

October 24, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to urge them to pass the *Pay Our Troops Act!* This legislation ensures that members of the Armed Services will be paid in the event of a government shutdown.

The American Legion appreciates all the emails you have sent so far.

Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.

Take Our Government Shutdown Impact Survey!

As Congress continues to debate federal funding, we know the government shutdown is creating real challenges for veterans, servicemembers, families, and communities across the country. The results will help us advocate more effectively for those feeling the effects of the shutdown. You can find the link to our anonymous survey [here](#).

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Address>

TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS

Kansas	504
Wisconsin	314
Tennessee	221
New York	196
Alaska	130

These are the number of e-mail messages these Departments sent to Congress on the VoterVoice campaigns this week.

Register more participants in your Department to increase the number of veteran voices advocating on the Hill!

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN INFORMATION

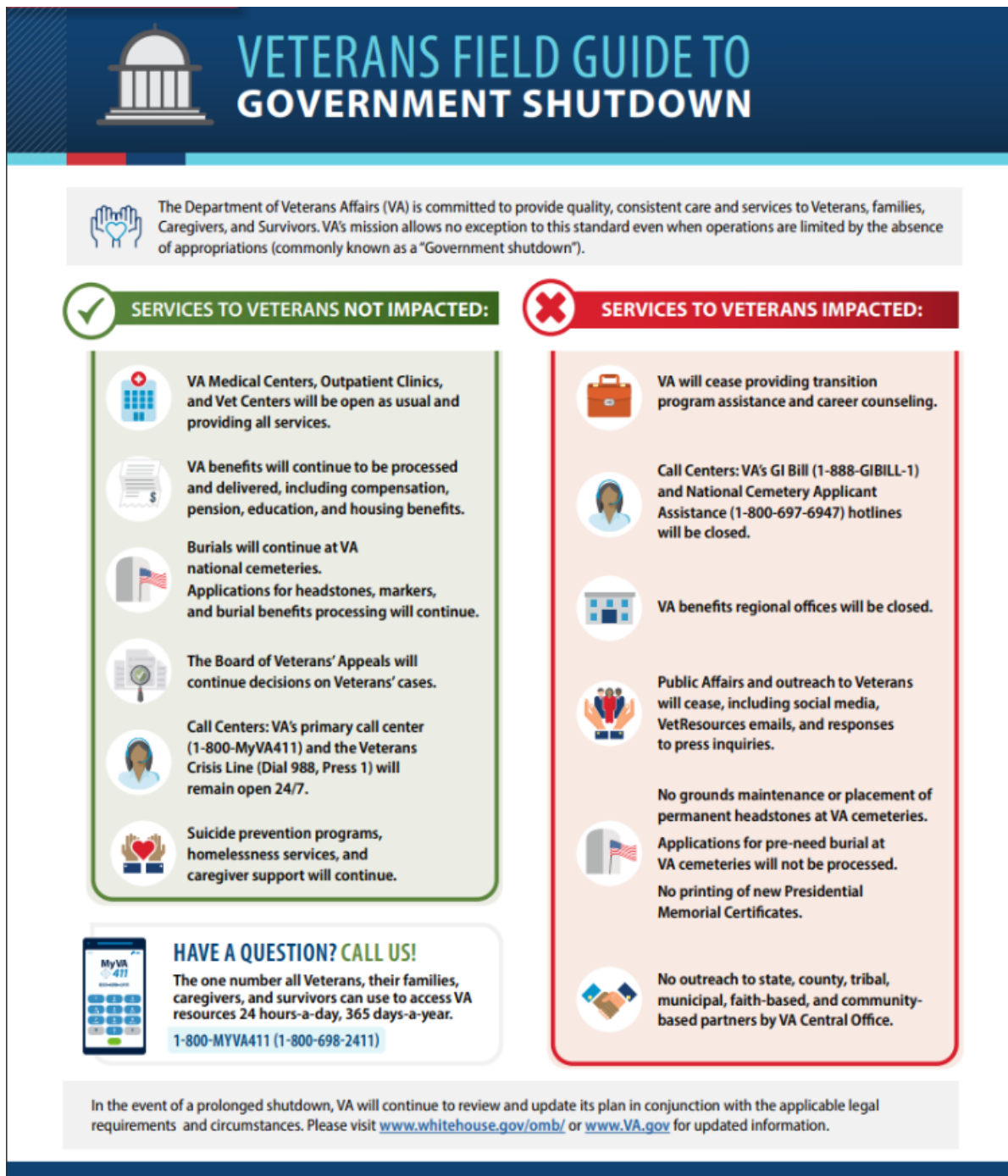
The American Legion's Government Affairs office is working diligently to keep the Legion Family updated on news related to the government shutdown, which has been in effect since October 1. The most recent vote in the Senate on 10/22 failed 54-46.

On October 14th, The American Legion participated in a joint press conference with other MSO/VSOs to call on Congress to open government and pass the

Pay Our Troops Act. You can watch Executive Director Mario Marquez's remarks [here](#).

Click [here](#) to watch National Commander Dan Wiley discuss the impact of the shutdown.

You can visit the Department of Veterans Affairs website to view the VA contingency plan [here](#). It breaks down what services are impacted by the shutdown, as well as what services are operating as normal.



VETERANS FIELD GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to provide quality, consistent care and services to Veterans, families, Caregivers, and Survivors. VA's mission allows no exception to this standard even when operations are limited by the absence of appropriations (commonly known as a "Government shutdown").

SERVICES TO VETERANS NOT IMPACTED:

- VA Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics, and Vet Centers will be open as usual and providing all services.
- VA benefits will continue to be processed and delivered, including compensation, pension, education, and housing benefits.
- Burials will continue at VA national cemeteries. Applications for headstones, markers, and burial benefits processing will continue.
- The Board of Veterans' Appeals will continue decisions on Veterans' cases.
- Call Centers: VA's primary call center (1-800-MyVA411) and the Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, Press 1) will remain open 24/7.
- Suicide prevention programs, homelessness services, and caregiver support will continue.

SERVICES TO VETERANS IMPACTED:

- VA will cease providing transition program assistance and career counseling.
- Call Centers: VA's GI Bill (1-888-GIBILL-1) and National Cemetery Applicant Assistance (1-800-697-6947) hotlines will be closed.
- VA benefits regional offices will be closed.
- Public Affairs and outreach to Veterans will cease, including social media, VetResources emails, and responses to press inquiries.
- No grounds maintenance or placement of permanent headstones at VA cemeteries.
- Applications for pre-need burial at VA cemeteries will not be processed.
- No printing of new Presidential Memorial Certificates.
- No outreach to state, county, tribal, municipal, faith-based, and community-based partners by VA Central Office.

HAVE A QUESTION? CALL US!

The one number all Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors can use to access VA resources 24 hours-a-day, 365 days-a-year.
1-800-MYVA411 (1-800-698-2411)

In the event of a prolonged shutdown, VA will continue to review and update its plan in conjunction with the applicable legal requirements and circumstances. Please visit www.whitehouse.gov/omb/ or www.VA.gov for updated information.

SHUTDOWN IS 'HOLDING MY VETERANS HOSTAGE,' VA CHIEF SAYS

This article's original publication can be found [here](#).



Despite the Veterans Affairs Department keeping most of its employees working through the government shutdown, the agency's leader said on Wednesday, the funding lapse is having significant impacts on key services for former military members.

Around 30,000 VA employees are currently furloughed as a result of the shutdown, VA Secretary Doug Collins told reporters, which is nearly double the number the department originally planned to send home without immediate pay. That figure will climb higher next week when VA furloughs most of its central office, but still represents less than 10% of its workforce.

Virtually all of the Veterans Health Administration, where most of VA's employees work, is currently working and getting paid on time using multi-year funds. Disability and other payments are still going out, though Veterans Benefits Administration staff are currently working without pay. Most of the National Cemetery Administration is furloughed, Collins said, though some employees have been brought back to allow burials to continue.

employees have been brought back to allow services to continue.

Still, the secretary said, veterans are missing out on critical services, such as vocational training and employment assistance for those transitioning out of the military.

“Right now they can't do it. They're shut down,” Collins said. “So we have some people who are trying to make a life outside of their time in the service, and they can't do this because Congress has decided that they want to shut the government down.”

More than 100,000 enrollees in VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment program are not currently receiving counseling or case management services, VA said, and 16,000 separating service members are missing out on briefings on the transition to civilian life. It added that more than 900,000 beneficiaries in VA's education programs cannot contact the dedicated phone line.

In a letter to Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., on Wednesday, Collins said the shutdown was making veterans question "the government's commitment to those who have served."

"Veterans should never have to doubt that their nation will uphold its commitments to them, and our dedicated employees should have to worry about feeding their families or paying the bills, especially as so many continue to work tirelessly every day," Collins said.

Collins has at times ostracized the VA workforce through his [various efforts](#) to [trim it](#) and his comments that the department does not exist to provide jobs. On Wednesday, he echoed [the Trump administration's position](#) that existing federal law does not require VA to provide back pay to furloughed workers—[in contravention of the statute](#) Congress passed and President Trump signed into law in 2019—and such retroactive compensation will require new legislation.

In response to the letter, Schumer criticized Collins' handling of VA and for Republicans' unwillingness to extend subsidies to Affordable Care Act premiums in exchange for reopening the government.

“Spare me the lecture from an administration that’s delivering a one-two punch to America’s heroes: first, firing thousands of VA workers and canceling

lifesaving care, and now, threatening to cripple 267,000 veterans with crushing health costs by refusing to extend ACA tax credits," Schumer said. Collins has sought to shed 30,000 employees from VA, though those workers mostly left by accepting voluntary incentives.

Veterans service organizations have also called on lawmakers to reopen the government, laying out more ways their members are being hurt.

"The graves are unmaintained in full measure," Mario Marquez, American Legion's government affairs executive director, said last week. "How much more disrespect can you demonstrate than that alone?"

He lamented the pause on transition services and said that in the midst of a suicide epidemic, the normal outreach efforts are not happening.

"So these problems are not administrative," Marquez said. "They are a moral failure by our government."

Democrats in Congress have accused Collins of "weaponizing" the shutdown by exacerbating its impacts. They specifically pointed to VA's decision to cut off assistance with congressional inquiries seeking to resolve issues raised by veteran constituents and noted that VA should use the multi-year funding Congress has provided to keep those services running.

"We take those concerns or their specific cases directly to VA and advocate on their behalf," Democrats from the House and Senate VA Committees said. "Thus, any delay in responding to this outreach or dispatching their cases will cause harm to the veterans we serve."

Collins on Wednesday did not address that concern directly, but said the issues impacting VA would be resolved if the shutdown were ended.

"It's time for my friends across the aisle to vote to open the government," Collins said. "Quit holding my veterans hostage."

NDA WORK ONGOING AS SHUTDOWN CONTINUES

This article's original publication can be found [here](#).

TOPLINES

1. NDAAs talks moving: Armed Services staff are working hard to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the fiscal 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, but it may be a while before members can sign off on a bicameral compromise and put it up for votes.
2. Non-negotiable: Top Democratic leaders called on President Donald Trump to negotiate an end to a partial government shutdown that is set to become the second longest in modern history this week.
3. Aviation bill advances: The Senate Commerce Committee advanced a bill Tuesday that would close a “loophole” in aviation safety protocol that federal investigations found led to the fatal January midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

FULL BRIEFING

1. NDAAs progress called slow and steady

Armed Services staff are working hard to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the fiscal 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, but it may be a while before members can sign off on a bicameral compromise and put it up for votes.

Sen. [Jack Reed](#) of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said in a brief interview Tuesday that House and Senate Armed Services aides have made considerable progress in negotiations but still have work to do before members can get involved.

Aides generally tackle the relatively easier issues before leaving the most contentious or impactful ones for lawmakers to resolve. The hardest issues of all are generally only settled at the end of the process by the chairs and ranking members.

Reed said authorizers have not yet set a deadline for finishing their work.

“A lot of the staff discussion is trying to sort of pave the way, and it’ll give us a better idea of how long it will take members to get together and talk over the issues,” Reed said. “We’re in full stage now.”

John M. Donnelly has the full story [here](#).

2. Trump rebuffs Democratic calls to negotiate end to shutdown

Top Democratic leaders called on President Donald Trump Tuesday to negotiate an end to a partial government shutdown that is set to become the second longest in modern history this week.

Senate Minority Leader [Charles E. Schumer](#), D-N.Y., said he and House Minority Leader [Hakeem Jeffries](#), D-N.Y., reached out to Trump to urge him to sit down with Democrats to address their party's main motivation for resisting a stopgap spending bill: the extension of expiring enhanced health care tax credits.

But Trump made clear his unwillingness to negotiate with Democrats during the shutdown at two White House appearances Tuesday. "We will not be extorted on this crazy plot of theirs," he told Senate Republicans at a Rose Garden lunch.

"I would like to meet with both of them, but I set one little caveat," Trump told reporters later in the Oval Office, when asked about meeting with Schumer and Jeffries. "I will only meet if they let the country open," he said, later clarifying, "The government has to be open."

With the funding lapse entering its fourth week, Republicans sought to display unity from the White House on Tuesday as the administration added another pressure tactic against Democrats. Sen. [Jerry Moran](#), R-Kan., said U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer didn't appear at a Senate Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations Subcommittee hearing that was initially scheduled for Tuesday because the "administration indicated that they were not having their personnel here during the shutdown."

Jacob Fulton and Aris Folley have more [here](#).

3. Senate Commerce advances bill sparked by Army helo crash

The Senate Commerce Committee advanced a bill Tuesday that would close a "loophole" in aviation safety protocol that federal investigations found led to the fatal January midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

The voice vote on the bipartisan bill ([S 2503](#)) is the first significant movement on legislation addressing the crash involving an Army Blackhawk helicopter and a commercial jetliner, killing 67 people. The panel also approved a slate of nominations and other bills.

“[The bill] closes a dangerous loophole that allowed military aircraft to operate in domestic skies without communicating their position quickly and accurately to other aviators like commercial aircraft do,” Chairman [Ted Cruz](#), R-Texas, said during the markup. “As National Transportation Safety Board Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy has said, this legislation will save lives.”

The NTSB released a preliminary report in March that said the Army helicopter had its ADS-B (Automatic Dependent Surveillance - Broadcast) Out system disabled during the flight.

The bill would require military aircraft to operate ADS-B Out systems immediately upon enactment of the law, narrowing the exceptions to the requirement. Military training flights would have to have the system on.

Valerie Yurk has the full story [here](#).

PLUS-UPS

Vets' SBIR plea: A coalition of 1.6 million veteran-owned small businesses is urging lawmakers to resolve their differences and reauthorize the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs.

The programs, which bankroll some \$4 billion a year in mostly defense-oriented small-business research, expired on Sept. 30. They cannot restart without a new authorization even when the partial government shutdown ends.

Sen. [Joni Ernst](#), R-Iowa, chair of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, has filed a three-year reauthorization ([S 853](#)) that would rewrite the programs' rules in a way that many companies object to, largely because her measure would cap at \$75 million the cumulative value of deals any one entity can receive. A similar bill ([HR 4777](#)) has been introduced in the House.

Sen. [Edward J. Markey](#) of Massachusetts, the panel's top Democrat, has proposed a simple one-year extension of the programs, a bill ([HR 5100](#)) the House passed last month. Ernst has blocked that bill.

"Since their inception, SBIR and STTR have helped create hundreds of thousands of American jobs, generated breakthrough technologies in defense, energy, healthcare, and cybersecurity, and spurred local economic growth in every state," wrote Scott Jensen, executive director of the National Veterans Small Business Coalition, in [an Oct. 20 letter](#) to Ernst and Markey.

Veteran to veteran: A group of 22 House Republicans who are military veterans urged Senate Democrats to join their Republican colleagues in supporting a short-term continuing resolution ([HR 5371](#)) that would reopen the government, citing the need to continue paying troops.

Their [letter](#), led by Rep. [Jen Kiggans](#), R-Va., and Rep. [Nick LaLota](#), R-N.Y., was addressed specifically to the seven Senate Democrats who are veterans. If those seven senators supported the stopgap measure, the House lawmakers noted, it would have enough support to pass.

"Let us be clear: passing this continuing resolution is not a concession by one side or the other," they wrote. "It is an act of solidarity with those who continue to serve."

BILLS TO PAY FEDERAL WORKERS STALL, BUT SENATORS READY TO COMPROMISE

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)

Key senators of both parties said they would try to find a way to pay all federal employees during the partial government shutdown after the Senate blocked consideration of dueling proposals Thursday.

Sens. [Ron Johnson](#), R-Wis., and [Chris Van Hollen](#), D-Md., who authored competing bills, talked up the possibility of brokering a compromise after both of their measures were blocked from advancing on the floor. But a provision in Van Hollen's bill to prohibit the administration from conducting layoffs during the shutdown received a less official point

the shutdown remained a key sticking point.

Johnson's bill ([S 3012](#)) would allow paychecks to flow for troops and “excepted” federal employees who are required to work without pay during the shutdown. Van Hollen's [bill](#) would also cover furloughed employees.

"I really don't have an objection to paying furloughed workers," Johnson told reporters. "They're going to get paid anyway. So let's figure out those areas of agreement. I mean, we're pretty darn close."

Van Hollen likewise expressed support for finding a compromise. "All Democrats would like to move forward," he said. "The difference is we don't want any federal employee to be punished for a shutdown they have nothing to do with. And if we can find a way with Sen. Johnson, Republicans, to accomplish that goal, then we can."

And Johnson appeared optimistic that a compromise could be reached in short order. "I think we can fix it over the weekend," he said. "We can maybe even fix it today, but again, we're going to have to vote on things, but we will work hard."

When asked if a compromise bill could get a vote next week, Senate Majority Leader [John Thune](#), R-S.D., told reporters: "We'll see. I mean, if there's headway made over the weekend, and obviously we're coordinating with Ron and his team, and we'll see where it goes."

A compromise couldn't come soon enough for hundreds of thousands of federal employees who are beginning to feel the squeeze of a partial government shutdown that is more than three weeks old. An Office of Management and Budget official said Thursday that “over 500,000 civilian federal employees will miss a full paycheck tomorrow.”

But a big hurdle to a deal centered on whether Republicans could stomach restricting President Donald Trump from laying off more workers during the shutdown, language that Democrats are seeking. White House budget director Russ Vought has said plans call for laying off more than 10,000 workers, although a federal judge has temporarily blocked more layoffs, known as reductions-in-force.

"Now it's just kind of down to reductions in force which I don't want to

...now it's just kind of down to resolutions in force, which, I don't want to completely constrain the president, but I don't mind making sure that Congress has a say in this as well," Johnson said. "So I'm actually quite hopeful."

And any bill that passes the Senate to pay federal workers would then require a vote in the House, which has been in recess since Sept. 19, when it passed a continuing resolution to extend government funding through Nov. 21 ([HR 5371](#)). Senate Democrats have blocked that bill as they fight to extend enhanced health insurance subsidies that are set to expire at the end of the year.

"I'm quite sure they would," Johnson said, when asked whether he thinks the House would come back in session if his bill passed the Senate. "I've heard publicly the speaker say he would do that if we passed this bill."

Competing bills blocked

The procedural vote to take up Johnson's bill was 54-45, falling six votes short of the 60 required to advance the measure under Senate rules. Three Democrats — [Jon Ossoff](#) and [Raphael Warnock](#), both of Georgia, and [John Fetterman](#) of Pennsylvania — joined all Republicans in support of the bill.

The legislation marked the latest effort by Republicans to force Democrats to make politically difficult votes as the shutdown drags on. And it comes as the Senate prepared to leave town for the weekend, ensuring the shutdown would continue at least into next week.

Democrats had countered Johnson with a pair of bills of their own.

In addition to the Van Hollen bill, Sen. [Gary Peters](#), D-Mich., had offered a more [limited measure](#) that would pay all federal workers only for the period from the Oct. 1 start of the shutdown to the day his legislation is enacted.

A Senate Democratic aide said the pair of bills was meant to provide two opportunities for Republicans to vote on legislation aimed at ensuring pay for all federal employees, as well as contractors and troops.

Both Democrats sought unanimous consent to take up their bills, but Johnson objected to both requests.

"I don't think we should limit the chief executive's ability to properly manage the

federal government and make the tough decisions sometimes to reduce the workforce,” Johnson said. “Cut out some government functions.”

More relief bills on deck

Republicans could press Democrats again on the issue of paying federal employees. Thune has teed up two additional bills for potential consideration: one ([S 3031](#)) from Sen. [Ted Cruz](#), R-Texas, that would compensate Transportation Security Administration employees and air traffic controllers, and another ([S 3030](#)) from Sen. [Dan Sullivan](#), R-Alaska, that would pay troops.

Republicans on Thursday sought to highlight the strain the shutdown is putting on the aviation industry, with Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy making an appearance on Capitol Hill to discuss the staffing issues that have started to pile up, causing flight delays across the country.

Senators could face a vote on an additional pressure point – funding for the food stamps program. Sen. [Josh Hawley](#), R-Mo., has introduced a bill that would fund the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and said he intends to ask for unanimous consent to either pass the measure or get a vote scheduled.

Thune has demurred on the possibility for a floor vote on that legislation. But state officials warned that SNAP funding is expected to dry up at the end of the month if the shutdown continues and no action is taken. Hawley said Thursday he had no commitment from leadership to take up his bill but was working on getting bipartisan support for it.

Thune was asked Thursday whether Republicans will move for more votes on individual bills like those offered by Sullivan and Cruz in the coming days to continue to up the pressure on Democrats during the shutdown.

“We’ll see,” he responded. “I mean, obviously the best answer to this, the best solution always, is open up the government. Everybody gets paid, and make sure that anybody who’s working today gets paid.”

Work on full-year appropriations bills, meanwhile, has continued to stall after at one point seeming like a potential route out of the shutdown. And Democrats

are doubling down on their resistance to the House-passed continuing resolution, with a 12th Senate vote on the measure coming up short yet again on Wednesday.

All the while, the Nov. 21 funding deadline included in the GOP stopgap bill is nearing, and Republicans have acknowledged that the shutdown is likely to force them to seek a longer funding extension.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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.

Allan Jensen, Washington

Allan, thank you for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities; we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

This month, Allan is the VoterVoice top power advocate, having sent over 130 messages to his Congressional representatives in the past 30 days. Way to go, Allan!

Thank you, Allan, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

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 us at grassroots@legion.org with the details.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress? Check out our [information papers and Legislative priorities](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

10 Tips for a Successful Meeting on Capitol Hill and the *Legislative Meeting Worksheet* are now available for viewing and download on The Legion's website. You can find them and other legislative resources on the [Legislative Advocacy Resources & Toolkit page](#).

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org or

ejohnson@legion.org.

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the [key legislation section of VoterVoice](#).



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 10/24, the following hearings are scheduled:

- Tuesday, October 28, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services, Full Committee Nomination hearing -- *“To Consider the Nominations of: Mr. Marc J. Berkowitz to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy; Dr. Joseph S. Jewell to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Science and Technology; Mr. James R. Caggy to be Assistant Secretary of the Defense for Mission Capabilities; and Mr. Brendan P. Rogers to be Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment”*
- Wednesday, October 29, 4:00 PM: Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Oversight hearing -- *“Putting Veterans First: Is the Current VA Disability System Keeping Its Promise?”*
- Thursday, October 30, 9:30 AM: Senate Committee on Armed Services, Full Committee Nomination hearing -- *“To Consider the Nomination of: Vice Admiral Richard A. Correll, USN to be Admiral and Commander, United States Strategic Command”*

HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)



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