



January 11, 2021



### **NDAAs Become Law and New Agent Orange**

**Conditions Added:** Last week, the House and Senate passed [H.R. 6395](#), *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021* (NDA), over a presidential veto. This law will add bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism to the VA's list of presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange. The VFW wishes to thank our members and advocates who contacted their members of Congress regarding this very important provision. We also thank the members of Congress who voted to expand care and benefits to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. If you need help filing a VA claim for disability compensation, please [contact a VFW Service Officer in your state](#). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many VFW service offices remain in a telework capacity, but the VFW's network of service officers have the capability to continue assisting our veterans safely without face-to-face contact.



### **VFW, SVA Announce 2021 Student Veteran Fellowship**

**Class:** Five Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) members and Student Veterans of America (SVA) leaders have been selected to participate in the 2021 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship. The fellowship is a semester-long academic experience where students submit a policy proposal to address an issue related to student veteran success on campus and beyond, improving veterans' health care and benefits, transitioning from military to civilian life, and challenges for service members and their families. The fellows will participate in the VFW Virtual Legislative Conference, during which they will be paired with their VFW Department (state) delegation and join with them in virtual meetings with their members of Congress to advocate for their policy proposals.

The five student veterans of the 2021 class are:

- Cameron Zbikowski, Navy veteran, Grand Valley State University
- Brandon Angel, Army veteran, Liberty University
- EL'ona Kearney, Army veteran, The Evergreen State College

- Eric Sowers, Army veteran, The Ohio State University
- John Davis, Army veteran, Harvard University



**Landmark Veterans' Legislation Now Law:** On Tuesday, the President signed [H.R. 7105](#), *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020* into law. This legislation includes several VFW-supported bills that were pending in the 116th Congress:

- Most notably the *Deborah Sampson Act*, which will break the cultural barriers impacting women veterans by requiring VA to address privacy concerns and improve access, expand the amount of time new mothers are given to find health care coverage for their newborns, increase staff cultural competency, eliminate harassment and assault, and make other much-needed improvements to women veterans' health care.
- Will require VA to make Disability Benefits Questionnaires available for public use, again.
- Will lower the age from 57 to 55 to remarry without incurring penalties for surviving spouses receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.
- Will modernize the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (SDVI) program.
- Will require VA to study incidents of cancer and other illnesses experienced by service members who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan between Oct. 1, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2005.
- Will change the statutory definition of Vietnam veteran to include individuals who served in the Republic of Vietnam from Nov. 1, 1955, to Feb. 27, 1961.
- Will increase certain veteran funeral benefits and authorize VA to add spouses and eligible dependent children to VA-furnished headstones.
- Will increase the maximum amount VA may grant in a fiscal year to states and tribal organizations for maintaining veterans' cemeteries from \$5 million to \$10 million.
- Will call for the elimination of the 12-year limit on using Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits.
- Will require VA to create a database on its website to explain public institution requirements for in-state tuition.

- Will expand benefits and services for homeless veterans.
- Will create certain education, employment, and housing protections for veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The enactment of this veterans' legislation package satisfies a number of VFW resolutions and legislative priorities regarding women veterans' health care, disability assistance and memorial affairs, and economic opportunity issues.



**COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance for VA Patients:** VA's COVID-19 vaccine phased plan is a collaborative effort with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other federal partners. VA health care personnel and veterans living in VA long-term care facilities are the first two groups who are slated to receive the vaccine. The next group to be vaccinated will be veterans with high risk factors for severe illness or death from COVID-19, such as age or pre-existing health problems. Your VA health care team will contact you if you are eligible to receive a vaccine. [Stay informed and up to date.](#)



**Latest VFW Podcast Available:** The latest episode of the VFW Podcast entitled, [Working as a Team to Support Those in Need](#), has been released. In this episode Medal of Honor Recipient Army Sgt. Maj. Thomas Payne discusses his service to the nation, leading soldiers in today's Army, and the events that resulted in him becoming our newest Medal of Honor recipient. Jesse James Dupree chats about joining forces with the VFW and the Unmet Needs program to help raise money for veterans and service members facing financial hardships. Army Col. (Ret.) George W. shares his personal story of ruin, resilience, and redemption as a recovering alcoholic.



**MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced two burial updates and two new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Mess Attendant 3rd Class Isaac Parker, 17**, of Woodson, Arkansas, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on

Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Parker. Parker will be buried June 8, 2021, in St. Louis. [Read about Parker.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class William L. Barnett**, 21, of Fort Scott, Kansas, was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Barnett. Barnett will be buried May 29, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Barnett.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William J. Sharp**, 18, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on July 24, 1950, after his unit sustained heavy casualties while defending against the North Korean army's advance near Hwanggon, South Korea. He was declared non-recoverable in January 1956. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sharp.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Roy H. Thomas**, 22, was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 12, 1950, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces as they attempted to withdraw near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Thomas.](#)

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