where he flew upwards of two thousand combat missions in UH-1 and Cobra helicopters. A recipient of fifty other combat decorations, including the Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and two Distinguished Flying

Crosses, Taylor engaged enemy fire almost three hundred and fifty times and was forced down five times in his aviation career.

Out of his many acts of bravery, the most valiant which earned him the Medal of Honor was a rescue mission on June 18th, 1968. Taylor was flying an AH1-G Cobra near Ap Go Cong, South Vietnam that night when he received a radio message for help. According to the Department of Defense's account, four Americans on a reconnaissance mission had been surrounded by a throng of enemy soldiers, adding up to one hundred potential assailants.

In the pitch black of night, Taylor and his wingman flew their Cobra at dangerously low levels firing ammunition at the enemy line. Despite the fact that his helicopter had been hit and Army standards would have allowed him to flee the scene, Captain Taylor refused to give up. Instead, Taylor used his landing lights to draw enemy troops away from the four men, allowing the rescue team to enter and save the soldiers.

His heroism that night did not end there. Captain Taylor returned to the scene determined to pick up the four men, despite the Cobra's limited capacity and continued enemy fire. Captain Taylor successfully saved his fellow servicemen, returning them, his wingman, and himself back to safety.

The four soldiers, named David Hill, Robert Elsner, Gerald Patty, and William P. Cohn, have campaigned for years to award Taylor the Medal of Honor. This year, President Joe Biden answered their request.

During Taylor's Medal of Honor ceremony on Tuesday, over fifty-five years after that incredible night, President Biden said "When duty called, Larry did everything; did everything to answer. And because of that, he rewrote the fate of four families for generations to come. That's Valor... That's our nation at its very best."

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Embodying the Soldier's Creed, Captain Taylor did not leave his comrades behind and "never lost a man." In his reflection of the event, Taylor spoke of his actions without hesitation or fear for what could have happened to his own life. In a report by Stars and Stripes he simply said, "I was just doing my job. I knew that if I did not go down and get them, they would not make it."

RETURN OF THE SENATE

"The Senate completed its lengthy summer break today, with a very full agenda for the coming weeks and months.

The top priority is to find a way to keep the federal government open and funded beyond the October 1 start of the next fiscal year. While there are hopes for a continuing resolution (CR), the reality is that the threat of a shutdown is very real.

In August, media reports indicated that Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) and House Speaker McCarthy (R-CA) had agreed on the necessity of a CR that goes into December. However, more recently, McCarthy has floated the idea of a shorter, one-month CR while he tries to get some appropriations bills to the floor. However, the House Freedom Caucus opposes any CR, with several Members making clear their high level of comfort with shutting down the government for an undetermined period of time. Some of these Members seem to think this would save the country money; however, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has repeatedly documented that a shutdown costs more money in the long run.

Technically, FY24 spending levels were set about equal to those in FY23 under the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA), which ended the debt ceiling showdown. However, the House Freedom Caucus (consisting of just over 30 Republican Representatives) is holding out for even deeper spending cuts. At the same time, defense hawks want to increase spending on national security, and there is support in the Senate and among House Democrats to increase some domestic spending as well.

During the recess, the White House submitted two supplemental funding requests, totaling \$16 billion, covering natural disasters, Ukraine assistance, and border security.

The White House has also released a five-page list of authorization issues that a CR would need to include, unless other legislation (such as the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)) were to be passed first. For the Department of Defense, that includes extension of "certain bonus and special pay authorities." Within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), license portability would expire on January 5, 2024, without additional action from Congress. The pilot program on sharing information with veteran-designated family and friends would end, as well as restoration of GI Bill educational benefits after closure or disapproval of an educational institution.

In comments on the floor today, Schumer called for bipartisanship to avoid "a pointless shutdown." To make that happen, he said, "all sides must work together in good faith." He pointed to the heads of the

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Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC), chair Sen. Murray (D-WA) and ranking member Sen. Collins (R-ME), as an example of what is needed. All 12 appropriations bills have been reported out of that committee on a bipartisan basis.

In his own floor comments, Senate Minority Leader McConnell (R-KY) indicated the Chamber will start floor consideration of appropriations bills next week. He did not specify which will come up first, or the potential of minibuses consisting of two or more bills.

Last week, several media outlets reported the SAC was considering creating a minibus with the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (Milcon) bill and the Agriculture, Rural Development, and the Food and Drug Administration (Ag bill) and the White House's supplemental funding request covering Ukraine, disaster relief, and border security. By this afternoon, that had morphed into a package containing Milcon, Ag, and State and Foreign Operations (SFOPS).

The House Rules Committee has put four appropriations bills on the path towards floor consideration when that Chamber returns next week: Defense; Homeland Security; SFOPS, and the Ag bill. While Members can submit amendments, the committee has not officially scheduled any hearings on these bills yet. As of this afternoon, over 300 amendments had been submitted to the Defense bill. As expected, many seek to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and similar "culture war" issues.

For those keeping track, the House Appropriations Committee did manage to report out all 12 bills before the August recess, but without Democratic support. The bill which reached the floor, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, passed on a 219 to 211 Party-line vote. It is usually a very bipartisan measure.

Sen. Tuberville (R-AL) continues to maintain a hold on 301 military nominations and promotions. From the start, he said the move was an effort to make the Pentagon cancel its reproductive health leave and travel policies. In recent weeks, he has started attacking individual nominees for what he terms as "wokeness," usually in the form of their support for DEI initiatives within the military. This is a far cry from the tradition of Congress largely trusting the military's promotion and selection process and not applying politics within the ranks.

A Pentagon spokesman told reporters today that the hold is like starting the football season with acting coaches who have limited authority in doing their jobs. In the past, McConnell has told reporters he does not support Tuberville's actions but does not appear to be pressuring the Senator to change course.

The House and Senate are expected to also conference the FY24 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in the coming weeks."

DEBATES AND DEVELOPMENTS ON AID TO UKRAINE

Since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the involvement of American troops in Ukraine has been hotly debated by politicians, civilians, and military officials alike.

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This week, officials at the Pentagon are faced with a decision to replace more than 4,000 U.S. troops, whose aim would be to support NATO allies in deterring Russian advancement in Ukraine. According to a report by NBC News, unnamed officials are now reluctant to continue American participation on the front, arguing that our presence is “no longer necessary.”

These officials have claimed that the presence of U.S. troops has not achieved the goal of Russian deterrence, and that these troops and funds would be better allocated elsewhere. These sentiments are not only receiving pushback from other defense officials, but also are undercut by claims of the effectiveness of the American troops’ presence, and the clear success of financial support and weapon provision.

According to Foreign Affairs, on-the-ground training by American troops and other Western allies has boosted the effectiveness of the Ukrainian defense. The training in “combat tactics, battlefield medicine, and dismantling improvised explosive devices” was both encouraging to Ukrainian troops and helped make institutional reforms to their military.

Moreover, Ukraine has slowly but surely regained its footing against Russia, recapturing about half the territory that Russia initially seized. The launch of Ukraine’s counteroffensive in June further bolstered optimism about Ukraine’s ability to push back against Russia. Since June, Ukraine has begun a drone campaign targeting Moscow and, according to Reuters, has recaptured another 20 miles of their territory from Russian troops.



Regardless of the success (or the continuation) of American troops in Ukraine, financial aid is largely agreed to be critical to this success of Ukraine’s defense by many defense experts. In a press release on September 5th, Pentagon Press Secretary Brigadier General Pat Ryder confirmed that the U.S. will continue to support Ukraine and “enable them on the battlefield.”

On the 6th, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken made good on the Pentagon’s promise. In a visit to Kyiv, the Secretary pledged \$1 billion in assistance to Ukraine. Blinken is optimistic that Ukraine will continue to deter Russian advances with assistance from Western allies. He told The Washington Post, “We are doing everything we can to maximize our support to Ukraine as it pursues the counteroffensive.”

The newly promised aid will be allocated towards air defense systems, ammunition, antitank missiles, uranium rounds, and other tactical equipment. On top of this, the differing versions of National Defense

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Authorization Act of 2024 in the House and Senate both permit and encourage continued assistance to Ukraine's military efforts.

Another incentive for continued participation is the development of NATO influence. The Wilson Center claims that the United States and its NATO Allies could "win the battle for hearts and minds of millions in countries increasingly skeptical of 'Western values.'" Of course, this interventionist position is countered by politicians and defense officials who are not convinced that the financial cost of involvement is worth the value of potential influence.

With a guarantee for financial aid through 2024 and significant NATO pressure to remain involved, it seems that the officials in the Pentagon who are unsure of our aid's efficacy will not see any funds reallocated away from Ukraine in the coming year. However, with the troops currently deployed return home in the early days of 2024, the debate over their replacement on the front lines will likely remain relevant in the coming weeks and months.

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.

D. Matt Scherer, Texas



Mr. Scherer attended American Legion Department of Texas Convention in July and read Legionnaire Elizabeth Hartman's briefing on the Afghan Adjustment Act. Inspired by her perspective, Mr. Scherer wrote and submitted an op-ed to Smerconish.com. On September 4th, Mr. Scherer's op-ed was published, and can be read here:

<https://www.smerconish.com/exclusive-content/two-years-later-afghan-allies-need-improved-refugee-laws/>

Congratulations, Matt!

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.

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UPCOMING HEARINGS

SENATE

- On Tuesday, September 12th at 9:30 A.M., the Senate Armed Services Committee will hold hearings to examine the nomination of General David W. Allvin, USAF, for reappointment to the grade of general and to be Chief of Staff to the Air Force, Department of Defense. The hearing will be streamed [here](#).
- On Thursday, September 14th at 9:30 A.M., the Senate Armed Services Committee will hold hearings examining the nomination of Admiral Lisa M. Franchetti, USN, for reappointment to the grade of admiral and to be Chief of Naval Operations, Department of Defense. The hearing will be streamed [here](#).

HOUSE

- On Tuesday, September 12th at 9:15 A.M., the House Subcommittee on Energy Management and Technology on evolving threats, security, and safety in a Post-9/11 context.
- On Wednesday, September 13th at 9:30 A.M., the House Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies will hold an oversight hearing regarding the VA's implementation of the Electronic Health Record Modernization Initiative.
- On Wednesday, September 13th at 2:00 P.M., the House Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs will hold a hearing to examine the Biden Administration's failures on Iran. This hearing can be streamed [here](#).
- On Thursday, September 14th at 10:00 A.M., the House Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia Subcommittee will hold a hearing assessing U.S. policy towards Iran's malign activities. This hearing can be streamed [here](#).
- On Thursday, September 14th at 10:30 A.M., the House Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on VA Electronic Health Record Modernization.