



LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

Both chambers returned from the Thanksgiving recess this week. House Republicans re-nominated Rep. Paul Ryan (WI) for re-election as Speaker of the House. Earlier this week, House Democrats voted on their leadership for the next Congress, re-nominating Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA) as Minority Leader of the House. Her formal election will take place on the first day of the First Session of the 115th Congress, January 3, 2017.

Fiscal Year 2017 is well underway and, except for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the federal government continues to operate under a continuing resolution (CR) which expires on December 9. As the Republican Party now controls the White House and both chambers of Congress, final appropriations could be completed by the end of the calendar year, or pushed into 2017 after the new Congress convenes and President-elect Trump takes office.

Obama Enacts Bill to Improve VA Crisis Hotline

On Monday November 28, President Obama signed into law a bill (**Public Law 114-247**) that seeks to ensure all telephone calls and other communications delivered through a VA crisis line get answered in a timely manner by a qualified person. The measure, entitled *No Veterans Crisis Line Call Should Go Unanswered Act*, comes after federal investigators substantiated allegations that some calls went into a voicemail system and that some veterans did not get immediate assistance.

The law creates a quality assurance process. It requires VA to develop a plan to ensure any communication to the crisis line or a backup center is quickly handled by someone in accordance with guidance established by the American Association of Suicidology. Rep. David Young (IA), the bill's sponsor, says those who sacrificed in defense of our freedoms deserve the best mental health care possible.

Lawmakers Begin Leadership Selection for 115th Congress



Lawmakers began taking their first steps in naming people to leadership positions for the 115th session of Congress. As of now:

House Republicans

Speaker Paul Ryan (WI) was nominated to a second term as House Speaker by House Republicans. His selection will have to be ratified by the whole Congress after January 3, 2017, when the 115th Congress begins. Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (CA), Majority Whip Steve Scalise (LA) and Conference Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA) will also retain their current roles.

House Democrats

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA) was re-nominated for her current position on November 30. It appears all the current leaders will be re-elected to their current positions in the new Congress.

House Committee Leadership

Committee chairmen and ranking members probably will not to be decided until the first session of the 115th Congress starts on January 3.

Senate Republicans

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (KY) has not announced chairmen.

Senate Democrats

Minority Leader will be Charles E. Schumer (NY). The rest of his leadership team will be:

Minority Whip: Dick Durbin (IL)

Assistant Democratic Leader: Patty Murray (WA)

Chair, Democratic Policy & Communications Committee: Debbie Stabenow (MI)

Vice Chair: Joe Manchin (WV)

Vice Chairs of the Conference: Elizabeth Warren (MA) and Mark Warner (VA)

Chair of the Steering Committee: Amy Klobuchar (MN)

Chair of Outreach: Bernie Sanders (VT)

Democratic Conference Secretary: Tammy Baldwin (WI)

Senate Committee Ranking Members will be:



Agriculture:	Debbie Stabenow (MI)
Armed Services:	Jack Reed (RI)
Appropriations:	Patrick Leahy (VT)
Banking:	Sherrod Brown (OH)
Budget:	Bernie Sanders (VT)
Commerce:	Bill Nelson (FL)
Energy:	Maria Cantwell (WA)
EPW:	Tom Carper (DE)
Finance:	Ron Wyden (OR)
Foreign Relations:	Ben Cardin (MD)
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions:	Patty Murray (WA)
Governmental Affairs:	Claire McCaskill (MO)
Indian Affairs:	Tom Udall (NM)
Judiciary:	Dianne Feinstein (CA)
Rules:	Amy Klobuchar (MN)
Small Business:	Jeanne Shaheen (NH)
Veterans Affairs:	Jon Tester (MT)
Aging:	Bob Casey (PA)
Ethics:	Chris Coons (DE)
Intelligence:	Mark Warner (VA)
Joint Economic:	Martin Heinrich (NM)

LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

On November 28 and 29, Legislative Chairman Bill Oxford (NC) and Legislative Council Chairman Dewey Moss (GA) were provided Orientation Briefings by the Legislative staff. Topics included were: the relationship between the Legislative Commission and the Legislative Council; staff concerns and views regarding what TAL should expect on Capitol Hill in the remaining days of the 114th Congress and what to expect in the upcoming 115th Congress; and concluded with a discussion about the 2017 Washington Conference. After the meeting closed Tuesday, the Chairmen went to pay a meet-and-greet visit with Sen. Thom Tillis (NC).



On November 30, Deputy Director Dean Stoline and Assistant Directors Warren Goldstein and Jeff Steele attended a meeting with leadership from the American Federation Government Employees (AFGE) to discuss potential legislative changes to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system in the 115th Congress.

On November 30, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein participated in a Congressional/Veterans Service Organization (VSO) roundtable discussion on *Realizing the Jason Simcakoski Memorial and Promise Act*, to address the opioid crisis and quality pain care for veterans.

Letters of Support/Opposition

On December 2, The American Legion sent a letter of opposition to Sen. Bill Cassidy (LA) regarding **S. 3081**, entitled the *Working to Integrate Networks Guaranteeing Member Access Now Act*, or simply the *WINGMAN Act*. This measure would grant access to VA's Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) for the purpose of assisting constituents; Members of Congress could select an employee and, at a cost to either the employee or Member, the selected employee would receive the necessary training to gain accreditation to legally review veterans' records within VBMS. Our organization opposes this legislation, on the grounds that there are thousands of accredited VSO representatives – 3000 in the Legion alone – who receive specialized training to ensure they have the most current understanding of the impact of changes in statutes, regulations and case law. The American Legion urges Congress to consider the long-term ramifications of supporting legislation that only requires their own employees to have the minimal level of understanding in veterans' law assisting their constituents.

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 **42** cosponsors.

On July 30, 2015, Sen. David Vitter (LA) introduced a companion measure, **Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res.) 21**. The Senate measure has **9** 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.]

The American Legion Legislative Division
(202) 861-2700
For Week Ending 12-02-2016

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)

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)
Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA)



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)
Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ-4)
Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL-10)
Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX-21)
Rep. Leonard Lance (R-NJ-7)