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1. Congress Passes Full-Year Appropriations: This week Congress passed a bill to fund the federal government until the end of fiscal year 2018. The agreement, which provides relief from sequestration budget caps for service members, veterans, and their families, funds the 2.4 percent pay raise for service members and fully funds America's sacred mission to bring home missing Americans from long-ago battlefields. The omnibus also would provide a 9.5 percent increase for VA and fully fund VA's new electronic health care record, authorize VA to provide mental health care for veterans with other than honorable discharges, require VA to improve claims processing for veterans exposed to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, fund improvements to VA's burn pits registry and other important improvements for veterans. At time of publication, President Trump had issued a veto threat, but it was unclear whether he would sign the bill to avoid a shutdown or veto the bill, which would send it back to Congress which has already left town for a two-week recess. [Read the complete bill](#) or [read a summary](#).

2. Omnibus Bill Omits Three VA Program Improvements: Congress reached a deal this week to fund the federal government through Sept. 30, the end of fiscal year 2018, but the VFW isn't happy that the \$1.3 trillion omnibus omits consolidating and reforming VA's community care programs, expanding family caregiver support to pre-9/11 veterans, and better aligning VA's infrastructure to its main mission of delivering quality care to veterans. The improvements are what the VFW has advocated for in the past, to include just this week a [joint letter to the majority and minority leadership of the House and Senate](#). "The VFW is very disappointed, but we will continue to work with House and Senate VA Committee leadership to bring these important issues to fruition," said VFW National Commander Keith Harman, "because the needs are not going away."

3. VFW Testifies in Support of Automatic COLA Increases: On Tuesday, VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in support of legislation to increase programs for veterans and survivors to keep pace with the rate of inflation. The VFW-supported *Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2018* would automatically increase VA benefits to match cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increases for social security beneficiaries. Other VFW-supported bills that were considered by the subcommittee would expand burial benefits to family members who precede their service members in death, expedite the adjudication of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation claims, and require the U.S. Department of the Interior to provide grave liners for veterans interred at cemeteries operated by the National Park Service. [Watch the hearing.](#)

4. VFW Participates in Secretary of Defense Roundtable: On Tuesday, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles attended a roundtable hosted by the secretary of defense which focused on the status of our military readiness and what the Department of Defense (DOD) is doing to address shortfalls concerning quality of life programs for military families, recruiting and retention, and the military transition process. Discussion participants included Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Dana White, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy David Trachtenberg, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Robert Wilkie, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and others. The four-hour meeting allowed for in-depth conversation with senior DOD leaders concerning the recently released National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review; military readiness and personnel program improvements; and future plans for community engagement from DOD. DOD provided an update on its new community engagement initiative called "Know Your Military," which is an effort to better educate the civilian population about who serves in the all-volunteer force. [Learn more about DOD's "Know Your Military" initiative.](#)

5. Secretary Shulkin Testifies on VA's Budget Request: On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing to discuss VA's budget request for fiscal year 2019. Secretary Shulkin advocated for increased funding for VA health care, outstanding infrastructure needs and information technology projects. The VFW and its Independent Budget (IB) partners — Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America — submitted testimony supporting several VA legislative proposals which would improve benefits and services for veterans, such as paying for veterans to live at medical foster homes and providing legal service for homeless veterans. The IB coauthors also made clear our objections to proposals which would take away certain benefits to pay for the expansion of others. [Read the testimony or watch the hearing](#) which begins at the 14:50 mark.

6. Hearing on Transition Assistance Bills: On Tuesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing on proposed legislation. The bills seek to improve opportunities for veterans and qualified family members with regard to education, home loans, and transition opportunities. Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty introduced the VFW-sponsored *Job TOOLS for Veterans Act* which would reintroduce transition training in the local communities similar to the TAP classes offered before leaving active duty. The highlight of this bill is that transition training could be attended by any veteran regardless of age or when they left military service. [Read the testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#).

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

-- **Army Pvt. Rudolph Johnson**, 20, of Malvern, Ark., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 23 in Little Rock, Ark. Johnson was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 365th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division — the only African-American combat infantry division in Europe. In February 1945, during Operation Fourth Term, Johnson's regiment fought for days against strong German counterattacks to secure positions along the Lama di Sotto ridge, part of the Gothic Line in northern Italy. Johnson was reported missing in action as of Feb. 6, 1945. His status was changed to killed in action on Feb. 21, 1945. [Read about Johnson.](#)

--**Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Donald J. Hall**, 29, of Stroud, Okla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 26 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Hall was a member of Detachment 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. On Feb. 6, 1967, Hall and three other service members were flying an HH-3E helicopter on a rescue and recovery mission over northern Vietnam. Hall's helicopter was hit by enemy ground fire after rescuing a downed pilot, resulting in an internal explosion and crash. Hall was subsequently reported missing in action. [Read about Hall.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Dow F. Worden**, 20, of Boardman, Ore., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Hall was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In September 1951, Worden's unit was operating in the vicinity of Hill 1024 in South Korea, near Heartbreak Ridge, when they were attacked by Chinese forces. After moving east to nearby Hill 867, American forces withdrew after suffering a large barrage of enemy mortar fire. Worden could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action on Sept. 28, 1951. His name did not appear on any prisoner of war lists and no returning POWs indicated any knowledge of his whereabouts, prompting the Army to declare him deceased in December 1953. [Read about Worden.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Frank A. Fazekas**, 22, of Trenton, N.J., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 28 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Fazekas was assigned to the 22nd Fighter Squadron, 36th Fighter Group. On May 27, 1944, Fazekas was returning from a mission over northern France when his P-47 Thunderbolt aircraft came under enemy fire, causing him to crash in a field north of the French village of Buyssechre. His remains were not recovered and the Army reported him deceased on May 27, 1944. [Read about Fazekas.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Thomas H. Mullins**, 18, of Harriman, Tenn., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 29 in St. Petersburg, Fla. Mullins was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In November 1950, his unit engaged with Chinese forces near Unsan, North Korea. Approximately 600 men were killed, captured or missing. Mullins was declared missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950. He was later reported to have died while being held in POW Camp 5, Pyokdong, North Korea. [Read about Mullins.](#)

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

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.