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1. New VA Budget Request a Good Start: The president's federal spending plan for fiscal year 2020 increases VA's overall budget by 9.6 percent to \$220.2 billion, which would enable the VA to start implementation of the MISSION Act, strengthen mental health access and treatment programs, increase women's health services, boost electronic health record interoperability with DOD, and support a host of [VFW legislative initiatives](#). VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence called the president's budget submission a good start. "What the VFW now expects from Congress is thoughtful consideration of what the proposed budget does for veterans, service members and their families, and what the VFW demands from Congress is a fair hearing," he said. As good as the budget request seems, the VFW national commander remains very concerned with the reintroduction of a controversial round-down of annual cost-of-living allowance increases, the proposed 45 percent decrease to VA's construction budget, and the near yearlong delay to expand caregiver benefits. "However, since the FY 2020 budget process just began, the VFW will now work with the administration and Congress to improve where needed in order to secure a quality budget for our men and women who answer the call to serve," he said. [Learn more about the VA FY 2020 budget request here.](#)

2. FY 2020 Defense Budget Request is a 4.9 Percent Increase: The president's \$750 billion budget request for total defense spending includes a 4.9 percent increase for the Defense Department, or \$718 billion, which will enable the department to continue its three-pronged strategy to compete, deter and win across all spectrums of warfare. Specifically, the Pentagon proposal includes:

- A 3.1 percent military pay raise, the largest in a decade.
- A 3.2 percent basic allowance for housing increase and a 2.4 percent basic allowance for subsistence increase.
- Growth of the active and reserve force by almost 40,000 over the next five years.
- A 10 percent increase for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, from the current year \$130.6 million to \$144.88 million.

- The largest research and development request in 70 years.
- Also, DOD plans to allocate \$8 billion to support military families with childcare, youth programs, school education, and commissary operations.
- [More details here.](#)

3. GI Bill Anniversary: This year the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, is turning 75. There have been many different modifications to the GI Bill throughout the years, enabling millions of veterans to prosper after leaving military service. To celebrate this historic milestone VA wants to hear from veterans who have used the GI Bill in any of its different versions. If you have used any version of the GI Bill, [please share your story.](#)

4. DPAA Makes 200th Identification form USS Oklahoma Unknown Remains: Last week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced that on Feb. 26, 2019, Navy Fireman 1st Class Billy James Johnson was identified, marking him as the 200th crewmen to be identified from the 388 individual sets of unknown remains recovered from the USS Oklahoma between 1941 and 1944. The VFW thanks the DPAA for its tireless dedication to this most sacred mission. [Learn more here.](#)

5. Air Force Secretary to Resign: Last Friday, the 24th Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Heather Wilson, officially submitted her resignation to President Donald J. Trump, effective May 31, 2019. Dr. Wilson, who represented New Mexico's 1st Congressional District from 1998-2009, has been named as the next University of Texas – El Paso president. Prior to her current position as the secretary of the Air Force, Dr. Wilson served as the president of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. [Read Dr. Wilson's statement of resignation here.](#)

6. Tester, Moran Introduce VFW-Supported Veterans Mental Health Bill: On Wednesday, Senators Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) introduced the VFW-supported Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019, which will improve veterans' access to high-quality mental health care and help reduce the rate of veteran suicide. The bill would bolster VA's mental health workforce to serve more veterans, improve rural veterans' access to mental health care, strengthen support and assistance for transitioning service members, study and expand innovative and alternative treatment options, and hold VA accountable for its mental health care and suicide prevention efforts. [Learn more](#) or [watch the press conference.](#)

7. Senate Committee Approves Nominee for Veterans' Employment Agency: On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs unanimously approved to advance the nomination of John Lowry III to be assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service. If confirmed, the Marine Corps veteran would oversee the federal government's efforts to ensure veterans obtain meaningful careers after leaving military service. Lowry testified before the committee on [June 13, 2018](#). His nomination advanced to the full Senate in 2018, but was not confirmed by the 115th Congress. Lowry now awaits confirmation by full Senate. [Learn more.](#)

8. Montana SSG to Receive Posthumous Medal of Honor: An Army 10th Mountain Division staff sergeant will be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor later this month. Staff Sgt.

Travis Atkins, of Bozeman, Mont., was killed in action on June 1, 2007, while conducting a route clearance mission southwest of Baghdad. Atkins, 31, heard a radio report of suspected insurgents crossing an intersection in the Iraqi town of Abu Samak. Atkins ordered his vehicle to intercept them. As Atkins attempted to search one of the suspects, the insurgent reached for an explosive vest under his clothing. Atkins grabbed the suicide bomber from behind and slammed him to the ground, away from the other soldiers standing only a few feet from the fight. As he pinned the insurgent to the ground, the bomb detonated. Atkins was killed by the blast. The Medal of Honor will be an upgrade to the Distinguished Service Cross he received for saving the three other soldiers from the suicide bomber. [Read the Stars and Stripes article here.](#)

9. MIA Update: This week the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of five U.S. personnel, previously unaccounted for from our nation's past wars and conflicts. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **U.S. Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Howard T. Lurcott**, was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. On Jan. 21, 1944, the B-24J bomber aircraft he was piloting crashed into Tarawa lagoon shortly after takeoff. Lurcott and the nine other service members aboard the aircraft were killed. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lurcott.](#)

-- **U.S. Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Carl M. Shaffer**, was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. On Jan. 21, 1944, the B-24J bomber aircraft he was aboard crashed into Tarawa lagoon shortly after takeoff. Shaffer and the nine other service member aboard the aircraft were killed. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shaffer.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William F. Delaney** was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. On Nov. 22, 1944, when his battalion launched a massive firing demonstration against a large pocket of German defenders near the town of Grosshau, in the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. During the battle, an enemy artillery shell struck Delaney's foxhole, and he died before he could be medically evacuated. Due to ongoing combat operations, his remains were not recovered at that time. Interment services are pending. [Read about Delaney.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Willard I. Lawson** 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 Lawson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lawson.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Joseph K. Maule** 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 Maule. Interment services are pending. [Read about Maule.](#)

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.