



March 20, 2020

In This Issue:

1. **Student Veteran Housing Bill Passes**
2. **Legislation Introduced to Add New Presumptive Diseases for Agent Orange Exposure**
3. **Major Richard Star Act Supported by The Military Coalition**
4. **VA Closes Regional Offices to the Public, VFW Service Officers Still Available**
5. **COVID-19 Guidance for VA Patients**
6. **COVID-19 Social Isolation Does Not Have to Lead to Loneliness**
7. **How to Switch to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery During COVID-19 Outbreak**
8. **VA Debt Management Financial Relief**
9. **Blood Donations Desperately Needed**
10. **DOD Officials Explain New Coronavirus Domestic Travel Restrictions**
11. **Beware of COVID-19 Virus Scams**
12. **DOD Implements Policy Change for Child Care Priorities**
13. **MIA Update**

1. Student Veteran Housing Bill Passes: This week, the House and the Senate passed [S. 3503](#), a bill to make sure student veterans impacted by the COVID-19-related closures would not see a decrease in their monthly housing stipends. Due to most classes around the country converting to online instruction for the remainder of the semester, VA determined those students should receive the “online only” housing rate, which is significantly less money each month. Veteran advocates and Congress swiftly stepped in to make sure students using distance learning due to the outbreak would not be affected. The bipartisan, bicameral bill quickly passed the House and Senate and is now headed to the president’s desk to be signed into law. The VFW thanks all the representatives and senators who made sure student veterans and their families are taken care of during this difficult time.

2. Legislation Introduced to Add New Presumptive Diseases for Agent Orange Exposure: Last week, Senator Tester (D-MT) introduced VFW-supported S. 3444, the [Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2020](#). This important legislation would expand the list of presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure to include parkinsonism, bladder cancer, hypertension, and hyperthyroidism. “Vietnam veterans did our part,” said VFW Commander-in-Chief William J. “Doc” Schmitz. “After winning every battle they fought while they were in Vietnam, many of them have lost their fight to the horrible health conditions they received from Agent Orange exposure. It’s unacceptable that the list of conditions presumed to be associated with Agent Orange exposure does not include bladder cancer, Parkinson-like symptoms, hypertension, and the other conditions that the scientists have said are connected to military

service. The VFW is proud to support the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2020, which would correct this wrong.” [Read more.](#)

3. Major Richard Star Act Supported by the Military Coalition: Yesterday, The VFW joined its Military Coalition partners, a consortium of uniformed services and veterans’ associations representing more than 5.5 million current and former service members, their families, and survivors, in writing a letter to express support for H.R. 5995 and S. 3393, the [Major Richard Star Act](#). The bill would enable veterans who have been medically discharged due to combat-related injuries, and less than 20 years of service be rightfully entitled to Department of Defense longevity pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation payment without offset.

4. VA Closes Regional Offices to the Public, VFW Service Officers Still Available: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA made the decision to close its regional offices to the public, postponing hearings for the duration of the national emergency. The VFW similarly made the difficult decision to close its Pre-Discharge locations to the public. However, Veterans Benefits Administration is still working, processing benefit claims for veterans. Veterans and advocates must also note that all VA filing deadlines still apply. The VFW is pushing VA to extend these deadlines and has started working with Congress, in case such an extension requires an emergency legislative fix. VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) continues to send guidance to the VFW’s global network of accredited service officers, many of whom continue to work from safe locations. Veterans should still be able to reach their VFW Service Officers and Pre-Discharge reps via email. [Find your representative](#). If you do not hear from your representative within two business days, please contact NVS via [email](#).

5. COVID-19 Guidance for VA Patients: VA is urging all its patients to follow the [CDC guidance](#) regarding COVID-19. Any veteran with symptoms such as fever, cough or shortness of breath should immediately [contact their local VA facility](#). VA urges veterans to call before visiting. Upon arriving at VA, all patients will be screened for flu-like symptoms before they enter in order to protect other patients and staff. A VA health care professional will assist you with next steps once this screening process is complete. [Read more.](#) [Contact the VFW](#) if you are having issues accessing health care.

6. COVID-19 Social Isolation Does Not Have to Lead to Loneliness: The VFW calls on the community to reach out to veterans and their [caregivers](#) by using technology to ensure no one is alone during the pandemic. [#BeThere](#) can be as simple as making a phone call, text message, or for the more tech-savvy individuals, video chat, email, or [a Netflix Party](#), as [Comcast is giving two months of internet service to disabled veterans and low income individuals](#). Discussion topics can include the status of their physical and mental well-being, [review the checklist of COVID-19 symptoms](#), ask about the state of their supplies, or a recommendation for a good book, TV show or movie. Remember to follow-up in a day or two to keep that connection going. VFW Posts can stay connected virtually through online meeting programs or conference calls. A conversation can break up the mundane day and provide a sense of connection to the outside world.

7. How to Switch to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery During COVID-19 Outbreak:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 virus guidance includes the recommendation to have a supply of necessary medications on hand. TRICARE offers beneficiaries the option to get a 90-day supply of their prescriptions at military pharmacies, via [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#), or at retail network pharmacies. During this outbreak receiving prescriptions at home will help lessen the spread of COVID-19 for vulnerable populations. [Learn how to switch to home delivery.](#)

8. VA Debt Management Financial Relief: This week, the VA Debt Management Center (DMC) released a statement asking that any veteran or family member who has a VA debt and is impacted by the COVID-19 virus reach out to them to request temporary financial assistance. The VA DMC can be reached at 1.800.827.0648. [Learn more.](#)

9. Blood Donations Desperately Needed: The American Red Cross is now facing a severe blood shortage due to the massive amounts of blood drives that have been canceled due to the COVID-19 virus. Eligible and healthy donors are strongly urged to make an appointment soon to donate blood, as donating blood is a safe process. [Learn more.](#)

10. DOD Officials Explain New COVID-19 Domestic Travel Restrictions: On Wednesday, Defense officials announced restrictions on domestic travel for service members, Defense Department employees, and family members in response to the new COVID-19 virus. Deputy Defense Secretary David L. Norquist signed a memorandum halting all domestic travel, to include permanent changes of station and temporary duty travel. The ban is in effect from March 16 to May 11. [Read the memo.](#)

11. Beware of COVID-19 Virus Scams: The White House is warning the public to ignore rumors of a national quarantine due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, which were circulated by erroneous text messages. “Text message rumors of a national #quarantine are FAKE,” according to a March 15 tweet posted on the Twitter page of the National Security Council. “There is no national lockdown.” Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman told defense reporters Monday that he “was not familiar” with any plans of using the U.S. military to enforce a national quarantine to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Social media has been flooded with virus-related rumors, many of which are being perpetrated by cybercriminals, according to U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command. [Read more.](#)

12. DOD Implements Policy Change for Child Care Priorities: The Department of Defense will implement a policy change to the current priorities for child care starting June 1. Over time, service members have faced long wait lists for child care due to facilities opening their doors to DOD civilians, retirees and others. As directed by Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper in a [memo](#) signed Feb. 21, 2020, the department will afford priority access to military families. “The department’s system of child care was established to assist service members as they face the unique challenges associated with the demands of military service,” said Virginia Penrod, acting assistant secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs. “Over time, child care access expanded to serve the total force, but we must not lose sight of the service member and mission requirements. We must ensure that our military members and families have the support needed in order to be mission ready.”

13. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new identification, and three 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:

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Orval A. Tranbarger**, 20, of Mountain View, Missouri, 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 Tranbarger. He will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be decided. [Read about Tranbarger.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. George M. Johnson**, 23, of Seaford, Delaware, was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands, when the B-24J bomber he was co-piloting crashed into Tarawa lagoon shortly after takeoff. Johnson and the nine other servicemen aboard the aircraft were killed. Johnson will be buried May 8, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Johnson.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Herbert B. Jacobson**, 21, of Grayslake, Illinois, 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 Jacobson. Jacobson will be buried May 15, 2020, at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. [Read about Jacobson.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. Jerome B. Morris**, 22, of East St. Louis, Illinois, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, 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. Morris was killed on the third day of the battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Morris will be buried in Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Morris.](#)

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.

[Click here to view this week's edition.](#)

For past editions of the VFW Action Corps Weekly, please visit: www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweeklyarchive

