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**1. VFW Testifies at Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Hearing:** On Tuesday, VFW Washington Office Executive Director B.J. Lawrence testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security regarding “Bringing Our Nation’s Heroes Home.” Mr. Lawrence thanked Chairman Lynch for introducing H.R. 4879, *Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Support Act*, which would ensure the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) has the necessary resources to continue its mission during government shutdowns. He also expressed the importance of our partnership with DPAA to work with foreign governments to help American researchers gain access to foreign military archives and past battlefields. “Since 1991, the VFW is the only veteran service organization to return to Southeast Asia, Russia, and China and has made it our goal to not rest until we achieve the fullest possible accounting of all missing American military and civilian personnel from all past wars,” stated Mr. Lawrence during the hearing. [Watch the hearing.](#)

**2. Student Veteran Housing Rates Could Change:** This week, VA’s Education Services testified before the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity to discuss the upcoming changes to the student veteran housing allowances. The final sections of the Forever GI Bill will go into effect on Dec. 1 this year, which could mean different housing rates for different students. Some student veterans will see an increase in their housing allowance, others could see a decrease, but most student veterans should not see any change whatsoever. The VFW is urging all student veterans to check with their schools’ veteran offices to make sure what the housing payments will be in the upcoming semester. [Watch the hearing.](#)

**3. Veterans Will Have Access to Health Records on iPhones Soon:** The Department of Veterans Affairs is rolling out nationwide access for veterans to their VA health data, alongside their health records from other health care providers in one place, in the Health Records section of the Health app for iPhone. Patients will be able to see their medical information from various participating institutions, including VA, organized into one view. The view covers allergies, conditions, immunizations, lab results, medications, procedures, and vitals. Veterans will also receive notifications when their data is updated. [Read more.](#)

**4. Student Veteran Protection Bill Introduced:** This past week Senator Tom Carper (D-Del.) introduced the *Protect Veterans' Education and Taxpayer Spending (Protect VETS) Act of 2019*, which would eliminate financial loopholes in higher education that could be used to prey upon student veterans. Sen. Carper, a VFW Life member, has worked tirelessly to bring about protections for veterans, service members, and their families during their pursuit of higher education. Sen. Carper's proposal would finally eliminate the problematic 90/10 loophole that has been a VFW priority for years. The VFW would like to thank Sen. Carper, along with his colleagues Senators Cassidy (R-La.), Lankford (R-Okla.), and Tester (D-Mont.) for their bold bipartisan actions to protect the interests of student veterans. [Read the release.](#)

**5. Pillars of Strength UMGC Caregivers Scholarship:** University of Maryland Global Campus is offering a full scholarship opportunity for caregivers of our nation's service members and veterans who are wounded, injured, and ill. The Pillars of Strength Scholarship Program aims to honor the unparalleled selflessness and extraordinary commitment of these caregivers. If you are a caregiver, this scholarship is designed to help you achieve your educational goals in a high-demand, career-focused undergraduate or graduate program at UMGC. The application deadline is March 15, 2020. [Learn more.](#)

**6. House Veterans Affairs Committee Considers Suicide Factors Bill:** The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing this week on H.R. 3495, *Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act*, also known as the Improve Act. The bill, introduced by Representative Jack Bergman (R-Mich.), seeks to establish a pilot program that will use grants to support local organizations that provide mental health and support programs focused on veterans and their families in local communities. VA estimates that 20 veterans die by suicide every day, 14 of whom have not engaged with VA in the year of or year preceding their suicides. The goal of the Improve Act is to reach veterans in the community who are not engaged with VA by offering them support through community-based programs. The VFW supports the concept of the Improve Act and is working to ensure it addresses the needs of veterans and their families in a meaningful way. [Watch the hearing.](#)

**7. House Holds Hearing on PFAS Exposure:** This week, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on Environment held a hearing to discuss federal regulation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). PFAS are a classification of compounds used in many household items such as non-stick cookware, degreasers, and cosmetics. Since these compounds are also used in certain types of firefighting foam, military communities are at a greater risk of PFAS contamination in drinking water. PFAS exposure has been linked to many adverse health effects including abnormal childhood development, liver and kidney toxicity, and cancer. At the hearing, actor Mark Ruffalo stated, "There is still no legal requirement to filter PFAS from tap water, so more than 100 million Americans today are likely drinking water contaminated with PFAS." Learn more about [PFAS](#). [Watch the hearing.](#)

**8. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced three new identifications, and four burial updates for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Hadley I. Heavin**, 23, of Kansas City, Missouri, was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Heavin. Interment services are pending. [Read about Heavin.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Welborn L. Ashby**, 24, of Louisville, Kentucky, was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The ship sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Ashby. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ashby.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Maximiano T. Lacsamana**, 37, of the Philippines, a veteran of the Philippine Scouts during World War II, was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. During the Korean War, his unit was engaged in intense fighting with the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces near Hagaru-ri, North Korea. He was reported missing in action Dec. 3, 1950. Following the war, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lacsamana.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Alfred Edwards**, 33 of Stilwell, Oklahoma, was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Edwards was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Edwards will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Edwards.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. John R. Bayens**, 20, of Louisville, Kentucky, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, including Bayens on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Bayens will be buried Dec. 16, 2019, in Louisville, Kentucky. [Read about Bayens.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Wilbur T. Tackett**, 18, of Alger, Ohio, was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. Tackett will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be decided. [Read about Tackett.](#)

-- **Navy Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Arnold M. Nielsen**, 32, of Oakland, California, 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, including Nielsen. The funeral date and location have yet to be decided. [Read about Nielsen.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <https://votervoices.net/VFW/register>.

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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).

[Click here to view this week's edition.](#) For past editions of the VFW Action Corps Weekly, please visit: [www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweeklyarchive](http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweeklyarchive)