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1. House Passes Blue Water Navy Act: By a vote of 410-0, the House on Tuesday unanimously passed H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019*. “The VFW salutes the united support of the House,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “Your vote will positively impact thousands of lives, and it once again proves that taking care of veterans and their families is a nonpartisan issue.” Once signed into law, H.R. 299 will restore VA benefits to thousands of so-called Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans who had their disability eligibility taken away after regulatory changes. Veterans exposed to Agent Orange while serving along the Korean DMZ will have an earlier start date to encompass the time frame when various defoliants were tested — from April 1, 1968, to Sept. 1, 1967. Benefits will expand to include children born with spina bifida due to a parent’s exposure in Thailand, as well as require VA to report on research being conducted on a broad range of conditions possibly related to service in Southwest Asia. The bill now moves to the Senate, which “failed to pass H.R. 299 in the previous Congress,” said Lawrence. “We cannot allow this to happen again, which is why I am urging every veteran, family member and advocate to contact their U.S. senators to get this bill passed and signed into law now!” [Contact your senators.](#)

2. Two Services to Reimburse Military Spouse Relicensing Costs: The Army and Air Force announced new programs this week that will reimburse military spouse relicensing and recertification costs if a permanent change of station requires them to move across state lines. Both services will reimburse qualifying fees of up to \$500 if authenticated on or after Dec. 12, 2017. “This is a tremendous quality of life initiative,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. Citing Defense Department [data](#) that puts the military spouse unemployment rate at 24 percent and underemployed rate at 31 percent, Lawrence said that any initiative that helps ease the stress of rotating assignments every few years is going to have a tremendous impact not

only on military recruiting but on retention, as well. “The old adage that you recruit individuals but retain families is entirely true,” he said. “Our military has been actively engaged since the beginning of Operation Desert Shield in 1990, and with still no end in sight. The services must explore all avenues to keep the troops and their families happy, and this great initiative is something I hope the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard will quickly emulate.” Learn more about the [Army program](#), or the [Air Force program](#).

3. Widow’s Tax Legislation Reaches Milestone, More Support Needed: The House and Senate have demonstrated momentous support to end the demeaning Survivor Benefits Plan (SBP) and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) Offset. H.R. 553, [the Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act](#), has reached the 290 cosponsor threshold which triggers, which triggers full House consideration. On May 21 and 22, 2019, the VFW will join members of Congress, other veterans service organizations, and survivor organizations to storm Capitol Hill to urge immediate congressional action on the Widow’s Tax. Events will be broadcast live at www.facebook.com/VFWFans. [Contact your members of Congress](#). [Join us on Twitter](#) or on Facebook by copying and pasting: **More than 65,000 surviving military spouses and dependents are unjustly penalized because their loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. America must honor military survivors, NOT tax them! Stand with the VFW and call on Congress to #AxeWidowsTax <https://bit.ly/2LfrvGL>.**

4. The VFW Calls for Increased Oversight of Service Member Protections: This week, the VFW and other veterans organizations, called for increased oversight of the Military Lending Act (MLA). The MLA protects service members and their families from predatory lenders. The MLA is overseen by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and the VFW is calling upon the CFPB to renew proactive investigations into potential violators of the MLA. The MLA is a vital protection for service members, especially while they are deployed. It is the VFW’s job to fight for our men and women who are fighting for us every day. [Watch the press conference](#).

5. Fiscal Year 2020 Defense Funding Bill: On Tuesday, the House Appropriations Committee released their first draft of the 2020 defense funding bill. In total, the proposal would provide \$690.2 billion in new discretionary funds for the Department of Defense, an increase of \$15.8 billion above fiscal year 2019. Of that total number, \$622.1 billion would be allocated for base funding, an increase of \$15.6 billion above fiscal year 2019, and \$68.1 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations funding, an increase of \$165 million. Other provisions in the bill include a prohibition on transferring F-35s to Turkey and \$21.7 billion for 11 Navy ships. Additionally, it would provide funds for the advance procurement of the first Columbia-class submarine and three Virginia-class submarines. [Learn more about the fiscal year 2020 defense funding bill](#).

6. Senate Confirmation Hearing for Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs: On Thursday, the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs held a hearing to discuss the nomination of James M. Byrne to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Byrne has more than 20 years of public service experience, including service as a deployed Marine infantry officer and a U.S. Department of Justice international narcotics prosecutor. Committee members questioned the nominee on VA’s plans to implement the VFW-supported VA MISSION Act, VA’s plan to

provide benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans, and VA's suicide prevention efforts. [Watch the hearing](#), which starts at the 18:30 mark.

7. President Signs Executive Order Aimed At Banning Chinese Tech: On Wednesday, President Donald J. Trump issued an executive order declaring a national emergency that prohibits U.S. companies from using telecommunications services that are solely owned, controlled, or directed by a foreign adversary. The executive order does not name a specific company or country. However, the directive comes in the wake of the revelation that products made by the Chinese telecom company Huawei are unsafe and pose a significant risk of being exploited. On Tuesday, during a Senate hearing on the future of the national telecommunication infrastructure, senators singled out Huawei as a significant security risk. [Read the executive order](#).

8. VFW Calls for Return of War Memorabilia: The VFW is asking Vietnam veterans to search their war memorabilia for any artifacts that might help Vietnam to determine the fate of its estimated 300,000 MIAs, or may at least bring some comfort to their families. The call to action, which will be repeated at the upcoming 120th VFW National Convention in Orlando, Fla., is the result of requests for help from Vietnamese veterans organizations directly to VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch, who recently returned from a POW/MIA fact-finding trip to Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. Being requested are photos and detailed maps of battle sites or burial locations, as well as personal artifacts that may contain names, family photos and personal letters. *No weapons, please!* Veteran-to-veteran initiatives generate goodwill and further assist the U.S. government's efforts to recover Americans missing from the war, where a total of 1,589 Americans remain missing; a number that includes 1,246 in Vietnam (North-452, South-794), 288 in Laos, 48 in Cambodia, and 7 in Chinese territorial waters. Please mail your memorabilia to Joe Davis, VFW Washington Office, 200 Maryland Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002. Everything collected will be turned over to the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington through the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

9. Armed Forces Day 2019: This Saturday, millions of Americans will pay tribute to the men and women of the Armed Forces for their service in support of our nation. First observed on May 20, 1950, Armed Forces Day was intended to not only give thanks for those who keep our nation safe, but also to educate the public about the various roles of our five branches of the military and the roles that those branches play in our community. In keeping with that theme, many DoD installations, such as Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Joint Base Andrews, and Fort Bragg will hold events that are open to the public to showcase our nation's military capabilities as well as the men and women who proudly wear the uniform. Additionally, many VFW posts will participate in local parades and hosting events to garner community awareness and support for our men and women in uniform.

10. VFW National Home for Children: How does your Post or District communicate to its membership? Is there a monthly newsletter, website or Facebook page? Please consider sharing information regarding your VFW National Home for Children. [Learn more](#) about who we help at the National Home.

11. The VFW Needs YOU: As a grassroots organization, the power of the VFW is in its membership. That means all 1.6 million of our members. We are stronger and more effective together because of what our collective efforts accomplish. Part of being great advocates means renewing your membership and we encourage you to do so. We also encourage you to consider becoming a Life Member of the VFW as a permanent show of your support. If you are not yet a member, we encourage you to join. [Renew your membership or become a Life Member.](#) [Join as a new member.](#)

12. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of three American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted for from Korea and WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Cpl. Charles S. Lawler** was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, engaged against enemy forces near Unsan, North Korea. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950, when he could not be accounted for by his unit. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lawler.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Toney W. Gochnauer** was a member of the 425th Bombardment Squadron, 308th Heavy Bombardment Group, 14th Air Force, where he served as a copilot of a B-24J bomber aircraft. On Jan. 25, 1944, contact with his aircraft was lost shortly following takeoff while on a flight from Kunming, China, to Chabua, India. No communication could be established and the crew did not reach its destination. The eight crewmembers and four passengers were subsequently declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gochnauer.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Roy Brown, Jr.** was a member of Company I, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, when he was reported missing in action following engagement with enemy forces along the Soputa-Sananda Track, while defending a position known as the Huggins Roadblock, near Buna, Papua New Guinea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Brown.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <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.

To view this week's and previous editions, visit: <http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>.