

National Legislative Division Weekly

LEGION TESTIFIES ON VETERANS' EDUCATION, HOMELESS ISSUES



Employment and Education Policy Analyst Ricardo Gomez testifies before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.

American Legion employment and education policy associate Ricardo Gomez testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity on June 14.

Gomez addressed the impact of school closures on veterans, including their access to academic transcripts in the wake of abrupt school closures. Gomez will also testify in support of the *Housing Our Military Veterans Effectively Act*, which seeks to grant the VA funds to improve flexibility in assisting homeless veterans.

You can watch the hearing by clicking the link [here](#).

CONGRESS

The House Appropriations Committee (HAC) re-started marking up its FY24 bills this week amid acrimony and controversy over spending limits. The Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) set aside the debt ceiling for two years in exchange for an agreement to set federal spending in FY24 at FY23 levels.

However, on Monday, HAC chair Rep. Granger (R-TX) released a statement that she considers the FRA agreement to be a ceiling for the FY24 bills. Therefore, she decided to mark up appropriations bills that limit new spending to the FY22 topline levels. The goal, she said, is to keep total spending 1% lower than if the government were operating under a continuing resolution (which would retain FY23 levels). Democrats loudly protested this abrogates the FRA agreement. HAC ranking member Rep. DeLauro (D-CT) told reporters on Tuesday this "all but guarantees a shutdown" of the federal government.

Things came to a head Wednesday evening when the HAC tried to vote on subcommittee allocations (they had already marked up and voted on some bills, including the Military Construction/Veterans Affairs one). Rep. Hoyer (D-MD) protested marking up to FY22 levels, asking "you think any of us would have made a deal if we thought your '22 number" was the end result. The committee abruptly adjourned until early Thursday morning.

There is clearly tension in the committee across Party lines, beyond just the spending levels. Several Conservative priorities are included in the bills released so far.

National Legislative Division Weekly

All of these provisions are, primarily, about sending a message rather than accomplishing much of anything. Some will not make it through the Senate. Others do not have real authority behind them. For example, prohibiting the VA from spending money on the display of the Pride flag does not prevent the Department from accepting a donated flag that is hung by volunteers.

NEXT WEEK IN CONGRESS

The House Armed Services Committee will hold a marathon markup of its FY24 NDAA next Wednesday. They are scheduled to start at 10am, and are expected to go into the night. In previous years, this event often ends in the wee hours of the next day, having gone as long as six the next morning.

The SASC will also be marking up its FY24 NDAA. Only the Personnel Subcommittee markup will be held in open session. The rest of the subcommittees and the full committee will mark up behind closed doors. While the HASC releases its materials in real time (and has already released its full mark), the SASC holds back until the final bill is filed with the Senate before going to the floor.

The HAC is also expected to mark up its FY24 Defense spending bill next week.

MILITARY PAY OVERHAUL COULD MEAN HUGE PAY BOOSTS FOR ENLISTED TROOPS

Original Article: [Here](#) (Military Times)

Junior enlisted troops could see their monthly pay boosted by up to 35% next year under a massive rewrite of the military's pay tables proposed under a House Republican defense appropriations plan released Wednesday.

The move would guarantee that even the lowest-ranking service members would make at least \$31,000 annually in base pay — roughly equivalent to a \$15-an-hour wage. Troops also receive other financial compensation in the form of housing stipends, free health care coverage and food stipends.

The proposal — which still has to survive numerous rounds of negotiations on Capitol Hill — comes in direct response to concerns that thousands of military families are living at or below the federal poverty line, struggling to keep up with rising inflation costs.

But other junior enlisted troops would benefit from the plan as well. Most troops ranked E-5 and below would see boosts under the budget plan. An E-3 with three years service would see his or her annual salary jump from just under \$31,000 to more than \$35,000 under the plan. An E-4 with six years in service would see annual pay go from about \$36,500 to \$38,500.

But other junior enlisted troops would benefit from the plan as well. Most troops ranked E-5 and below would see boosts under the budget plan. An E-3 with three years service would see his or her annual salary

National Legislative Division Weekly

jump from just under \$31,000 to more than \$35,000 under the plan. An E-4 with six years in service would see annual pay go from about \$36,500 to \$38,500.

Junior enlisted pay has been a major focus of lawmakers in recent years. As many as 22,000 active-duty military service members and their families qualify for federal food assistance, earning so little that they are at or below the federal poverty line, according to past government studies.

Last week, lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee unveiled plans for monthly bonus pay for troops rank E-6 and below next year, to be awarded “as economic conditions dictate.” The exact amounts would be determined by Pentagon officials after passage of the legislation.

Overhauling the military pay tables could minimize the need for those bonuses. Under the appropriations proposal, troops ranked E-1 with at least four months service would see their yearly basic pay increased by more than \$8,000 under the changes, a huge financial boon for those families.

Last week, lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee unveiled plans for monthly bonus pay for troops rank E-6 and below next year, to be awarded “as economic conditions dictate.” The exact amounts would be determined by Pentagon officials after passage of the legislation.

Overhauling the military pay tables could minimize the need for those bonuses. Under the appropriations proposal, troops ranked E-1 with at least four months service would see their yearly basic pay increased by more than \$8,000 under the changes, a huge financial boon for those families.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

In an effort 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.

John Hacker, North Carolina



John Hacker spreading awareness of veteran suicide in Raleigh, North Carolina.

This week, we are excited to recognize John Hacker from the Department of North Carolina for presenting about The American Legion’s “Be the One” campaign at a conference in Raleigh with the Rotary Foundation and local veteran service organizations (VSOs). He reported that many people were unaware of the severity of veteran suicide.

Thank you, Mr. Hacker!

National Legislative Division Weekly

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 me at kisaacson@legion.org.

UPCOMING HEARINGS

- On Tuesday, June 20, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization will hold a hearing titled "The Status of VA Financial Management Business Transformation."
- On Wednesday, June 21, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will hold a markup hearing of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).
- On Wednesday, June 21, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health will hold a legislative hearing. The American Legion will be testifying; you can watch it [here](#).
- On Wednesday, June 21, the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel will hold a business meeting to markup those provisions which fall under the subcommittee's jurisdiction of the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year (FY) 2024.
- On Wednesday, June 21, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold a hearing to examine the effectiveness of the Office of Integrated Veteran Care.
- On Thursday, June 22, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee will have a member day.
- On Thursday, June 22, the Senate Appropriations Committee will have a business meeting to consider the appropriation bills for FY 24.