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1. VFW Commander-in-Chief Brings Veterans' Voices to Congress: Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz called for “accountability for failure to grant benefits to Vietnam and Post-9/11 veterans suffering from toxic exposures” during a special joint hearing of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs. The VFW expressed its frustration with the Department of Veterans Affairs’ lack of urgency in providing benefits to individuals who suffer from conditions associated with toxic exposures, especially when there is science to back up veterans’ claims. “The VFW proposes a permanent, comprehensive, and evidence-based framework of granting presumptive benefits for toxic exposure,” said Schmitz. “Veterans who were exposed to burn pits and now suffer from pulmonary conditions and rare cancers should not have to wait decades for benefits – like Vietnam veterans did.” Schmitz reminded committee members that the VFW has led or played a major role in every reform or expansion of veterans benefits since the institution of the VA. [Watch the hearing.](#) [Read the written testimony.](#)

2. Concurrent Receipt Bill Introduced in the Senate: On Wednesday, Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) introduced a VFW-championed bill, S.3393, which would expand concurrent receipt eligibility to combat-wounded veterans who were medically discharged. The bill would provide total offset relief for certain veterans. “The VFW would like to thank Senators Tester and Crapo for their leadership on this issue and their continued commitment to America’s military and veterans,” said VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Kyle Kalman. S. 3393 is the Senate version of H.R. 5995, [the Major Richard Star Act.](#)

3. Legislation Introduced to Recognize Early Vietnam Veterans: On Wednesday, Representative T.J. Cox (D-CA) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 6082, the *Forgotten Vietnam Veterans Act*. This important legislation would allow veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam from Nov. 1, 1955, to Feb. 27, 1961, to receive wartime benefits. “More than 3,000

veterans served in Vietnam from Nov. 1, 1955, to Feb. 27, 1961, ten of whom were killed in action,” said VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle. “However, veterans who served in Vietnam prior to Feb. 28, 1961, are not considered wartime veterans and likewise are ineligible for certain VA benefits. The VFW is proud to support this legislation, which would change the statutory definition of Vietnam veteran to include those who served in the Republic of Vietnam beginning on Nov. 1, 1955. The VFW thanks Rep. Cox and all original co-sponsors for their efforts to expand benefits for veterans.” [Learn more.](#)

4. Legislation Introduced to Modernize Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance: Last Friday, Representative Mike Bost (R-IL) and Representative Kathleen Rice (D-NY) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 6013, the *Veteran Families Financial Support Act*. This important legislation would increase the maximum payment under the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI) program from \$10,000 to \$40,000 and extend eligibility beyond the current two-year period after a veteran receives notification of a new service-connected disability. “The current payment amount of \$10,000 under the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance program does not cover the rising cost of end-of-life expenses,” said VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle. “The VFW is proud to support this legislation, which would increase the coverage amount of Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance and expand eligibility beyond the current two-year window after a veteran receives notification of a new service-connected disability. The VFW thanks Rep. Bost and Rep. Rice for introducing this legislation and for their efforts to expand disability benefits for veterans.” [Learn more.](#)

5. Strong Week for VFW Student Veteran Legislative Fellows: This week, the 2020 class of VFW Student Veteran fellows stormed Capitol Hill during the VFW March Legislative Conference. The fellowship provides VFW members who are in school the opportunity to advocate on an issue that impacts the veteran community. The fellows joined their VFW Departments on their meetings with legislators to present their policy proposals. The proposals ranged from fixing sexual assault training to bringing the Transition Assistance Program to communities so veterans can access them after service. [Learn more about the VFW Student Veteran Fellowship.](#)

6. Health Record Delay Means More Capabilities for Veterans: On Thursday, House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization held a hearing to discuss the root causes of the delay in implementation of VA’s Electronic Health Record Modernization. Subcommittee members discussed how delivery of health care would be impacted at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Wash. VA officials indicated a lack of confidence in a seamless implementation as the core reason for delaying the go-live from March to July, 2020. VA Veterans Health Administration Executive in Charge Dr. Richard Stone indicated that the delay means veterans will be able to continue to request prescription refills through an online portal, like they do today through www.myhealth.va.gov, which would not have been included if VA kept the March 2020 go-live rollout. It was unclear to the VFW whether veterans who receive telehealth from the Mann-Grandstaff Medical Center will have the ability to continue to do so in July 2020. [Watch the hearing.](#) [Contact the VFW](#) with concerns regarding the new health care record.

7. Registration Open for 2020 National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic: Applications are now open for veterans interested in participating in the 2020 National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic, Sept. 20-25, 2020, in San Diego, California. The National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic offers adventure sports and recreational activities such as sailing, surfing, kayaking, and cycling for veterans with disabilities. Complementing the therapy provided in daily rehabilitation programs, the clinic shares a glimpse of the many exciting recreational opportunities awaiting those veterans who accept the challenge. Participants will develop sports skills and take part in a variety of adaptive sports workshops. The deadline to submit an application is May 1, 2020. [Apply online.](#)

8. First All-Women Senior Veteran Flight: Operation HerStory is working with Honor Flight Chicago, Daughters of the American Revolution, Illinois Joining Forces, and the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs to create the first all-women senior veterans flight from Illinois to Washington, D.C., in the fall of 2020. The women will have the opportunity to visit the Women in Military Service for America Memorial and the Vietnam Women's Memorial, memorials built to honor the service of female service members. [Learn more.](#)

9. Department of Justice Creates Elder Fraud Hotline: The Department of Justice announced that they have created an Elder Fraud Hotline. This hotline will be staffed by case managers who will provide personalized support for callers. The case managers will assist callers with reporting fraud cases to the correct agencies. The hotline is a toll-free number at 1.833.372.8311. People can also report fraud cases [online.](#)

10. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced one new identification, and three burial updates for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Pvt. James J. Cansler**, 21, of Bolivar, Missouri, was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Vossenack, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was reported as missing in action on Dec. 19. A year later, Army officials had received no evidence he had been captured or otherwise survived combat, and so released a presumptive finding of death. While studying unresolved American losses in the Hürtgen area, a DPAA historian determined that one set of unidentified remains, designated X-2505 Neuville, recovered from a minefield north of Vossenack in 1946 possibly belonged to Cansler. He will be buried on April 15, 2020, in Springfield, Missouri. [Read about Cansler.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Dan E. Reagan**, 20, of Haslet, Texas, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Reagan. He will be buried on April 14, 2020, in North Little Rock, Arkansas. [Read about Reagan.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Leo T. Keninger**, 20, of Ackley, Iowa, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo

hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Keninger. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keninger.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Andrew J. Schmitz**, 26, of Richmond, Virginia, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Schmitz. He will be buried on March 6, 2020, in Amelia Court House, Virginia. [Read about Schmitz.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <https://votervoice.net/VFW/register>.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.

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