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December 19, 2025

WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to urge them to pass *H.R. 2605/S. 1441, the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act*! This legislation proposes a five-year pilot program for the VA to award grants to nonprofit organizations to provide trained service dogs to eligible veterans, cover the cost of training, and provide lifelong veterinary insurance.

The American Legion appreciates all the emails you have sent so far.

Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

****There will be NO Grassroots Newsletters on December 26 or January 2. Newsletters will resume on January 9. Happy Holidays and a happy New Year to all!****

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Address>

GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS DECEMBER ACTIONS

Kansas	813
Wisconsin	672
Tennessee	582
New York	485
Florida	333
Texas	331
Virginia	244
Indiana	211

West Virginia	207
Alaska	205
Ohio	170
Pennsylvania	163
California	159
Georgia	154
Illinois	149
Michigan	136
Arizona	131
Connecticut	126
New Jersey	125
Washington	124
Missouri	112
North Carolina	109
Oregon	105
Colorado	89
Nevada	87
Massachusetts	85
Maine	70
Minnesota	69
Iowa	64
South Carolina	61
Maryland	60
Arkansas	49
Alabama	48
Rhode Island	43
Louisiana	42
Utah	39
Nebraska	38
Oklahoma	38
New Hampshire	35
Kentucky	34
Montana	29
Delaware	28
Idaho	26
Mississippi	26
Vermont	17
Wyoming	15
South Dakota	14
North Dakota	12
New Mexico	12

Hawaii	5
Puerto Rico	5

These are the number of e-mail messages these Departments sent to Congress on the VoterVoice campaigns during the month of December.

Register more participants in your Department to increase the number of veteran voices advocating on the Hill!

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

LEGISLATIVE WINS IN THE 119TH CONGRESS

The following Legion-supported bills passed during the first session of the 119th Congress:

Date Passed	Bill Number	Short Title	Summary	Legion Position
July 30, 2025	H.R. 1815	VA Home Loan Program Reform Act	To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to take certain actions in the case of a default on a home loan guaranteed by the Secretary, and for other purposes.	Support
August 14, 2025	S. 201	ACES Act of 2025	To provide for a study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on the prevalence and morality of cancer among individuals who served as active	Support

			duty aircrew in the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.	
November 25, 2025	S. 2392	Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2025	To increase, effective as of December 1, 2025, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.	Support
December 1, 2025	H.R. 695	Medal of Honor Act	To amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the rate of the special pension payable to Medal of Honor recipients, and for other purposes.	Support
December 17, 2025	S. 1071	National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026	To authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2026 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military	Support

			personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.	
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NATIONAL COMMANDER WILEY PRAISES EXECUTIVE ORDER RECLASSIFYING CANNABIS

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)



Reclassification will allow the FDA to conduct research into its therapeutic value for veterans.

American Legion National Commander Dan K. Wiley stood alongside President Donald Trump in the Oval Office Thursday when the president issued an executive order to reclassify cannabis in a way that will allow FDA to legally conduct research into its therapeutic value for veterans.

“This is a really important executive order, and The American Legion has long advocated for this change,” Wiley said in the White House. “Cannabis being classified schedule 1 blocks large-scale, randomized clinical trials examining cannabis’ impact on PTSD, TBI, sleep disruption, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain ... conditions strongly associated with veteran suicide.”

[The American Legion passed a resolution in 2016 to reclassify cannabis to recognize it “as a drug with potential medical value.”](#)

Wiley made clear that this move does not imply American Legion support for legalization of cannabis for non-medical use.

“Reclassification is not legalization and does not mandate use,” Wiley said. “It simply removes federal barriers to research and informed decision-making. It promotes transparency, clinician oversight, informed consent, and honest patient-provider discussions – reducing unsafe self-medication. Supporting reclassification demonstrates the Legion’s commitment to science, oversight, and saving lives through evidence-based public health policy.”

YOUR EXPERT GUIDE TO THE 2026 NDAA

This article’s original publication can be found [here](#)



They made a list and checked it twice. On Wednesday, the US Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2026, sending the Pentagon’s annual policy bill to President Donald Trump’s desk. The bill—running to [more than three thousand pages](#) and authorizing more than \$900 billion in spending—covers all

corners of the defense policy landscape. Below, our experts, many of whom worked on Capitol Hill and in the Pentagon, delve into the text to dig out the most important elements for a range of US policy priorities.

Europe: Roadblocks to slow US disengagement

The NDAA stands in stark contrast to the recently released National Security Strategy (NSS) by pumping the brakes on efforts in Washington to shift resources away from the Euro-Atlantic theater. The bill establishes guardrails by prohibiting the use of funds to reduce US force structure in Europe below 76,000 troops, remove major equipment, or [relinquish](#) the role of an American Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR)—unless the Pentagon can provide a detailed impact report certifying that such decisions were made in consultation with allies and are consistent with US national security interests.

The legally binding NDAA also authorizes \$175 million for the Baltic Security Initiative—just three months after the Pentagon [proposed](#) cutting the program—which aims to deepen cooperation with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania by supporting their procurement of key US defense systems.

Unlike the NSS, which seeks to restore “strategic stability” with Russia, the NDAA clearly defines Moscow as an adversary, requiring the Pentagon to submit annual assessments on Russian strategic objectives and NATO’s ability to maintain a comparative military advantage.

As NATO allies ramp up military spending, Europeans should also welcome the creation of an assistant secretary of defense for international armaments cooperation, a new position intended to help improve the Pentagon’s understanding of allied industrial bases and facilitate “win-win” defense industrial integration.

Syria: The lifting of sanctions is a pivotal moment

The bill includes a repeal of the 2019 Caesar Act sanctions, marking a pivotal shift for Syria and signaling a move away from prolonged political and economic isolation. Over the past decade, sanctions have coincided with the collapse of Syria’s economy, with nearly [90 percent](#) of the population estimated to be living below the poverty line. While the fall of the Assad regime created an opening for recovery, continued sanctions have constrained Syria’s ability to transition from active conflict to early recovery and to begin the long process of reconstruction.

Sanctions relief has the potential to catalyze economic recovery and contribute to political stabilization in ways that would be felt in everyday life across Syria. The World

Bank [estimates](#) reconstruction and infrastructure needs at \$216 billion, and renewed investment could help restore livelihoods for millions of Syrians who lost their homes and businesses during the conflict. Relief would also support the voluntary return of displaced Syrians who have been reluctant to return to a country where access to basic services—including water, healthcare, and education—remains unreliable, and where most urban areas receive only two to four hours of electricity per day.

In the health sector, sanctions relief would reduce longstanding constraints by facilitating the importation of essential medicines, medical equipment, and supplies needed to stabilize service delivery. More than 40 percent of Syria's hospitals are not functioning at full capacity, and more than [four hundred health facilities](#) have been affected by funding cuts, forcing many to scale down or suspend services, which places additional strain on those that remain functional. At the household level, prolonged economic collapse has rendered healthcare increasingly unaffordable, compounding existing access gaps and health inequities. More broadly, reopening Syria's banking and commercial sectors would reconnect the country to the global economy and lower barriers to diaspora engagement, long deterred by legal and financial risk.

Sanctions relief alone will not resolve Syria's deep structural challenges, but it is a necessary condition for making life in Syria viable for most families and ensuring political stability. In this critical moment, the United States should deepen its engagement in Syria's economic recovery and reassess recent decisions to scale back State Department and United States Agency for International Development programs that underpin humanitarian assistance and early recovery efforts at a time when Syrians need them most.

Ukraine: A demonstration of how much US support has changed in 2025

This NDAA is the first—and likely only—legislation passed by Congress in 2025 to support Ukraine. It also underscores just how dramatically US support for Ukraine has changed in the past year.

When it comes to military assistance, it's unlikely the NDAA will lead to any new arms for Ukraine to defend itself—it includes \$400 million in funding for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, down from the nearly \$14 billion passed by Congress in 2024. The Trump administration requested no new funding for the program, as it instead shifts to selling weapons to Europe for Ukraine.

Congress is using oversight requirements in the NDAA to put up obstacles to what it saw as efforts by the Trump administration to undermine remaining support for Ukraine this year. New reporting requirements are designed to dissuade the administration from

ending intelligence support for Kyiv—something it has often used as leverage over Ukraine in negotiations with Moscow. There are also reporting requirements to stop the Pentagon from seizing weapons built for Ukraine by [redirecting](#) them to US stocks, as the Pentagon did in June. The NDAA also passes bipartisan legislation to resume US efforts to locate, return, and rehabilitate Ukrainian children abducted by Russia.

While lacking significant new material assistance, the NDAA's provisions are a clear indication that bipartisan support for Ukraine remains strong in Congress. It's an important signal as the White House [pledges](#) that it will send security guarantees for Ukraine to the Senate for ratification as part of a potential peace deal.

Korea: A hard floor for US forces on the peninsula

While the Trump administration achieved many of its [core priorities](#), it also received several direct rebukes in the final bill. Few are as overt as [Section 1268](#). This provision, originating from the [Senate NDAA](#), prohibits the use of funds by the administration to reduce the quantity of forces stationed or deployed to US Forces Korea (USFK) below 28,500 without independent and extensive reporting requirements. The provision was "[strongly opposed](#)" by the administration in its Senate NDAA statement of administrative policy because it would limit the president's commander-in-chief authority. The provision will also reduce the ability of USFK and United States Indo-Pacific Command to adapt their force posture to the rapidly changing environment, holding on to a nonsensical requirement of troop-count instead of [requirements-based language](#), which would enable the rightsizing and modernization of forces stationed on the peninsula.

The passage of the Senate language, despite the nonrestrictive language [included](#) in the House NDAA and the administration's opposition, signals the Senate's strong concern, perhaps rightly, that the administration may go too far in its reductions in USFK. This Section 1268, therefore, aims to reassure Washington's commitment to the US-South Korea alliance; however, this quantity-based reassurance comes at the cost of regional readiness and effectiveness.

The Arctic: A potential bureaucratic divide between the State Department and the Pentagon

Noticeably absent from the NSS, the Arctic makes several appearances in the NDAA, with the most consequential provisions affecting the State Department rather than the Pentagon.

The law authorizes an ambassador-at-large for Arctic affairs, a position first established by the Biden administration. With the position codified, the Arctic ambassador is more empowered to execute their duties engaging with Arctic nations and other stakeholders.

The NDAA also expands State's "Arctic Watcher" program. Building on the success of the American Presence Post in Tromsø, Norway, an expanded Arctic watcher cohort will provide valuable US influence in Arctic communities far from capitals.

Another provision potentially sets up a bureaucratic divide between State and the Pentagon by designating the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs as the lead for Arctic security within State. In contrast, Arctic policy within the Pentagon was reorganized this year to fall within the Americas Security Affairs office, which aligns with the US military's increased focus on homeland defense, where the Arctic region plays a vital role. Staff working Arctic security in the Pentagon and at State will continue to work together, but these shifts could portend incongruity in the US approach to the region, as the teams adopt different priorities based on their bureaucratic homes.

The Western Balkans: A new report to track Russian and Chinese malign influence

The Western Balkans Democracy and Prosperity Act's inclusion in the annual defense authorization bill marks a notable US policy priority for the Western Balkans.

This act directs several important US positions, including for the United States to call for Serbia and Kosovo to return to the normalization dialogue and to sanction those who would destabilize the region. It also includes a statement of policy that the United States shall not pursue redrawn borders as a way to effectuate regional stability.

The act also provides emphasis on economic growth and US business opportunities. Included is a five-year Economic Development Strategy, reauthorization of the Young Balkan Leaders Initiative, and direction for inclusion into the European Democratic Resilience Initiative. This direction will bolster vital projects, such as Bosnia's southern energy interconnector, which can help remove Bosnian reliance on Russian gas and strengthen the cohesion of Bosnia as a whole.

Among the act's most notable provisions, however, is a biannual malign influence report. Russian and Chinese malign activity have long been a concern in this vulnerable portion of Europe. This classified security review on this activity will positively instruct US actions and strengthen regional defense for years to come.

The Western Balkans Democracy and Prosperity Act begins on page 2,784 of this mammoth bill. It is worth a close read and an expeditious implementation.

Biodefense: Important progress to build upon

As with previous years, this NDAA represents incremental steps by Congress to address the biological threat, while also acknowledging the military's biodefense responsibilities. [Section 1207](#) of the act requires the Pentagon to enter into memoranda of understanding with other federal departments and agencies with international biodefense responsibilities to clarify roles and responsibilities for building biodefense capabilities internationally. This provision, which addresses a recommendation from our Commission's report [Battle Rattle: Fast Movers for Military Biodefense](#), should serve as a first step to enhance coordination and identification of capability gaps in global biological surveillance and detection activities, in alignment with the goals of the [National Biodefense Strategy](#) and the Trump administration's [America First Global Health Strategy](#). Future iterations of the NDAA should further build out the role of the military in identifying and addressing biological threats abroad, before they arrive here at home.

Mention must also be made of the NDAA provisions addressing biotechnology, clear recognition of the important work of the [National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology](#). Among other provisions, the act requires the creation of a Biotechnology Management Office to coordinate military biotechnology development, acquisition, and sustainment activities, including through the development of a biotechnology strategy. Reinvigoration of and advancements in US biotechnology dominance should rightfully begin with the military, which is the federal leader in this space. While biotechnology is but one element of national biodefense, it is a critical area that requires additional investment and attention by political leadership.

The nation remains at critical risk of a biological event, whether naturally occurring, intentionally caused, or accidentally released. The next NDAA would benefit from even bolder action to address larger elements of the military biodefense enterprise.

US adversaries: A focus on the connective tissue between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea

While the Trump administration's 2025 NSS did not explicitly reference the so-called "axis of aggressors"—China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea—the NDAA reflects a sharper understanding of how these actors operate in concert to undermine US security. The Comprehensive Outbound Investment National Security Act, enacted as Title LXXXV of the NDAA, addresses this challenge by restricting US outbound investments that "benefit a foreign adversary's military modernization efforts" and

threaten US national security interests to designated countries of concern including China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, as well as Venezuela and Cuba.

Targeting the entire axis is essential as US adversaries increasingly act in coordination with one another. Iranian technology has been [identified](#) in drones used by Russia in Ukraine, while North Korean artillery continues to [sustain](#) Moscow's war effort. These examples underscore that allowing US capital or technical expertise to flow to any country of concern risks empowering the entire malign network.

Congress is right to focus on this connective tissue. By constraining outbound investment to countries of concern, the NDAA seeks to inhibit adversarial coordination and limit access to resources that fuel military competition with the United States and its allies. Success, however, will depend on close coordination with partners facing the same shared threat.

The defense industrial base: A bridge over the 'Valley of Death'

The fiscal 2026 National Defense Authorization Act is more than a budget; it is a desperate but necessary signal flare to the industrial base. For years, I [have argued](#) that the Pentagon's acquisition culture is the single greatest threat to US national security, stifling the very innovation the United States need to compete. This bill finally attempts to bridge that "Valley of Death."

By prioritizing multi-year procurement for critical munitions and mandating faster, flexible acquisition pathways, Congress is acknowledging that the "Arsenal of Democracy" cannot be rebuilt with twentieth-century bureaucracy. The emphasis on reindustrialization and the integration of advanced manufacturing is a win for the investor community, validating the dual-use thesis that [software-defined warfare](#) will define the future battlefield.

However, authorization is not appropriation, and policy is not execution. While the cuts to bureaucratic bloat and the \$900 billion topline are promising, the Department of Defense must now prove it can actually deploy this capital to non-traditional entrants at speed. The legislation is in place; now it will take cultural courage to break the status quo. If the United States fails in this mission, it will lose the next war.

Latin America: Congress and the White House agree on prioritizing the Western Hemisphere

This NDAA drives home some of the key points made in the NSS: stability in the Western Hemisphere is a [top priority](#) for US security interests.

A few particular sections highlight that point. For example, in the security realm, [Section 504](#) requires the National Intelligence Council to conduct an assessment of the potential effect of expanding partnerships on combating the illicit drug trade, human trafficking networks, and corruption in Latin America. Findings here can potentially provide an opening for the region to cooperate with the United States on mutually beneficial issues like tackling transnational criminal networks.

The new NDAA also pays special attention to one of the most critical passageways for global trade: the Panama Canal. [Section 1206](#) announces a new cybersecurity integration framework, including enhanced US-Panama cooperation on deterrence of ransomware attacks on the canal's critical infrastructure. The provision incorporates these cybersecurity measures into the regular PANAMAX training exercises carried out by US Southern Command and security forces from Latin American countries that are focused on the security of the Panama Canal.

Critically, [Section 8701](#) of the NDAA triggers the re-authorization of the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) with new provisions that allow for further US investment in Latin America's economic development. The 2026 NDAA has elevated the income threshold of countries that may receive DFC funding to include "advancing income countries," meaning that upper-middle income countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil can now receive funding for infrastructure projects. This expansion can bring about opportunities for new US investment in Latin America in areas critical to US economic security interests.

The 2026 NDAA exemplifies the renewed political push in the United States for stability and security in the region.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

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.

Clare Sullivan, Department of Alaska

Clare, thank you for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities; we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

This week, Clare was contacted by Senator Dan Sullivan's office. Clare will be assisting the Senator's office by helping to organize a Veteran Q&A at Seward Post 5 to discuss the Big Beautiful Bill/Working American Tax Relief Act sometime in January.

Thank you, Clare, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress? Check out our [information papers and Legislative priorities](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

10 Tips for a Successful Meeting on Capitol Hill and the *Legislative Meeting Worksheet* are now available for viewing and download on The Legion's website. You can find them and other legislative resources on the [Legislative Advocacy Resources & Toolkit page](#).

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org or ejohnson@legion.org.

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the [key legislation section of VoterVoice](#).

Register for Action Alerts today at
<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Washington Conference is scheduled for Feb 28-Mar 5 at the Washington Hilton!

March 2 – Legislative Commission Meeting and Commander's Call

March 3 – 'Know Before You Go' briefs and Hill visits

March 4 – National Commander's Testimony to Joint session of Congress



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 12/19, there are **NO** hearings scheduled for the remainder of 2025. The 119th Congress's 2nd Session will begin the week of January 5, 2026.

HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)