

March 11, 2024



VFW National Commander Testifies Before Congress:

VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento testified before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs. The VFW delivered its top legislative priorities of cracking down on predatory claims companies, improving VA benefits data sharing for suicide prevention, including accredited claims representatives in transition assistance programs, and removing offsets from concurrent receipt policies. Sarmiento stated the VFW strongly supports the *GUARD VA Benefits Act* to reinstate penalties for charging veterans unauthorized fees for submitting VA claims, and explained that Claim Sharks are spending millions of dollars to lobby against this bill, which is stalling a federal fix. "It's distasteful that these Claim Sharks take money from veterans. But it's disgusting that they take money from survivors," Sarmiento said. [Read the testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 7:39 mark.



Major Richard Star Act Press Conference:

VFW Department of Montana Adjutant/Quartermaster Tim Peters spoke at a press conference on H.R. 1282/ S. 344, *Major Richard Star Act*, alongside Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT); Rep. Gus Bilirakis (FL-12); Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID); Tonya Star, the widow of Major Richard Star; and other veteran advocates. "Our veterans cannot afford to continue losing their full earned military retirement pay because Congress insists on saving money at their expense," said Peters. "It is time to stop talking about this bill and get it done!" With consistent and overwhelming bipartisan and bicameral support, this legislation would permit combat injured and medically retired veterans with

less than 20 years of service to receive their full earned retirement pay and disability compensation without reduction. The press conference was heavily attended by VFW members from across the nation, as it coincided with the annual VFW Washington Conference.



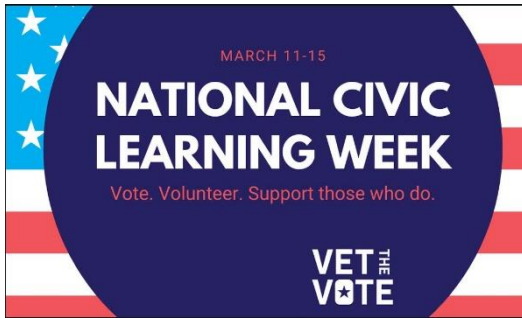
Representative Levin Receives VFW

Congressional Award: The VFW presented its 2024 Congressional Award to Rep. Mike Levin (CA-49) for his outstanding service and years of unwavering support of veterans, service members, their families and survivors. “I am honored to present this award to such a staunch advocate for our military and veteran communities,” said VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento. “Representative Levin exemplifies the values of service and advocacy that we at the VFW strive to live every day. His propensity for and track record of working across the aisle to deliver results is remarkable.” Levin is a staunch proponent of the *GUARD VA Benefits Act* that would protect veterans by eliminating predatory claims practices, and is one of the VFW’s top legislative priorities.



VFW Department of New Jersey Accepts Award:

The VFW presented its 2023-2024 National Legislative Service Award to VFW Department of New Jersey. The criteria for the award includes quality reporting of legislative activity, advocacy actions taken, and resulting accomplishments. The department was instrumental in the passage of a state law that makes it a violation of the *Consumer Fraud Act* for individuals to receive unlawful compensation for advising or assisting with veterans’ benefits. This legislation safeguards veterans from fraud and Claim Sharks. VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento presented the award to National Legislative Committee members Bill Thomson and Luddie Austin who accepted the award on behalf of the Department of New Jersey.



Vet the Vote: March 11-15 is National Civic Learning Week. Participate in this non-partisan event by registering to vote or checking your voter registration status. The program also provides volunteer opportunities for veterans and military families to support their local communities by becoming poll workers in time for election day. [Learn more.](#)



MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced two burial updates for service members who have been missing and unaccounted for from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 2nd Class Lawrence J. Overley, 21**, of Los Angeles, California, 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. He was among 429 crewmen killed that day. He will be buried on March 27, 2024, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl), Honolulu, Hawaii. [Read about Overley.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. James B. McCartney, 22**, of Ridgeway, Colorado, was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 222nd Infantry Regiment, 42nd Infantry Division. He was killed in action on March 1, 1945. He will be buried on March 30, 2024, in Bakersfield, California. [Read about McCartney.](#)

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