



March 13, 2020

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**1. Coronavirus Victim Visited Omaha VFW Post 2503:** An Omaha, Nebraska, woman tested positive for coronavirus March 6 and remains hospitalized with serious symptoms. The Veterans of Foreign Wars encourages anyone who may have worked or visited VFW Post 2503 the evening of March 4 to stay home, limit contact with others and take necessary precautions and self-report possible exposure to the [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services](#) immediately. [Know the facts about COVID-19.](#)

**2. VFW Testifies on Education Benefits:** This week, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Pat Murray testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity regarding 14 proposed pieces of legislation. Many of the proposed bills were supported by the VFW such as benefits parity for deployed reservists and improvements to VA's homeless programs. There were also bills the VFW opposed such as the proposal to cash out the GI Bill to pay for loans. At the hearing Murray stated, "The VFW has held the belief for years that the GI Bill should not be traded for any monetary value! The value of an education is not something that can be quantified, and the GI Bill's worth is more than something that can be measured in simple dollar amounts." [Watch the hearing.](#)

**3. VFW Testifies on VA Debt Collection Practices:** On Tuesday, VFW National Veterans Service Deputy Director Michael Figlioli testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations on VFW-supported H.R. 5245, [Stopping Harm and Implementing Enhanced Lead-time for Debts for Veterans Act](#), or *SHIELD for Veterans Act*. Figlioli stressed that although the bill is about "debt", it is really about the Veterans Benefit Administration's internal business practices causing unnecessary stress for our nations veterans. Figlioli stated, "Veterans and the VFW understand that debts must be repaid. What we all fail to

understand is how and why the burden almost always falls on the veteran, particularly when it was created by VA's lack of timeliness." [Watch the hearing.](#)

**4. Independent Budget Urges Proper Funding for VA:** On Tuesday, VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes joined the VFW's Independent Budget (IB) coauthors DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and Paralyzed Veterans of America in testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies to indicate that the President's budget request for VA falls more than \$4 billion dollars short of what is needed. The IB urged Congress and the Administration to exempt funding VA needs for *VA MISSION ACT of 2018* implementation from budget caps. [Watch the hearing.](#)

**5. VFW Participates in Congressional Briefing to Discuss GWOT Memorial:** On Monday, VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle attended a congressional briefing to discuss H.R. 5046, the [Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act](#). This important legislation would authorize the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) memorial to be placed within the Reserve, an area in Washington, D.C., that encompasses the National Mall and the Tidal Basin. Under the *Commemorative Works Act*, no memorial may be placed within the Reserve without congressional authorization. At the briefing, Matthew Doyle stated, "The Global War on Terrorism is the longest war fought by volunteers, many of whom served multiple deployments. It is also a multi-generational conflict, as many of today's service members are the sons and daughters of the men and women who fought earlier in the war. Global War on Terrorism veterans deserve to be memorialized in a prominent area of our nation's capital. To that end, there is no better location for the Global War on Terrorism memorial than the Reserve." [Learn more](#) about the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation.

**6. VA Suspends GI Bill Use at Five Colleges:** This week, the VA suspended future GI Bill use at five colleges due to deceptive marketing and recruitment practices. The five colleges are: University of Phoenix, Colorado Technical University, American InterContinental University, Bellevue University, and Temple University. The decision by VA will apply to all new enrollments, both in residence and online. The suspension will not affect those students currently enrolled in classes during the current term as long as there are no breaks in enrollment for current GI Bill beneficiaries. "This decision will affect over 16,000 student veterans and it should not be taken lightly," said the VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Pat Murray. "This shows that preying upon student veterans comes with consequences." VA is encouraging students attending or considering attending the schools to contact the department's Education Call Center at 888.442.4551. [Learn more.](#)

**7. VA Preparing to Improve Assistance for Family Caregivers:** VA published a rule in the Federal Register on March 6, 2020, that changes and standardizes VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) and ensures the program regulations reflect changes required by the *VA MISSION Act of 2018*. The proposed rule seeks to standardize eligibility by basing the definition of serious injury on service-connected disability ratings – regardless of whether it resulted from an injury, illness or disease – defining what it means to be in need of personal care services, and ensuring that the eligibility criteria capture the personal care service needs of veterans and service members with cognitive or neurological impairment or

mental health conditions, among other things. “The Veterans of Foreign Wars truly hopes this is another positive step in the right direction for caring for our caregivers,” said VFW Director of Communications & Public Affairs Terrence Hayes. “Our nation’s veterans depend on many of these selfless and dedicated individuals in their recovery and rehabilitation process and we must ensure they are cared for as well.” To this end, VFW staff is meticulously reviewing the nearly 300-page document to ensure it conforms to the intent of the law. [Read more.](#)

**8. Citizenship Bill for Children of Military and Civil Servants Heads to President:** Last week, the Senate passed H.R. 4803, [Citizenship for Children of Military Members and Civil Servants Act](#). This bipartisan legislation was introduced by Representatives Doug Collins (R-GA) and Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) to ensure children of deployed service members and civil servants are conferred automatic U.S. citizenship and are not disadvantaged because their parents are serving our country abroad. The bill was passed by the House in December and now awaits the president’s signature. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Johnny Isakson led the effort in the Senate.

**9. VA Announces Urgent Care Network Change in Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern States:** Effective March 18, 2020, VA’s urgent care network in region 1 will transition from TriWest Health Alliance to Optum Public Sector Solutions, Inc. The change means veterans will need to confirm whether an urgent care clinic that participated in the urgent community care benefit under TriWest’s network is included in Optum’s network. The new VA community urgent care benefit was authorized by the VFW-supported *VA MISSION Act of 2018*. This also means clinics that were not in the previous network could be included. The change also affects covered private sector pharmacies, where veterans are able to receive 14-day urgent care prescriptions. This change specifically impacts veterans in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and West Virginia. All veterans are encouraged to visit VA’s [facilities locator](#) before going to an urgent care clinic. VA will not cover visits to non-network urgent care clinics. [Learn more.](#)

**10. VFW Supports Gold Star Families Parks Pass Act:** This week, the VFW supported H.R. 5998, [Gold Star Families Parks Pass Act](#). Introduced by Congressman Jared Golden (D-ME), the bill would expand access to National Parks for free for Gold Star families. Senator Angus King (I-ME) has introduced the same bill in the Senate. [Learn more.](#)

**11. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced four new identifications, and two burial update 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 Pvt. Ballard McCurley**, 34, of Pauls Valley, Oklahoma, was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, during the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. On Nov. 29, 1944, his battalion went to a reserve position in the woods west of the town of Hürtgen. He and other Soldiers in his unit were ordered to clear a field of tree stumps so vehicles could drop off rations and supplies. According to witnesses, while clearing out a tree stump, McCurley inadvertently set off an enemy anti-personnel mine and was killed instantly. McCurley will be buried April 25, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about McCurley.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Kenneth E. Walker**, 19, of Madill, Oklahoma, was a member of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces. His remains could not be recovered following the battle. Walker will be buried April 18, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Walker.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Clarence A. Blaylock**, 20, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Blaylock. Interment services are pending. [Read about Blaylock.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Russell C. Roach**, 22, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Roach. Interment services are pending. [Read about Roach.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Alton W. Whitson**, 22, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Whitson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Whitson.](#)

-- **Navy Shipfitter 3rd Class Patrick L. Chess**, 24, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Chess. Interment services are pending. [Read about Chess.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <https://votervoice.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.](#)

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