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In This Issue:

- 1. SCOTUS: Bladensburg Peace Cross Stays**
- 2. Participate in a Conference Call with President Trump About the VA MISSION Act**
- 3. VFW Testifies in Support of Medicinal Cannabis Research**
- 4. TRICARE Catastrophic Cap Reimbursement**
- 5. National League of POW/MIA Families Turns 50**
- 6. The GI Bill Turns 75**
- 7. Defense Leadership Changes**
- 8. 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force Repeal Gains Traction**
- 9. VFW-Supported Harmony's Law**
- 10. The VFW Needs YOU**
- 11. MIA Update**

1. SCOTUS: Bladensburg Peace Cross Stays: Yesterday, the U.S. Supreme Court announced its decision that the World War I memorial in the shape of a 40-foot-tall cross can continue to stand on public land in Maryland. The court's 7-2 decision in favor of allowing the cross to stand, clarifies the fact that the mere shape of a monument does not create an "Establishment" of religion. Therefore, the nearly 100-year-old memorial will be allowed to stay on public land. The VFW's amicus brief is cited in the opinion. "The Supreme Court made the right call," said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. "Today's decision not only protects this memorial outright, but helps to establish a precedent to protect thousands of other veterans' memorials that currently reside on federal, state or municipal land. "My hat's off to all of the organizations that joined the VFW in filing amicus briefs concerning this case." [Read the VFW's amicus brief.](#)

2. Participate in a Conference Call with President Trump About the VA MISSION Act: Please join President Trump and Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Wilkie for a conference call on Tuesday, June 25, at 11:45 a.m. EST to discuss the one-year anniversary of the passage of the MISSION Act and the milestones accomplished during this time. To attend the conference call, please [fill out the following link](#) and you will receive the dial-in information, upon RSVP'ing. To begin the registration process, please provide Conference ID # 469230. [RSVP for the call today.](#)

3. VFW Testifies in Support of Medicinal Cannabis Research: On Thursday, VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes testified during a hearing of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and offered the VFW's support for legislation to require VA to research the efficacy of medicinal cannabis and other alternatives to high-dose prescriptions VA provides veterans who suffer from chronic pain and other health conditions. Committee members also discussed the need to improve VA Specially Adaptive Housing program by increasing the number of applications VA is able to process per year and expediting the process for veterans

with serious illnesses. The VFW also supported legislation to improve the reimbursement of ambulance service costs when veterans are transported to emergency rooms, expand a successful health care seminar during the Transition Assistance Program for servicewomen transitioning out of military service, and others. Read the [VFW's testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#).

4. TRICARE Catastrophic Cap Reimbursement: On Tuesday, VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes and VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Kyle Kalman attended the Military Health System MSO/VSO Executive Council meeting with the Defense Health Agency (DHA) Director, Vice Adm. Raquel Bono and senior military medical personnel. DHA is working to correct an error with the implementation of recent TRICARE changes which resulted in retiree enrollment fees not being credited to the family catastrophic cap. To rectify the overpayment, DHA has sent out letters to affected beneficiaries that indicates they can be refunded or credited to future enrollment fees.

5. National League of POW/MIA Families Turns 50: The VFW attended the National League of POW/MIA Families' 50th annual meeting this week in nearby Arlington, Va. The League originated on the West Coast in the late 1960s as the result of the U.S. government's policy at the time to maintain a low profile on the POW/MIA issue, which included urging family members to refrain from publicly discussing the problem. The reason the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency exists today is because of the perseverance of this organization to have our government account for their loved ones, a fullest possible accounting mission that has since expanded beyond the Vietnam War to encompass World War II, Korea, Cold War and post-Vietnam losses. [Learn more.](#)

6. The GI Bill Turns 75: This week the *Service Members Readjustment Act of 1944*, also known as the GI Bill, will celebrate its 75th anniversary. The first-ever GI Bill was signed into law on June 22, 1944. Since then, the GI Bill has been a critical tool for veterans during their transition to civilian life. The bill has provided veterans and their families education benefits, financial assistance, and home loan guarantees that have led to the expansion of the American middle class and economic growth and opportunity. Recently, the VFW-supported Forever GI Bill expanded this incredible benefit so future service members will be able to use their education benefits throughout their lives. Learn more about the [Forever GI Bill](#).

7. Defense Leadership Changes: It was announced this week that Patrick Shanahan will resign as acting defense secretary at midnight, Sunday, and that Secretary of the Army Mark Esper will assume the duties as acting defense secretary at 12:01 a.m., Monday. Esper, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and Life member of the VFW Department of Pennsylvania, is a 1986 West Point graduate who served as an infantry officer with the 101st Airborne Division during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. It is not yet known whether the president intends to nominate him to fill the position permanently. Esper has led the Army since November 2017, and his priorities have focused on rebuilding combat readiness against near-peer competitors.

8. 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force Repeal Gains Traction: On Wednesday, a provision revoking the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) was included in a \$1 trillion minibus appropriations bill that passed the House by a vote of 226-203. The existing AUMF was initially passed in the weeks following the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and authorized the administration to use military force against those responsible for the attacks, or nations who

were complicit in harboring those responsible for the attacks, without expressed congressional approval. In recent years many lawmakers have grown concerned that the AUMF grants the administration too much unilateral power and strips Congress of its responsibility to declare war, and have unsuccessfully fought to repeal the provision. If approved by the Senate, the administration would have eight months to draft a new AUMF or do nothing at all. However, both President Trump and Senate Leader Mitch McConnell have indicated that the repeal is a non-starter.

9. VFW Supports Harmony's Law: On Monday, the VFW sent a letter of support to the office of Congressman Brian Mast (R-FL) for H.R. 2388, *Harmony's Law*. The bill would rightfully clarify the National Defense Authorization Acts of Fiscal Years 1987 and 2006, that sexual assault offenses in the military will have no statute of limitations. Since the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces ruled in *U.S. v. Mangahas* that the statute of limitations for sexual assaults that occurred before 2006 shall be five years, convicted sexual offenders who committed offenses before 2006 are now able to appeal their convictions and be set free. The bill would hold convicted sexual assault offenders accountable and restore justice to victims. [Read the press release.](#)

10. 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 urge 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, join today. [Renew your membership or become a Life Member.](#) [Join as a new member.](#)

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

-- **Navy Reserve Seaman 2nd Class Moyses A. Martinez** was stationed aboard the USS Colorado, which was moored approximately 3,200 yards from the shore of Tinian Island. Early in the morning, the USS Colorado came under attack by a concealed Japanese shore battery. From the attack, four crewmen were declared missing in action, and 39 personnel were killed, including Martinez. Interment services are pending. [Read about Martinez.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Jacob W. Givens** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, which was engaged in battle against enemy forces in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest near Germeter, Germany. He was reported missing in action as of Oct. 20, 1944, when his company reorganized after a severe counterattack. [Read about Givens.](#)

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>.

