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1. VFW Wants Coast Guard, DHS Funded: Today marks the third full week of the partial federal government shutdown because Congress and the administration cannot reach an agreement over how much to spend on border protection. “Our government’s first responsibility is to secure the nation and protect her citizens,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence, who noted that the military is not affected by the current shutdown because their fiscal year 2019 spending bill was approved already, but that America’s fifth service — the U.S. Coast Guard — and the rest of the Department of Homeland Security are very much impacted by the shutdown. “Our country needs this Congress and this White House to push through the rhetoric and take care of those who are on the front lines protecting our country,” he said. “What the Coast Guard and DHS do daily allows the rest of us to sleep easier at night. No one should ever take that for granted.”

2. VFW Makes Strong Showing at SVA National Conference: Last week, the VFW attended the Student Veterans of America (SVA) National Conference in Orlando, Fla. VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence met with many of the almost 2,300 student veterans present and spoke at SVA’s awards banquet. VFW staff also hosted and presented at multiple panels that ranged from stories about advocacy, fellowship programs, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, and the role of Veterans Service Organizations. The VFW and SVA have been strategic partners for years, and we work closely with them to expand and protect benefits for student veterans. The highlight of the conference was the announcement of the 10 VFW members selected to participate in our joint VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship this semester. [Learn more](#) about the fellowship.

3. Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Bill Remains Top Priority: The VFW has worked with congressional leadership in the House and Senate to reintroduce and work toward quick passage of the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019*, which would restore benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans and expand benefits for Korean DMZ and Thailand veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. Stay tuned to the VFW Action Corps Weekly for updates on this important bill. Read House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs [Chairman Mark Takano’s statement on reintroduction](#). Read [Ranking Member Phil Roe’s statement](#).

4. Space-A Travel Opens to 100% Disabled Vets: A new change contained in the 2019 defense bill now allows 100 percent disabled veterans to travel Space-Available aboard military and military-contract flights within the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. territories. According to an [article in Military.com](#), the disabled veterans must possess a Defense Department ID Card (DD Form 2765) in order to not only fly Space-A but to access military installations. The rule change halfway accomplishes Resolution 419 from the 112th VFW National Convention; only halfway because dependents are not eligible to accompany them. The article also states disabled vets have limited destinations, whereas other Category 6 travelers (military retirees) have worldwide eligibility. That discrepancy will be addressed.

5. Express Scripts Quarterly Update: This week, VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles attended the quarterly Express Scripts MSO/VSO meeting at their Washington, D.C. office. The meeting provided insight into what the company's primary agenda is moving into 2019 and gave attendees the opportunity to engage with their government relations staff. Topics of discussion ranged from some of the technologies Express Scripts is developing, such as an automated kiosk that will be able to fill routine prescriptions without the need for an in-person pharmacist, improved electronic health records interface that gives health care providers a more comprehensive view of the medications that they are prescribing to patients, and legislative priorities for the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, such as pharmacy fee increases and future policy initiatives that will better serve TRICARE beneficiaries. [Learn more](#) about how Express Scripts serves the military community.

6. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced three new identifications. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Chief Pharmacist's Mate James T. Cheshire** 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, including Cheshire. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cheshire.](#)

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

-- **Navy Buglemaster 2nd Class Lionel W. Lescault** 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, including Lescault. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lescault.](#)

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.