

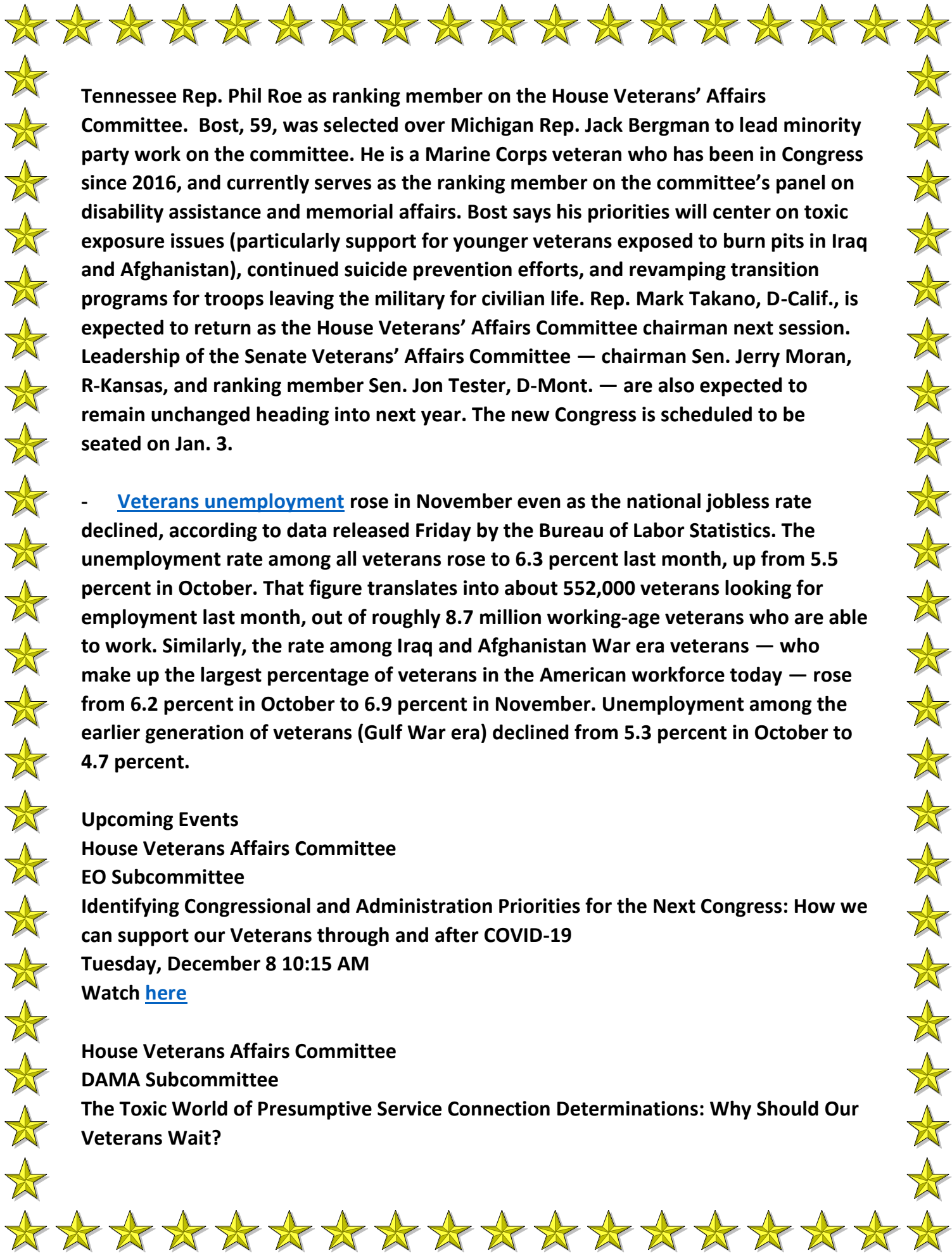


AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

DECEMBER 8, 2020

News Driving the Week

- After years of fighting with federal officials, Vietnam veterans suffering from [bladder cancer, Parkinsonism or hypothyroidism would be granted presumptive benefits](#) status under language included in the final version of the annual defense authorization bill. If passed into law, the mandate would require Veterans Affairs officials to begin granting fast-track disability status for about 34,000 veterans suffering from the three conditions. It would also represent a major victory for veterans advocates who have pushed for the change for years. Department officials have blocked the move to grant presumptive benefits status in recent years while they conduct additional scientific research into the connection between the illnesses and exposure to chemical defoliants during the Vietnam War. But the policy bill still faces a veto threat from President Donald Trump on other, unrelated issues.
- U.S. President Donald Trump doubled down on his [threat to veto the annual defense policy bill](#) with a pair of late-night tweets that called out the Republican Senate Armed Services Committee chairman — a close ally of the president — for not heeding to his demands for changes to the measure. It's the latest act in the drama over the bill, which defies Trump's plans to retain the titles of several Army bases named after Confederate figures and withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Germany. Republican and Democratic aides to the armed services committees that draft the bill each year said before the president's latest tweets that they did not have a backup plan if the commander in chief vetoes the legislation. "We're definitely not looking at what to do about a veto," said a senior Republican aide to the Senate Armed Services Committee, "because we're still hoping there won't be a veto." The 4,517-page, \$740.5 billion defense authorization bill for fiscal 2021 unveiled Thursday is the product of months of negotiations between House, Senate and Trump administration officials. Congressional aides said they expect the bill to pass the House early this week, with the Senate following a day or two later.
- House Republican leaders named [Illinois Rep. Mike Bost](#) as their top veterans policy voice for the next congressional session, tapping him to replace retiring



Tennessee Rep. Phil Roe as ranking member on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. Bost, 59, was selected over Michigan Rep. Jack Bergman to lead minority party work on the committee. He is a Marine Corps veteran who has been in Congress since 2016, and currently serves as the ranking member on the committee's panel on disability assistance and memorial affairs. Bost says his priorities will center on toxic exposure issues (particularly support for younger veterans exposed to burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan), continued suicide prevention efforts, and revamping transition programs for troops leaving the military for civilian life. Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., is expected to return as the House Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman next session. Leadership of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee — chairman Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, and ranking member Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont. — are also expected to remain unchanged heading into next year. The new Congress is scheduled to be seated on Jan. 3.

- [Veterans unemployment](#) rose in November even as the national jobless rate declined, according to data released Friday by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The unemployment rate among all veterans rose to 6.3 percent last month, up from 5.5 percent in October. That figure translates into about 552,000 veterans looking for employment last month, out of roughly 8.7 million working-age veterans who are able to work. Similarly, the rate among Iraq and Afghanistan War era veterans — who make up the largest percentage of veterans in the American workforce today — rose from 6.2 percent in October to 6.9 percent in November. Unemployment among the earlier generation of veterans (Gulf War era) declined from 5.3 percent in October to 4.7 percent.

Upcoming Events

House Veterans Affairs Committee
EO Subcommittee

Identifying Congressional and Administration Priorities for the Next Congress: How we can support our Veterans through and after COVID-19

Tuesday, December 8 10:15 AM

Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee
DAMA Subcommittee

The Toxic World of Presumptive Service Connection Determinations: Why Should Our Veterans Wait?

Wednesday, December 9 10:00 AM

Watch [here](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee

Women Veterans Task Force

2020 Report of the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans

Wednesday, December 9 2:00 PM

Watch [here](#)

AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

Continued News

- The number of [military veterans in Congress](#) will drop again next session, reaching the lowest levels of members with some military experience since at least World War II. For now, 91 veterans are set to be sworn in as members of the 117th Congress in January, a decrease of five from the start of the 116th Congress in 2019. Of the group, 74 will serve in the House, and 17 in the Senate. In 1993, 236 lawmakers were veterans, according to Congressional Research Service records. By 2001, that number was down to 168. In 2011, it was only 118. Even with the years of decreases in Congress, veterans will still make up about 17 percent of the 117th session's membership. This year's congressional races saw the highest-ever number of female veteran candidates who won primary contests (24, almost double the total in 2018) but the number of female veterans in Congress at the start of next year will be only six, a decrease of one from the 116th session.

- A former Navy SEAL has filed a [lawsuit against the Department of Veterans Affairs](#) over new restrictions that make it harder for caregivers of post-9/11 veterans

to receive VA benefits. In a complaint filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, Andrew Sheets, his wife Kristie, and the non-profit advocacy group Veterans Warriors, Inc., say rules published July 31 conflict with the law that created the program, and extend restrictions beyond what was intended by the law that expanded the program to veterans from all eras. But the new rules, the Sheets say, include restrictions that could preclude them and thousands of other post-9/11 veterans from being eligible for the benefits. According to the final rule published in the Federal Registry, the caregiver program is intended for those who sustained serious injury; are in need of in-person personal care; and are 100% unable to perform at least one or more activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, eating or getting around.

- [Opinion](#): How Biden Can Help Warriors Save Warriors
- [Opinion](#): Why Joe Biden Needs to Nominate Women to Lead VA and the Defense Department
- [Opinion](#): Legal victory and false hope?

