



LEGISLATIVE "FREEDOM ADVOCATES" – MARCH 2021 BULLETIN

Unit and District end-of-year (EOY) reports are quickly approaching.

- Due dates:
 - Unit Chairman to District Chairman 2nd Friday in April which is **April 9, 2021**.
 - District Chairman to Department Chairman due **May 1, 2021**.

Please do not be late many EOY reports aren't used because they are received after the District or Department Chairman has to submit their report. As always please include pictures of legislative actions.

The 117th Congress is now in session continue to contact all those that have a say in supporting our veterans to include your local community. The American Legion (TAL) request that we share their agenda for the 117 Congress 1st Session. Remember TAL is the voice of nearly 2 million military veterans and service members. When we add our voices with theirs we are even stronger. The Legislative Agenda for the 117th Congress, 1st Session;

- **Toxic Exposure & Burn Pits** – High percentage of post-9/11 veterans have been exposed to airborne toxic hazards due to their military service. Request your representatives in Congress reintroduce and pass the Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act of 2020. Also support the continued research directly related to contaminants in order to establish a complete list of presumptive diseases caused by toxic exposure during service.
- **Improved Health Care of Women Veterans** – VA needs to develop and expand health-care services for women, the fastest-growing demographic in the veteran community. Women veterans not signed up for VA Health Care shared no gender-specific services and lack of awareness about VA benefits why they were not enrolled. The American Legion urges Congress to oversee implementation of recently passed VA pilot programs, research initiatives and policy revision to address these issues. The American Legion encourages expansion of newborn care and gender-specific services at VA.
- **Telehealth Rural Health** – Accessibility is often a barrier for veterans and caregivers when pursuing health services from VA. There should be consistent, quality access to care, regardless of location or availability of broadband networks. To address this issues TAL has worked with VA to introduce a pilot program that provides telehealth sites in American Legion posts to serve rural areas, known as **Project ATLAS**. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that expands broadband capabilities and services to veterans in remote areas.
- **Address the Forever War** – Nearly two decades after 9/11 U.S. troops continue to wage war in Iraq, Afghanistan and other corners of the world under the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMFs). Global security environment the United States faces is no longer the same, with the rise of great-power competition and other threats. The use of military force, as opposed to diplomacy, is considered the primary instrument of national power. The American Legion urges the renewal of a proper constitutional balance to U.S. foreign policy decision-making by urging Congress to renew its war-making oversight role beginning with repealing or replacing the outdated post-9/11 AUMFs and by properly resourcing civilian tools of diplomacy.
- **Citizenship for Honorable Service** – Many veteran immigrants say they have been deported after discharge because they failed to acquire U.S. citizenship while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The American Legions supports measures to ensure the process of naturalization through military service is completed prior to discharge, to include reinstatement of the USCIS Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative, training for military recruiters, and commands about the naturalization process, and reopening all USIS field offices aboard to serve servicemembers stationed overseas.
- **Pay the Coast Guard** - The Coast Guard was the only military branch forced to work without pay during government shutdowns, due to their status under the Department of Homeland Security. The

repeated and all too common threat of government shutdowns brings severe hardship to Coast Guard men, woman and families. The American Legion urges Congress to reintroduce and pass the Pay of Coast Guard Parity Act, which would guarantee that Coast Guard personnel are paid without delay, even in the case of a government shutdown.

- **Close the 90/10 Loophole** – Proprietary schools offer students valuable education options, but some bad actors use a loophole in the 90-10 rule to evade a cap on federal financial aid by aggressively targeting veterans, servicemembers, families and survivors for their education benefits. The American Legion is committed to ensure that veterans and their families receive the highest quality of education when using the GI Bill and encourage legislation and federal action to provide higher quality and student outcomes for institutions approved for use of VA education benefits by adding Department of Defense and VA funds to the Title IV revenue sources calculation under the Higher Education Act.
- **Military Awards for Minority Veterans** – The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation lifting statutes of limitations and other obstacles that may impede proper investigation and expand the review of minority veterans from all wars and conflicts whose military records and official descriptions of combat actions support consideration of the Medal of Honor and other military citations or metals.
- **Peer Support** – Studies show that peer support is mutually beneficial for people who are experiencing transitions, mental health concerns and for those who wish to give back to their communities. The American Legion has its own peer-support program known as the “Buddy Check” and urges Congress to pass legislation requiring the VA to implement a similar program. The American Legion also encourages legislation to establish a peer-support program that would offer grants to place peer-support specialist in local posts of veteran’s service organizations.
- **Protect the American Flag** – The American Legion urges Congress to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag. The American Legion urges Congress to pass the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021 to amend the U.S. Flag Code to codify multiple common patriotic customs and practices as described in TAL Resolution N.19 Flag Code Amendment.
- **Global War on Terrorism Memorial** – The Global War on Terrorism is the longest war in U.S. history; more than 2.8 million American Service members have been deployed abroad. After tens of thousands of casualties and thousands of deaths, it is only fitting that we honor the sacrifices of service members and their families with a Global War on Terrorism Memorial in place of prominence at our nation’s capital. The American Legion believes this memorial belongs on the National Mall and urges Congress to pass the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act.

This is a lot to read but choose items in the TAL Legislative Agenda for the 117th Congress 1st Session that are near and dear to your heart. Take your heartfelt feelings to your representatives in Congress and your local representatives when it applies. My last bulletin provided some of the veterans and military legislative actions that have now become law. We can add to those by continuing our legislative volunteerism with these agenda items.

*Joan Cannon,
Dept. Legislative Chairm*