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1. VA to Implement Appeals Modernization Act Next Week: Beginning Feb. 19, all veterans who disagree with their VA rating decision will have three new options to resolve their benefit dispute: request a higher-level review from a more experienced person, submit a supplemental claim with additional evidence, or appeal directly to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Over the past two years, the VFW worked closely with VA and other veterans' organizations to craft this new framework, which was authorized by the VFW-supported *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*. The goal of the new system is to offer veterans greater flexibility and transparency to resolve benefit disputes in a timely manner, instead of waiting years for VA to adjudicate their appeals. [Read more](#) about appeals modernization. For assistance appealing a decision on your benefits claim, [contact a highly trained and accredited VFW service officer](#).

2. Military Family Housing Horrors: Testimony from three military spouses Wednesday before a joint hearing of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel, and Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support revealed military family housing horrors ranging from insects and rodents to asbestos and lead-based paint. Testimony was also given by five company CEOs and/or presidents, who collectively manage some 200,000 family housing units throughout the military; and four assistant DOD, Army, Navy, and Air Force secretaries, who are responsible for installation oversight. To the VFW, the dismissive attitude of housing contractors and installation commanders, who may have thought their days of listening to housing complaints were over when the military signed 50-year contracts with civilian management companies in the mid-1990s, was egregious. It was clear from testimony and ensuing Q&A sessions that all military installation commands must take an active role in contract fulfillment, oversight and customer satisfaction, and families need an effective forum to communicate their issues with housing authorities and installation commanders without fear of retribution. The VFW will continue to monitor this issue to ensure the military and their contractors make good on their pledges to perform and communicate better. [Read testimony or watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 18:30 mark. If you, or anyone you know is affected by unacceptable housing conditions, please email the VFW at vfwac@vfw.org.

3. Veterans Groups Say \$103 Billion in VA Funding Needed for FY 2020: This week, the three coauthors of The Independent Budget (IB) — the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., Disabled American Veterans, and Paralyzed Veterans of America — released the IB’s fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget recommendations for VA. The IB coauthors recommend a total of \$103.3 billion to ensure VA begins to fully and faithfully implement the *VA MISSION Act of 2018*, make needed improvements, and is able to timely deliver benefits and services to wounded, ill and injured veterans, their families and survivors. [Read the IB FY 2020 budget recommendations.](#)

4. VFW Attends Secretary of the Army Roundtable: On Thursday, VFW Director of National Security and Foreign Affairs John Towles joined the Secretary of the Army Mark Esper and senior Army officials to discuss the department’s priorities for FY 2020, how to improve benefits and care for our nation’s service members and their families, and the future of Arlington National Cemetery. Additional topics of discussion included the need for a robust and strategically driven FY 2020 budget, the success and expansion of the [Military Health System GENESIS](#) across military treatment facilities within the Defense Health Agency, an [Army Accessions Command](#) modernization update, and an overview of current Army operations occurring worldwide. Towles provided feedback to Secretary Esper concerning proposed changes to eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Read the [Federal Advisory Committee’s December report](#), which includes the new eligibility proposals.

5. VA to Implement High Tech Training Program: In anticipation of launching the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) program in April, VA is seeking training providers to help implement this new training course. The VET TEC program will provide training on information technology, computer software, information science, media application, data processing and computer programming fields. The VET TEC program was part of the VFW-supported Forever GI Bill that made sweeping reforms to education and training programs for veterans. [Learn more or apply for the VET TEC program.](#)

6. VA to Receive Three New Fisher Houses: VA announced yesterday that it is scheduled to receive three new buildings from the Fisher House Foundation. The new facilities will be located in Ann Arbor, Mich., Aurora, Colo., and Omaha, Neb. The Fisher House Foundation donates housing facilities to VA and the military to act as a “home away from home” for active duty military, veterans, and their families when receiving treatment at a VA medical facility or major military installation. These facilities are located within walking distance from treatment facilities and provide cost-free housing. Currently, there are 80 Fisher Houses around the world — 38 are located next to VA facilities. An expansion from 38 to 64 is planned over the next few years. [Read more about VA Fisher Houses.](#)

7. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced twelve new identifications. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Army Pvt. Winfred L. Reynolds** was a member of Medical Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, and attached to 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, near Hwach’on Reservoir, South Korea. He was killed on April 26, 1951, while caring for wounded soldiers. Because of ongoing fighting in the area, Reynolds’ remains were unable to be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Reynolds.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Carlos E. Ferguson** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, engaged in combat against the North Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces during the "Battle of the Soyang River." Ferguson was reported missing in action on May 18, 1951. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ferguson.](#)

-- **Army Master Sgt. Charlie J. Mares** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, engaged in combat against the Korean People's Army. Mares was reported missing in action following the battle, fought near Kwonbin-ni, South Korea, on July 31, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mares.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. George R. Schipani** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. Early in the morning of Nov. 2, 1950, Schipani's battalion was struck by enemy units of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces. After several days of intense fighting, survivors escaped to friendly lines. Schipani was reported missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Schipani.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. James C. Rix** was a member of Company E, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was killed in action on Nov. 30, 1950, during heavy fighting between the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces and the 7th Cavalry Regiment in South Pyongan Province, North Korea. His remains were processed through a 7th Cavalry Regiment Collection Station and interred at the United Nations Military Cemetery Pyongyang, on Dec. 2, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rix.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Tech. Sgt. Alfred R. Sandini** was a member of 22nd Bombardment Squadron, 341st Bombardment Group, serving as a radio gunner aboard a B-25C aircraft. On Feb. 15, 1944, the aircraft crashed, near the Do Len Bridge in Thanh Hoa Province, French Indochina, now known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sandini.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class William A. Klasing** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Klasing. Interment services are pending. [Read about Klasing.](#)

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 1st Class Edward J. Shelden** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Shelden. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shelden.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Kirby R. Stapleton** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Stapleton. Interment services are pending. [Read about Stapleton.](#)

-- **Seaman 1st Class John A. Karli** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Karli. Interment services are pending. [Read about Karli.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Kenneth H. Sampson** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Sampson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sampson.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pvt. Waldean Black** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Black. Interment services are pending. [Read about Black.](#)

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.