



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

WASHINGTON WEEKLY



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VFW Legislative Leaders Talk to Congress

VFW legislative leaders headed to all 535 Congressional offices to ask their legislators to *Finish Strong for Veterans*. Building on critical issues remaining, they discussed several bills still in play, calling on Congress to act before the end of the current term. Some of VFW's outstanding issues included protections for VA and DoD from across-the-board cuts, education and job creation for veterans, improved care for women veterans and stopping any changes to military healthcare and retirement benefits. For highlights from the fall conference and VFW's outstanding legislative issues, [click here](#).

VFW Chair Officers in Washington

VFW Commander-in-Chief John Hamilton, Senior Vice Bill Thien and Junior Vice John Stroud were in the nation's capital this week for a host of meetings and briefings with senior administration and Defense Department officials, as well as to thank 70 VFW Legislative Committee members for their effort to get the 112th Congress to finish strong for veterans before they recess until after the elections. Meetings were held with Student Veterans of America leadership, the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment, senior officials in the Defense POW/MIA Office, Army Reserve Affairs, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, and with the U.S. State Department regarding NATO, Afghanistan, and the turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa.

Stolen Valor Act Update

The Stolen Valor Act of 2012 passed the House on Thursday with an overwhelming vote of 410-3. The legislation closes a specific loophole that the U.S. Supreme Court identified when it overturned the VFW-supported Stolen Valor Act of 2005 in June due to First Amendment freedom of speech protections. The new version would make it illegal for a person to benefit from lying about being awarded military medals, awards and badges, to include the military's top valor awards, as well as the Purple Heart and combat badges, medals and ribbons. Punishments could include up to one year in prison and a \$10,000 fine. Sponsored by Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV), a Navy veteran, the House-passed bill is similar to a measure introduced by Sen. Scott Brown (R-MA), a colonel in the Army National Guard. Another bill in the Senate, sponsored by Navy Cross recipient Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA), would also make it a federal crime to benefit from the lie.

Sequestration Update

The Office of Management and Budget released its long-awaited report today on the pending effects of sequestration on government programs, as required by the Sequestration Transparency Act. The VFW is thankful to see that veterans' programs would not be affected by sequestration, since there had been conflicting information about whether VA administrative accounts might be cut. Personnel accounts related to pay and retirement in the Department of Defense are also untouched. The VFW, however, remains very concerned that 9.4% funding reductions to Quality of Life accounts—like \$3.2 billion less for the Defense Health Program and \$121 million less for Military Family Housing Operations and Maintenance—would be very detrimental to the morale of a military that is still at war.

Senate Committee Clears Veterans' Legislation

This week, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee cleared an array of veterans' bills. Provisions from several bills were rolled into a larger bill, mental healthcare package (S. 3340), sponsored by Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D-WA). The Senate is expected to vote on the bills next week.

Some of the VFW-supported provisions within S. 3340 include:

- Extending mental health services to families of deployed service members.
- Directing VA to carry out an outreach programs to recruit more mental health professionals.
- Requiring DoD to develop a comprehensive suicide prevention program.
- Increasing outreach to women veterans regarding VA healthcare and benefits.
- Providing immunizations to veterans as recommended on the Schedule established by Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.
- Allowing continuation of homeless programs to include VA drop-in centers and emergency shelters.
- Directing those given grants for transitional housing for homeless veterans to meet gender-specific privacy, safety and security needs.

Other bills cleared included S. 2241, *GI Bill Consumer Awareness Act*, which provides protections and information for those using GI Bill benefits and requires institutions to maintain and report academic data to VA. S. 2259, *Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act*, increases rates of compensation for service-connected veterans and DIC compensation for survivors of certain veterans effective December 1, 2012. S. 3313, *Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvement Act of 2012*, directs VA to expand research by collaborating with DoD and HHS on long-term reproductive and gender-specific health, including urinary tract trauma in the battlefields. It also requires VA to provide fertility counseling and treatment to veterans who have service-connected injuries that caused infertility. S. 3322, the *Servicemembers' Protection Act of 2012*, extends additional Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) and USERRA protections to military families, veterans and families of the fallen, including additional protections against foreclosure, allowing service members to terminate leases if on-base housing becomes available, increasing penalties for SCRA violations, making USERRA arbitration agreements unenforceable, and treating the Federal Aviation Administration and Transportation Security Administration as federal agencies for the purposes of USERRA redress.

Veterans' Education Bill Passes House

Late Tuesday, the House passed VFW-supported legislation designed to improve protections for student veterans using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. H.R. 4057 was also amended to include several other provisions including safe housing for homeless veterans, an Open Air Burn Pit exposure registry within VA and a change to ensure that States consider military training for professional licenses in several technical fields. To learn more about the bill, [click here](#). [Read](#) the House VA Committee Press Release.

VFW Testifies on VA Fee Care Programs

Earlier today, VFW testified before the House VA Subcommittee on Health regarding VA's Fee Basis programs. Fee Basis Care was created to ensure that a civilian doctor is meeting the needs of veterans when VA is unable to meet the demand. VA is pursuing a two-pronged approach to fix the problems: Non-VA Coordinated Care (NVCC) to fix the broken business practices in VA's Chief Business Office, related to Fee Basis Care and Patient Centered Community Care (PCCC or PC3), to set up contracted networks of private care across the country. Similar to Project HERO, this program will be permanent and nationwide. VFW believes that the internal processes within VA must be improved to eliminate the waste, fraud and abuse while eliminating the overpayments and duplicative services common in Fee-Basis Care. VFW also believes that any follow-up to Project HERO must measure quality of care and ensure that no veteran using Project HERO gets cut out of the program before PC3 is fully up and running. For VFW's testimony, or to view the recorded webcast, [click here](#).

VFW Joins in Republican and Democratic Roundtables

This Tuesday, the VFW joined House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) for a roundtable discussion of veterans' issues with Republican leaders from the committee. On Thursday, the VFW then joined House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi for a roundtable discussion with Democratic leaders from the House. Though Republicans and Democrats may have different visions for how to best meet the needs of our veterans, both discussions centered on similar issues like mental health, employment and looming budget cuts. To learn more about each roundtable, click on the links below:

[House Republicans](#)

[House Democrats](#)

NGB Gets New Chief

Army Gen. Frank Grass was sworn in Sept. 7 as the new National Guard Bureau chief, replacing Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley, who is retiring after nearly 40 years of service. McKinley became NGB Chief in 2008 after serving for two years as the chief of the Air National Guard. He became the first chief to be promoted to four stars, and in January 2012, became the first chief to become a full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Grass had served since 2010 as deputy commander of the U.S. Northern Command, and as vice commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command. [Read more](#).

Two MIAs Identified

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of two officers who had been missing in action since the war in Southeast Asia. Returned home are:

- Air Force Lt. Col. Clarence F. Blanton, 46, of El Reno, Okla. In 1968, Blanton and 18 other men were assigned to Lima Site 85, a tactical air navigation radar site on a remote, 5,600-foot mountain peak known as Phou Pha Thi in northeastern Laos. In the early morning of March 11, the site was overrun by Vietnamese commandos. Eight of the men would be rescued, but Blanton, who was the site commander, and 10 others were killed in action and unable to be recovered.
- Navy Lt. Cmdr. Edward J. Broms, Jr., 25, of Meadville, Penn. On Aug. 1, 1968, Broms was the pilot of an A-4C Skyhawk aircraft that crashed while attacking enemy targets in Ha Tinh Province, North Vietnam. Three other U.S. pilots in the flight did not witness the crash, and search-and-rescue teams found no sign of the aircraft or Broms.

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