



March 9, 2018

In This Issue:

- 1. VFW National Commander Testifies Before Congress**
- 2. VFW-SVA Legislative Fellows Push Priorities**
- 3. VFW Women's Advisory Committee in D.C.**
- 4. Hearing on Proposed Changes to Arlington National Cemetery Eligibility**
- 5. VFW Attends VA Caregiver Meeting**
- 6. VFW Letter Urges Preservation of Educational Protections**
- 7. VA to Provide Adoption Reimbursement**
- 8. DOD Military Family Readiness Council**
- 9. MIA Update**

1. VFW National Commander Testifies Before Congress: VFW National Commander Keith Harman testified Wednesday before 22 members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs on issues important to America's veterans, service members and their families. Backed by a packed house of some 500 VFW and VFW Auxiliary members who attended the 2018 VFW Legislative Conference, the Chief said the VFW is pleased that Congress recently passed a bipartisan budget agreement to alleviate the sequester's impact on our military and veterans, but that Congress only delayed its return by two years. "Our service members, veterans and their families are counting on you to repeal sequestration once and for all!" he stressed. Harman did commend the committees for making some VFW-proposed changes to the Choice Program, but reminded them that Choice is merely a stopgap that must be replaced with a permanent and improved program that would ensure timely access to high-quality care, consolidate VA's community care programs into an easily understood and administered program, and consolidate funding. He also called for the quick passage of the *Caring for Veterans Act of 2017*, and urged enhancements to other programs, such as expanding telemedicine, granting caregiver benefits to pre-9/11 families, increasing gender-specific services and peer-to-peer support groups, ending the so called "Widow's Tax," and extending toxic exposure presumptions for wherever Agent Orange was used, stored or transported, among many others. Read the Chief's [full testimony](#), and watch [video of the hearing](#) which begins at the 17:44 mark.

2. VFW-SVA Legislative Fellows Push Priorities: The VFW and Student Veterans of America hosted the fourth class of legislative fellows as part of the 2018 VFW Legislative Conference this week. The Fellows, who are all VFW members currently attending college, briefed White House staff and members of Congress on the research they have conducted related to issues

affecting veterans. Additionally, they had briefings with the Department of Labor and the Army's Soldier for Life program, attended the VFW National Commander's testimony before Congress, and met with House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Phil Roe, M.D. The fellows will continue promoting research in hopes of getting legislative or regulatory changes made that benefit veterans, like three fellows from the program have done in the past. [Read more about the fellowship.](#)

3. VFW Women's Advisory Committee in D.C.: The VFW's Women Veterans Advisory Committee was in Washington, D.C., this week to assist with the 2018 VFW Legislative Conference. The members of the committee — one from each of the four VFW conferences — provide advice and guidance on policy and legislation related to women veterans' issues. Their mission is to advocate for women veterans by identifying the needs, benefits, resources, and access to services and programs which are specific to women veterans or which significantly impact them, including health care, education, employment and training, vocational assistance, among other benefits. The committee participated in a congressional roundtable discussion about VFW's legislative health care priorities, held meetings with staff members from the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, and attended the VFW National Commander's testimony on Wednesday, where they were recognized by the committee members.

4. Hearing on Proposed Changes to Arlington National Cemetery Eligibility: On Thursday, the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel held a hearing to discuss the rapidly shrinking number of in-ground grave sites at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles delivered testimony that advocated for making the eligibility requirements for ANC commensurate with VA's National Cemetery Administration, and offered support to the proposed "Southern Expansion," which would give ANC more than 38,000 additional in-ground burial sites. This combination would extend the life of the cemetery through 2074. However, additional land acquisition would be necessary beyond that date. Mr. Towles suggested that in addition to the "Southern Expansion," the Department of the Army would be well served to consider using excess land at the Soldiers Home National Cemetery, which is adjacent to the Armed Forces Retirement Home in Washington, D.C., and would provide an additional 80,000-120,000 gravesites. [Watch the hearing.](#)

5. VFW Attends VA Caregiver Meeting: Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs met with the VFW and other veterans service organizations this week to discuss VA's caregiver program. The discussion focused on legislation to expand the program to veterans who served prior to Sept. 11, 2001, and on ways to improve the program. To learn more, watch [this video on Facebook.](#)

6. VFW Letter Urges Preservation of Educational Protections: Recently, the VFW sent a [letter](#) to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, along with the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, regarding the *Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act*. The VFW is concerned the *PROSPER Act* would eliminate the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, and also remove a regulation requiring schools to receive no more than 90 percent of their revenue from government benefits, commonly called the 90-10 rule. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program is an amazing recruiting tool the Department of

Veterans Affairs uses to recruit and retain the best and the brightest medical professionals. The VFW urges Congress to strengthen and protect programs for veterans, not erode them.

7. VA to Provide Adoption Reimbursement: Veterans who lost their ability to reproduce due to a service-connected disability may now be eligible for adoption-related expenses to be reimbursed through VA. Last year VA was authorized to begin providing coverage for assisted reproductive technology, which has primarily been focused on in vitro fertilization, and will now use this authority to provide reimbursement for covered veterans who adopt. [Learn more.](#)

8. DOD Military Family Readiness Council: The VFW participated in the latest meeting of the Military Family Readiness Council, which was established to assess and make recommendations to the secretary of defense on the policy, plans and programs impacting military family readiness. This meeting focused on: military children education and programs, blended retirement system implementation, telemedicine/telemental health, and military spouse licensure portability. The next meeting, which is open to the public, will be held on June 6. [Read more about the meeting.](#)

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

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Howard V. Keffer** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Keffer was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keffer.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. William W. Shank**, a P-38 pilot, was assigned to the 338th Fighter Squadron, 55th Fighter Group, 66th Fighter Wing, 8th Fighter Command, 8th Air Force. On Nov. 13, 1943, Shank was killed after engaging with the enemy on a mission to Bremen, Germany. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shank.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Herman W. Mulligan** was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division. On May 30, 1945, Mulligan's unit was engaged with Japanese forces on Hill 27 on the northern bank of the Kobuka Estuary, Okinawa, Japan, when a large crypt of ammunition exploded, killing Mulligan and wounding dozens of others. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mulligan.](#)

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.