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1. VFW Statement on the State of VA: “The news media over the past week has reported on the disingenuous actions of a few political appointees in Washington who are attempting to undermine the support and confidence of America’s veterans in their Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as in the secretary and deputy secretary who lead it,” said Keith Harman, national commander of the 1.7 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliary. “Let there be no mistake that veterans and this Administration can lay claim to a host of successes ranging from increased accountability and transparency to a beefed-up education package and increases in overall funding and patient satisfaction,” he said. “As reported in the press, the acts of these individuals have become a cancer inside this Administration. They sow doubt, they create turmoil, and their ideological agenda clearly puts outside interests ahead of the care and well-being of millions of wounded, ill and injured veterans. I now call on President Trump to clean house of these distractors. We need a fully functioning VA, not distractions or self-inflicted headlines. That’s what veterans of today and tomorrow expect and definitely deserve.”

2. WWI Memorial Sculpture Unveiling: On Wednesday, the World War I Centennial Commission held an unveiling ceremony of the sculpture that will be the focal point of the National WWI Memorial. The ceremony was intended to give veterans’ advocates and other stakeholders a rare opportunity to see a 3-D rendering of what the final sculpture will look like. VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles was in attendance along with other members of the veterans’ community and members of Congress. The sculptor, Mr. Sabin Howard, provided remarks concerning his own connection to WWI, and explained the underlying story behind the sculpture. The sculpture, dubbed “A Soldiers Journey,” is comprised of five distinct panels and highlights the key events that embodied the journey to war that

millions of Americans made beginning in 1917: departure, initiation, ordeal, aftermath, and return. [Read more.](#)

3. VFW-SVA Fellow Speaks on Improving Education Benefits: On Thursday, VFW-SVA Fellow Francheska Salazar joined other student veterans in a panel on Capitol Hill to share her experiences being a student veteran. Francheska spoke about the hurdles she faced in her transition to school and the path toward her degree. Each year the VFW joins with Student Veterans of America to bring 10 student veterans to Washington, D.C., to advocate for issues they face ranging from education and employment to VA health care. [Read more about the VFW-SVA Fellowship.](#)

4. Forever GI Bill Education Benefit Restoration: VA recently updated their website on opportunities for veterans to potentially restore and utilize their education benefits. A provision was added to the Forever GI Bill to allow student veterans whose benefits were wasted at schools that abruptly closed to seek restoration of those benefits. Also added was an extension of benefits for students pursuing STEM degrees, full eligibility for Purple Heart recipients, removal of the expiration date for veterans who left service after January 2013, and many other provisions for veterans, families and survivors. The VFW strongly supported these additions and worked closely with Congress and our veterans' community partners on this legislation. [Read more about eligibility or apply for benefits restoration.](#)

5. TRICARE West Transition Delay: The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 directed many changes regarding the TRICARE program, including the consolidation of three TRICARE service areas into two, and a change in managed care support contractors overseeing those regions. On Thursday, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) published [an update](#) regarding some of the challenges that beneficiaries are experiencing in the TRICARE West Region, such as referral backlogs, call wait times, enrollment backlogs, and expanded provider network delivery. DHA and Health Net Federal Services (HNFS) are actively working to mitigate many of these challenges by waiving the standard authorization process for TRICARE Prime referrals in the West Region until March 18, 2018, hiring additional staff for HNFS call centers, expediting the enrollment of beneficiaries, and updating the network provider directory for the West Region. If you are currently in the TRICARE West Region and are experiencing any of the issues mentioned, please visit the [TRICARE West](#) website.

6. Learn More about Camp Lejeune Benefits: VA issued a video regarding benefits available to veterans and their family members who suffer from conditions related to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. The video is part of VA's outreach efforts on this issue and includes available options and contact information. The team of professional, highly trained VFW Service Officers can help you file claims related to Camp Lejeune water contamination. [Watch the video](#) or [find an accredited service officer near you.](#)

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

-- **Navy Gunner's Mate 2nd Class William F. Hellstern** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on

Dec. 7, 1941. Hellstern was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hellstern.](#)

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Lorentz E. Hultgren** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Hultgren was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hultgren.](#)

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

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Joe Lukie** was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Lukie's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Lukie died on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lukie.](#)

-- **Marine Corps 2nd Lt. Harvel L. Moore** was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Moore's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Moore died on the third day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. [Read about Moore.](#)

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Leo J. Husak** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division, serving in the European theater. On Jan. 30, 1945, Husak was killed while out on patrol in Germany's Hürtgen Forest. The offensive in the forest was one of the longest battles the United States fought during World War II, lasting for nearly five months. Interment services are pending. [Read about Husak.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Leonard V. Purkapile** was Company E, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, Purkapile's unit was engaged by Chinese forces in the vicinity of Unsan, while withdrawing southeast to Yongbyon, North Korea. Purkapile could not be accounted for following the battle and was declared missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Purkapile.](#)

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 yfwac@vfw.org.