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**1. VFW First-Ever Virtual Legislative Conference:** This week, the VFW National Legislative Committee came together for the first-ever virtual legislative conference. VFW National Officers joined committee members in Zoom meetings to discuss the VFW's legislative priorities, they held virtual or phone meetings with their legislators, and took to social media to spotlight their hard work and dedication. The COVID-19 pandemic may be changing the way business is done, but it will not stop the VFW from being the voice of our members and fighting for veterans' benefits on Capitol Hill. [Learn more about the VFW legislative priorities.](#)

**2. Veterans Legislation Clears the House:** This week, the House passed several veterans bills. The House passed the Senate-passed and VFW-supported version of [S. 785](#), the *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019*, which would provide VA the authority it needs to expand suicide prevention efforts, and provide the opportunity to expand telehealth capabilities to veterans in rural and highly rural areas. Additional House legislation also passed unanimously. [H.R. 3228](#), the *VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act* would expand the *VA MISSION Act of 2018*'s authority for health professions trainees to provide treatment via telemedicine. [H.R. 6092](#), the *Veteran's Prostate Cancer Treatment and Research Act* would establish a national clinical pathway for prostate cancer within VA. [H.R. 5245](#), the *SHIELD for Veterans Act* would reform the VA's debt collection process. [H.R. 7105](#) would provide VA will flexibility while caring for homeless veterans during a covered public health emergency. [H.R. 8247](#), the *Veterans COMPACT Act of 2020* would further improve support during the transition from service member to veteran, suicide prevention and mental well-being initiatives, and care and services for women veterans. [H.R. 3798](#), the *Equal Access to Contraception for Veterans Act* would ensure the same no-cost contraceptive care for women veterans as required by non-veteran health insurance plans. The VFW thanks Chairman Mark Takano and Ranking Member Phil Roe, M.D., for the swift passage of the Johns Scott Hannon Bill which now heads to the president's desk.

**3. Congress Moves VFW-Supported Legislation:** On Tuesday, the House unanimously passed six pieces of veterans' legislation. Among the bills passed is VFW-supported [H.R. 7795](#), the *Veterans Benefits Fairness and Transparency Act of 2020*, which would require VA to publish disability benefits questionnaires (DBQs) on its website for use by the public. Additionally, on Wednesday, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee advanced VFW-supported [S. 4393](#), the *Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act of 2020*, and [S. 4511](#), the *Veterans Benefits Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2020*. The *TEAM Act of 2020* would reauthorize key provisions of the *Agent Orange Act of 1991*, including a requirement for the VA Secretary to enact regulations to add conditions to the list of presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange. The legislation would also establish an independent commission to inform VA about new toxic exposures related to military service, require VA to enter into a partnership with the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) to determine levels of association regarding the incidence of disease and exposure to toxic substances, and require VA to implement regulations on the basis of NASEM recommendations. S. 4511 would change the statutory definition of "Vietnam veteran" to include individuals who served in the Republic of Vietnam beginning on Nov. 1, 1955, and would expand a variety of other veterans benefits. The Senate must now pass H.R. 7795, S. 4393, and S. 4511 in their entirety.

**4. Help PREVENTS Task Force REACH 20K Pledges:** Suicide is preventable and change starts when you pledge to REACH out, share hope, and help someone who is hurting, someone who may have lost someone to suicide, or someone who may be at risk. So far this month, 10,000 people have taken the PREVENTS Pledge to REACH – hitting a huge milestone for Suicide Prevention Month. Please help PREVENTS reach a new goal of 20,000 signatures by the end of September. Sign the pledge and challenge at least five people you know to sign the individual [PREVENTS Pledge to REACH](#). Together, we can REACH all Americans to change the culture around mental health and suicide prevention.

**5. Senators' Letter Urges Agent Orange Provision in NDAA:** On Tuesday, 45 senators sent a [letter](#) urging members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees to keep a provision to add bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism in the final version of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*(NDAA). The bipartisan letter was spearheaded by Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), who introduced an amendment, to the NDAA that would add these conditions to the list of presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange. The amendment was approved by a vote of 94-6 in July in the Senate. Although the measure was not approved in the House, it will be included in the final version of the NDAA if it is approved by a conference committee which will be comprised of members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. The VFW thanks the senators who signed this letter for their efforts to provide care and benefits to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. [Learn more.](#)

**6. Survivors' Benefits Bill Introduced in Senate:** On Thursday, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) introduced VFW-supported [Caring for the Survivors and Families of Veterans Act of 2020](#). This important legislation would expand Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits for surviving spouses. It would allow for surviving spouses to retain DIC if they remarry at the age of 55 and would make survivors eligible for DIC after a veteran has consistently held a permanent and total disability rating for five years. This bill is the result of recommendations

made in *The Independent Budget* co-authored by Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. [Learn more.](#)

**7. House Holds Hearing on Burn Pits:** On Wednesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a hearing to discuss airborne hazards in the Southwest Asia theater of military operations. During the hearing, members of the subcommittee focused on the findings of a recent study conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). The study, [Respiratory Health Effects of Airborne Exposures in the Southwest Asia Theater of Military Operations](#), that was released on September 11, 2020, found that limited or suggestive evidence exists linking exposure to burn pits and other airborne hazards and respiratory symptoms, such as persistent or recurring cough. At the hearing, Chairwoman Elaine Luria (D-VA) stated, "We have to accept the reality that we may not have all the answers about burn pits for a long time, if ever. But what we do know is that it's making people very sick and I can't tell these people to sit down and wait another ten years because, quite frankly, some of them might not have another ten years." [Watch the hearing.](#)

**8. VA #FightFlu Initiative:** VA has expanded the options eligible veterans have on where they can receive a seasonal no-cost flu shot. Veterans can now receive a standard-dose or high-dose flu shot at their local VA health care facility, in-network community retail pharmacy, or an urgent care location. If you are eligible, you only need to present a valid, government-issued ID at a covered location. [Learn more about eligibility and location options.](#)

**9. Unprecedented Poll Worker Shortage:** Healthy elections require poll workers, the majority of whom are over the age of 60. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, election officials are reporting an unprecedented shortage. Without sufficient numbers of poll workers, it is possible that polling locations could have long lines, lack of staff to assist voters, and possible closures of polling locations. The VFW encourages any member, advocate, or supporter, who is healthy and willing, to consider becoming a poll worker for the general election in November. The [Stanford-MIT Healthy Election Project](#) has partnered with local organizations like Power the Polls, which helps to follow up with applicants, confirm their commitment, and assist them in completing the process. If you sign up through this [special VFW link](#), you will be contacted by Power the Polls, a partner organization, or your local election administrators.

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

- **Army Pvt. Donald A. Fabrize**, 17, was a member of Company B, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on July 16, 1950, during battle defending, then withdrawing from, positions along the Kum River in South Korea. His remains could not be immediately located or recovered. The Army deemed Fabrize non-recoverable on Jan. 16, 1956. Interment services are pending. [Read about Fabrize.](#)
- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Alphard S. Owsley**, 23, as 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 Owsley. Interment services are pending. [Read about Owsley.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Bobbie Ray Daniels**, 17, was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was reported missing in action on Aug. 16, 1950 during battle near Waegwan, South Korea. His remains could not be immediately recovered. He was officially declared dead on May 1, 1953. Interment services are pending. [Read about Daniels.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Gabriel J. Eggud**, 25, was a pilot assigned to the 110th Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter), 71st Reconnaissance Group. On July 6, 1944 he was piloting a P-39 Airacobra fighter on a combat mission over Wewak, New Guinea, when a released bomb exploded and destroyed his aircraft. Efforts to recover Eggud's remains were unsuccessful. Interment services are pending. [Read about Eggud.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Oliver Jeffers**, 31, of Huntsville, Tennessee, was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Germeter, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was killed in action on Nov. 10. Jeffers could not be recovered because of the on-going fighting. Jeffers will be buried Oct. 7, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Jeffers.](#)

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