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1. Army Proposes Arlington Eligibility Changes: The Department of the Army this week proposed changing the interment and inurnment eligibility criteria for Arlington National Cemetery. The recommendations, which involved more than two years of deliberation and 250,000 survey respondents, are in response to a congressional mandate that directs the Army to keep the cemetery functioning as an active burial ground well into the future – defined as 150 years. Given the current rate of burials, Arlington will be closed to future burials in three decades, so Army's challenge was to meet the needs of the existing veteran population while preserving space for future warriors. One recommendation changes eligibility from the current one day of service to two years, which matches VA cemetery requirements, but adds an additional requirement to having served in combat. Other recommendations, though differing for in-ground and above-ground, specifically link eligibility to having served in combat. "The service life of Arlington will be extended by restricting eligibility to those who have been to war or who are training for war," said VFW National Commander William J. "Doc" Schmitz. "The VFW understands there are many details that must still be ironed out, but at first glance it appears the Army has addressed VFW's eligibility concerns and answered Congress' mandate to keep the cemetery functioning well into the future." As required by law, a public comment period will soon open on the Federal Register. [Read more.](#)

2. VA Health Care Trending in Right Direction: The VFW this week released the results of its latest nationwide survey on the VA health care system from the veterans' point-of-view. Now in its seventh edition, the VFW created "Our Care" in the aftermath of the nationwide crisis in access to care and confidence that enveloped the VA in 2014, and the ensuing legislative corrective actions that followed. "The VFW prides itself on having the ability to take the pulse of veterans, especially in evaluating what works at the VA and what doesn't," said VFW National Commander William "Doc" Schmitz. "Veterans turn to VA for high-quality, individualized care, but there is always room for improvement, especially in the areas of access to quality care inside VA medical facilities and outside in the communities," he explained. This year's "Our Care" survey included care experience questions from past surveys, as well as logic-based questions on

innovations unique to the recently passed MISSION Act, which improved upon its predecessor Choice Act in areas like community care consolidation as well as introducing a new urgent care benefit. Very noticeable was 74 percent of respondents reported seeing improvements at their local VA, compared to 64 percent in 2018, and 91 percent of respondents recommend VA care to other veterans compared to 80 percent last year. Also positive was learning that veterans who were offered community care still prefer to receive their care from the VA, that veterans who use community care facilities are reporting fewer billing problems, and that veterans have a positive opinion of the new urgent care benefit. VA health care is trending in the right direction, but the VFW wants the VA to continue the momentum. [Learn more and access the “Our Care 2019” report.](#)

3. VFW Participates in the PREVENTS Task Force: Last Friday, VFW Washington Office Executive Director Vincent “B.J.” Lawrence attended a meeting of The President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS), a cabinet-level task force. PREVENTS is a collaboration between the White House and VA that was created by presidential executive order on March 5 of this year. The task force is charged with developing a comprehensive national roadmap that will combine efforts by the federal government with state, regional, business, nonprofit, faith-based, academic, and community efforts. Barabara Van Dahlen, PhD, founder and president of [Give an Hour](#), will serve as the executive director of this task force.

4. VFW Participates in Women Veteran Roundtable: This week, Army veteran and VFW National staff member Meggan Thomas spoke at a congressional roundtable event focused on women veterans. The congressionally mandated Women Veterans Task Force is committed to highlighting issues specifically affecting our sisters-in-arms, and the VFW is proud to take part in important issues and add our voice to these discussions. One of the areas Thomas brought to the attention of the group, was the burdensome process faced by both men and women when seeking care and benefits from Military Sexual Trauma-related incidents. The VFW applauds Congress for continuing to make women service members and veterans a priority, and will continue to work with this task force to improve care and benefits for all women who served.

5. Senate Calls for the Elimination of the Widow's Tax: On Wednesday, Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.) called for a Motion to Instruct (MTI) vote on including the elimination of the Widow's Tax into the final version of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA). With a vote of 94-0, the Senate unanimously voted to pass the MTI. This is a call to action and sends a message to the NDAA conference committee members that a permanent fix of the Widow's Tax is long overdue. While an MTI is a non-binding show of support, the elimination of the Widow’s Tax has never made it this far in the NDAA process in 20 years.

6. Senate Holds Hearing on Toxic Exposure: This week, the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee held a hearing to discuss VA’s presumptive disability decision-making process regarding toxic exposure. VA and DOD are working together to develop a database to track known toxic exposures by location and date, including burn pits and other environmental hazards. The database, known as the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER), is scheduled for limited release on Oct. 1, 2019, and will assist VA and DOD to improve care, benefits, and research. The VFW thanks Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and Ranking

Member Jon Tester (D-Mont.) for their continued bipartisan efforts to expand benefits and protections for service members, veterans, and their families. [Watch the hearing](#), which starts at the 15:22 mark.

7. VFW “Our Care 2019” Report Highlighted in Hearing: On Wednesday, the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a hearing entitled “MISSION Critical: Care in the Community Update.” The VFW provided the results of the “Our Care 2019” survey to the committee as an important measure of veteran satisfaction. When asked about feedback, Dr. Richard Stone, Executive in Charge of the Veterans’ Health Administration stated, “I think probably one of the best pieces of data to come back so far is 48 hours ago the VFW released a survey ... about 7,000 responded that they used our care and their relative satisfaction level was extraordinarily transformative from previous years.” The VFW will continue to monitor the implementation of the MISSION Act to ensure veterans receive the highest quality of care. [Watch the hearing](#).

8. 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Application is Closing Soon: The 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is now accepting applications. The program, which is in its sixth year, is for VFW-eligible members who attend an accredited institute of higher learning. Ten student veterans will be selected for the semester-long program that focuses on real policy issues faced by veterans, service members, and their families. The highlight of the program is participation in the VFW Legislative Conference, which in the past has included meetings with senior officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress. Those selected also spend time with their VFW Department members on Capitol Hill pushing the VFW’s legislative priorities. Alumni of the program have become more active in all levels of the VFW and have changed laws to improve care and benefits for veterans. [Learn more and apply for the fellowship](#).

9. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recently announced the identification of seven American sailors and soldiers who had been missing and unaccounted-for since World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

- **Navy Radioman 2nd Class Floyd A. Wells**, 24, of Cavalier, N.D., will be buried Oct. 1 in Mandan, N.D. On Dec. 7, 1941, Wells was assigned to the battleship USS Arizona, which sank after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 1,177 crewmen. [Read about Wells](#).
- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class D.T. Kyser**, of Oklahoma, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kyser](#).
- **Army Sgt. David C. Sewell**, of Minnesota, was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. On Nov. 28, 1950, Sewell was killed in action after enemy forces launched a massive surprise attack on their position near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sewell](#).
- **Army Cpl. Harold Pearce**, 25, of Dillon, S.C., was buried yesterday in Latta, S.C. Pearce was a member of 1st Platoon, 24th Military Police Company, 24th Infantry Division. He was killed July 10, 1950, when his unit was withdrawing from the city of Taejon, South Korea. [Read about Pearce](#).

-- **Army Cpl. Jerome V. Hummel**, of Missouri, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action Nov. 30, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hummel.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Willie V. Galvan**, 24, of Bexar County, Texas, was buried yesterday in San Antonio. Galvan was a member of Medical Company, 7th Infantry Division, 31st Regimental Combat Team. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, after the enemy attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. [Read about Galvan.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Kenneth E. Ford** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ford.](#)

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>.