

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.

The National Commanders Testimony on legislative priorities to Congress was today at 10:00am Eastern Standard time. You can go to the American Legion Website at www.legion.org to view his message.

It was good to see many of at Mid-Winter Conference. I had the privilege of attending the American Legion's secession for Legislative and hearing the National Commander talk about Legislative issues and his upcoming trip to Washington to address the Legislators and Senators on legislation supported by the American Legion. I hope all of you continue to support the Legion's efforts in letting our Senators and Representatives know The American Legion position on current legislation.

Please remember to keep our military and the Ukraine people in your prayers. "BEFORE ANY U.S. TROOPS ARE SENT TO UKRAINE, SOME IN CONGRESS WANT A SAY. U.S. Reps. Peter Defazio of Oregon, a Democrat, and Warren Davidson of Ohio, a Republican, are leading a broad, bipartisan coalition of lawmakers urging the president to not send U.S. troops into Ukraine, or declare war, before receiving authorization from Congress. President Joe Biden has not dispatched troops to Ukraine following Russia's invasion and has said he does not intend to do so, but on Tuesday announced sanctions on Russia, as well as on its oligarchs. Biden also said he would move U.S. forces and equipment already in Europe to the three Baltic states - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In a Tuesday letter to Biden, the House members cited Article I in the Constitution that gives Congress the power to finance and declare war, along with Article II that names the president as commander-in-chief. They noted that "the War Powers Resolution of 1973 was passed into law after multiple presidential administrations failed to receive congressional approval for over a decade of unauthorized involvement by U.S. Armed Forces in hostilities in Southeast Asia." The Democratic and Republican lawmakers acknowledged there's no intention now to place U.S. troops in Ukraine. National Legislative Division Weekly February 25, 2022 "However, if the ongoing situation compels you to introduce the brave men and women of our military into Ukraine, their lives would inherently be put at risk if Russia chooses to invade," lawmakers said in the letter. "Therefore, we ask that your decisions comport with the Constitution and our nation's laws by consulting with Congress to receive authorization before any such deployment." Defazio said in a statement that the letter is meant to reaffirm the War Powers Resolution, which "states that Congressional authorization is required before the 'introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances.'"

"Should your administration seek to introduce U.S. Armed Forces into hostilities or decline to remove any U.S. military personnel currently deployed inside Ukraine from unauthorized hostilities or imminent hostilities, Congress stands ready to deliberate over the potentially monumental implications of such scenarios," according to the letter. "The American people, through their representatives in Congress, deserve to have a say before U.S. troops are placed in harm's way or the U.S. becomes involved in yet another foreign conflict," lawmakers wrote. Bipartisan members of Congress banded together on Tuesday to urge Biden to place tough sanctions on Russia, though some Republicans remained highly critical of Biden. Russia's President Vladimir Putin on Monday directed troops to begin moving into two areas within eastern Ukraine, the Luhansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic. Thursday evening, Russian forces launch a full-scale assault on Ukraine, with its military attacking the country from the north, east and south.

Nearly 50 lawmakers signed the DeFazio-Davidson letter, including Democrat Cori Bush of Missouri, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Raul Grijalva of Arizona, Darren Soto of Florida, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Earl Blumenauer of Oregon and Mark Pocan and Gwen Moore of Wisconsin, along with Republicans Matt Gaetz, Bill Posey and Kat Cammack of Florida, Matt Rosendale of Montana, Yvette Herrell of New Mexico, Andy Biggs, David Schweikert and Paul Gosar of Arizona, Peter Meijer of Michigan, Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska and Ben Cline and Morgan Griffith of Virginia, among others."

News from the Legion on current Legislation

"TOXIC EXPOSURE LEGISLATION Last week, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair Sen. Tester (D-MT) and ranking member Sen. Moran (R-KS) introduced legislation to expand veterans' access to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care and services related to toxic exposures. That legislation was given mixed reviews, as it does not go as far as legislation previously introduced by House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) chair Rep. Takano (D-CA). Tester's bill, the Health Care for Bum Pit Veterans Act (S. 3541) does expand the eligibility period during which veterans may apply for benefits and calls for more federal research on the issues. American Legion National Commander Paul Dillard says the bill will "bridge the gap" until Congress can pass more comprehensive legislation. This week, HVAC ranking member Rep. Bost (R-IL) introduced the same legislation in the House. Bost touted the bill as bipartisan. However, of the 24 initial cosponsors, only one, Rep. Houlihan (D-PA), is a Democrat."

Health Care Shortage: "In a speech Wednesday, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary McDonough repeated his calls for Congress to pass legislation allowing higher pay rates for nurses and physician assistants (the RAISE Act). Speaking at the Charleston, SC, VA Medical Center, McDonough pointed out that nurses can earn thousands of dollars more in the private sector in their own communities. Between nurses leaving to get more money and aging nurses retiring, McDonough estimates that the Veterans Health Administration will need to hire 15,000 nurses a year for the next five years to handle the turnover. The VHA has already received authorization from the White House to raise retention bonuses."

Rebecca Higgins News from North Carolina

The US House has passed a bill from three North Carolina Representatives that would allow those harmed by contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune to sue for compensation. The Bill is part of the Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, which passed on Thursday, March 3. This will allow those stationed at Camp Lejeune between the 1950s and the 1980s for more than 30 days to sue in the Eastern District of North Carolina for damages caused by the water. This part of the bill is referred to as "The Camp Lejeune Justice Act". There was a unique quirk in NC law that did not allow for this type of suit until the passage of this act.

WASHINGTON, D.C. \$266.2 million for North Carolina military installations has been secured in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022.

Army:

- Fort Bragg, 10MW Microgrid Utilizing Existing and New Generators - \$19.5 million
- Fort Bragg, Emergency Water System - \$7.7 million

Marine Corps:

- Camp Lejeune, Water Treatment Plant Replacement - \$64.2 million
- Camp Lejeune, II MEF Operations Center Replacement - \$42.2 million
- MCAS Cherry Point, Aircraft Maintenance Hangar - \$57.9 million
- MCAS Cherry Point, F-35 Flightline Utilities Modernization - \$30 million
- MCAS Cherry Point, F-35 Sustainment Center - \$10 million
- MCAS Cherry Point, ATC Tower and Airfield Operations - \$18.7 million
- MCAS New River, Maintenance Hangar - \$13.3 million
- MCAS New River Aircraft Maintenance Hangar Addition/Alterations - \$2.7 million

Total Funding - \$266.2 million

NC House Bill 138 recognizes April 24 as Wounded Heroes Day in North Carolina. It is in honor of retired Sgt. Michael Verardo who was catastrophically wounded in Afghanistan while serving with the 82nd Airborne Division in 2010. Sgt. Verardo was deployed to Afghanistan with Bravo Company, 2-508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. An estimated 60% of that unit would receive a Purple Heart, and 24 soldiers would be sent home as casualties. Verardo has undergone 120 surgeries and requires close medical care at home, including speech, visual, physical and occupational therapies.

He's one of more than 155,000 wounded veterans in North Carolina. On April 24, he was listed as "death imminent," but a field blood transfusion saved his life. Ever since, he celebrated the

24th of April as his "alive day." Many military veterans celebrate their own "alive day," the day they might have died in combat but didn't. For some of those, it's also a day of mourning, because they might have lost a fellow service member on the same day.

NC House Bill 370 seeks to establish a pilot program for counties with high veteran populations to help expand training for local law enforcement and first responders on veteran-specific crisis intervention, suicide prevention and the Veterans Affairs resources available for the veterans they encounter.

If approved, the program would appropriate \$1 million to the nonprofit The Independence Fund to establish the pilot program in Cumberland, Brunswick, Craven, Onslow, Union and Wayne Counties. These are the counties with the heaviest populations of veterans.

"NVLB aims to transform the stigma associated with a mental health crisis and to start by asking a simple question during a mental health emergency: 'Did you serve?'" Verardo says. "By increasing dialogue around the unique issues our veterans face, NVLB will work to decriminalize and de-escalate mental health emergencies for veterans."

If the name "Verardo" rings a bell that is because The Independence Fund non-profit was set up by Sarah Verardo, the wife of SGT Micheal Verardo of Wounded Hero's Day. **Where the Bill Stands:** This Bill is in the Committee on Rules and Operations of The Senate.

House Bill 584 seeks to allow posttraumatic stress disorder to be taken into consideration for courts when a veteran is sentenced.

The bill states that if a veteran has been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of his or her military service and is undergoing professional treatment, that factor can be used to mitigate a sentence. **Where the bill stands:** It passed its first reading and was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security, Military and Veterans Affairs.

House Bill 599 seeks to provide free admission to state attractions for veterans and military service members and residents of North Carolina. **Where the bill stands:** It passed its first reading April 20, 2021, and was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security, Military, and Veterans Affairs,

Rest easy. **House Bill 66** has been passed and signed by the Governor. This Bill Regulates the Use of Deer Secretions for Hunting. If you have excretions collected from a cervid make sure it is synthetic, legally harvested, or natural with a valid Farmed Cervid License & properly labeled.

Senate Bill 123 Would provide for hiring preferences for state jobs for veterans and their spouses. **Where the Bill Stands:** It has passed its first reading in the Senate and has been referred to the Committee for Rules and Operations of the Senate.

These Bills are worth keeping an eye on and urging your Senator and Representatives to support. Nothing seems to have happened since Spring of 2021 on these bills.

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REMINDERS

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Join the newly created Department Legislative Facebook page NC **ALA Legislative Facebook group**

Download a copy of the **ALA Legislative Advocacy Guide** from **Visit the Legion's 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.

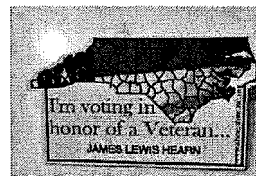
Identify your U.S. representative and two U.S. senators and build a relationship and rapport with these individuals and/or members of their staff.

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.**



Check out the North Carolina General Assembly page <https://ncleg.gov/> Near the bottom of the page click on find your Legislator, enter your address and you will find your North Carolina senators and Representatives to the General Assembly. Click on their name and you

On July 16th National Atomic Day will be observed. Atomic Veterans participated in nuclear tests between 1945 and 196