



ACTION CORPUS WEEKLY



March 29, 2021



SAVE LIVES Act Signed Into Law: On Wednesday, President Biden signed into law VFW-supported [H.R. 1276](#), *Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse (SAVE LIVES) Act*. The law allows VA to provide a COVID-19 vaccine to all veterans, their spouses, caregivers, and Civilian Health and Medical Program recipients regardless of their eligibility for VA health care. Veterans who are already using VA health care will have priority. "COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on all Americans including veterans and their families," VFW National Legislative Director Pat Murray said in a statement. "The end may be near, but we will not come out of this until everybody possible has vaccinations." [Read more.](#)



VFW Testifies on C&P Exams Backlog: On Tuesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a hearing to discuss VA compensation and pension (C&P) exams. VA paused C&P exams in April 2020 due to health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic and, although exams are now taking place, there is a considerable backlog causing delays to the entire VA disability claims process. VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci recommended VA use all its available resources and tools to address the backlog, consider private medical evidence when making rating decisions, and improve communication with veterans and veterans service organizations about claims status and scheduling for exams. [Watch the hearing.](#)



VFW Testifies Before Senate: VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Tammy Barlet testified before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs regarding veterans' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of the VFW-supported Hannon Act. Barlet spoke about VFW [ATLAS](#) locations and the VFW's work with VA and Philips to leverage VA's anywhere to anywhere authority to expand telehealth options for veterans who live in rural areas, or who may lack access to the internet, necessary equipment, and knowledge to facilitate VA Video Connect. "Making eye contact and seeing facial and body cues is essential to successful appointments," Barlet said on the importance of the VA Video Connect appointments. [Watch the hearing.](#) [Read the testimony.](#)



Press Conference on Comprehensive Toxic Exposure Bill: On Tuesday, VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Kristina Keenan participated in a press conference held by Sens. Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) to introduce S. 927, the *Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act*. This legislation aligns directly with the VFW's priority to establish a permanent framework to address past, present, and future toxic exposures in the military at locations both domestic and abroad. Unlike other bills which address toxic exposures in a piecemeal fashion, the VFW believes the TEAM Act will not only take care of a significant number of veterans but would provide VA the guidance necessary to address all toxic exposures in the military. The VFW also supports the companion bill, H.R. 2127, introduced by House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Mike Bost (R-IL). The VFW looks forward to working with Sens. Tillis and Hassan, and Ranking Member Bost on this comprehensive legislation to provide America's veterans with the care and benefits they need.



Senate Introduces Bill to Extend and Improve Care and Benefits for Gulf War Illness: On Thursday, Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced a bill that addresses the VFW's concerns surrounding care and benefits for Persian Gulf War veterans outlined in the Independent Budget. Although U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf are currently ongoing, the authorization to provide benefits will expire on December 31, 2021. The *Improving Benefits for Gulf War Veterans Act* would permanently extend VA's authority to grant benefits for Gulf War Illness and would broaden the definition of Persian Gulf veteran to include those who served in Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, and Jordan. Additionally, since Gulf War Illness is difficult to identify, the bill would create a single Gulf War Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) for the associated symptoms and would provide training to VA medical examiners for Gulf War disability claims. The VFW looks forward to working with Sen. Menendez to pass this significant legislation. [Learn more.](#)



Legislation Introduced to Recruit Separating Medical Personnel: On Wednesday, Sens. Mike Braun (R-IN) and Margaret Wood Hassan (D-NH) introduced VFW-supported S. 894, *Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021*. This legislation would require VA and DOD to identify military personnel in health care occupations who are interested in pursuing employment in a related field after separation from military service. The bill would also require the referral of such personnel to a VA recruiter for consideration of open positions in the specialty and location of interest to the service member. [Learn more.](#)



MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced two burial updates and five new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are: -- **Army Pvt. Lyle W. Reab, 22**, of Phillips, Nebraska, was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action as of Nov. 9, 1944, after

his unit engaged German forces at Vossenack, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest. His body was not recovered. Reab will be buried June 8, 2021, in Aurora, Nebraska. [Read about Reab.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. John F. Middleswart, 19**, of San Diego, 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 Middleswart. He will be buried on June 8, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Middleswart.](#)

-- **Navy Pharmacist's Mate 3rd Class George L. Paradis, 23**, 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 Paradis. Interment services are pending. [Read about Paradis.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wilbur F. Ballance, 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 Ballance. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ballance.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Harold E. Bates, 27**, 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 Bates. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bates.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Elmer P. Lawrence, 25**, 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 Lawrence. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lawrence.](#)

-- Navy Signalman 1st Class Eugene M. Skaggs, 33, 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 Skaggs. Interment services are pending. [Read about Skaggs.](#)

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