



February 17, 2026



**VFW Advocates for Student Veterans:** VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Joe Grassi spoke on a legislative panel at the National Association of State Approving Agencies 2026 midwinter conference. These agencies have responsibility to review, approve and monitor all programs and schools to ensure quality education for those using VA benefits such as the GI Bill. He presented the VFW's concern regarding educational institutions withholding transcripts from veterans using Post-9/11 educational assistance as a way to settle billing disputes. "Veterans should not be penalized for administrative or billing issues," Grassi said. He also stressed the need for increases in housing allowances for those veterans enrolled in VA on-the-job training or apprenticeship programs.



**Veterans Independent Budget Released:** DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) have released the *Veterans Independent Budget* fiscal year 2027 recommendations for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). For nearly forty years, the VFW has collaborated on this independent, comprehensive guideline developed solely around veterans' needs and not constrained by competing government budget demands. This edition outlines specific appropriations levels to fully fund the projected demand for VA services and benefits, while also supporting critical program expansions driven by policy improvements. The recommendations cover the full scope of VA operations from health care and disability compensation to infrastructure modernization and information technology upgrades. [Read the report.](#)



**VFW Applauds Federal Court Decision Striking Down Louisiana 'PLUS' Act:** VFW National Commander Carol Whitmore hailed a federal court decision nullifying Louisiana's 2024-enacted "PLUS Act" as unconstitutional, calling it a decisive victory for veterans nationwide. In her [statement](#), Whitmore said the ruling reaffirms that states cannot override federal law to legitimize unaccredited, fee-charging agents who prey on veterans seeking benefits. She warned other states against pursuing similar legislation and vowed the VFW will continue leading the fight against those commonly known as Claim Sharks, thereby protecting veterans from exploitation and ensuring their earned benefits are never treated as a get-rich-quick scheme. [Read the ruling.](#)



**California Veterans Score Win in Claim Sharks Battle:** In a significant victory for veterans, California has enacted [Senate Bill 694](#) into law to protect them from predatory, unaccredited representatives commonly known as Claim Sharks. The law requires federal accreditation, prohibits charging unauthorized fees to assist VA disability compensation claims and strengthens enforcement against those who exploit veterans for profit. It also makes it unlawful to access or misuse a veteran's VA login credentials, which is an abusive practice some bad actors use to monitor claims activity and pursue additional fees tied to future benefit increases. The law renders noncompliant contracts void and unenforceable. Always use an [accredited representative](#) when seeking claims assistance.



**Federal Appeals Court Bars VA from Using Implicit Denials:** The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit ruled that VA cannot treat claims as denied without clearly stating so in a written decision. The case centers on what counts as a final, appealable denial and how VA communicates decisions to veterans. The ruling is expected to push VA to issue clearer decision notices and reduce confusion for claimants navigating the appeals process. Veterans advocates said the decision strengthens due-process protections in the benefits system. The

case has been sent back to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans claims for further proceedings. [Learn more](#).



**MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced no identifications or burial updates this week.

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