

## National Legislative Division Weekly

### SUPPORT OUR DISABLED VETERANS BY PASSING THE MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

Right now, VA deducts the retirement pay of veterans with a disability rating of less than 50%. These veterans who have been forced into medical retirement are being penalized for their injuries, and there is no excuse for it. Disability compensation and retirement pay are two different payments, and should be treated as such. DoD awards retirement pay for honorable service, while the VA is responsible for disability compensation. Conflating the two and forcing deductions in retirement pay is an injustice.

The American Legion stands with disabled veterans and urges Congress not to continue this denial of retirement benefits. The Major Richard Star Act would repeal this draconian offset for those veterans who are medically retired due to injuries sustained in combat and allow them to receive both their retirement pay without forfeiting their disability compensation.

### TAKE ACTION NOW!

### CONGRESS

The House was not in session this week, and will not return until after the November elections.

The Senate returned for one day this week in order to start the process for floor consideration of the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Armed Services Committee chair Sen. Reed (D-RI) and ranking member Sen. Inhofe (R-OK) brought the bill to the floor, and immediately adopted a 75-amendment managers package.

In recognition of the tight legislative calendar once the full Senate returns in November, Reed and Inhofe have accepted a wide array of non-Defense pieces of legislation, including six authorization bills from other committees. This includes reauthorization of the Coast Guard and technical changes to the Honoring Our Pact Act.

When the Senate returns on November 14, lawmakers will have to plow through over 900 remaining amendments. On the personnel side of the bill, many GOP Senators continue to submit provisions to ensure that service members who are separated from the military due to a refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine not only receive an honorable discharge but also have nothing negative in their separation paperwork. One amendment would prevent the military from separating anyone for this reason until the Services once again meet their authorized end strengths.

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### SENATE FY23 NDAA

Earlier this week, Senate Armed Services Committee chair Sen. Reed (D-RI) and Sen. Inhofe (R-OK) officially introduced the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for floor action.

However, the only thing that happened to the bill immediately was the inclusion of 75 amendments as part of the manager's package. The Senate immediately returned to recess mode, and will be back in session after the elections in November. Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) has previously announced that the next votes will occur on November 14, in the evening.

As a result of the amendments, the Department of Defense will have until October 1, 2024, to designate four military treatment facilities (MTFs) as Core Casualty Receiving Facilities. These hospitals will maintain the medical capability and capacity required to diagnose, treat, and rehabilitate a large volume of combat casualties. They will provide a medical response to natural disasters, mass casualty events, and other national emergencies. The Services are to maintain staffing at these hospitals at no less than 90% of requirements, although they can augment with civilian personnel as needed.

Service member pay and benefits also received attention. One amendment increases reimbursement of service members' transportation of pets making permanent change of station (PCS) moves overseas. This was a particularly thorny issue during the last PCS season. Another amendment requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to review dislocation and relocation allowances.

Another amendment makes technical corrections to the Honoring Our PACT Act, which was signed into law last August. That legislation expands access to care and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for toxic-exposed veterans.

When the Senate returns in November, they will have only a few weeks before this session of Congress ends. It is likely that only the NDAA and either an omnibus spending bill for FY23 or another continuing resolution will pass. As a result, Reed is allowing the inclusion of many provisions that have nothing to do with the NDAA's traditional purview. This includes reauthorization of the Coast Guard Act and inclusion of the International Pandemic Preparedness and COVID-19 response Act of 2022.

However, over 900 amendments submitted by lawmakers to the NDAA still await attention. The table below highlights those related to health care and personnel issues. Many (probably the majority) will not see further action.

The table below lists amendments The American Legion supports. It also indicates the section within the NDAA where the sponsoring legislator thinks the provision belongs.

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Senator	# & Sec	Amendment Purpose
Menendez (D-NJ)	#5963: Sec. 1077	Make all World War II veterans eligible for VA care.
Kelly (D-AZ)	#6226: Sec. 589	Authorization for award of medal of honor to E. Royce Williams for acts of valor during the Korean war.
Tester (D-MT)	#6075: Sec. 632	Provides for disability retirees with fewer than 20 years of military service to receive both kinds of compensation, without an offset.
Kaine (D-VA)	#5684: Sec. 1226	Repeal the 1991 and 2002 Iraq AUMFs.
Hirono (D-HI)	#6394	VA to establish the Advisory Committee on US Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States to advise the Secretary on improving care and services for veterans in those areas.
Ossoff (D-GA)	#6021	Within 60 days of enactment, the US Archivist is to submit a plan for eliminating the backlog in VA records requests.

## THE APPLICATION FOR THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL IS NOW OPEN

With the midterm elections a month away, The American Legion is beginning the process of rebuilding its National Legislative Council for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. Interested candidates may submit their applications [at this webpage](#) for their departments' consideration. Legionnaires are encouraged to submit their applications before the Nov. 8 election. Thank you to those who have already applied!

The National Legislative Council (NLC) is a 535-member group designated to serve as direct liaisons to every member of the U.S. Congress. Approved in Resolution 45 by the National Executive Committee in 1975, the council's aim is to "propagate an interest in a furtherance of the legislative goals of The American Legion and to serve as a medium for disseminating information and developing an understanding with our elected representatives." Learn more about the council [in this story](#).

Members of the NLC are relied on to reinforce The American Legion's overall legislative efforts, particularly at times when immediate and personal contact with lawmakers is necessary – typically referred to as “grassroots contact.”

They routinely email, write, and/or call lawmakers and their staff regarding veterans legislation. Members should strive to visit the lawmaker's local office at least once per month to discuss issues that will directly impact The American Legion's legislative goals.

Members work to:

- Promote an interest in and a furtherance of The American Legion's legislative goals.

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- Serve as a liaison for disseminating information to elected lawmakers and staff.
- Develop and maintain strong working relationships with elected lawmakers and staff.
- Disseminate information on proposed and adopted veterans legislation to posts and members of the Legion within the congressional district.

Position requirements include:

- Current member of The American Legion
- Experience working with public relations and/or elected officials is a plus.
- Excellent verbal and written communications skills are necessary.
- Comfortable speaking and making presentations to larger groups.
- Ability to use social media.
- Ability to represent The American Legion and veterans to various groups and organizations.
- Ownership of an email account and internet access is required.
- Personal relationship with the member of Congress to whom they are assigned, senior staffers in their office, or willingness and ability to establish relationships with them.

### UPCOMING HEARINGS

Congress is out of session next week; there will be no hearings.