

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

VETERAN-RELATED LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

Congressional Updates

Both congressional chambers were in session this week.

On November 1, the Senate took a first step toward resolving the stalled fiscal year (FY) 2012 appropriations cycle. On that day, the chamber voted 69-30 to pass a consolidated appropriations bill – **H.R. 2112**, termed a “minibus” by its Senate supporters, as opposed to an omnibus – which would provide funding to the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Justice, and Transportation and related agencies for the remainder of the fiscal year.

House Appropriations Chairman Harold Rogers (KY) has signaled a willingness to approve this measure, which will hopefully initiate further “minibus” bills in the weeks ahead. On Thursday, November 3 the House voted 265-160 to send the Senate-passed measure to a conference committee, with instructions on funding levels for several programs.

However, time is running out on a short-term spending bill passed in early October (**P.L. 112-36**), which expires on November 18. It is likely that more stopgap funding measures will be needed to keep the federal government running before final FY 2012 appropriations are finally in place.

On Wednesday, November 2, the House of Representatives by a vote of 425-0 passed **H.R. 2061**, the “*Civilian Service Recognition Act of 2011*.” This bill, introduced by Reps. Richard Hanna (NY) and Darrell Issa (CA) would codify a program to present American flags to the families and next-of-kin of foreign service workers who die in the line of duty overseas. The American Legion originally had concerns with vague language in the measure. After consulting with the cosponsors, the bill was rewritten and reintroduced. It now goes to the Senate for further action. The final language included suggestions made by The American Legion.

Also on Wednesday, the House passed **S. 894**, the “*Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2011*,” by a voice vote. This measure would increase, effective December 1, the rates of veterans’ disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. This would be the first COLA for veterans’ compensation

recipients in two years. The measure now goes to the White House for the President's signature.

LEGISLATIVE FOCUS FOR THE WEEK:

Legionnaires Meet with JSC Members, Hoping to Prevent Cuts to DOD, VA

With a deadline looming, the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (JSC, or "Supercommittee") is working to develop a plan to reduce federal programs by nearly \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years. The JSC has not been very forthcoming in its deliberations, nor what form its final plan will take. Possible massive reductions in programs of the Departments of Defense (DOD) or Veterans Affairs (VA) have been the focus of attention by the Legislative Division since the JSC was created.

On November 1, 42 Legionnaires from across the country met in Washington, DC to formulate a strategy to lobby the JSC concerning the possible budget cuts. Legislative Council liaisons for the 12 members of the super-panel were included, along with Department NECmen, Department Commanders, and Department Adjutants. Also attending the meeting were newly-appointed National Legislative Commission Chairman Ken Governor of New York, and Leading Candidate for National Commander James Koutz of Indiana.

The next day, these Legionnaires – accompanied by members of the Legislative Division staff – held face-to-face meetings with their congressional members or their staff to express The American Legion's hope that further DOD cuts will not endanger our nation's security.

House Judiciary Panel Approves Legion Charter Bill, Full House Next

On Thursday, November 3 a Legion delegation of six members – led by Legislative Commission Chairman Kenneth Governor and Council Chairman Brett Reistad – attended a House Judiciary Committee hearing. The highlight of the meeting was the successful approval by that committee of **H.R. 2369**, a bill to amend The American Legion's congressional charter. The bill passed the committee by a voice vote. The measure now goes to the full House, where final passage is almost certain.

We immediately have begun working with Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor to expedite its vote on the floor. We hope to have that vote sometime in November – which most likely might be sometime the week of November 15th. They are in recess until then. Even if they fail to vote on it in 2011, the bill will not die and can be brought up when they return from the holiday

recess in January during the second session of the 112th Congress. Despite this, we're doing everything in our power to get it passed this month.

During the discussion in the Judiciary hearing, Chairman Smith noted that at 433 co-sponsors, "The American Legion has set the record for the most co-sponsors ever on a bill in Congress."

Letters of Support

On October 21, The American Legion sent a letter to Rep. Todd Akin (MO), thanking him for his introduction of draft legislation entitled the "*Open Burn Pits Registry Act of 2011*." If enacted, this measure will create a registry that will enable VA to better track those service members exposed to dangerous burn pits and help facilitate further research to ensure this country does not leave these exposed veterans behind in treatment.

Update on Flag Amendment Bills

Senator Orrin Hatch's (UT) office continues to solicit additional cosponsors for **Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res.) 19**, a proposed constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration. Its text states simply: "*The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.*" The cosponsor total for the Senate legislation stands at 29, with the recent addition of Sen. John Boozman (AR).

To date, **H.J. Res. 13** – the House companion to the Senate measure – has accumulated 64 cosponsors, with the additions last week of Reps. Charles Bass (NH), Bill Johnson (OH), and Rob Wittman (VA). Please contact your representatives' and senators' offices, and ask them to become cosponsors of the flag amendment in their respective chambers. If they are already cosponsors, be sure to thank them for their support.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK: "I am wondering if the information included in these updates is the most current possible. How can I be sure?"

The Weekly Update from the Legislative Division is sent each week to all members of the National Legislative Council and the Legislative Commission and other Legion family members who have asked to receive a copy. It's not intended for an outside audience, although it can always be read from the website.

In addition, members of both of the Council and the Commission are subscribed to receive any action alerts from the Legion's Legislative Action Center (LAC). **Just because you get this weekly update doesn't mean you're on our action alert list.** As we often extend, any member of the Legion family who wishes to receive this Update – as well as Action Alert – can contact the Legislative Division at www.leg@legion.org and request that they be added to the mailing list for this Update and/or the LAC alerts.

The American Legion Legislative Division

Tim Tetz, Director

(202) 263-5752

For Week Ending 11-4-11