

Veterans' legislative update

In the first session of the 118th Congress, numerous bills have been introduced and moved through Congress that would affect veterans. Below is a sampling of some of these bills and how they would address veterans' unique needs.

On Nov. 13, in honor of Veterans Day, President Biden signed two bills into law that benefit America's veterans:

Korean American VALOR Act—PL 118-20

This law requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to extend health care benefits and related services to members of the South Korean armed forces who served in the Vietnam War. It was introduced in the House by Veterans Affairs Committee Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA) and in the Senate by Sens. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Mike Braun (R-IN).

Wounded Warriors Access Act—PL 118-21

This law streamlines veterans' access to their benefit claim files from the VA. The VA will establish and maintain a secure online tool that allows veterans to request their claim files electronically, instead of having to travel to a regional VA location or mail in a form to receive a paper copy of their claim file. House Democratic Caucus Chairman Pete Aguilar (D-CA) led the legislation in the House, and Sens. Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Braun led it in the Senate.

The following are veterans-focused bills moving through Congress:

Build, Utilize, Invest, Learn and Deliver (BUILD) for Veterans Act of 2023—H.R. 3225/S. 42

This bill was introduced by Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and Sens. Patty Murray (D-WA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Mark Warner (D-VA) in

the Senate, and Reps. Chris Deluzio (D-PA) and Frank Mrvan (D-IN) in the House. It would modernize the delivery of VA medical facilities and other infrastructure projects, execute a plan to hire more construction personnel, and examine the disposal or repurposing of unused and vacant buildings owned by the VA, allowing the agency to better serve veterans.

Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act—H.R. 542/S. 141

This bill, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the House (414-5) on Dec. 5, would improve and expand community-based services for aging veterans and improve VA support for veterans and caregivers of all ages. It would expand non-institutional care, allowing veterans to receive the care they need on their own terms. Reps. Julia Brownley (D-CA) and Jack Bergman (R-MI) introduced the bill in the House. A Senate companion bill (S. 141) was introduced by Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH).

Caregiver Outreach and Program Enhancement (COPE) Act—H.R. 3581

On Dec. 4, the House passed this bill, which would increase mental health resources available to veterans' caregivers. Through a VA grant program, it would provide support and mental health care for veterans' caregivers. It was introduced by Reps. Jen Kiggans (R-VA) and Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA). No companion legislation has been introduced in the Senate.

Sen. Tuberville ends blockade for most military promotions

On Dec. 5, Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) ended his nearly 10-month



hold on hundreds of military promotions.

Tuberville, who objected to the Pentagon's abortion access policy, was stalling high-level Defense Department nominations. While he did not drop all of the holds, his release allowed for the advancement of more than 430 defense positions.

The decision came after Tuberville faced increasing pressure from senators on both sides of the aisle who claimed his blockade was endangering national security. It forced many military officials to delay their retirements. In many posts, interim appointees held high-level leadership positions for months. With the end of Tuberville's protest, the newly appointed leaders will settle into their positions.

For updates on legislation and other congressional action that affects our veteran members, check the "Government Affairs" section on nalc.org.

Correction: Ann Arbor, MI Branch 434 member Christopher R. Matheson's name was listed wrong on the list of Veterans Group members in the November *Postal Record*.