

ALA NC Legislative News

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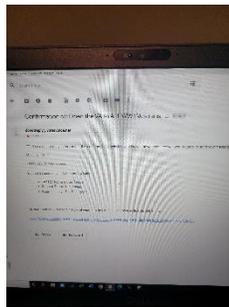
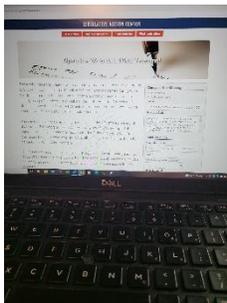
The purpose of this newsletter is to encourage and empower members to be more knowledgeable to take action on The American Legion's legislative priorities.

Happy New Year!!!! I pray each of you had a wonderful time at Christmas with friends and family. For our American Legion Family, I know from November through December is a busy time of year. We are organizing Christmas parties for children and veterans, buying, and wrapping gifts for our shut-ins and veterans, helping in our communities, working that last minute membership. Many of us are even doing the same type activities with our Church Family and other civic organizations. There is something about the New Year that renews my spirit. I always feel energized. I think it is because of the hope and new possibilities that the New Year will bring to us.

If your unit has not had a letter writing campaign yet, January would be an excellent month to do so. Many of you saw the letter from National Commander Paul Dillard that I shared on Facebook asking us to write letters to Congress on behalf of our WWII Veterans. Many WWII Veterans do not have access to health care at the VAMCs. Please copy and paste the following link in your web browser.

<https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/5Cqz62knIgBUuNys5kbrKQ>

This link will take you to the American Legion Action Center. All you must do is fill in your information the rest is done for you. My Unit 342 will be doing this at our next meeting. Please join us and let Congress hear our Voice. Let us Honor our WWII Veterans by speaking up for them now. Most of these veterans are 90 plus years old. They sacrificed and fought against evil so that we can enjoy our freedom today. Please take a few minutes and help them.



“You can recognize these remaining heroes with actions far more meaningful than words. The Veterans Health Care Eligibility Act of 1996 exempted all veterans who served during the Mexican Border Period and World War I from the means test required to enter the VA health care system. It is time to do the same for our World War II veterans.

H.R. 5562, the *WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility Act* would exempt WWII veterans from the means test needed to receive VA healthcare services. It would afford WWII veterans accessibility to the same VA healthcare services received by Spanish-American War and WWI veterans. Senator Menendez (D-NJ) has supported these efforts by introducing S.1040, the Senate companion to this bill.

S.1040 has ten bipartisan cosponsors and H.R. 5562 has three cosponsors. In July, S.1040 was ordered out of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee favorably without amendment and is now awaiting a vote on the Senate Floor. Likewise, in October, H.R. 5562 was included for consideration in a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing. Time is running out; it is vital H.R. 5562 or S.1040 is signed into law as swiftly as possible. This is why The American Legion has always vociferously supported this legislation.

Please urge your elected officials to support this critical and time-sensitive legislation by cosponsoring H.R. 5562 S.1040.”

Excellent News for North Carolina’s Military Retirees!

Rebecca Higgins

In November 2021, NC finally eliminated the tax on military retirement for those who retired without having five years of service before 1989. This initiative has taken 22 years to pass. This bill also removes that taxation of those medically retired and survivors of veterans.

Now all military retirees will be treated equally in NC. It is estimated that this will result in veteran retirees keeping about \$30 million rather than paying it out to the government state taxes.

This will be retroactive to January 2021.

If having no state income tax on retirement persuades 2,000 more retirees to stay in, or move to, North Carolina, the bill pays for itself, according to a Clemson University Study cited in the Fayetteville News and Observer.

Col. Scott Pence, Fort Bragg’s garrison commander, called the law an “achievement for military retirees,” in a statement provided to The Fayetteville Observer,

“Military retirees go on to serve as educators, first-responders, executives, and community leaders,” Pence said. “Many more of us will reside in North Carolina for our sunset years. North Carolina has one of the largest military footprints in the country, and we recognize the positive message this sends to those who have served our nation.”

State Sen. Chuck Edwards, In the Henderson Lightning, called attention to what he touted as one of the most significant provisions of the recently enacted state budget.

"It's one thing to talk about how we value our veterans, but it's much better for us to show them our appreciation," he said in a news release. "Exempting military pensions from state tax is one of the strongest shows of support I think we can display for those who stood to protect our freedoms."

Arizona, Nebraska, and Delaware also passed similar laws this year.

As of January 2022: 35 states do not tax military retirement (including the 9 states do not tax income at all), 16 states have small "special provisions" usually allowing a small amount to not be taxed, and 3 states plus DC tax the total amount.

American Legion Legislative Updates

‘AMERICAN LEGION SEES SIGNIFICANT WINS IN 2022 NDAA

The Senate passed a vital defense spending bill on Dec. 15, advancing the \$768 billion Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to the president's desk for final approval. The sweeping defense budget includes significant wins for The American Legion's legislative agenda and the nation's veterans.

"There are a number of important initiatives in the NDAA that The American Legion supports," American Legion National Commander Paul E. Dillard said. "First, no military servicemember will receive a dishonorable discharge solely on the basis of COVID-19 vaccine refusal. While we are supportive of the vaccines, we do not believe a veteran's military service should be characterized as 'dishonorable' simply because he or she disagrees.

"The NDAA will also provide for a robust national defense and establish the long overdue Global War on Terrorism Memorial. There is renewed funding for the Troops for Teachers program, which is not only a win for our transitioning veterans but for students in classrooms across the country. The legislation also makes strides in fighting military sexual assault and establish a commission that will examine every aspect of the Afghanistan war. We are also pleased that this law makes it easier to preserve and update Arlington National Cemetery memorials to military chaplains. The NDAA is a bipartisan example of lawmakers coming together and putting our country first. The American Legion is looking forward to the president signing it into law."

Here are some highlights of critical importance to our nation's veterans and military.

Troops to Teachers The Troops to Teachers program was revived in the compromise version of the NDAA legislation approved by the Senate. The American Legion lobbied lawmakers to include the program in the defense spending bill after it was abruptly defunded as part of the Defense-Wide Review when the Department of Defense (DoD) opted to realign program resources to higher priority programs more closely aligned to the National Defense Strategy. The program was allowed to sunset on Sept. 30, 2021. In a joint letter addressed to the House and

Senates Armed Services Committee, The American Legion joined a coalition of veteran's service organizations (VSOs) urging lawmakers to include the program in the NDAA. "Allowing the Troops for Teachers program to sunset would go against America's critical need to support our children's education," they wrote. The program was designed to assist transitioning servicemembers and veterans to begin careers as educators in K-12 public, charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. DoD reported the program placed over 21,000 veteran teachers in classrooms over the course of 27 years. The American Legion passed Resolution No. 21: Support State and National Funding for Troops to Teachers Program in support of renewing funding for the Troops to Teachers program at both state and national levels.

GWOT Memorial Another one of The American Legion's top legislative priorities included in the defense spending bill is the establishment of a Global War on Terrorism Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. In early November, The American Legion joined veterans' advocates, lawmakers, wounded warriors, and Gold Star families in front of the U.S. Capitol to call on Congress to pass legislation authorizing the memorial to be built on the National Mall. A national memorial for Global War on Terrorism veterans will become a place to gather, remember and reflect. Veterans of past wars often did not live to see the completion of the memorials designed to honor their service and sacrifice. Marine Corps veteran Chanin Nuntavong, executive director of Government Affairs for The American Legion, highlighted the sacrifices of the nearly 3 million veterans who have served in the Global War on National Legislation Terrorism. The gift of freedom, he said, is preserved by the men and women who fought for something much greater than themselves. "The warriors, whose sacrifice we admire every day, either laid down their lives or faced overwhelming dangers – not to uphold one moment, but one nation," he said. "The motivation that binds us – those of us who have worn the cloth of this nation – is our respect for, and commitment to, those who have chosen to put their lives before others."

Sexual assault reform The NDAA included changes to protect servicemembers from sexual assault. While The American Legion supports the approved changes, it believes more work is needed to overhaul the military justice system amid the epidemic of sexual assault and harassment in the armed forces. The American Legion became the first major VSO to support the Military Justice Improvement & Increasing Prevention Act. Supported by Resolution No. 67: Military Sexual Trauma, The American Legion is an advocate of improving the system by which the DoD investigates and prosecutes reported cases of military sexual trauma so that it is on par with the civilian system. While the Military Justice Improvement Act did not pass in its original form, the legislation drafted by the House and Senate Armed Services Committee makes strides in the right direction. The American Legion supports the approved legislation but asserts there is much work still to be done when it comes to reforming the military justice system.

Afghanistan War Commission Act of 2021 The Afghanistan War Commission Act of 2021 creates a nonpartisan, independent commission that would conduct a comprehensive examination of the war in Afghanistan. "Congress owes the thousands of American servicemembers who sacrificed in Afghanistan a serious, honest and long-term effort devoted to bringing accountability and transparency, which is why I'm introducing legislation to create an independent, nonpartisan commission aimed at ensuring we learn from mistakes made and implement reforms to ensure those mistakes are not repeated," said Sen. Tammy Duckworth,

DIII. The commission will examine every aspect of the war, according to the bill's text, including the political and strategic decisions that transformed a military mission into a nation-building campaign resulting in 20 years of involvement in Afghanistan.

Chaplain memorials An American Legion-backed effort to preserve memorials dedicated to chaplains at Arlington National Cemetery was also included in the NDAA. The Chaplains Memorial Preservation Act will enable the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces to update the chaplains' memorials. The memorials that rest atop a hill in Section 2 of Arlington National Cemetery honor chaplains killed in World War I; Protestant chaplains killed in World Wars I and II; Catholic chaplains killed in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam; and Jewish chaplains killed while on active duty. The most recent addition to Chaplain's Hill honors 14 Jewish chaplains. Dedicated in 2011, its inscription reads, "They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions." American Legion Past National Commander Brett Reistad initiated the resolution by which The American Legion supports these efforts in his home post located in McLean, Va. Resolution No. 17: Updates to Chaplains Hill Monuments at Arlington National Cemetery was unanimously approved during the National Executive Committee's spring meeting.

Vaccines and discharges Additional legislation in the NDAA supported by The American Legion includes a provision that will prevent DoD from dishonorably discharging members of the armed forces based solely on their refusal to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Other matters impacting veterans in the NDAA include the observance of National Atomic Veterans Day, a study on incidence of breast cancer among members of the armed forces serving on active duty and expanding the scope of Department of Veterans Affairs open burn pit registry to include burn pits in Egypt and Syria

STUDENT VETS TAKING REMOTE CLASSES NEXT SEMESTER WILL STILL GET FULL GI BILL BENEFITS Congress on Wednesday passed Legion-supported legislation to extend GI Bill protections for student veterans still forced into remote classes by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, ensuring they'll receive full benefits until next summer. The move is expected to affect about 57,000 students currently enrolled in degree programs, according to Veterans Affairs data. At issue is how post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are paid out to students who attend college classes remotely, rather than in-person. Students using the veteran's education benefit receive money for tuition plus a monthly housing stipend. Individuals enrolled in traditional in-person classes receive the full financial benefit, while students in online-only classes get half of that housing stipend. But when the coronavirus pandemic shuttered college campuses across America in spring 2020, that left tens of thousands of students worried they may not have their rent payments covered because their classes were forced online. The difference between half of a housing stipend and the full payout can range from a few hundred dollars to nearly \$2,000, since the payouts depend on the location of the student and school. Making up that difference could force some individuals move out mid-semester or drop course entirely.

To avoid those types of financial problems, Congress granted VA leaders broad authority to continue paying out the full housing stipends even if students had been forced out of the classroom. That authority was set to expire on Dec. 21. But the Senate on Wednesday passed

legislation to push that date back to summer 2022, in recognition of the ongoing transition from online to in-person classes. The measure, sponsored by Rep. David Trone, DMd., passed the House without objection on Dec. 8. President Joe Biden is expected to sign the measure into law in coming days.

SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS ADVANCES NOMINATION, HEALTH BILLS

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee sent 25 bills to the floor Wednesday by voice vote and advanced the nomination of Kurt DelBene to be assistant secretary for information and technology. Up for debate were bills related to improving veterans' experience and access to health services through the Department of Veterans Affairs, including legislation to improve access to care for rural veterans, process claims for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and improve veterans' health facilities, among other things. All the bills had bipartisan support, and there was little discussion during the swift markup. The bills approved by voice vote included: • Legislation (S 2533) by Committee Chair Jon Tester, D-Mont., to expand mammography services furnished at the VA. • A bill (S 2852) from Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., to authorize the VA to pay for care in non-Veterans' Affairs medical foster homes for certain veterans who cannot live independently. • A measure (S 3163) from Tester and committee ranking member Jerry Moran, R-Kan., that would increase transparency of the medical disability examination program and authorize the VA to offer contract examiners incentives to provide better services to rural and housebound veterans.

REMINDERS/ Helpful Hints

On July 16th National Atomic Day will be observed. Atomic Veterans participated in nuclear tests between 1945 and 1962.

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REMINDERS

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legislative website**,
www.legion.org/legislative to keep current
on legislative priorities. The site also

contains the Legion's legislative priority sheets and point papers, available for download. The priority/drop sheets outline the Legion's priorities, and you can "drop" these in your elected official's office. The point papers provide more information on the issue and the Legion's position.

Actively post The American Legion's legislative priorities on social media.

Identify your U.S. representative and two U.S. senators and build a relationship and rapport with these individuals and/or members of their staff.

Subscribe to e-newsletters of your elected officials to monitor what they consider to be their priorities and to make sure the veteran/military and national security issues are among them. Follow them on social media as well.

For Information on the Municipalities elections for North Carolina

<https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/upcoming-election> **Voting in local government elections is extremely important.**

Municipalities control our local tax rates, (property taxes) make decisions about development, policing, trash services and other issues that affect our daily lives Most municipalities in NC conduct election in odd-numbered years. On this website you will find a tab "voting tool kit" that will show you county by county and what election will occur this year and dates for the elections.

***Check out the tab for VOTE IN HONOR OF A VETERAN. You can receive a personalized pin. When you order your pin take a picture of you wearing your pin and post it on the Department Legislative Facebook page.**



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