



January 25, 2021



VFW 2021 Priority Goals: This month marked the beginning of the 117th Congress. The 2021 VFW Priority Goals focus on Budget; Health Care; Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs; Education, Employment, and Transition Assistance; Military Quality of Life; and National Security, Foreign Affairs, and POW/MIA. The VFW looks forward to working with the new and returning members of Congress to improve care and benefits for veterans, service members, and their families. [Read the VFW's 2021 Priority Goals.](#)



Gen. Lloyd Austin (Ret.) Confirmed as Secretary of Defense: On Friday, the Senate voted to confirm Gen. Lloyd Austin (Ret.) as the new defense secretary by a vote of 93-2. Austin retired from the military in 2016, as a four-star Army general, after more than 40 years of service. Senate Armed Service Committee Chairman Jack Reed (D-R.I.) called Austin's confirmation "an extraordinary, historic moment." [Read more.](#)



Joining Forces Coming Back to White House: The Joining Forces initiative, first launched in 2011 by then-First Lady Michelle Obama and Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden is being relaunched under the Office of the First Lady Dr. Jill Biden. When initially launched the goal was to encourage members of the public and private sector to work together to support service members, veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. The work focused on employment, wellness, and education. Stay tuned for updates.



VA Adaptive Sports and Therapeutic Art Programs:

The mission of the Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events (NVSPSE) is to improve veterans' independence, well-being, and quality of life through adaptive sports and therapeutic arts engagement with VA and the community. Veterans eligible for VA health care can participate in national rehabilitation programs and events coordinated by NVSPSE such as National Veterans Wheelchair Games, National Veterans Golden Age Games, Valor Games, National Veterans Summer/Winter Sports Clinic, and National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival. [Read more.](#)



MilTax and IRS Free File Available Now: MilTax, a Department of Defense program which offers free preparation and e-filing software for all military members and some veterans, with no income limits, is now open. IRS Free File online is also currently available for Americans whose income for 2020 was \$72,000 and below. [Learn more.](#)



Complete the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry:

All veterans who served in eligible locations should include their information in the [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits Registry](#). Participation in the registry is very important as it will allow VA to track burn pit exposure and draw inferences regarding associated adverse health effects. Exposure to burn pits may be associated with respiratory conditions such as asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD). Recently, VA stated that veterans with underlying respiratory conditions [may be at greater risk](#) for developing complications related to COVID-19. Service members and veterans who have already signed up for the registry should make sure that their contact information, phone number, address, and email are up to date.



MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new identification for a service member who has been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:
-- **U.S. Navy Chief Machinist's Mate Class Lada Smisek, 42**, of Cleveland, Ohio, served at the Naval Ammunition Depot and Submarine Base in Cavite, Philippine Islands, when Japanese forces invaded. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. According to prison camp and other historical records, Smisek died Sept. 28, 1942, and was buried along with fellow prisoners in the local Cabanatuan Camp Cemetery, in grave number 437. Smisek will be buried on Jan. 29, 2021, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. [Read about Smisek.](#)

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

[Click here for past editions of the VFW Action Corps Weekly.](#)

[Click here to sign up new veterans' advocates.](#)

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.