



April 3, 2020

In This Issue:

- 1. VFW Opposes VA Decision to Eliminate 48-Hour Review Period for Claims**
- 2. COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments and Small Business Assistance**
- 3. COVID-19-Related Debt Assistance and Deadlines for Claims**
- 4. Multiple VHA Facilities Inspected by OIG During Pandemic**
- 5. VA Changing Rules for Electronic Sharing**
- 6. Share Your Story**
- 7. DOD Modifies Use of National Guard Forces**
- 8. Do You Use a Military Pharmacy?**
- 9. Have You Filled Out Your Census Form Yet?**
- 10. MIA Update**

1. VFW Opposes VA Decision to Eliminate 48-Hour Review Period for Claims: VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz called it “despicable” and “inconceivable” that Department of Veterans Affairs Undersecretary for Benefits Dr. Paul Lawrence intends to eliminate the accredited veterans service officer (VSO) 48-hour review period for claims effective April 30, 2020. “The VFW strongly opposes the repeal of the 48-hour review period in reviewing VA decisions for accuracy, as this is a final quality control check that we perform on behalf of our veterans to ensure that their rating decisions are correct the first time,” said Schmitz. VSOs have the opportunity and the responsibility to review proposed VA rating decisions to ensure that all claimed conditions have been addressed and properly adjudicated prior to VA finalizing its rating decision and sending notification to the veteran. For decades, VA has allotted VSOs 48 hours to review the applicable laws and regulations that were applied to the claim. During this time, VSO representatives can go back to VA to seek corrections before each claim goes to promulgation. This quality review allows VSOs to give the claim an independent quality control check before it is reviewed by VA and undergoes VA’s internal quality review process. [Read more.](#)

2. COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments and Small Business Assistance: Veterans are not alone in facing economic hardship during the COVID-19 outbreak, and thankfully there is relief coming. Veteran-run small businesses and VFW Posts will be eligible for some economic relief for employees of these businesses through the Small Business Administration. Additionally, veterans and survivors who do not file taxes because they rely on VA benefits are eligible for the economic stimulus checks due in a few weeks. However, there is uncertainty on whether such individuals will need to submit information to the IRS before being able to receive the stimulus checks. The VFW and a bi-partisan group of senators have implored Secretary Mnuchin to waive unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles for those veterans and survivors. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates. [Learn more about Economic Impact Payments.](#) [Read small business](#)

[guidance](#). [Learn about the Paycheck Protection Program](#), which VFW posts are eligible to receive.

3. COVID-19-Related Debt Assistance and Deadlines for Claims: Veterans impacted by COVID-19 are eligible for temporary debt relief from the VA Debt Management Center (DMC). If you are affected and need temporary financial relief, please contact DMC at 1.800.827.0648 to request assistance. On Thursday, President Trump announced that he will direct Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie to take further measures to address issues with deadlines for claims and debt collections amidst the COVID-19 public health crisis. We are monitoring developments on both issues, but urge our members to maintain communication with their service officers. Please keep your service officer informed if you are unable to attend a compensation and pension (C&P) exam, and please contact the C&P examiner to reschedule your appointment. [Find a VFW-accredited Service Officer near you](#). [Learn more about the VA Debt Management Center](#).

4. Multiple VHA Facilities Inspected by OIG During Pandemic: VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) made unannounced visits to over 237 facilities throughout the nation to inspect VHA's COVID-19 screening processes and pandemic readiness last week. A report released on March 26, 2020, detailed the findings of those visits. OIG hopes these findings will assist VHA leaders in their awareness of the facilities' emergency status and preparedness during the pandemic. [Read the report](#).

5. VA Changing Rules for Electronic Sharing: VA is changing the rules for electronic sharing via the Veterans Health Information Exchange (VHIE). Beginning April 17, 2020, VA will be able to seamlessly and securely share electronic health information with non-VA community providers treating veterans unless they opt out. VA has also recently released a new online option for veterans to manage their VHIE sharing options in [My HealthVet](#). There is no deadline for veterans to change their sharing options and they may do so at any time before or after April 17, 2020. [Learn more about VHIE](#).

6. Share Your Story: S. 3393 or H.R. 5995, the [Major Richard Star Act](#), would enable Chapter 61 veterans who have been medically discharged due to combat-related injuries to rightfully receive retirement pay and disability compensation without offset. In FY18, there were 42,163 disabled veterans affected by this offset. An [Action Corps Action Alert](#) has been launched. For veterans who are affected by this offset, [please share your story](#) by writing a short essay detailing your years of service, DOD/VA disability percentages, and how the offset has impacted your standard of living. The VFW will use these stories to build support for the passage of the *Major Richard Star Act*. If you are interested in participating, please send your story to vfwac@vfw.org. [Learn more](#) and/or [take action](#).

7. DOD Modifies Use of National Guard Forces: Last Friday, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper modified and accelerated the process for how DOD authorizes the use of National Guard forces under Title 32 Section 502(f). The modification creates a conditional pre-authorization in response to Federal Emergency Management Agency requests that ensures quicker federal funding for state National Guard forces mobilizing to aid in whole-of-government COVID-19 response efforts. [Read DOD release](#).

8. Do You Use a Military Pharmacy? If so, there may be temporary limitations that result in a decrease in service or closure at your pharmacy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to maintain the safety of patients and personnel, you may have to temporarily switch your prescription to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery or to a TRICARE retail network pharmacy. [Learn how to switch.](#)

9. Have You Filled Out Your Census Form Yet? It's time to be counted in the census again. The results of the census will determine congressional representation, advise hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding, and be used to draw congressional and state legislative districts. The VFW encourages all Americans to take part in this year's census. [Learn more.](#)

10. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new burial update for a service member who has been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Ernest L. Roth**, 20, of Los Angeles, was assigned as a pilot with the 359th Bombardment Squadron, 303rd Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force in Europe. On May 19, 1944, he was piloting a B-17G bomber while on a bombing run over Berlin when the plane was hit by flak and crashed. Six of the 10 crewmembers, including Roth, were killed in the incident. They were recovered by German forces and reportedly buried in the Döberitz cemetery. Roth will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Roth.](#)

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.

[Click here to view this week's edition.](#)

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