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1. VFW Demands End to Widow's Tax: The Senate recently passed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 by a vote of 86-8. The bill, which must still be conferenced with the House of Representatives, provides \$750 billion in total defense spending, a 3.1 percent military pay raise, and reforms the Military Housing Privatization Initiative for military families, among many other enhancements. Sadly missing, however, was one bipartisan amendment that would have finally ended a dollar-for-dollar offset that continues to financially penalize some 65,000 military widows and widowers from simultaneously receiving Survivor Benefits Plan (SBP) payments from the Defense Department and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the Department of Veterans Affairs. In an [opinion editorial published Sunday in The Hill](#), VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence called out the Senate for not including the amendment, saying that Congress is balancing “the budget on the back of the widows and orphans, which is a disgrace.” He said “surviving spouses and veterans [like [VFW Life member Jeremy Kitzhaber](#)] do not have the luxury of waiting for Congress to do its job. The VFW again calls on all of its members and advocates to demand Congress end this injustice now.”

2. VA Orders Stay on Blue Water Navy and Korean DMZ Claims: In a memorandum dated July 1, Secretary Wilkie stated that all Blue Water Navy claims, claims based on service in or near the Korean Demilitarized Zone, and claims for children of veterans with spina bifida will be held from being processed until Jan.1, 2020. The VFW encourages veterans and surviving spouses to file claims now. [Contact a VFW Service Officer.](#)

3. House Defense Authorization Bill Would End Widow's Tax: Today, the House passed H.R. 2500, the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA) that authorizes \$733 billion in defense spending, a 3.1 percent pay increase for all military personnel. The legislation includes a number of VFW-supported provisions that improve the quality of life for our service members and military families, to include the termination of the demeaning dollar-for-dollar offset of earned benefits for the surviving spouses of about 65,000 service members and veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice, known as the Widow's Tax; repeals the Feres Doctrine to ensure the Military Health System is held accountable for malpractice; provides \$9.2

million for construction and improvement of military family housing; authorizes a \$1,000 reimbursement increase for military spouses to obtain professional certifications and licenses after a PCS change; and authorizes financial assistance to civilian child care providers who care for the children of members who die in the line of duty. The VFW is also pleased the legislation would also direct DOD to review the service records of World War I minority service members who were appropriately recognized for their valorous service, but denied the highest service medal because of racial bias. The NDAA now heads to conference to resolve the differences between the Senate and House versions.

4. Affordable Mortgages for Veterans Act Headed to the President: On Tuesday, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1988, the *Protecting Affordable Mortgages for Veterans Act of 2019*. The legislation corrects an unintended consequence of a previous law that prohibits veterans from refinancing their home loans within the first six months to combat a tactic by predatory lenders known as “loan churning” in which veterans are convinced to refinance their home mortgages, and fees and other expenses are often added. Introduced by Rep. David Scott, (D-Ga.), and Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-N.Y.), H.R. 1988 would approve approximately 2,500 refinanced loans that were being processed when the law was implemented, but could not be completed because of a technical error. Last month, the Senate passed an identical bill, S. 1749, which was introduced by Senator Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.), and Tom Tillis (R-N.C.). Since both bills are identical, H.R. 1988 now heads to the president’s desk. [Learn more](#).

5. U.S. and Chinese Navies Discuss South China Sea Escalation: On Tuesday, the Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson met via teleconference with China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy Vice Adm. Shen Jinlong to discuss the importance of open communication between our two countries due to increased military presence in the South China Sea. Tuesday’s teleconference was the fourth between the two military leaders and comes on the heels of a \$2.2 billion dollar U.S. weapons sale to Taiwan, which was approved by the U.S. State Department on Monday. Since 1979, the U.S. has recognized Taiwan as a part of mainland China. However, the U.S. Department of State has maintained an unofficial relationship with Taiwan, including a long standing commitment to assist Taiwan with assistance and material support to bolster its defensive capabilities.

6. House Holds Hearing on Economic Opportunities for Women: This week the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing to discuss the different ways women veterans are affected by different programs throughout VA. In some areas such as education and employment, women veterans are represented more favorably than non-veteran women and male veterans. However, there are areas where women veterans are underserved such as veteran homelessness programs. Women veterans have been the fastest growing population of veterans for years, and special attention must be paid to their specific needs. [Watch the hearing](#).

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

-- Army Cpl. Donald E. Angle was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, fighting against members of the Korean People's Army. On July 25, 1950, he was reported missing in action in the vicinity of Yongdong, South Korea. Absent of evidence of continued survival, the Department of the Army declared him deceased as of Dec. 31, 1953. Interment services are pending. [Read about Angle.](#)

-- Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Grady J. Crawford was a member of Battery M, 4th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, serving in North Korea. He was last seen engaged in combat operations at Yudam-ni, West Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, on Dec. 1, 1950. No lists provided by the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces or Korean People's Army showed Crawford as a prisoner of war. Absent evidence of continued survival, the Department of the Navy declared him deceased as of Oct. 30, 1953. Interment services are pending. [Read about Crawford.](#)

-- Army Pvt. Penn Franks was a member of Company G, 371st Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle on the Gothic line in the northern Apennine Mountains near Strettoia, Italy, when he was killed in action on Feb. 10, 1945. Following the battle, his unit was unable to recover his remains. Interment services are pending. [Read about Franks.](#)

-- Army Pvt. James I. Trick was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, which was engaged against enemy forces in the Hürtgen Forest, near Germeter, Germany. He was reportedly killed by enemy shrapnel on Nov. 4, 1944, while bring supplies for his unit. Interment services are pending. [Read about Trick.](#)

-- Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Paul Cybowski was a member of the 373rd Bombardment Squadron, 308th Bombardment Group, based in Yangkai, China. On Sept. 15, 1943, Cybowski was a gunner aboard a B-24D aircraft, on a bombing mission over Haiphong, French Indochina. Approximately 50 Japanese fighters attacked the formation as it turned to make a run over the target, shooting down three of the five American aircraft. Five crewmembers were able to bail prior to the crash, but Cybowski, and four other crewmembers, were killed during the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cybowski.](#)

-- Army Pvt. Laurel W. Ebert was a member of Company I, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, serving as part of a nine-person patrol to find and silence an enemy machine gun position somewhere west of the Sanananda Track in the Cape Killerton area of the Australian Territory of Papua (present-day Papua New Guinea.) Six members of the patrol, including Ebert, failed to return following the mission. He was subsequently listed as missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ebert.](#)

-- Navy Radioman 3rd Class Starring B. Winfield 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 Winfield. Interment services are pending. [Read about Winfield.](#)

-- Navy Radioman 2nd Class Floyd A. Wells was stationed aboard the USS Arizona, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941, which caused a cataclysmic explosion, and ignited a fire that burned for two days. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 1,177 crewmen, including Wells. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wells.](#)

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>.