Congress has always made it a priority to consider legislation to improve the lives of the men and women who have served in the military. In fact, during the 115th Congress, some 1,327 bills were introduced in the House and Senate related to veterans’ affairs and 70 were signed into law. Many were straightforward and designed to improve issues affecting veterans, some were directly or indirectly harmful to veterans, others affect federal employees specifically as well as veterans, and still more set precedent for how unrelated legislation may be drafted in the future.

While many bills do not directly affect letter carriers, this article highlights and summarizes a few that are important to our members one way or another.

**Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019 (Public Law 115-244)—Signed into law on Sept. 21, 2018**

Each year, Congress puts forward an appropriations bill to fund energy and water, the legislative branch, military construction and veterans affairs. While many funding measures do not get signed into law, this year lawmakers were able to agree on a plan that contains a funding boost of more than 6 percent for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in fiscal year 2019. The $209 billion allocation for the VA in H.R. 5895 includes $1.1 billion for the start of a VA electronic health records overhaul and $400 million for opioid abuse prevention within the department.

**VA Mission Act (Public Law 115-182)—Signed into law on June 6, 2018**

Among other provisions, this bipartisan bill (S. 114) provides an additional $1.4 billion in funding for VA and allows the department to manage non-VA care better than the Choice program. This temporary fix will allow VA to open 28 new clinics and implement new hiring programs, thereby providing more veterans access to the care they need.

**Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-55)—Signed into law on Aug. 23, 2017**

This legislation (S. 1094) places arbitrary caps on VA employees’ official time, limiting who can use official time, and thereby ensuring professionals do not receive adequate representation. It also restricts due-process rights for new hires by extending the probationary period from 12 to 18 months, limits official representation of union members by chosen leadership, and allows members to revoke their membership at any time. By allowing members to drop in and out of membership at will, the bill interferes with union business solely to undermine the union and reduce overall membership. Additionally, it calls for the secretary of VA to submit an annual report to Congress relating to the use of official time by employees.