Legislative Update / August 15th, 2026

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UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Chief Petty Officers & Enlisted Associations

Legislative Affairs Committee

FULL LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS UPDATE

Convention Email Edition | 15 August 2026

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Shipmates,

This update covers only legislation still working through Congress — bills not yet signed into law. Where a measure we previously tracked has been enacted, it is noted as resolved and dropped from active tracking. Congress returns from the August district work period at the end of the month facing a 30 September funding deadline, an unfinished defense authorization, and the largest veterans benefits package in a decade sitting unresolved on the House floor. There is a great deal on the table for our people this fall.

How to read this update

Legislative reporting goes wrong when fact and forecast are blended together, so this edition separates them explicitly:

- VERIFIED STATUS — procedural posture drawn from Congress.gov, the Office of the Clerk, CBO, or enacted public law. Sourced and checkable. If a claim could not be verified against a primary source, it is labeled as reported by a named secondary source.
- Narrative paragraphs — what the bill does and the surrounding context, drawn from bill text, committee documents, and trade press.
- CHALLENGE and CPOA ASSESSMENT — the Committee's own political judgment. These are opinion. Reasonable people on this Committee disagree with some of them, and you are free to disagree too.

Nothing in the assessment lines should be cited as fact. Bill numbers, vote counts, and CBO scores in the verified status lines can be. Where the two conflict, believe the verified line.

1. URGENT — FY2027 FUNDING AND THE RISK OF ANOTHER DHS SHUTDOWN

What Happened

The FY2026 appropriations fight ended badly for the Coast Guard. When Congress failed to complete the Department of Homeland Security bill, DHS — and DHS alone — entered a funding lapse on 14 February 2026 that ran until 30 April 2026, the longest single-department shutdown in the Department’s history. For 75 days the Coast Guard was the only armed service operating inside a shutdown.

Active-duty and activated Reserve pay was ultimately protected. The Department used discretionary and reconciliation-provided funds to keep military paychecks moving, and Coast Guard members did not miss a payday. Our civilian shipmates were not so fortunate. Coast Guard civilian employees received their last full paycheck on 16 February, a partial check on 2 March, and then nothing until back pay landed between 10 and 16 April. Auxiliarists, contractors, and the small businesses that support our bases absorbed real losses that were never made whole.

The lesson CPOA drew from those 75 days is simple: the Coast Guard was protected in 2026 by an administrative decision, not by law. The next time, that decision could go the other way.

Where Things Stand

FY2027 appropriations are behind schedule. As of this writing only a small number of the twelve annual bills have cleared the full House, and the Senate has not passed any of them on the floor. Current funding expires 30 September 2026.

- House-passed continuing resolution (H.R. 9770): reported passed in late July 2026 by a vote of 220–205, extending funding through 4 December 2026. It has not been taken up by the Senate. [Vote count and date are from House Appropriations Committee releases and trade press; the Committee was not able to confirm them against the Office of the Clerk roll call record before this edition went out. Verify before citing.]
- Senate Appropriations alternative: Senate appropriations leaders released a competing continuing resolution running through 11 December 2026. The two chambers are roughly one week apart on duration and have not reconciled.
- FY2027 DHS Appropriations (House Committee bill): reported out of the Homeland Security Subcommittee with roughly $64.9 billion in total discretionary funding for the Department. For the Coast Guard the bill carries an additional $135 million to expand the Indo-Pacific footprint and counter Chinese maritime activity, $48 million for overdue shore facility maintenance, and $45 million against the depot-level maintenance shortfall. It has not received a House floor vote.

The practical read: a continuing resolution of some length is the most likely outcome before 30 September, and the House is expected to act on the Senate’s version when it returns in late August. But DHS has now been the sticking point in three consecutive funding cycles, and a fourth lapse — again isolated to our Department — is a live possibility. Members should not assume the 2026 outcome repeats itself.

What CPOA Is Doing

- Pressing House and Senate Homeland Security appropriators to move the FY2027 DHS bill as a standalone measure rather than allowing the Coast Guard to be held hostage to unrelated immigration and border disputes.
- Making the permanent-fix argument on every Hill visit: an administrative workaround is not a policy. We are asking Members to attach Coast Guard pay protection to whatever vehicle moves first — CR, DHS appropriations, or the FY2027 NDAA.
- Collecting documented hardship data from the February–April lapse — missed mortgage payments, civilian furlough losses, PCS disruptions, childcare terminations. Members and spouses with a story to tell should contact the Legislative Affairs Committee. Specific, verifiable examples move staffers in a way that talking points do not. Email you story here: LegislativeAffairs@uscgcpoa.org
- Coordinating with members of The Military Coalition, so that Coast Guard pay protection is carried on more than one letterhead.

2. COAST GUARD LEGISLATION — STILL PENDING

RESOLVED SINCE LAST REPORT: The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025 was enacted as DIVISION G of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 (S. 1071), signed into law 18 December 2025 as P.L. 119-60. The House passed the final NDAA 312–112 on 10 December 2025; the standalone House bill, H.R. 4275, had passed the House 23 July 2025. Division G authorizes appropriations for FY2026 and FY2027, with active-duty end strength of 50,000 for FY2026 and 55,000 for FY2027. It also codifies the Safe-to-Report policy protecting Coast Guard members who report sexual assault, and authorizes the Service to use existing funds for final completion of the National Coast Guard Museum. Authorization is not appropriation — those dollars still must be appropriated annually, which is what Section 1 above is about. Dropped from active tracking. [Correction: an earlier draft described this as authorizing "through FY2029" and cited it by its standalone bill numbers; the enacted vehicle is Division G of P.L. 119-60, covering FY2026–FY2027.]

Pay Our Coast Guard Act (S. 802)

Companion: Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2025 (H.R. 1542)

Verified status: S. 802 referred to committee; no markup scheduled. House companion H.R. 1542, Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2025, also in committee. Neither has received a floor vote.

The single most important bill on this list for the enlisted force. S. 802 would provide standing appropriations for Coast Guard military pay and allowances, and for the pay and benefits of qualified civilian and contract employees, whenever Coast Guard appropriations lapse. The authority runs until Coast Guard appropriations are enacted or Department of Defense appropriations terminate — meaning the Coast Guard would be funded on the same footing as the other five armed services during a shutdown, automatically, without anyone in the Department having to find money.

The bill has been referred to committee and has not advanced to markup in either chamber. The February–April 2026 lapse gave it the strongest factual record it has ever had, and cosponsorship has grown, but leadership in neither chamber has scheduled it.

Challenge: The obstacle is not opposition — almost no one will say on the record that the Coast Guard should go unpaid. The obstacle is that permanent appropriations language sits at the intersection of the appropriations and authorizing committees, and appropriators are institutionally hostile to any provision that spends money outside their annual bill. It also removes a point of leverage in shutdown negotiations, which is precisely why it keeps stalling. A CBO score attaching a cost to a shutdown that "might not happen" makes it easy to defer.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Moderate. Standalone passage remains unlikely. The realistic path is attachment to the FY2027 NDAA or the FY2027 DHS appropriations bill as a rider. Given three funding lapses in twelve months, this is the best political environment this bill has ever had — but it has had good environments before and still not moved.

Coast Guard Sustained Funding Act of 2025 (H.R. 2051)

A House companion approach to the same problem, sponsored by Rep. Mark Green with Reps. Carlos Gimenez and Monica De La Cruz. H.R. 2051 amends Title 14 directly to appropriate the sums necessary for Coast Guard military pay and allowances (including the Reserve component) and for qualified civilian and contract employee pay whenever an appropriations act expires before its successor is enacted.

The distinction from S. 802 matters procedurally: by amending Title 14 rather than writing a freestanding appropriation, H.R. 2051 is arguably an authorizing change and can travel on an authorizing vehicle. It was introduced in March 2025 and remains in committee.

Challenge: Same jurisdictional fight, different door. Amending Title 14 to create a permanent appropriation invites a point of order in the House, and the Rules Committee has shown no appetite to waive it. The bill also competes with S. 802 for the same cosponsors and the same floor time, which splits the coalition rather than concentrating it.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low to moderate as a standalone. Better as report language or a conforming amendment inside the FY2027 NDAA Coast Guard title. CPOA supports whichever vehicle moves; we are not wedded to a bill number.

Shutdown Fairness Act — multiple versions pending

S. 3001, S. 3012, S. 3168, H.R. 5801, H.R. 7137 | True Shutdown Fairness Act: S. 3039, H.R. 7322

A family of bills, none identical, all aimed at the same outcome: appropriating pay and allowances for excepted federal employees who are required to work during a funding lapse. Most versions define "excepted employee" to include members of the Armed Forces on active duty and certain contractors supporting federal operations — which would capture the Coast Guard.

The proliferation of bill numbers is itself the story. Seven or more competing versions were introduced across the past year, several in direct response to the DHS lapse. Each sponsor has a slightly different scope: some cover contractors, some do not; some cover only the shutdown in progress, some are permanent.

For CPOA purposes the relevant question about any given version is narrow: does it name the Coast Guard, does it cover civilians as well as military, and is it permanent or one-time? Members contacting their delegation should ask that question specifically rather than endorsing "the Shutdown Fairness Act" generically.

Challenge: Seven bills chasing one outcome is a coalition problem, not a majority problem. Neither chamber has consolidated behind a single text, and until they do, none of them moves. There is also a genuine policy dispute underneath the sponsorship: paying excepted employees during a lapse reduces the political cost of a shutdown, and a meaningful bloc in both parties considers that a feature to be avoided rather than achieved.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low individually; moderate that some version is enacted if a lapse actually occurs this fall. History says these bills pass in the middle of a shutdown, not in advance of one. That is a poor way to run a Service, but it is the pattern.

Coast Guard Leadership Modernization Act (S. 5069)

Sens. Rick Scott, Dan Sullivan, and Tommy Tuberville — introduced July 2026

The newest Coast Guard bill on this list and a significant one. S. 5069 would establish a Senate-confirmed Secretary of the Coast Guard and an Under Secretary, giving the Service dedicated civilian leadership on the model of the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Secretary would report to the Secretary of Homeland Security and would assume much of the Service’s direct interaction with the Department of Defense.

The argument for it is one the enlisted force understands well: the Coast Guard is the only armed service without a civilian secretary advocating for it inside the budget process, and it competes for attention within a Department whose dominant priorities are immigration enforcement and border security. A dedicated secretariat would give the Service a voice in DHS budget formulation that a uniformed Commandant, however capable, structurally cannot provide.

The argument against is that a new secretariat adds a political layer and overhead billets without adding a single cutter, aircraft, or billet at the deckplate, and that the Commandant’s direct line to the Secretary of Homeland Security is an asset worth preserving.

Challenge: Introduced in late July 2026 with a Republican-only sponsor list and no announced Democratic cosponsor or House companion as of this writing. It was referred to committee immediately before the August recess, which means no hearing has been held. Standing up a new secretariat also requires appropriations that the FY2027 DHS bill does not currently contain.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low for this Congress. The 119th Congress adjourns in a few months and the bill has no hearing, no companion, and no bipartisan cosponsor. Its real value is positioning it for reintroduction in the 120th Congress. CPOA is monitoring and has not taken a formal position; there are respectable arguments on both sides, and we intend to hear from the membership before the Committee commits.

Secretary of the Coast Guard Act of 2025 (H.R. 2546)

The earlier House vehicle for the same concept, introduced in April 2025. A version of the Secretary provision was carried in the House-passed Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025 (H.R. 4275), but the provision did not survive into the enacted FY2026 NDAA text in a form that stood up the position.

H.R. 2546 remains in committee. It is now effectively the House companion to S. 5069 in substance if not in formal pairing, and if the Senate bill gains traction this is the number most likely to move alongside it.

Challenge: The provision has already been through one conference and came out reduced. Once a policy loses in conference, re-litigating it in the same Congress is difficult; the members who traded it away have limited appetite to reopen the trade.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low for this Congress. Watch this one as a leading indicator: if H.R. 2546 picks up a Democratic cosponsor or a subcommittee hearing this fall, the Secretary concept is alive for the 120th Congress. If it stays static, it is not.

Ensuring Coast Guard Readiness Act (S. 407 / H.R. 4952)

S. 407 would allow the Coast Guard to construct a vessel, or a major hull or superstructure component, in a foreign shipyard — provided the yard is in a NATO country or in an Indo-Pacific country with which the United States holds a current mutual defense agreement, provided the foreign cost is lower than the domestic cost, and provided the Commandant certifies the yard is not owned or operated by a Chinese company or by a multinational domiciled in China.

This is a direct response to the domestic shipbuilding bottleneck that has driven icebreaker and cutter delivery schedules years to the right. Members who have watched a hull sit incomplete for multiple deployment cycles understand the frustration behind it.

It is also, candidly, one of the more contested bills on this list within the maritime community, and reasonable people in the Service disagree about it.

Challenge: Domestic shipbuilding interests and their congressional delegations oppose it firmly, and the Jones Act coalition is one of the more durable blocs in maritime policy. It has been referred to the Senate Commerce Committee without a markup since February 2025, and an identical bill in the 118th Congress (S. 4530) died the same way.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low. Two Congresses, two referrals, no markup. Absent a specific acquisition crisis that forces the issue onto the floor, this bill does not move. Its more likely future is as a narrow, single-program waiver attached to an authorization bill rather than as general authority.

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2027 (S. 4784 and the House-passed companion)

The most likely vehicle for everything else on this list

The House Armed Services Committee approved its FY2027 NDAA 44–12 on 5 June 2026, and the House passed a roughly $1.15 trillion bill on the floor in July by a vote of 216–212 — an unusually narrow margin for a defense authorization. The Senate Armed Services Committee reported its version, S. 4784, on 15 June 2026 by a committee vote of 18–9.

The Senate bill has not reached the floor. Reporting indicates it is being held up over unrelated foreign policy disputes and objections to the topline growth rate. The FY2027 NDAA is therefore stalled at the point where Coast Guard and quality-of-life provisions would normally be negotiated.

This matters to CPOA out of proportion to its Coast Guard content. The NDAA has been the enacting vehicle for Coast Guard authorization, for TRICARE changes, and for military personnel policy for the past several cycles. If it slips past the end of the Congress, a long list of provisions on this page slip with it.

Challenge: A 216–212 House vote leaves no cushion in conference. Senate floor time is the binding constraint — the calendar between the September return and the end of the session is short, and appropriations will consume most of it. Coast Guard provisions are traditionally among the last items negotiated and the first traded away.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: High that an FY2027 NDAA is eventually enacted — Congress has completed one for 64 consecutive years. Uncertain as to timing and content. CPOA's working assumption is a December conference with limited room for new Coast Guard provisions unless they are already in one of the two chamber texts.

FY2027 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations (House Committee bill)

See Section 1 — tracked here for the Coast Guard accounts

The House Appropriations Committee's FY2027 Homeland Security bill provides approximately $64.9 billion in discretionary funding for the Department, of which roughly $2.9 billion is scored as defense activity. Coast Guard-specific increases over FY2026 include $135 million to expand the Indo-Pacific presence, $48 million for deferred shore facility maintenance, and $45 million against depot maintenance shortfalls.

These are real increases, and they track priorities the Service has identified repeatedly in unfunded requirements lists. They are also modest against the maintenance backlog and against the authorization levels carried in the FY2026 NDAA.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has not reported a companion DHS bill.

Challenge: The DHS bill is the hardest of the twelve appropriations bills to move, for reasons that have nothing to do with the Coast Guard. Immigration enforcement, detention bed levels, and border infrastructure drive the floor politics, and the Coast Guard accounts ride along as collateral. This is exactly the dynamic that produced the 75-day lapse in February.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Moderate that Coast Guard accounts are ultimately funded near the committee-reported level, most likely inside an omnibus or consolidated package in December rather than as a standalone bill. Low that a standalone DHS bill is signed before 30 September.

3. VA BENEFITS — STILL PENDING

Take Care of America's Veterans Act (H.R. 9237 / S. 4744)

The largest veterans package in years — and the most contested

Verified status: H.R. 9237 introduced 10 June 2026 by Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL). Motion to recommit FAILED 210–211 on 16 July 2026 (Office of the Clerk, Roll Call 249, 119th Congress, 2d Session; R 3 yea / 210 nay, D 207 yea / 0 nay, 10 not voting). Final passage vote not held; bill remains on the House calendar. Companion S. 4744 placed on the Senate legislative calendar. Statement of Administration Policy issued July 2026.

Introduced 10 June 2026 by the Republican chairmen of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, H.R. 9237 consolidates 62 separate provisions covering veterans' benefits, health care, counseling, VA personnel, VA infrastructure, and the Veterans Community Care Program. The Senate companion, S. 4744, has been placed on the Senate legislative calendar.

The headline provisions are substantial. The package would give medically retired veterans both full military retirement pay and VA disability compensation — the Major Richard Star Act concept, folded in — and would allow surviving spouses to retain military benefits if they remarry before age 55. For combat-injured medical retirees with fewer than twenty years of service, this is the difference between keeping their retirement and waiving it dollar-for-dollar.

The offsets are where it gets difficult. The package is scored at over $7 billion, and to satisfy PAYGO the sponsors proposed eliminating the VA home loan funding fee exemption for disabled veterans rated 70 percent and below on second and subsequent home purchases. Several major veterans service organizations have opposed the offset while supporting the underlying benefits, and the veterans community is genuinely split.

On the House floor, a motion to recommit failed 210–211 — a single vote — which kept the bill alive, but leadership then pulled the final passage vote rather than risk losing it. The Statement of Administration Policy was issued in July. The bill sits on the House calendar awaiting a rescheduled vote.

Challenge: A one-vote margin on the motion to recommit tells you exactly how fragile this is. The bill needs the offset to comply with PAYGO, and the offset is what costs it votes. Any change to the offset reopens the score; any failure to change it keeps some VSOs opposed. Meanwhile the underlying benefits — particularly concurrent receipt — command overwhelming bipartisan support in the abstract. That gap between abstract support and floor arithmetic is the whole problem.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Moderate. Something passes, but probably not this text. The most likely outcome is a renegotiated offset in September or October and a narrower package. CPOA supports the concurrent receipt and surviving spouse provisions without reservation and has urged the Committees to find an offset that does not come out of the pockets of disabled veterans.

Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 2102 / S. 1032)

Concurrent receipt for combat-injured medical retirees

Verified status: H.R. 2102 introduced 14 March 2025 by Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL); companion S. 1032. Both remain in committee — NEITHER HAS RECEIVED A FLOOR VOTE. Cosponsors reported at 317 House / 78 Senate as of late March 2026, and at more than 330 House / nearly 80 Senate as of July 2026 (Military Times). Senate unanimous-consent requests by Sen. Blumenthal were blocked 8 October 2025 (Sen. Wicker objecting) and 3 March 2026 (Sen. Johnson objecting); a fallback 60-vote roll call offer was also blocked. A Star Act provision was in the Senate FY2026 NDAA but was dropped in conference. CBO score: $78.1B direct spending FY2026–2036 (CBO pub. 62237, 23 March 2026).

Under current law, a servicemember medically retired under Chapter 61 with fewer than twenty years of service must waive DoD retired pay dollar-for-dollar against VA disability compensation. Combat-Related Special Compensation restores only part of that offset, and only for the portion of disabilities DoD certifies as combat-related. The Star Act would amend 10 U.S.C. § 1414 to let this group draw full retired pay and full VA compensation concurrently.

CORRECTION TO PRIOR REPORTING: an earlier draft of this update stated that H.R. 2102 had passed the House and had been blocked four times in the Senate, and cited an $11 billion cost. All three statements were wrong. The bill has never received a floor vote in either chamber. Two Senate unanimous-consent requests are documented, not four. And the current CBO score is not $11 billion.

The cost figure is now the central obstacle, and the story behind it deserves the membership's attention. CBO scored H.R. 2102 at $78.1 billion in direct spending over FY2026–2036, plus roughly $7.45 billion subject to appropriation. The roughly $10 billion figure still circulating on advocacy one-pagers was CBO's score for H.R. 1282, the narrower 2023 predecessor in the 118th Congress. The jump is about $68 billion.

CBO attributes roughly $65 billion of that increase to two provisions in the 2025 text that were not in the 2023 text: making Chapter 61 retirees with fewer than twenty years of service eligible for Concurrent Retired and Disability Pay (about $63 billion), and removing the CRDP cap for Chapter 61 retirees with at least twenty years (about $2 billion). Using DoD Office of the Actuary data, CBO concluded roughly 255,000 Chapter 61 retirees with fewer than twenty years would become newly eligible.

Congressional staff involved in drafting both versions have publicly disputed that reading, telling Military Times the revision was meant to close a narrow gap affecting roughly 1,124 additional retirees — taking the covered population from about 54,000 to about 56,000, not to 255,000. CBO has reaffirmed its estimate. That unresolved disagreement between drafting intent and budget scoring, not opposition to the underlying policy, is what is holding this bill.

On 10 June 2026 the sponsors changed strategy, introducing S. 4744 pairing the Star Act with an offset package and folding a version into H.R. 9237. That is what tied this bill's fate to the larger package described above.

Challenge: This is a scoring fight, not a merits fight. No senator argues combat-injured retirees should have their retirement reduced — the objections raised on the floor were cost and "double benefit." But a $78.1 billion score triggers statutory PAYGO and requires an offset of that magnitude, which is an entirely different political problem from offsetting $10 billion. Until the CBO-versus-drafters dispute over the covered population is resolved, sponsors are trying to pay for a bill that may be far broader than they intended to write.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Moderate over the next twelve months, poor for standalone passage. Cosponsorship is extraordinary and the moral argument is unanswerable, but the score is the binding constraint and it will not resolve itself. The most likely path is a narrowed text that CBO scores closer to the sponsors' intent, moving inside a renegotiated H.R. 9237 or as an NDAA amendment. This remains the veterans provision CPOA is pushing hardest.

Review Every Veteran's Claim Act of 2025 (S. 1657)

Directed at disability claims processing and adjudication quality for veterans with and without toxic exposure claims. CBO has scored it. It sits in the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The context has shifted since this bill was introduced, and it has shifted in a good direction. VA's disability compensation and pension backlog is reported to have dropped below 70,000 pending claims for the first time since February 2020, and VA is reported to have processed more than two million disability claims in FY2025, the highest single-year total on record.

A word of caution on the numbers in this paragraph. These figures come from VA public statements and secondary reporting, not from a primary VA data publication the Committee has independently verified, and the definition of "backlog" — claims pending more than 125 days — is narrower than "claims pending." Widely circulated PACT Act approval-rate figures could not be traced to an authoritative source and have been omitted from this edition rather than repeated. Members should treat all of these as directionally accurate and cite VA's published data directly.

The improvement cuts against the urgency argument for new legislation, which is a good problem to have. What remains is the accuracy question: faster is not the same as correct, and appeal rates deserve continued scrutiny.

Challenge: The backlog numbers have taken the political oxygen out of claims-reform legislation. When the chart is going the right direction, committees move on to other subjects. The bill also overlaps with provisions inside H.R. 9237, which makes it a candidate for absorption rather than standalone passage.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low as a standalone bill; moderate that its substance survives inside a larger veterans package. CPOA's position is that oversight should continue even as the numbers improve — a falling backlog says nothing about whether the claims coming out of it were decided correctly, and throughput is the easiest metric to improve and the least meaningful one to a veteran whose claim was wrongly denied.

Veterans' True Choice Act of 2025 (H.R. 244)

Would expand veterans' ability to obtain care through community providers rather than through VA facilities, building on the Community Care framework. It remains in the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Community care is one of the genuinely contested questions in veterans policy, and CPOA members hold views across the spectrum. Those who live far from a VA medical center generally want more community care access. Those who rely on VA specialty care — particularly for service-connected conditions that community providers see rarely — are concerned that expanding community care drains the resources and case volume that keep VA specialty programs viable.

Both concerns are legitimate. Elements of the community care debate are also folded into H.R. 9237's Veterans Community Care Program provisions, which is where the real negotiation is happening.

Challenge: Community care expansion is the central ideological fight in veterans health policy, and it does not resolve on the merits — it resolves on which coalition has the floor. Major VSOs are divided. The bill has been in committee since the start of the Congress without a markup.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low as a standalone. The action is inside H.R. 9237. CPOA has not taken a formal position on community care expansion and will not do so without polling the membership; this is a question where our members' circumstances genuinely differ.

4. TRICARE AND MILITARY HEALTH CARE — STILL PENDING

Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2025 (H.R. 4768 / S. 2448)

TRICARE dependent coverage to age 26 without a separate premium

Verified status: H.R. 4768 and S. 2448, Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2025, both pending in committee. TRICARE Young Adult premiums effective 1 January 2026: $794/month TYA Prime, $363/month TYA Select — reported as more than a 280 percent increase since 2015. The age-26 premium structure originates in the FY2011 NDAA.

The bill that generates more member mail than any other on this list. Under current rules, TRICARE dependents remain on a parent's coverage to age 21, or 23 if enrolled full-time in college. Beyond that, continuing coverage requires enrollment in TRICARE Young Adult at a separate premium — which in 2026 reached roughly $794 per month for TYA Prime and roughly $363 per month for TYA Select.

Civilian plans have covered dependents to age 26 at no additional premium since 2010. Military families do not get that. The gap traces to the Young Adult Program structure written into the FY2011 NDAA, and it has never been fixed.

H.R. 4768 and S. 2448 would extend TRICARE coverage to age 26 for dependents of active duty and retired beneficiaries without the separate premium, aligning TRICARE with the civilian standard. Sponsors estimate it would reach roughly 350,000 military families and save an affected family on the order of $8,700 per year. The Senate bill was introduced by Sens. Kelly, Murkowski, and Warren.

Challenge: Cost. Extending coverage to age 26 without a premium moves a real expense from families onto the Defense Health Program budget, and it must be offset. The bill has been introduced in multiple Congresses with broad bipartisan cosponsorship and has never cleared the score. It is also perennially proposed as an NDAA amendment and perennially dropped in conference for exactly this reason.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Moderate, and improving. Cosponsorship is the broadest it has been, and the equity argument — that military families pay for something every civilian family gets free — is unusually easy to make to a member of Congress. The realistic path is an FY2027 NDAA amendment. Whether it survives conference depends entirely on whether an offset is identified before the conference rather than during it.

Rx ACCESS Act (S. 4106)

Sens. Tom Cotton and Tim Kaine

The Rx Access, Choice, Cost Equity, and Supply Stability Act would let TRICARE beneficiaries fill non-generic prescriptions at the pharmacy of their choice — retail, mail order, or military treatment facility — rather than being steered into a single channel. It would also protect independent community pharmacies from below-cost reimbursement and require an annual audit of TRICARE's pharmacy benefit contractor.

The practical effect for retirees in rural areas and for members at small units without a nearby MTF pharmacy is meaningful. Beneficiaries in these communities have watched local pharmacies drop TRICARE entirely because reimbursement fell below acquisition cost, leaving mail order as the only option — which is a poor answer for an acute prescription.

Challenge: Pharmacy benefit managers are a well-resourced and effective lobby, and any bill that constrains their reimbursement practices draws sustained opposition. The bill also touches Defense Health Agency contracting authority, which makes the Armed Services Committees protective of it. Introduced in March 2026 with bipartisan sponsorship but no markup scheduled.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Low to moderate this Congress. The audit and transparency provisions are the most likely to survive as an NDAA amendment even if the pharmacy-choice mandate does not. Partial progress here is still progress.

TRICARE Provider Reimbursement and Network Adequacy

Pending oversight and potential legislation — no single bill number yet

Not a bill so much as a developing fight that CPOA expects to become one. During FY2026 NDAA deliberations Congress raised sustained concerns about how TRICARE reimburses certain providers, particularly children's hospitals, and about the downstream effect on beneficiary access to pediatric specialty care.

The Senate Armed Services Committee directed the Secretary of Defense to report to the armed services committees no later than 1 March 2026 clarifying the scope of the children's hospital reimbursement policy and ensuring transparency in its implementation, explicitly to inform future oversight and potential legislative action.

That report deadline has passed. What Congress does with it is the question for the fall. Related measures including the Provider Reimbursement Stability Act of 2026 (H.R. 8163 / S. 5180) address adjacent reimbursement stability questions on the Medicare side, and the underlying dynamic is the same: when reimbursement falls below the cost of delivering care, providers leave the network and the beneficiary discovers the problem at the worst possible moment.

For Coast Guard families this is not abstract. Our people are stationed at small, remote units where the TRICARE network may consist of a handful of providers. The loss of one pediatric specialist in a Coast Guard town is a bigger event than the loss of one in San Diego.

Challenge: Reimbursement policy is technical, unglamorous, and generates no press coverage until access has already collapsed. It competes for committee attention against far more visible issues. Legislating on it also means overriding DHA rate-setting authority, which the Department resists on principle.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Uncertain — there is no vehicle to score yet. CPOA is watching for the SASC report to surface in the FY2027 NDAA conference and will report specifics in the November update. Members experiencing TRICARE network access problems — providers dropping TRICARE, specialty referrals denied for lack of an in-network provider, unreasonable drive times — should document them and send them to the Committee. This is the kind of issue where a stack of specific cases from small units is worth more than any argument we can make on our own.

Context: TRICARE Cost-Share Changes Already in Effect for 2026

Not pending legislation — included so members are not caught off guard

Several TRICARE cost-sharing adjustments took effect in calendar year 2026 under existing authority, without new legislation. These are administrative changes to catchment amounts, cost-shares, and TRICARE Young Adult premiums.

They are listed here only so that members reviewing this update understand which changes are already law and which are still being fought over. If a change to your cost-share appeared in 2026, it is almost certainly one of these — not something Congress is currently debating. The Committee can answer specific questions on request.

Challenge: Not applicable — these are in effect.

CPOA assessment — probability of passage: Not applicable. Reported for member awareness only.

5. CLOSING WORD

Shipmates, the seventy-five days between 14 February and 30 April were the clearest demonstration in a generation of why this Committee exists. Our people kept sailing, kept flying, kept standing the watch, and kept boarding vessels in weather most people would not go out in — while the Department they belong to was closed and their civilian shipmates went ten weeks without a paycheck. Military pay was protected. It was protected because someone in the Department made a decision to protect it, and for no other reason. That is not a policy. That is luck with a good outcome.

The Coast Guard Authorization Act finally became law in December after years of effort, and it is a genuine win — the largest authorization in the Service’s history, with real money behind icebreakers, cutters, and shore infrastructure. I do not want that to pass unremarked. But authorization is a promise and appropriation is a paycheck, and we are heading into another September with the appropriation unfinished.

On the veterans side, I have to be straighter with you than an earlier draft of this update was. The Major Richard Star Act has not passed the House. It has more than 330 House cosponsors and nearly 80 senators, which is remarkable, but it has never had a floor vote in either chamber, and two senators have blocked it by objecting to unanimous consent. What is actually stopping it is a CBO score of $78.1 billion — not the $10 billion figure that has been on advocacy handouts for three years, and not the $11 billion this Committee mistakenly published. CBO reads the 2025 text as covering roughly 255,000 retirees. The drafters say they meant about 56,000. Until that is reconciled, sponsors are trying to find an offset for a bill they may not have intended to write.

That is not a reason to give up on it. It is a reason to ask a sharper question. When you call your senators — and I hope you will — do not just ask them to support the Star Act. Ask whether they will support a narrowed text scored to the population the drafters intended. That is the question that actually moves this now, and roughly 54,000 combat-injured retirees are waiting on the answer.

I will not tell you every bill on this list is going to pass. Most of them will not. The Ensuring Coast Guard Readiness Act has been referred to committee in two consecutive

Congresses without a markup, and I would not bet on the third. The Secretary of the Coast Guard concept lost in conference once already. Part of the job of this Committee is telling you honestly which fights are winnable this year and which ones are seed-planting for the next Congress — because your time and your phone calls are finite, and they should go where they will do the most good.

The three that are winnable this year, in my judgment: Coast Guard pay protection attached to a moving vehicle, the Major Richard Star Act inside a renegotiated veterans package, and TRICARE dependent coverage to 26 as an NDAA amendment. That is where the Committee is putting its weight. If you have a hardship story from the February lapse, a TRICARE network access problem, or a claims adjudication issue, send it to us. Specific, documented, from a real Coast Guard family — that is the currency that works on the Hill. Talking points are free and everyone has them. Your story is not. Email you story here: LegislativeAffairs@uscgcpoa.org

Thank you for what you do and for what you have done. Watch your six, take care of your shipmates, and keep the pressure on.

Very respectfully,

BMCS Jon Ostrowski, USCG (Ret.), GLM #38
Chairman, Legislative Affairs Committee
United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association

SOURCES AND VERIFICATION NOTES

Primary sources relied on for the verified status lines in this edition:

- P.L. 119-60, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 (S. 1071), Division G — Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025. Signed 18 December 2025.
- U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Clerk, Roll Call 249, 119th Congress, 2d Session (H.R. 9237 motion to recommit, 16 July 2026).
- Congressional Budget Office, Cost Estimate for H.R. 2102, Major Richard Star Act, publication 62237, 23 March 2026. Prior estimate: CBO publication 59244 for H.R. 1282, 13 June 2023.
- Congress.gov bill pages for S. 802, H.R. 1542, H.R. 2051, H.R. 2546, S. 407, H.R. 4952, S. 5069, H.R. 2102, S. 1032, H.R. 9237, S. 4744, S. 1657, H.R. 244, H.R. 4768, S. 2448, S. 4106, H.R. 8163, S. 5180, H.R. 9770, S. 4784.
- House Committee on Appropriations, FY2027 Homeland Security bill release and subcommittee markup materials.
- Military Times / Army Times reporting on the CBO rescore of the Major Richard Star Act, 22 July 2026.

Known limitations of this edition

Stated plainly so that no one is misled by the confident tone of a newsletter:

- The H.R. 9770 vote count and date could not be confirmed against the Office of the Clerk record before publication and are flagged in-line as reported rather than verified.
- PACT Act approval-rate percentages circulating in secondary reporting could not be traced to an authoritative VA source and were removed rather than repeated.
- VA claims backlog figures are from VA public statements and secondary reporting, not independently verified against a primary VA data publication.
- Cosponsor counts move weekly. The figures here carry the date on which they were reported.
- Several bills tracked here have identical or near-identical companions; where the Committee consolidated them for readability, both numbers are given.

Corrections from the prior draft of this update are marked in-line where they occur, in the Coast Guard Authorization note and the Major Richard Star Act entry. The Committee would rather publish its own corrections visibly than quietly restate the record. If you spot an error in this edition, tell us and it will be corrected the same way.