



January 12, 2018

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1. Executive Order to Improve Mental Health Care for Recently Discharged Veterans:

On Tuesday, President Trump signed an executive order requiring the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Homeland Security to develop and implement a joint action plan which would ensure transitioning service members have access to mental health care services. The White House announced that veterans who are 3 to 12 months out of military service are three times more likely to die from suicide than their active-duty counterparts, while those up to three months out of service were 2.5 times as likely, according to a study from the Naval Postgraduate School. One of the goals of the executive order is to provide eligibility for VA mental health care for all veterans who are within a year of their date of discharge. The VFW looks forward to working with the Administration to ensure it reduces the rate of suicide in this vulnerable population, but also devotes more resources and personnel to suicide prevention so all eligible veterans can receive timely access to the mental health care they need and deserve.

2. We Need Your Feedback on Recent Accountability and GI Bill Changes: Next week the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs will hold a hearing on the state of VA. The hearing will focus on VA's progress in implementing legislation that became law in 2017. The VFW would like your feedback on two of the important reforms passed into law this past year: The Forever GI Bill and the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act. We are looking for member feedback related to notification and implementation of education reforms — what you know and how you found out about the latest GI Bill updates. Additionally, we want your voice to be heard regarding VA accountability and what new steps you have seen taken at your local VA facilities to ensure transparency and honesty among VA employees. The VFW's strongest asset is our members, and we cannot succeed without your powerful voice. Please send any feedback to vfvac@vfw.org.

3. VFW Attends Committee on Veterans' Affairs Roundtable: On Wednesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a roundtable discussion with VA, the U. S.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) and veterans service organizations to discuss progress made toward taking VA off GAO's High Risk List. The list is released every two years and VA health care has been listed on it since 2015. The High Risk List was established in 1990 and it has taken an average of nine years for agencies to be removed from it. Both VA and GAO agreed that since the hiring of staff to address the High Risk List from VA's perspective, communication has increased between the two agencies as well as efforts from VA to address the five areas of fulfillment necessary for removal — leadership commitment, capacity, an action plan, monitoring and demonstrated progress. [Read GAO's report.](#)

4. Hearing on Home Loan Churning: On Wednesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing on the practice of "churning" VA home loans. Veterans have been targeted by opportunistic financial institutions with refinancing opportunities that are detrimental to the veteran homeowners. Most refinance opportunities are offered in good faith, but there are some predatory institutions that look to prey on and deceive veterans through dubious offers. Subcommittee Chairman Jodey Arrington expressed his goal to investigate the problem thoroughly and come up with a solution that protects veterans without hindering their consumer freedoms. The VFW is glad Congress is taking the necessary steps to ensure the VA Home Loans program is fully protected from those who look to take advantage of its users. [Watch the hearing.](#) If you have been scammed by a financial institution that promised you a lucrative refinance deal, please email us at vfwac@vfw.org.

5. VA Revises Reimbursement Rules for Non-Service Connected ER Treatment: On Wednesday, VA announced its revised regulations to pay and reimburse for non-VA emergency room treatment for non-service connected conditions. VA will begin to process the approximately 800,000 pending claims for reimbursement of reasonable costs that were put on hold after the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims found VA is legally required to pay certain hospital charges, professional fees and emergency transportation. While it will take VA several months to eliminate the backlog of claims, it informs the VFW that it plans to complete new claims within 45 days. [Read more.](#) To speak to a customer service representative specifically about this issue, Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST), call the VA dedicated hotline at 1-877-466-7124.

6. WWI Commemorative Coin Sales Begin Wednesday: The U.S. Mint will begin selling the 2018 World War I Centennial Silver Dollar on Jan. 17 at noon Eastern with a one-month introductory discount of the proof (\$51.95 each) and uncirculated (\$48.95) coin versions only. The five different service versions of the World War I Centennial Silver Dollar and Medal Sets will go for \$99.95 each. Public Law 113-212 authorizes the Mint to issue up to 350,000 silver dollar coins. Customer demand will determine the ratio of proof to uncirculated coins within the authorized mintage limits. The price of each coin includes a \$10 surcharge, which will help construct the VFW-supported World War I Memorial a block away from the White House. In a ceremonial "first purchase" on Wednesday will be Gerald York, a Life member of VFW Post 7589 in Manassas, Va., and the grandson of another VFW member, WWI Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Alvin C. York. [Learn more about the commemorative coins.](#)

7. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identification and burial updates of five American servicemen who had been missing in action from WWII and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Pfc. Lonnie B.C. Eichelberger**, 20, of Waco, Texas, whose identification was previously announced, was buried Jan. 10 in Houston. Eichelberger was assigned to Company I, 371st Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division — the only African-American division to fight in Europe. As part of Operation Fourth Term, Eichelberger's regiment fought in the hills near the town of Strettoia, Italy. His regiment suffered heavy losses while attacking German defenses. Following the battle, Eichelberger could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on Feb. 10, 1945. [Read about Eichelberger.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Harold P. Hannon**, 28, of Scranton, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Jan. 13, in his hometown. Hannon was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. Hannon's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Hannon was killed on the first day of the battle and was originally buried in a battlefield cemetery. [Read about Hannon.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Willard H. Aldridge** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Aldridge was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Aldridge.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Harry C. Morrissey** was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division. On Oct. 9, 1942, Morrissey's unit was part of the main offensive action in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Morrissey was killed in action during the two-month battle. He and two other Marines from his battalion were interred in graves atop Hill 73. Interment services are pending. [Read about Morrissey.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Albert E. Quintero** was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Self-propelled Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Quintero was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Quintero.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm>.

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.