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In This Issue:

- 1. Urge the Senate to Pass the FY2020 NDAA**
- 2. VFW Participates in Widow's Tax Press Conference**
- 3. VFW Priorities Included in NDAA Conference Agreement**
- 4. Certain Veterans Can Now Be Part of a Class Action Lawsuit**
- 5. How Veterans Can Access Commissaries and MWR Facilities**
- 6. MIA Update**

1. Urge the Senate to Pass the FY2020 NDAA: The Conference Committee has included a provision to eliminate the Widow's Tax in this year's *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA). "This is a momentous victory for every military spouse who endured the tragic loss of their husband or wife who paid the ultimate sacrifice," said VFW National Commander William "Doc" Schmitz. On Wednesday, the House passed the final version of the NDAA, now it's up to the Senate to vote on the bill, and then on to the president's desk for final signature. [Take action](#) to urge your Senators to vote for the NDAA.

2. VFW Participates in Widow's Tax Press Conference: This week the VFW joined Representatives Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and John Yarmuth (D-Ky.), along with other veteran and military advocacy groups, and surviving spouses to discuss the repeal of the "Widow's Tax" that made it into the final conference report for the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020*. The VFW wants to thank Representatives Adam Smith (D-Wash.), John Yarmuth (D-Ky.), Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), Senators Doug Jones (D-Ala.), and Susan Collins (R-Maine) for their hard work and dedication in ending the unjust Survivors Benefit Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset. [Watch the press conference](#).

3. VFW Priorities Included in NDAA Conference Agreement: The Conference Committee has settled on a finalized version of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA). The Conference Report includes a 3.1 percent pay raise for troops and improving occupational license portability for relocated military spouses. Other important VFW-supported provisions include expanding Arlington National Cemetery, granting full military honors for Medal of Honor and Prisoner-of-War Medal recipients, directing DOD to conduct post-deployment medical assessments for burn pits, toxic airborne chemicals, and other airborne contaminants, and incorporating blast exposure history into service members' medical records. As of right now, the House has passed the final version. Next week, the Senate will vote on the bill, once passed, it will go to the president for his signature.

4. Certain Veterans Can Now Be Part of a Class Action Lawsuit: Last Friday, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, who in a 6-3 decision, correctly granted the plaintiffs' motion for class certification. The plaintiffs in this case were service members who were involved in the cleanup of radioactive plutonium in Palomares, Spain, after a B-52 Stratofortress bomber

collided with a KC-135 refueling tanker on January 17, 1966. The collision caused two thermonuclear bombs to impact the ground and detonate, spreading radioactive debris for miles. More than 1,400 service members were sent to assist in cleanup and monitoring efforts, some of whom were exposed to very large quantities of radioactive material. This is the first time the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims has permitted a class action lawsuit in an individual appeal of a Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) decision. After this decision, it will be easier for other classes of veterans with similar claims to file appeals from decisions of the BVA.

5. How Veterans Can Access Commissaries and MWR Facilities: Starting Jan. 1, 2020, there will be expanded access for Commissaries, Military Service Exchanges, and Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities for newly eligible veterans. Next month, veterans who received a Purple Heart, were former POWs, or veterans with a service-connected disability rating will be able to physically access on-base facilities that were previously off limits to those veterans. Veterans seeking access to military installations will require identification. Veterans can use their current VA-issued Veterans Health Identification Card (VHIC). If a veteran is ineligible for a VHIC, DOD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A that indicates Priority Group 8E and an acceptable identification credential, like a REAL-ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport. [Learn more.](#)

6. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced two 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:

- **Army Pfc. William J. Winchester**, 20, of Mount Hope, Alabama, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was captured by enemy forces near Unsan, North Korea in November 1950. He reportedly died while in custody of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces at Prisoner of War Camp Number Five in February 1951. Winchester will be buried March 19, 2020, in Lima, Ohio. [Read about Winchester.](#)
- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. William E. Rambo**, 20, of LaPorte, Indiana, was a member of Company H, 2nd Battalion, 8th 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 November 1943, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, and more than 2,000 were wounded during the fighting. Rambo was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Rambo will be buried on April 11, 2020 in Arlington National Cemetery. [Read about Rambo.](#)

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.

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