



## LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

Week Ending January 8, 2021

### Congress

This should have been a quiet week on Capitol Hill, with lawmakers engaging in the bureaucracy involved in starting the 117th Congress: swearing in new members, certifying the Electoral College votes, voting on new rules, and so on. As anyone not living under a rock knows, Wednesday's events turned everything on its head. The attack by rioters refusing to accept President-elect Biden's win is sure to change how lawmakers proceed, especially in the short term.

During Wednesday's assault, Senators from both Parties found themselves locked in a secure location together. Several have since noted that this was the most time they have spent with those across the aisle in quite some time. There is a possibility that this could prompt more bipartisan discussions and meetings, especially out of the public eye where they can speak more freely.

On the other hand, some lawmakers seem to be buying into a narrative that the rioters were "antifa" conducting a "black flag operation" to make Republicans look bad. This concept is unlikely to promote bipartisanship, much less civility in the halls of Congress.

Right now, Washington is in recovery mode. The Senate is not scheduled to convene for business until January 19. The House also only has pro forma sessions scheduled for the coming week. House Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) says the House Sergeant at Arms will resign in the wake of the security breaches at the Capitol. Soon-to-be Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) is calling for the resignation of the Senate Sergeant at Arms. Both are also calling for the resignation of the Chief of the Capitol Police, Steven Sund. During the Wednesday attack, about 50 police officers were wounded, with one landing in the hospital. Others, however, were captured in pictures taking selfies with the rioters and appearing to help them in and out of the building. Sund says he has no intention of resigning. Investigations on both sides of the Hill will begin immediately on the role of the Capitol Police.

Notably, Democrats now control the House and the Senate, with the election of Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in Tuesday's special runoff election in Georgia. Democrats and Republicans each now have 50 Senators, leaving Vice President-elect Harris with the tie-breaking vote. While this will make it easier for Biden to get his chosen appointees, political initiatives will most definitely require buy-in from some Republicans on a regular basis.

Although the Senate will not be in formal session, the Armed Services Committee has scheduled a hearing for next Tuesday on civilian control of the Armed Forces. This is the first step towards considering President-elect Biden's expected nomination of retired General Lloyd Austin to be the next Secretary of Defense.

## **COVID-19 update**

Last weekend, multiple media outlets raised the fact that only a tiny percentage of the almost 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine sent to states so far has actually been used. Operation Warp Speed (OWS) and other federal public health officials this week say the slow pace is largely due to the holiday period. Many long-term care facilities and hospitals were reluctant to run large-scale vaccination clinics at a time when they were somewhat shorthanded due to people taking days off. NIAID Director Anthony Fauci and other officials said they expect the pace to pick up in the coming weeks.

OWS Moncef Slaoui says the vaccination pace will increase further once a third vaccine, made by Johnson & Johnson, is authorized for use in the United States. Slaoui says they are on track to apply for emergency use authorization (EUA) by the end of this month, which could put it in circulation early in February. This vaccine has the advantage of only requiring one dose, eliminating the need to track people to bring them back for a second dose.

It is becoming clear that underfunded state public health departments are simply overwhelmed by the fragmented nature of administering the vaccine. The first phase of administration focused on health care and long-term care facilities, where all recipients are gathered in one place. The effort quickly got complicated as vaccinators in hospitals had to figure out how to inoculate health care workers in the community. The challenge will only increase as target populations expand to include essential workers and the elderly living in the community. Efforts to build coalitions including business and community organizations (such as churches) are only just beginning to get off the ground.

Slaoui told reporters on Wednesday he has been asked to remain with OWS as a consultant under the Biden Administration. OWS Chief Operating Officer General Gus Perna says he has not been officially asked, but he intends to stay in place as long he is needed.

As of Tuesday, the Department of Defense (DoD) reported 19,633,525 doses had been distributed through OWS in the first three weeks of operations. The VA announced it had administered doses to more than 14,000 veterans at high risk of getting COVID-19 and more than 132,000 health care workers.

As 2021 started, DoD reported that 175 medical professionals and 21 support personnel were in place supporting COVID-19 response efforts in North Dakota, Wisconsin, Guam, Hawaii, the Navajo Nation, and California. Another 143 medical professionals started working in Arizona, California, and the Navajo Nation over the past week. California has reportedly requested hundreds more health care personnel, as their hospital systems are becoming overwhelmed.

## **Upcoming Hearings**

- No relevant hearings at this time

## **Grassroots**

The National Legislative Division (NLD) uses VoterVoice as its advocacy platform for connecting American Legion members with members of Congress. From December 18th to January 8th five (5) member subscribed to receive action alerts while zero (0) unsubscribed. **There are now 24,957 members and supporters signed up to receive action alerts.**

Appointments to the National Legislative Council are two-year terms that conclude on December 31<sup>st</sup> of even years. The National Commander, with recommendations from the Departments, appoints and reappoints Legionnaires with working relationships with their member of Congress to be the Legionnaire at the local level to work directly with their member of Congress to relay the national priorities of The American Legion. On December 2<sup>nd</sup> the NLD Grassroot team sent out spreadsheets to all Departments with previous vacancies and vacancies created by the election of new members of Congress. Departments were asked to reply with new appointments by January 15, 2021 to [grassroots@legion.org](mailto:grassroots@legion.org). **Please respond by January 15 with an updated council roster or an ETA of when it will be completed if you have not done so already.**

### **Legislative AARs**

- National Legislative Division staff continues preparations for the upcoming 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, to include updating the Legislative Agenda, writing Point Papers, and drafting campaign plans.
- From Monday, January 4 to Friday January 8, NLD Staff began outlining and working on the National Commander's Testimony for 2021. This included multiple meetings between staff and respective divisions to coordinate this important document.
- On Monday, January 4, NLD staff participated in a joint VSO conference call to discuss coordinating efforts on a variety of issues concerning the Veterans Benefits Administration.
- On Tuesday, January 5, the NLD participated in a following up briefing and post-event analysis of a meeting that occurred during the previous holiday week involving minority veterans. This meeting consisted of VSO community members, local and federal government officials, and advocates looking to identify and address the health needs of minority veterans particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On Wednesday, January 6, NLD staff participated in a conference call with the House Veterans Affairs Committee Staff to discuss toxic exposure legislation for the 117th Congress and provided The American Legion's input.
- On Wednesday, January 6, the NLD began planning for the 2021 Commander's Testimony. This included various internal meetings with different divisions across The American Legion. Health Policy for instance is deciding which topics are most effecting our members are most pressing for Congress to become aware of and act upon.

***On January 10, 1944, the first GI Bill of Rights passed Congress. Proposed by the American Legion, the legislation enabled millions of men and women who served in World War Two to attend school and get affordable home loans.***

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