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**1. Senate Passes Veteran Mental Health Legislation:** On Wednesday, the Senate passed VFW-supported [S. 785](#), the *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019*, which would support VA as it continues to make improvements to veterans' mental health care. The bill covers a strategic plan for veterans transitioning from active duty, pilot programs integrating alternative therapies, establishing a VA and DOD clinical provider treatment toolkit, improving care and services for women veterans, and expanding the mental health medical workforce. [Project ATLAS](#) could benefit from this bill as there is an opportunity to expand telehealth capabilities, suicide prevention, and mental health programs to veterans in rural and highly rural areas. [Read more.](#)

**2. Expansion of Caregiver Program Planned for Fall:** VA released its [final rule](#) on revising its regulations for VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). According to the document, the expansion is set to begin Oct. 1, 2020. Under this rule, PCAFC will be expanded in two phases. The first phase is for caregivers of veterans injured on military duty before May 7, 1975. Veterans injured in service between 1975 and 2001 will have to wait two more years. With this final regulation, PCAFC will be open to veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 70% or higher. [Read more.](#)

**3. VFW Recognizes National Purple Heart Day:** National Purple Heart Day is observed on Aug. 7 each year. It is a time for Americans to pause to remember and honor the brave men and women who were either wounded on the battlefield or paid the ultimate sacrifice. The VFW honors all service men and women who have earned this medal with their sacrifice.

**4. Legislation Introduced to Include DBQs on VA Website:** On Wednesday, Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Mike Rounds (R-SD) introduced VFW-supported S. 4412, *to improve the ability of veterans to access and submit disability benefit questionnaire forms*. This important legislation would require VA to publish Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) on a public website. DBQs were introduced in 2010 to streamline the collection of medical evidence in support of

disability benefits claims. Until recently, both VA and private medical physicians were permitted to use DBQs. As stated by VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Matthew Doyle, “For more than a decade, VA physicians and private medical providers used DBQs to supplement evidence in support of disability claims. This April, VA removed public-facing DBQs from its website, thereby preventing private medical providers and veterans from accessing these forms.”

**5. Legislation Introduced to Help Veterans Request VA File:** On Wednesday, Reps. T.J. Cox (D-CA) and Chip Roy (R-TX) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 7926, *to allow for the electronic request of certain records*. This legislation would require VA to permit veterans to request copies of their entire disability claims file online. These files contain comprehensive information regarding the evidence a veteran submitted in support of a claim, information VA obtained from third parties, and a record of requests for higher-level review and supplemental claims.

**6. Veteran COVID-19 Viral Testing Guidance for Community Care:** Veterans can receive COVID-19 viral tests through VA health care facilities and community providers if they meet the criteria provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local public health department guidance. To be eligible for a community care provider, veterans must either be enrolled in VA health care or must be eligible for VA care. Veterans will not be charged a copayment for COVID-19 viral testing. Testing is available at community health care locations at **in-network urgent care/retail locations**, if it is in conjunction with a clinical visit for care at one of the authorized care centers, **in-network community care providers**, with a referral or authorization, or **emergency departments**, if the visit otherwise meets criteria for VA coverage of emergency care services.

**7. TRICARE Select Enrollment Fee to Start Jan. 1:** DOD announced that TRICARE Select Group A retirees will be required to pay an enrollment fee beginning on Jan. 1, 2021. Congress directed the *Defense Health Agency in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* to implement TRICARE Select retiree enrollment fees, but delayed the implementation. Group A is comprised of retirees and their family members if the sponsor’s initial enlistment or appointment occurred before Jan. 1, 2018. The enrollment fee is waived for medically retired individuals and their family members, and for survivors of active-duty deaths. During [TRICARE Open Season](#), which will run from Nov. 9 to Dec. 14, beneficiaries must set up an allotment with their regional contractors for the enrollment fee to begin on Jan. 1, 2021. Beneficiaries who do not set up their allotment by the deadline will be unenrolled due to non-payment, and will have 90 days from the termination date to request reinstatement. [Learn more](#).

**8. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new identification and one burial update for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:  
-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Frank L. Athon, Jr.**, 29, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese

were virtually annihilated. Athon died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Athon.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. George R. Reeser**, 25, of Washington, Illinois, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Reeser died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Reeser will be buried Sept. 26, 2020, in Deer Creek, Illinois. [Read about Reeser.](#)

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