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1. VFW Testifies in Support of Cemetery Improvements: On Wednesday, VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes testified on behalf of the VFW at a Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs hearing on bills to improve VA cemetery benefits and operations. Fuentes offered the VFW's support for H.R. 4312, which ensures the battlefield cross is authorized to be displayed at VA national cemeteries; H.R. 6409, which would authorize VA to inscribe the name of spouses and children buried with veterans on veterans' headstones; and H.R. 6420, which would expand the Veterans Legacy Program that perpetuates the memories of veterans buried at VA national cemeteries. [Read the testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#).

2. VFW Attends Arlington Cemetery Update: On Tuesday, VFW Director of National Security and Foreign Affairs John Towles attended a roundtable discussion hosted by the Honor Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC) to discuss the results of the most recent National Dialogue Survey, hear feedback from veterans service organizations regarding the survey process, and to discuss the future of Arlington National Cemetery. The survey had more than 230,000 respondents and included veterans, service members, and survivors from all generations and branches of service, many of whom are members of the VFW. The VFW appreciates the support of all its members who participated in this important process and will provide updates regarding the future of Arlington National Cemetery. [Read a brief summary of the survey](#).

3. VFW Against Weakening Military Lending Act: The VFW partnered with nearly three dozen veteran and military service organizations and others to urge Defense Secretary James

Mattis and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Director Mick Mulvaney to stand against any attempt to undermine or weaken the Military Lending Act of 2006. At issue are proposed rule changes that would reduce government oversight of payday lenders, who in the past were allowed to charge military service personnel as much as 400 percent interest on short-term loans. Along with damaging individual credit ratings, failing to make good on those predatory loans impacts security clearances, military careers, and ultimately, military readiness. The Military Lending Act capped those interest rates at 36 percent. The proposed rule changes would reduce government enforcement and oversight; or, in other words, allow the payday lenders to once again police their own industry. [Read the joint letter.](#)

4. VA Nomination Hearings Held: This week, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a nomination hearing for two positions within VA's leadership. Dr. Tamara Bonzanto is nominated for the role of Assistant Secretary for the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (OAWP), and Mr. James Paul Gfrerer is nominated for the role of Assistant Secretary for the Office of Information and Technology (OIT). If confirmed, both would serve in critical roles within offices that have been under scrutiny in recent months. The OAWP was responsible for implementing the Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act last year, and overseeing the discharge and disciplinary actions against senior VA officials who failed veterans and VA employees. The OIT is tasked with overseeing the new Electronic Health Record Modernization Program, a ten year modernization of VA's records system, which is considered one of the more substantial changes to VA's operating procedures in decades. At the hearing, Ranking Member Tester stated, "You both have been nominated for two of the most challenging positions at VA. If you are confirmed, I hope that we can have a constructive relationship because our veterans deserve that." [Watch the hearing.](#)

5. Adaptive Grant Hearing Held: This week, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held an oversight hearing on VA's Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program (SAH). This program allows certain severely disabled veterans to receive various grants in order to add adaptive features into new homes or make improvements on existing properties. While programs like the SAH are an incredible benefit for many veterans, there are always areas that could be improved upon. Timeliness and accuracy of processing are issues with many claims within VA, and the SAH program is no exception. The VFW thanks Subcommittee Chairman Jodey Arrington and Ranking Member Beto O'Rourke for bringing attention to this incredibly vital program for our severely disabled veterans. [Read about the SAH program](#) or [watch the hearing.](#)

6. Suicide Prevention Month and Third Annual *A Day to Change Direction*: With an average of 20 veterans who die by suicide each day, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie launched a month-long VA campaign to spread awareness about risk factors, warning signs for suicide, and to start a conversation about mental health and support for veterans in their communities. In June, VA released the most recent [national veteran suicide data report](#), which examined more than 55 million veterans' records from 1979 to 2015. As veteran suicide is an ongoing problem, VA has named suicide prevention as its number one clinical priority. In recent years, VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention has implemented varying suicide prevention initiatives such as expanding the Veterans Crisis Line, the joint action plan with DOD and the Department of Homeland Security, and multiple partnerships with groups such as the VFW. The VFW urges

all its members and Posts to participate in the third annual “A Day to Change Direction” on Sept. 15. VFW Posts around the world will host a day of service and action to raise awareness, foster community engagement, and eliminate the stigma associated with mental health. If you are a veteran who is in a crisis or concerned about a loved one, please call **1-800-273-8255 and press 1, text 838255, or visit the [Veterans Crisis Line website](#). Watch or read Secretary Wilkie’s Suicide Prevention Month message and participate in the VFW’s third annual [A Day to Change Direction](#).**

7. VA Provides Training for Rural Women’s Health Providers: The number of women veterans enrolled in VA has more than tripled since 2000, and as of May 2017 over a quarter of those women lived in rural or highly rural areas. As the demand for more gender-specific health care increases for VA, rural women veterans struggle with a lack of providers in general — let alone providers adequately trained in their gender-specific needs. Since 2009, Women’s Health Services (WHS) has been providing face-to-face education and training for clinical staff, called the Women’s Health Mini-Residency, 1-2 times per year in Orlando. Over the years, WHS realized the difficulties for rural VA providers to travel and partake in the three-day program. This summer, the program took to the road and will provide the education and training for rural providers and nurses in up to 40 rural clinical sites per year. Each provider and nurse who completes the program will receive more than 18 hours of accredited medical training. [Learn more](#) about the Women’s Health Mini-Residency.

8. DOD to Allow Purple Heart Recipients to Transfer GI Bill Benefits: Earlier this week, the Pentagon granted an exception to policy for active duty Purple Heart recipients, which will allow them to transfer their GI Bill education benefits without incurring an additional four years of service. This change comes in the wake of a larger policy issued in July of this year that prohibits service members from transferring this benefit without extending their service, including service members who were severely wounded and undergoing the medical retirement process. Because transferability was intended to be a retention tool and not a benefit of service, it is encouraged that service members who are currently eligible to designate a family member as a beneficiary do so prior to separating from the service. [Read the new policy memo](#).

9. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced 10 new identifications, and the burial date and location for one previously identified serviceman. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Reserve Ensign Harold P. DeMoss**, 21, of Nashville, Tenn., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Sept. 15 in his hometown. DeMoss was a member of Fighting Squadron 100 (VF-100), piloting an F6F-3 Hellcat from Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii. On June 23, 1945, DeMoss was accompanied by two other squadron aircraft for a night division tactics training flight. Following the completion of their flight plan, the pilots circled the island. DeMoss climbed above the clouds and attempted to descend through them. His aircraft was not seen reemerging from the clouds and DeMoss was declared missing shortly thereafter. [Read about DeMoss](#).

-- **Army 1st Lt. Herman L. Falk** was a member of Company B, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, supporting Republic of Korea Army attacks against units of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces (CPVF) in the vicinity of Changbong-ni, South Korea. Falk, and half of his platoon, were reported missing in action on Feb. 12, 1951. Following the war,

returning American prisoners of war reported that Falk died in either April or May of 1951, while being held as a prisoner of war at the Suan Bean Camp in North Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Falk.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class James S. Streetman, Jr.** was a member of Company B, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In July 1950, the Korean People's Army outmaneuvered and overwhelmed Streetman's regiment, forcing units into a fighting withdrawal through enemy lines. Streetman was initially reported to have been killed in action on Aug. 14, 1950. However historical records determined he had been killed on July 22, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Streetman.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. John D. Crouchley, Jr.** served as a pilot with the 828th Bombardment Squadron, 485th Bombardment Group. On June 28, 1944, Crouchley was lost when his B-24H aircraft was shot down and crashed during a combat mission over Romania. The other nine crewmembers parachuted safely, were captured as prisoners of war in Belgium, and subsequently returned to duty. American personnel were not able to conduct an immediate search due to enemy forces in the area. Based on no further information of his status, he was declared deceased as of June 29, 1945. Interment services are pending. [Read about Crouchley.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Herbert W. Harms** served as a B-17 tail gunner with the 569th Bombardment Squadron, 390th Bombardment Group, 13th Combat Bombardment Wing. On Aug. 16, 1944, Harms' aircraft was struck by anti-aircraft artillery during a bombardment mission to Zeitz, Germany, and subsequently crashed. Eight of the nine crewmembers safely bailed out of the aircraft and were captured by German forces, but Harms could not be located. Interment services are pending. [Read about Harms.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. Millard Odom** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Odom died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943, during the first waves of the assault. Interment services are pending. [Read about Odom.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class George E. Naegle** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Naegle. Interment services are pending. [Read about Naegle.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Alva J. Cremean** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Cremean. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cremean.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Earl P. Baum** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Baum. Interment services are pending. [Read about Baum.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Joseph K. Maule** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Maule. Interment services are pending. [Read about Maule.](#)

-- **Navy Water Tender 2nd Class Edgar D. Gross** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple

torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Gross. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gross.](#)

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.