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1. House Committee Passes VA Mission Act: On Tuesday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs passed H.R. 5674, the *VA Mission Act of 2018*. The bill will now move to the House floor for a vote before it can go to the Senate. This bill would consolidate all VA community care programs, improve administrative issues with the current Choice Program, invest in crucially needed improvements for VA health care and expand VA's caregiver program to veterans of all eras. The VFW urges its members and supporters to contact their members of Congress and tell them to vote YES on H.R. 5674 and pass this legislation before Memorial Day. [Read a summary](#) and [urge your representatives to support this bill](#).

2. Blue Water Navy Legislation Moves Forward: H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017*, as amended, passed the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on Tuesday. The VFW-supported bill, which must still be approved by the full House and Senate before going to the president, would restore benefits to thousands of Vietnam veterans, expand inclusive dates to those who served along the Korean DMZ, require VA to report on research related to a broad range of conditions possibly connected to service in Southwest Asia, and benefit children born with spina bifida due to a parent's exposure to Agent Orange-related herbicides in Thailand. Further, VA will be required to conduct an outreach campaign to those Blue Water Navy sailors who were denied benefits in the past and make retroactive payment of benefits for those previously denied. The vote on this legislation comes 16 years after benefits were lost due to a regulatory change in the Agent Orange Act, and the VFW is proud to have worked with this committee to ensure passage without any cuts to other benefits. Read the [VFW's press release](#) on this major legislative victory.

3. VFW-supported Bill to Aid Veteran Farmers: This week, Senators Debbie Stabenow and Pat Roberts introduced the *Farmer Veteran Opportunity Act of 2018* which would expand support for veteran farmers. This bill would provide disaster relief, crop insurance, technical training and many other important benefits for farmers, ranchers and growers. The VFW is proud to support this important piece of legislation that would offer relief, assistance and empowerment for veterans across the country. We applaud Senators Stabenow and Roberts for their continuing efforts to aid veterans in their pursuit of meaningful careers in agriculture. [Read a summary of the bill.](#)

4. VFW Participates in Panel on Rural Veterans: On Tuesday, the VFW participated in a roundtable discussion hosted by the House Blue Dog Coalition. The coalition heard from VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Ken Wiseman regarding the needs of women veterans and veterans of indigenous populations, as well as the need to expand caregiver benefits to pre-9/11 veterans, among other issues. [Watch the discussion.](#)

5. Hearing on Better Budget and Appropriations Processes: The Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform, which was established as part of the recent budget deal, met on Wednesday to hear from organizations and individuals who are recommending changes to current methods. The VFW has been working with a broad spectrum of organizations through the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) to propose improved methods to end harmful budget actions like continuing resolutions, and sees the joint select committee as the way to end sequestration and its harmful effects on the military. [Watch the hearing](#) or [read the B3P proposal.](#)

6. VA Health Care Rated Same or Better than Private Sector: The RAND Corporation recently published the results of a study that found VA either performs to the same standard or outperforms the private sector a majority of the time. The study compared each VA facility to three non-VA facilities with similar geographic settings, size and complexity of care, and based analysis on safety, effectiveness and patient-centered care. VA inpatient care performed the same or significantly better than private sector inpatient care centers on 21 of 26 measures. VA also performed significantly better than commercial and Medicaid Health Maintenance Organizations on 28 of 30 measures. The study also found that while there is a wide variation in performance from one VA facility to another, variation is even wider within the private sector. [Learn more about the study.](#)

7. VFW Participates in Army Partnership Conference: On Thursday, VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles was at the Pentagon with Army senior leadership for their annual partnership conference. The conference allowed for one-on-one conversation on military personnel program improvements, recruitment and retention, community engagement, and future Army media and marketing updates. Also in attendance were Director of Army Public Affairs Brig. Gen. Omar Jones; Chief of Army G-1 Distribution & Readiness Lt. Col. Frank Bukoski; Executive Officer to the Sergeant Major of the Army SGM Don Rose; Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard John Sampa; Command Sergeant Major of the Army Reserve Ted Copeland; and Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army and Director, Army Marketing Research Group, Ms. Elizabeth Wilson.

8. US Army Twilight Tattoo: On Wednesday, VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles joined leaders from the U.S. Army Recruiting Command and the U.S. Army Soldier for Life program at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Washington, D.C., for this year's second Twilight Tattoo performance. The Twilight Tattoo is a time-honored tradition that blends the precision and discipline of various units within the U.S. Army Military District of Washington with the orchestral sounds of the U.S. Army Band, "Pershing's Own." Performances include members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), the Old Guard Caisson Platoon, the Continental Color Guard, the Presidential Salute Battery, the Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps, the U.S. Army Drill Team and many others. The 2018 Twilight Tattoo showcase will run through August 8, every Wednesday with the exception of July 4 and 11. The event is free and open to the public. [Read more details.](#)

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

-- **Army Maj. Donald G. Carr**, 32, of San Antonio, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 11, at San Antonio National Cemetery. Carr was assigned to Mobile Launch Team 3, 5th Special Forces Group, as an observer in an OV-10A aircraft. On July 6, 1971, his aircraft encountered bad weather. Shortly afterward, the ground team he was supporting heard an explosion to their northeast, which they believed to be that of an OV-10A. They failed to locate the crash site, however, and Carr was declared missing in action. [Read about Carr.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Albert E. Quintero**, 23, of Los Angeles, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 14 in Long Beach, Calif. Quintero was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Self-propelled Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Quintero was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. [Read about Quintero.](#)

-- **Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class William G. Payne**, 41, of Springfield, Mo., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 11 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Payne was a medical specialist assigned to the 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. In late November 1950, Payne's unit was fighting against repeat attacks by Chinese forces in the area surrounding Yudam-ni, North Korea. Payne was killed during the fighting on Dec. 1, 1950, and was reportedly buried in a temporary cemetery at Yudam-ni. [Read about Payne.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Cpl. John V. McNichol**, 20, of Altoona, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 14 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. McNichol was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, McNichol's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Over several days of fighting, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed in the intense fighting. McNichol was killed on Nov. 21, 1943. [Read about McNichol.](#)

-- **Navy Radioman 2nd Class Quentin J Gifford**, 22, of Mankato, Minn., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 12 at Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minn.

Gifford was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Gifford.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Clifford G. Goodwin**, 24, of Diamond, Mo., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 12 in his hometown. Goodwin was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Goodwin.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Natale I. Torti** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Torti.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class George C. Ford** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ford.](#)

-- **Navy Shipfitter 3rd Class John M. Donald** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Donald.](#)

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.