

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

Both chambers were in session this week, as the House returned from its district work period. Continued consideration of the fiscal year (FY) 2017 budget proposal released by the President last month dominated the agenda.

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

On March 11, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein attended the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) Annual Legislative Roundtable at the Disabled Veterans of America (DVA) Headquarters to provide an update on the American Legion's Legislative Agenda for the 114th Congress (2nd Session).

On March 15, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein, Legislative Division attended the Joint Oversight & Investigations (O&I) and Disability and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) Subcommittee Hearing Twenty Five Years After the Persian Gulf War: An Assessment of VA's Disability Claim Process with Respect to Gulf War Illness, in which Zachary Hearn, Deputy Director for Claims, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Division provided oral and written remarks. The purpose of the hearing was to evaluate VA's disability claims process for veterans that been afflicted with Gulf War Illness (GWI). The American Legion's testimony can found at <http://veterans.house.gov/>.

On March 15, Assistant director Warren Goldstein, Legislative Division attended the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) Committee hearing on Pending Veterans Legislation, in which Louis J. Celli, Jr., Director of Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Division provided oral and written remarks.

- S 2633: Improving Veterans Access to Care in the Community Act; A bill to improve the ability of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide health care to veterans through non-Department health care providers, and for other purposes.
- S 2646: Veterans Choice Improvement Act; A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the Veterans Choice Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve health care provided to veterans by the Department, and for other purposes.
- S 2473: Express Appeals Act of 2016; A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide veterans the option of using an alternative appeals process to more quickly determine claims for disability compensation, and for other purposes.
- Discussion Draft on Title 38, United States Code, appointment, compensation, performance management, and accountability system for senior executive leaders in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The American Legion's testimony is located online at <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings/pending-legislation03152016>

On March 16, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein, Legislative Division attended the Joint EO & Health Subcommittee Legislative Hearing on Draft legislation to improve the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and other employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, in which Roscoe Butler, Deputy Director for Health Care Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Division provided oral and written remarks.

The American Legion's testimony can found at <http://veterans.house.gov/> .

On March 16, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein, Legislative Division, and Deputy Director for Health Care Roscoe Butler, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Division, attended a stakeholder Congressional roundtable to discuss challenges relating to opioids. The roundtable was to brainstorm policy and discuss initiatives to help limit the overuse of opioids, a problem that, plagues many populations across America, including many of our veterans. The roundtable also explored legislative proposals that would require pharmacies to take back and destroy unused or expired medicines, while encouraging the DEA to streamline requirements regarding safe storage and disposal of these prescriptions.

On March 16, The American Legion provided the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Information Technology testimony for the Record for a hearing entitled VA Cybersecurity and IT Oversight. The hearing can be found at: <https://oversight.house.gov/>.

On March 16, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein, Legislative Division, Assistant Director Larry Provost, for Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) and Physical Evaluation Board and Deputy Director Gerardo Avilla for Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) and Physical Evaluation Board attended the Fairness4Vets Coalition Meeting at the Student Veterans of America's (SVA) National Headquarters in Washington DC.

On March 17, Deputy Director Dean Stoline and Assistant Director Warren Goldstein held a Congressional meeting with Jeremy Hayes, Professional Staff Member for the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) to discuss veteran issues and concerns as it relates to the VA Choice Program.

On March 16, Deputy Director Dean Stoline attended a panel discussion to consider the question of amending the Selective Service Act in order to register women, 18-26, for the draft. Included in the session were the following topics: Current law and policies governing Selective Service registration and what would have to change to include women; the relationship between registration and the draft; whether the Selective Service System, as currently administered, remains a necessary component of national security; what are a citizen's duties with respect to Selective Service registration and should those pertain

equally to men and women; and what can the Norwegian conscription system, which applies to both men and women, teach the United States.

Update on Flag Amendment Bill

On January 7, 2015, **House Joint Resolution (H.J. Res.) 9** was introduced by Rep. Steve Womack (AR). This legislation is 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.”* In addition to Rep. Womack and the five original co-sponsors of the House joint resolution there are now a total of **38** cosponsors.

Staff from the Legislative Division met with staff of Sen. Orrin Hatch (UT) to discuss the re-introduction of the flag protection amendment in the 114th Congress. Sen. Hatch has long been a champion of the amendment. Our efforts finally came to fruition on July 30, 2015, when Sen. David Vitter (LA) introduced **Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res.) 21**, prior to the August district work period. The Senate measure now has **8** cosponsors.

Additional cosponsors continue to be sought for both measures. [A listing of all cosponsors for both flag amendment bills is attached to the end of this report.]

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For Week Ending 03-18-2016

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 9

Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR-3) [Sponsor]
Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE-1)
Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-ND-At Large)
Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH-6)
Rep. David Roe (R-TN-1)
Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN-7)
Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC-3)
Rep. Steve Palazzo (R-MS-4)
Rep. Scot DesJarlais (R-TN-4)
Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH-5)
Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT-1)
Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL-1)
Rep. Michael Simpson (R-ID-2)
Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-OH-12)
Rep. Ralph Abraham (R-LA-5)
Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-KS-1)
Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ-2)
Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL-3)
Rep. Brad Ashford (D-NE-2)
Rep. Mark Amodei (R-NV-2)
Rep. John Kline (R-MN-2)
Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO-8)
Rep. David Young (R-IA-3)
Rep. Adrian Smith (R-NE-3)
Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC-2)
Rep. Steve King (R-IA-4)
Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA-3)
Rep. Brian Babin (R-TX-36)
Rep. Pete Olson (R-TX-22)
Rep. John Duncan (R-TN-2)
Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ-11)
Rep. John Fleming (R-LA-4)
Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC-7)
Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK-4)
Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO-4)
Rep. Bill Flores (R-TX-17)
Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR-2)
Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX-32)
Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA-4)

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 21

Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) [Sponsor]
Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT)
Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)
Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL)
Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA)
Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)
Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV)
Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE)
Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Most recent addition to list of cosponsors in the Senate.