

## Weekly Meeting Report:

Week of 11/22/2021

### VA&R:

- Soldiers who refuse to get the COVID-19 vaccine and have not requested an exemption will no longer be allowed to re-enlist or be promoted.
  - Applies to active duty as well as reservists and National Guard members.
- Burnpits 360 townhall on Friday was a worthwhile event.
  - Burnpit recognition is a National legislative agenda piece
  - OH State Senator Hearcel Craig spoke and is interested in a state level push for burnpit recognition.
    - I established relations with him, and he is interested in working with us on legislation/ resolution to pressure Congress to push the VA for recognition.
  - [US HR.2433: Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act](#)
    - Authorizes specified individuals to update the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry with the cause of death of a registered individual. The Department of Veterans Affairs established the burn pit registry to allow certain veterans and service members to document their exposures and report health concerns. The registry is for individuals who may have been exposed to toxic airborne chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits (areas used for burning solid waste in open air without equipment) while deployed in certain locations (e.g., Afghanistan or Iraq). Specifically, the bill authorizes a designee of a registered individual or an immediate family member to update the registry with the cause of death of the individual.
    - Passed the House last week and is in the Senate now.
- [US S.3255: A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of Vet Centers in certain States based on population metrics, and for other purposes](#)
  - Beneficial to some states in the Union as their populations boom while infrastructure and resources lag.
  - Ohio ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in veterans' healthcare in the union but below 40 in all other categories for veterans. This bill, if passed, could help Ohio's veterans if the guidelines allow for Ohio to add more Vet Centers.

### VE&E:

- [US HR.5516: VITAL Assessment Act](#)
  - implements changes related to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program, which focuses on enhancing student veterans' academic success and retention by assisting with things like mental and physical health. The VA must report on the program and establish best practices, goals, and measures for the program that are uniform among the VA's medical centers. The bill also requires the VA to conduct outreach among the Armed Forces, veterans service organizations, institutions of higher learning, and non-college degree programs regarding the VITAL

“Veterans Strengthening America”

program. Additionally, the VA must assess the feasibility and advisability of including the suicide rate for student veterans in the National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report.

- [US HR.5603: Protections for Student Veterans Act](#)
  - Authorizes service members who are utilizing Department of Veterans Affairs educational assistance benefits to withdraw or take a leave of absence after they receive orders for active service or inactive-duty training. Institutions of higher education are prohibited from taking adverse actions against such service members for withdrawing or taking a leave of absence, including assigning a failing grade, reducing the member's grade point average, characterizing any absence as unexcused, or assessing financial penalties. The bill requires institutions of higher education to refund all tuition and fees (including for housing) for the academic term for which the service member withdraws. In situations where the service member takes a leave of absence, the institution of higher education must assign a grade of incomplete for the applicable term and permit the member to complete the academic term after the period of service.
- [US HR.4233: Student Veterans Counseling Centers Eligibility Act](#)
  - Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to furnish counseling, including counseling through a Vet Center, to veterans or members of the Armed Forces who are pursuing a course of education using specified Department of Defense or VA educational assistance benefits.
  - Passed the House and is headed to the Senate.

## National Security:

- Ukraine has accused Russia of waging “hybrid war” on Europe
  - Related to Russia potentially fueling the migrant crisis in Belarus as a means to destabilize the region and to interfere on “humanitarian” basis.
- Work on a secret Chinese military base in the UAE has been abandoned after US intervention.
  - US satellite imagery uncovered a large construction project in the port of Khalifa by the Chinese shipping corporation, Cosco.

## Legislation:

- The infrastructure bill passed and was signed by President Biden. The \$1.2 trillion bill will give Ohio \$9.2 billion for highway appropriation programs, \$483 million for bridge repair, \$100 million for broadband expansion, and \$1.4 billion for water infrastructure.
  - The funding will be for the next 5 years.
- On Saturday, Gov DeWine signed SB 258. This approves a four-year congressional map cementing at least a 12-3 majority delegation for his fellow Republicans.
  - Ohio is split 45% Democratic vote to 55% republican votes in the presidential elections.
  - This “fair” map is a joke and insult to Ohioans.
  - DeWine goes back on his words from 2018 for “fair representation” as a ploy for political gain as he fights for re-election.
- [SB59: War Relics](#), passed out of the House and is headed to the Gov. desk for signature.
- [SB160: Veterans Benefits](#) had a long hearing last week. This is the Bill that Legion Post 700 submitted unauthorized testimony on.

“Veterans Strengthening America”

THE AMERICAN LEGION  
DEPARTMENT OF



---

DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS: 60 BIG RUN ROAD, DELAWARE, OHIO 43015-8007  
PHONE: 740-362-7478 | FAX: 740-362-1429 | EMAIL: LEGION@OHIOLEGION.COM

- I believe this bill is a good sound bill, but it may be amended by the committee as there is push back from the chair, Ghanbari, regarding its subject matter.

“Veterans Strengthening America”