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In This Issue:

- 1. Make Sure Your Voice is Heard on Nov. 6**
- 2. Delayed Housing Payments Impacting up to 180,000 Student Veterans**
- 3. 2019 COLA Increase Will Be Largest in 7 Years**
- 4. Depression Screening Available Online**
- 5. Hurricane Michael Closes Several VA Facilities**
- 6. VFW Endorses Budget Reform Recommendations**
- 7. DPAA Accounts for 203 Missing Personnel in FY 2018**
- 8. Four New Law Judges Appointed to VA's Board of Veterans Appeals**
- 9. Breast Cancer Awareness Month**
- 10. F-35 Fleet Grounded**
- 11. MIA Update**

1. Make Sure Your Voice is Heard on Nov. 6: The VFW encourages all its members and supporters to get involved with the upcoming elections. With continued threat of sequestration, deficit reduction, and budget cuts that affect veterans, the military, and their families, it is important to support members of Congress who support us. Ways to get involved may include: registering to vote and encouraging others to register; setting up or volunteering at voter registration drives; hosting or attending town hall meetings or candidate forums and bringing up VFW priorities; helping the elderly and disabled get to the voting booth on Election Day; and voting on Nov. 6. Here are some useful resources: [voter registration information](#), [voter assistance for military and families](#), [VFW Priority Goals](#), and the [VFW's Veterans Vote brochure](#).

2. Delayed Housing Payments Impacting up to 180,000 Student Veterans: The VFW is urging tens of thousands of student veterans to immediately contact the Department of Veterans Affairs at 888-GIBILL-1 (or 888-442-4551) if they are facing a financial hardship due to delayed VA housing payments. VA said earlier this week that as many as 180,000 student veterans housing payments were delayed this month in part due to computer updates to reflect benefit changes through the Forever GI Bill. Until the problem is fixed, VA is requiring benefits processors to work overtime and weekends, while many student veterans may be forced to raid their individual savings accounts or borrow money from their families to hopefully avoid late fees, ruined credit ratings or eviction. "The VA reports that education claims will be processed immediately, as will disbursements, but if student veterans do not achieve resolution within three business days, I urge them to contact the VFW through our 1StudentVeteran@vfw.org email

address,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “We will intervene directly with the VA to ensure your housing allowance is correct and paid. In the meantime, I would encourage all student veterans to contact their landlords and explain the VA’s computer processing problem, and for landlords to be patient and understanding, because they will be paid.”

3. 2019 COLA Increase Will Be Largest in 7 Years: Military and federal retirees, veterans receiving compensation from VA, and Social Security recipients will see a 2.8% Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) increase beginning in 2019. This is the largest COLA increase since 2011 when it was 3.6%, and a 0.8% increase from last year. Annual COLA increases are based on the Consumer Price Index, which measures the inflation during the 3rd quarter of each fiscal year (July, August, and September) and compares it to the previous 3rd quarter.

4. Depression Screening Available Online: Occasional feelings of sadness are part of normal life, but when the emotions continue for extended periods of time, or are associated with feelings of hopelessness and despair, it may be depression. For veterans who are concerned that they may have depression, VA now provides an online screening test through MyHealtheVet. The 10-question test does not require an account or for anyone to log in online. The test also provides pop-up information for individuals who take the test and are at high risk of suicide. Upon taking the test, the clinical results are available with directions to print them if desired. [Take the test.](#)

5. Hurricane Michael Closes Several VA Facilities: Hurricane Michael, which hit Florida and the southeastern coast this week, has affected several VA facilities causing some closures. Senators Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson of Florida sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie urging him to ensure that veterans affected by the storm get the care they need. “As you begin to assess the damage sustained to Veterans Health System facilities in the Florida panhandle, we also urge the department to deploy VA Mobile Facilities to assist veterans in areas where clinics remained closed,” the letter said. The VFW is currently accepting donations to help veterans, service members, and military families impacted by Hurricane Michael. From hurricanes to raging wildfires, the VFW's Disaster Relief Fund provides the organization the opportunity to react quickly with immediate relief to those in the affected areas. Learn more about [VA facility closures](#) or support the [VFW Disaster Relief Fund](#).

6. VFW Endorses Budget Reform Recommendations: For the past year, the VFW has worked with a diverse group of organizations whose constituents are directly impacted by the dysfunctional federal budget process. The [Convergence Building a Better Budget Process Project](#) focused on making recommendations to Congress on how to reform the budget process to avoid budget shutdowns and continuing resolutions which significantly impact programs and benefits for service members, veterans, and their families. While the VFW is glad DOD and VA have received full year funding for Fiscal Year 2019, the budget process must be reformed to make certain timely budgets for VA and DOD become the norm, not the exception. [Read the report.](#)

7. DPAA Accounts for 203 Missing Personnel in FY 2018: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) accounted for 203 formerly missing persons from past conflicts, the highest yearly total reached by the agency or its predecessor organizations. Also, the agency individually identified the remains of three additional personnel, who were previously accounted for as part of group burials, reaching another milestone of 206 individual identifications for the

FY. Broken down by conflict, 10 were accounted for from the Vietnam War, 37 from the Korean War, and 156 were from World War II. “Science and technology have expanded exponentially in recent years, enabling identifications that even five years ago seemed impossible. We also attribute the increasing yearly trend to DPAA's expanded use of partnerships, a more precise management of disinterments, and improvements in our robust field operations,” said Rear Adm. Jon Kreitz, DPAA's Deputy Director for Operations. The agency is focused on the research, investigation, recovery and identification of approximately 34,000 (out of approximately 83,000 missing personnel) believed to be recoverable, who were lost in conflicts from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

8. Four New Law Judges Appointed to VA’s Board of Veterans Appeals: President Trump recently approved the appointment of four new Veterans Law Judges to VA’s Board of Veterans’ Appeals. Lauren Cryan, Evan Deichert, William Donnelly, and Cynthia Skow will assume their roles on Oct. 14, and will begin holding hearings and signing decisions for veterans and other appellants. In fiscal year 2018, the board issued a historic 85,288 decisions to veterans — 61.6 percent more than 2017. “Bringing on additional judges means the board will be better staffed to conduct hearings and decide appeals properly in a timely manner,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Combined with procedural changes under the Appeals Modernization and Improvement Act of 2017 and the hiring of more than 200 additional Board attorneys, this translates into better and faster service for Veterans.” [Learn more.](#)

9. Breast Cancer Awareness Month: October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and VA is doing outreach to remind veterans, both women and men, of the importance of monthly self-checks as well as mammograms for early detection. While breast cancer typically affects women, there are cases of male breast cancer. This is particularly true for veterans who were exposed to contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune from the 1950s through the 1980s for more than 30 days. For individuals who were stationed in the Camp Lejeune area and were exposed to the water between Aug. 1, 1953 and Dec. 31, 1987, presumptive service connection for veterans who developed one or more of eight diseases, including breast cancer, is available. There are also options for family member reimbursements for relatives of veterans who resided at Camp Lejeune during this time. Learn about [breast cancer early detection](#), [water contamination at Camp Lejeune](#), or if you lived or worked at Camp Lejeune in 1987 or before, register to receive notifications regarding [Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water](#).

10. F-35 Fleet Grounded: On Thursday, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis ordered the grounding of all F-35s operated by the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy. Preliminary data suggests that the Sept. 28 F-35 crash in South Carolina may have been caused by a faulty fuel tube. In response, all U.S. military F-35s will be inspected as well as F-35s operated by U.S. allies. Currently, the Air Force has 156 F-35 aircraft in inventory, the Marine Corps has 61, and the Navy has 28. This grounding comes in the wake of guidance issued by the Pentagon to the Secretaries of the Navy and Air Force last month to increase the overall mission capable rates of its fighter jets to over 80% by the end of next September.

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

-- **Army Pvt. Delbert J. Holliday**, 22, of Minneapolis, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 15 in Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minn. Holliday was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 7th Cavalry Division, participating in combat actions against the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces in the vicinity of North Pyongan Province, North Korea. Holliday was killed in action on Nov. 30, 1950, and was reportedly buried in the United Nations Military Cemetery in Pyongyang. As the United Nations' situation with North Korea worsened, circumstances forced the cemetery in Pyongyang to close on Dec. 3, 1950, and buried remains could not be recovered. [Read about Holliday.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Creighton H. Workman** 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 Workman. Interment services are pending. [Read about Workman.](#)

-- **Navy Chief Warrant Officer John A. Austin** 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 Austin. Interment services are pending. [Read about Austin.](#)

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.