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## In This Issue:

1. **VFW-Supported Mental Health Bill Becomes Law**
2. **National Suicide Hotline Bill Becomes Law**
3. **National Veterans Small Business Week**
4. **Monument Honoring Women in the Military Unveiled**
5. **Update to TRICARE Select Enrollment Fee to Start Jan. 1**
6. **Calling All Middle and High School Students**
7. **Need Help With Voting?**
8. **Poll Workers Still Needed in Some Locations**
9. **MIA Update**

**1. VFW-Supported Mental Health Bill Becomes Law:** The VFW-supported version of [S. 785](#), the *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019*, was signed into law last Saturday. This law supports VA as it continues to make improvements to veterans' mental health care by covering a strategic plan for veterans transitioning from active duty, pilot programs integrating alternative therapies, establishing a VA and DOD clinical provider treatment toolkit, improving care and services for women veterans, and expanding the mental health medical workforce.

**2. National Suicide Hotline Bill Becomes Law:** Last Saturday, [S. 2661](#), the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020* was signed into law. This legislation designates 9.8.8 as the telephone number for the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. The existing hotline, which can be reached by dialing **1.800.273.8255**, is operated by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and through the [Veterans Crisis Line](#). Both hotlines offer confidential support from qualified responders 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many of the responders with the Veterans Crisis Line are veterans themselves.

**3. National Veterans Small Business Week:** Join the Small Business Administration (SBA) the week of Nov. 2 - 6, 2020, for the seventh annual National Veterans Small Business Week. This week is a way to bring service members, veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, and military spouses together to celebrate the veteran- and military-owned small business community. Every day of the week, SBA will highlight different aspects of the veteran entrepreneurship journey from transition assistance, to accessing capital. [Learn more.](#)

**4. Monument Honoring Women in the Military Unveiled:** On Saturday, the Washington, D.C., area's first monument to honor women in the military was unveiled at the Women in Military Service for American Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. *The Pledge*, sculpted by Susan

Bahary, is a bronze statue of a kneeling service woman in full combat gear, locking eyes with her working military dog, meant to honor the promise of loyalty made between a soldier and their combat dog in faithful allegiance to our county. Following the unveiling, Sgt. Britany Gavit stated, "I've been a dog handler for four years now, and to see a female statute for the first time, it feels great ... She could be any one of us, in any rank of the military, and it's so significant." [Learn more.](#)

**5. Update to TRICARE Select Enrollment Fee to Start Jan. 1:** DOD announced that TRICARE Select Group A retirees will be required to pay an enrollment fee beginning on Jan. 1, 2021. Congress directed the Defense Health Agency in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 to implement TRICARE Select retiree enrollment fees, but delayed the implementation. Group A is comprised of retirees and their family members if the sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurred before Jan. 1, 2018. The enrollment fee is waived for medically retired individuals and their family members, and for survivors of active-duty deaths. During [TRICARE Open Season](#), which will run from Nov. 9 to Dec. 14, beneficiaries must set up an allotment with their regional contractors for the enrollment fee to begin on Jan. 1, 2021. Beneficiaries who do not set up their allotment by the deadline will be unenrolled due to nonpayment. These individuals would have previously had 90 days from the termination date to request reinstatement. However, recently the Defense Health Agency has agreed to extend the reinstatement period to 180 days. [Learn more.](#)

**6. Calling All Middle and High School Students:** It is not too late to participate in the annual VFW [Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen](#) essay competitions. Open to eligible high school students, the Voice of Democracy program is one of the top patriotic audio essay competitions in the nation, with more than \$2.1 million in educational scholarships and incentives up for grabs, and a first-place prize of \$30,000. More than 64,400 students participate in the competition each year. This year's theme challenges students to answer the question, "Is This the Country the Founders Envisioned?" Open to eligible sixth through eighth grade students, more than 165,400 students compete in the Patriot's Pen essay competition each year to win their slice of more than \$1.4 million in state and national awards. The top individual VFW Department (state) winners are vying for the first-place prize of \$5,000. This year's Patriot's Pen theme asks, "What is Patriotism to Me?" Essay entries must be submitted through a participating [local VFW Post](#). [Learn more.](#)

**7. Need Help With Voting?:** The general election on Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020, is less than two weeks away. If you or anyone you know needs assistance with voting, please visit the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's website. The website has information on voting accessibility for disabled Americans, as well as other important topics such as voting by mail, in-person voting, and election security. [Learn more.](#)

**8. Poll Workers Still Needed in Some Locations:** Healthy elections require poll workers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, election officials in some parts of the country are still reporting shortage of poll workers. Without sufficient numbers of poll workers, it is possible that polling locations could have long lines, lack of staff to assist voters, or possible closures of polling locations. The VFW encourages any member, advocate, or supporter, who is healthy and willing, to consider becoming a poll worker for the general election on Tuesday, Nov. 3. The Stanford-

MIT Healthy Election Project has partnered with Power the Polls, which helps to follow up with applicants, confirm their commitment, and assist them in completing the process. If you signed up through the special VFW link, you should have been contacted by Power the Polls, a partner organization, or your local election administrators. If you have not yet been contacted, [please reach out](#) to see if your assistance is still needed.

**9. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced three burial updates and four new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Earl W. Smith**, 22, of Oakland, California, was a pilot assigned to the 80th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Group, 5th Air Force. On Aug. 20, 1943, Smith was piloting a P-38 Lightning fighter on a test flight near Port Moresby, Australian Territory of Papua (current day Papua New Guinea), when he crashed into the harbor off Paga Point. Smith did not bail out and his body was not recovered. Smith will be buried Aug. 20, 2021, at a location yet to be determined. [Read about Smith.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class James M. Flanagan**, 22, of Jacksonville, Florida, 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 Flanagan. Flanagan will be buried on Nov. 6, 2020, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. [Read about Flanagan.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class D.T. Kyser**, 18, of Muskogee, Oklahoma, 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 Kyser. The date and location for Kyser's burial have yet to be decided by the family. [Read about Kyser.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class William L. Barnett**, 21, was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Barnett. Interment services are pending. [Read about Barnett.](#)

-- **Navy Shipfitter 1st Class Charles F. Perdue**, 32, 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 Perdue. Interment services are pending. [Read about Perdue.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Edward D. Johnson**, 24, 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 Johnson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Johnson.](#)

-- **Navy Ship's Cook 1st Class Rodger C. Butts**, 47, 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 Butts. Interment services are pending. [Read about Butts.](#)

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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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).