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1. House Holds Hearing on VA Budget Proposal: On Thursday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs examined President Trump's budget proposal for VA. Totaling \$198.6 billion, the budget includes a 5 percent increase in mandatory spending and an 8 percent increase in discretionary spending. Nearly 7,000 additional employees would be added — most being health professionals — while just over 600 would be added to work on reducing the appeals backlog. Major priorities for the budget include mental health care that would receive \$468 million more than the fiscal year 2018 budget, the new electronic health record system that would be interoperable with the military's record, and construction. The VFW joined its *Independent Budget* partners (Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America) to express support for the increased funding for VA health care, IT, and construction. However, the proposal also includes a VFW-opposed plan to implement reductions to monthly compensation known as "COLA round downs." The VFW will continue to monitor the budget process to ensure Congress properly funds the benefits and services veterans have earned. [Read the president's proposal.](#) [Read The Independent Budget.](#)

2. HillVets Recognizes VFW Members: Congratulations to VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace and VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes for being named to the HillVets Top 100 list of most influential people in Washington. HillVets is a bipartisan, nonprofit group of veterans and supporters dedicated to highlighting the value veterans bring to policy decisions and to policymakers. Wallace is being honored for a lifetime of advocacy for veterans, service members, and their families. Fuentes is being recognized for helping to create and enhance good veterans' legislation. Both will be honored at a March 29 gala alongside many other VFW members who are in the Top 100, to include White House Chief of Staff Gen. John

Kelly, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, Sen. John McCain, and Reps. Brad Wenstrup, Don Bacon, Mike Coffman, Adam Kinzinger, and many more. [View the categories](#).

3. DOD Releases New Retention Policy: On Thursday, the Department of Defense (DOD) released a new [policy memo](#) on retention of non-deployable service members. The policy comes as DOD reports that approximately 286,000 service members are medically non-deployable at any one time. The new policy requires that military members who have been non-deployable for 12 continuous months be processed for separation via administrative procedures or referred into the Disability Evaluation System. Members who have been recently determined to be non-deployable and are anticipated to remain so for more than 12 months can also be immediately referred for separation processing. The interim policy guidance, effective immediately, applies to all service members, with the exception of pregnant and postpartum service members, regardless of the reason they are non-deployable. Implementation of the policy will be open to interpretation by the military services, and questions remain on how this policy will be applied to wounded warriors, sole survivors, immuno-compromised individuals and others. The VFW has sent a [letter to Secretary Mattis](#) expressing some of our concerns with implementation of the policy.

4. Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing: On Wednesday, the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel held a hearing concerning military and civilian personnel programs and military family readiness. The overall primary concern expressed was the prolonged fiscal challenges that have been placed on our military and the repeated cutting of family support programs as a means to save money. Some additional concerns focused on the toll that 16 years of war has had on military families due to the operational tempo; funding shortages for quality of life programs maintained by DOD; post-deployment reintegration; and financial readiness. [Read the testimony or watch the hearing](#) which begins at the 18-minute mark.

5. Operation Homecoming: This week marks the 45th anniversary of the start of *Operation Homecoming*, in which the first 40 of 591 U.S. prisoners of war were returned from Vietnam. On Thursday, in a somber display of remembrance and a call to intensify efforts, the House unanimously passed [H. Res. 129](#). The resolution calls on the Department of Defense, other appropriate elements of the federal government, and foreign governments to resolutely intensify efforts to investigate, recover and identify the some 82,000 United States personnel who are still designated as unaccounted for from past wars and conflicts around the world. The resolution's sponsor, [Representative Sam Johnson](#), a Life member of VFW Post 4380 in Plano, Texas, spent more than six years as a POW in an annex of the notorious Hanoi Hilton, and was one of the first POWs returned to the U.S. in February of 1973.

6. Ginnie Mae Penalizes Nine Lenders for Targeting Veterans: The Ginnie Mae - VA Loan Churn Task Force recently sent notices to nine institutions for pressuring veterans into costly home loans. In January, Ginnie Mae changed its regulations to compel the investigations of lenders whose actions appear to be out of step with other lenders. Issuers who have been notified are expected to deliver a corrective action plan that identifies immediate strategies to bring prepayment speeds in line with market peers. [Read the press release](#).

7. VA to Host Women Veteran Athletes for Women's History Month: VA will display the stories of 10 women veteran athletes throughout the month of March as part of their celebration and recognition of Women's History Month. "The Women Veteran Athletes Initiative will highlight the strength, diversity and resilience of women who served our country," said VA Secretary David Shulkin. "With this effort, our goal is to increase awareness of women Veterans, both in VA and in the public, and to encourage women Veterans to choose VA to support their health and wellness goals." The 10 athletes who were selected represent every branch of service, and their stories of serving their country then healing from disabilities, injuries, and struggles with transition will be on display at multiple locations. [Learn more](#) about the athletes and display locations.

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

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

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

-- **Army Pfc. David Baker** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. On Nov. 25, 1950, his unit was attacked by Chinese forces while positioned near Yongbyong, North Korea. The battalion suffered heavy casualties and Baker was listed as missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950. Later reports indicated that Baker was, indeed, captured by the enemy. Interment services are pending. [Read about Baker](#).

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.