



Veterans' legislation roundup

As we near the end of the first half of the 116th Congress, now is a good time to review more legislation of importance to veterans since our last roundup in July. Here are some of the most significant events and legislation around veterans' issues that are important to NALC and its members.

Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations

At the end of October, the House and Senate completed work on H.R. 3055, a package of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations bills that including funding for "Military Construction-Veterans Affairs." The Military Construction-Veterans Affairs is the primary source of funding for national defense facilities, housing and infrastructure for military families. It is also the primary source of funding for Veterans' Affairs programs, including health care and benefits.

With hundreds of amendments filed and differences remaining between the House and Senate versions, as well as overall funding uncertainty, short-term funding measures known as continuing resolutions (CRs) have been necessary to provide more time for solutions to be reached and final bills to be passed.

Veterans-related legislation of note

There has been a lot of action related to veterans' affairs in the 116th Congress, though the majority of it has come out of the House of Representatives, having passed a series of bipartisan bills both in committee and on the floor since the August recess. The Senate, however, has taken up only a handful of bills in the 116th Congress. For reference, the last mark-up of pending legislation in the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs was on May 22.

H.R. 1200—Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019 (signed into law Sept. 26)

This bill, authored by U.S. Navy veteran and freshman Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA), was referenced in the July *Postal Record*; it has since been signed into law and was set to become effective on Dec. 1. It will provide a one-time cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to disabled veterans and their families as a disability and survivors' compensation, provided there is a COLA for Social Security recipients. The COLA is the same as that set by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and would cover benefits such as wartime disability compensation, a clothing allowance, and dependency and indemnity compensation for children and surviving spouses.

H.R. 4285—Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2019 (signed into law Sept. 30)

This law preserves critical Veterans Affairs (VA) housing and travel programs that were set to expire at the end of September. Among other provisions, the law provides a two-year extension of authority to fund financial assistance for supportive services for low-income veteran families in permanent housing (authorizes appropriations at \$380 million), a one-year extension of VA's authority to temporarily expand payments and allowances for beneficiary travel in connection with veterans receiving care from vet centers, and a one-year extension of VA's authority relating to vendee loans.

H.R. 749—Veterans Right to Expediency Act (introduced Jan. 24)

This bipartisan bill would ensure that veterans are informed in a timely manner of the outcome of their VA Department disability claim, requiring

the notices be delivered through USPS by certified mail.

S.598/H.R.497—"Burial Rights for America's Veterans' Efforts Act of 2019" or the "BRAVE Act of 2019" (introduced Feb. 28)

This bill, introduced in both the House and Senate, would improve burial services for veterans by increasing funeral benefits offered through the VA, updating the current funeral and burial benefit system to treat all non-service connected deaths equally, regardless of where the veteran passes away.

H.R. 2942—"Helping Expand and Launch Transitional Health for Women Veterans Act" or "HEALTH Act" (passed in the House July 23)

Authored by U.S. Navy veteran and freshman Rep. Gil Cisneros (D-CA), this bill would direct the VA secretary to carry out the Women's Health Transition Training pilot program through Fiscal Year 2020 to ensure transitioning servicewomen are aware of the health services available to them, including eligibility for gender-specific services and mental health programs.

H.R. 4477—Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act (committee passage Oct. 16)

This bipartisan bill seeks to improve management and improve the quality of care within the Veterans Health Administration. It is currently part of Government Accountability Office's (GAO) "High Risk List" of federal government programs that are most susceptible to fraud, waste or mismanagement. This bill would target issues that arise in programs affecting veterans by requiring the VA secretary to submit a plan to fix the problems and remove it from the "high risk" designation.

Veterans' legislation roundup (continued)

H.R. 4852—"G.I. and Veterans Education Empowerment Act" or "GIVE Act" (committee markup on Oct. 29)

This legislation would require the VA secretary to provide information about post-secondary educational institutions, such as colleges and universities, to veterans who could then make use of the G.I. Bill to help pay for their attendance to such institutions, provided they qualify.

H.R. 4183—Identifying Barriers and Best Practices Study Act (committee markup on Oct. 29)

This bipartisan bill would instruct the comptroller general of the United States to initiate a three-year study on the pension and disability benefits for members of the National Guard and members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces. The goal is to identify barriers or benefit disparities that may exist between veterans in regular compo-

nents, versus those that serve in reserve components.

In addition to numerous pieces of legislation, there has been recent attention on Capitol Hill regarding the protection of veterans from criminals seeking to scam and rob them of their savings.

On Nov. 6, the Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing to discuss this troubling issue and heard testimony that such scams include pretending to collect donations on behalf of veterans' groups, pretending to update a veteran's files to obtain personal information, and informing veterans that they qualify for special or secret government programs that require an initial fee.

NALC encourages letter carriers to be on the lookout for such scams and, when in doubt, to check with someone you trust. NALC will continue to monitor any updates or legislation related to this ongoing problem.

As always, NALC is carefully monitoring both good and bad legislation that is introduced and advanced in the 116th Congress and will be sure to keep letter carriers aware of what may affect our membership.

Join the NALC Veterans Group

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members—both active and retired letter carriers—who are also military veterans the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans. It is free to join.

Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for your military service and membership in NALC.

If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at nalc.org/veterans.

Election Notices

California

Nominations for elections will be the last order of business at the Friday session of the 56th CSALC convention at the Wyndham San Diego Bayside Hotel, 1355 N. Harbor Drive, San Diego, on May 1. Nominations for the offices of president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, director of retirees and director of education/organizing will be accepted from all branches in the state. Nominations for executive board of state officers, one position for each of the eight districts, will be accepted from the branches in their respective districts.

Balloting is to take place during the May 2 session of the convention. Newly elected officers will be sworn in as the last order of business during the May 2 session.

There will be a brief post-convention board meeting half an hour after the adjournment of the convention on May 2, which newly elected officers will be

required to attend. The location of the board meeting will be announced prior to the convention closing.

Mark L. Lesch, Sec., CSALC

Corinth, Missouri

This is official notice to all branch members of Branch 2022 that nominations and election of officers serving the office of president, vice president, secretary/treasurer and shop stewards will be held at the meeting on Dec. 14 at 6:30 p.m.

Derenda P. Lucas, Sec./Treas., Br. 2022

Glenview, Illinois

To all members of Branch 4007: Let this serve as official notice to all members that the membership was notified at the October regularly scheduled monthly branch meeting that nominations for delegates to the 2020 state convention would take place at the No-

vember branch meeting.

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday falling on the date of our regular monthly branch meeting, the November branch meeting has been re-scheduled to Thursday, Nov. 22, at the Glenview Post Office in the Union Room at 6 p.m., with elections to follow at the Dec. 26 branch meeting.

Brian J. Gavin, Pres., Br. 4007

Mento, Ohio

This is an official notice of elections to all members in good standing of Branch 4195 for delegates to the 72nd biennial convention. Nominations will be held at the regular branch meeting on Dec. 12.

Frank Leonard, Pres., Br. 4195

Rochester, New York

In accordance with Article 5 of the NALC Constitution, this is official notice

to members of Branch 210 that nominations for union stewards for the term of two years (Jan. 1, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2021), must be submitted to the union hall at 585-427-2450 by no later than Jan. 9.

Election ballots will then be mailed out and must be returned to the union hall at 2491 Brighton-Henrietta Townline Road, Rochester, by Jan. 31.

Anthony Polidori, Rec. Sec., Br. 210

Valley Stream, New York

This is to serve as official notice to all members of Branch 2189 that nominations for the offices of president, vice president, secretary-treasurer and three trustees will be held at the January meeting, and the elections will be held at the February meeting.

Bob Sowers, Pres., Br. 2189