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1. VFW Presents the Independent Budget to Congress: This week, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Pat Murray joined representatives from Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), and Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to present the Independent Budget policy recommendations to dozens of Capitol Hill staff members. The Independent Budget is a collaboration between the VFW, PVA and DAV to provide independent and veteran-centric recommendations for VA policy and budget improvements. The three organizations have partnered to produce the Independent Budget for over three decades, and is a valuable tool for congressional offices to use in crafting legislation or policy proposals. [Read the Independent Budget.](#)

2. Expanding Military, National and Public Service Opportunities: On Wednesday, VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles attended an interim progress update hosted by the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service (NCOS). After a year of examination, the commission released its Interim Report regarding options it is examining to increase participation not only in military service but also in national and public service. Recommendations will be included in the commission's final report, due March 2020. According to Military Times, some of the options in the final report could lead to a recommendation that women ages 18 to 26 begin registering for the draft just like their male counterparts. The commission might also recommend more local volunteer opportunities while in high school, simplify the process for applying to federal jobs, better promote federal service organizations like the Peace Corps, and use the Selective Service System to better identify military recruits. The final report could also recommend that the Selective Service System be disbanded altogether. More details to come. [Learn more](#) or [read the Interim Report.](#)

3. VA Secretary Holds Virtual Town Hall: Last week, VA Secretary Robert Wilke, along with the leadership from all the divisions within VA, held a virtual town hall to give a status update of the state of VA and answered questions submitted by veterans. One of the main points highlighted during the briefing was the new VA Welcome Kit, which gives VA users a more streamlined and easier to understand packet of information about what the VA offers for its users. The secretary and his undersecretaries answered questions ranging from health care

concerns, education benefits, and IT issues. The virtual town hall was a way to have VA leadership interact with the veterans they serve, and we look forward to more of these informative sessions. [Watch the virtual town hall.](#) [View or download the VA Welcome Kit.](#)

4. Concurrent Receipt Legislation Reintroduced: This month, Congressman Gus Bilirakis and Senator Jon Tester reintroduced the VFW-supported *Retired Pay Restoration Act*, to ensure full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability compensation. Presently, concurrent receipt of these benefits applies only to those with a 50 percent VA disability rating or higher. The VFW continues to advocate for the end of this offset for all military retirees regardless of their VA disability rating. [Learn more.](#)

5. Repeal of SBP/DIC Offset Reintroduced: The VFW-supported H.R. 553, *Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act*, which would repeal the requirement for surviving spouses to offset Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) benefits with Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) was reintroduced this past week. SBP and DIC are different benefits, which are earned for different reasons. The full repeal of this unjust offset remains a top legislative priority for the VFW. [Learn more about H.R. 553.](#)

6. VA Wait Times Improve, Equal to or Better Than Private Sector: A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association titled, “Comparison of Wait Times for New Patients Between the Private Sector and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers” found VA wait times significantly reduced for primary care and three other specialty services between 2014 and 2017. According to the study, in 2014 the average wait time for VA appointments was 22.5 days, and 18.7 days for the private sector. By 2017, the average wait time for VA was 17.7 days and 29.8 days for the private sector. [Read more](#) or access to the study.

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

-- **Mr. Edward J. Weissenback** was an employee of Air America Incorporated, and a crewman aboard an Air America C-123K. On Dec. 27, 1971, his aircraft was on a routine resupply mission between Thailand and Laos when radio contact was lost northeast of Sayaboury, Laos. Search and rescue efforts continued through Dec. 31, 1971, but no sign of the aircraft or the four crewmembers were found, including Weissenback. Interment services are pending. [Read about Weissenback.](#)

-- **Mr. Roy F. Townley** was an employee of Air America Incorporated, and a co-pilot aboard an Air America C-123K. On Dec. 27, 1971, his aircraft was on a routine resupply mission between Thailand and Laos when radio contact was lost northeast of Sayaboury, Laos. Search and rescue efforts continued through Dec. 31, 1971, but no sign of the aircraft or the four crewmembers were found, including Townley. Interment services are pending. [Read about Townley.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Frank J. Suliman** was a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On Dec. 1, 1950, the convoy of trucks Suliman was riding in was halted by a roadblock and the soldiers were commanded to dismount to get through the roadblock on foot. Fellow soldiers reported that Suliman was captured and taken to a prisoner

of war camp at Pukchin-Tarigol, North Korea, where he reportedly died in March 1951. Interment services are pending. [Read about Suliman](#).

-- **Army Pvt. Floyd A. Fulmer** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 14, 1944, after fierce combat in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest, near the village of Simonskall, in Germany. Due to ongoing enemy activity in the area, his remains could not be recovered. On Nov. 15, 1945, the War Department declared him deceased. Interment services are pending.

[Read about Fulmer](#).

-- **Baker 2nd Class David L. Kesler** 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 Kesler. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kesler](#).

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.