



**NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.**

# WASHINGTON WEEKLY



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## **Boston Marathon Bombing**

The VFW shares in the grief and anger that Monday's tragic terror bombing of the Boston Marathon produced. As VFW National Commander John Hamilton said, "Our hearts and prayers are with Boston and our friends, families and visitors who came to celebrate Patriots' Day and tremendous human achievement, but who now leave wounded inside and out, or worse. As a nation, we cannot allow our great ability to heal to also become a liability. Our resiliency must not turn into complacency, because America's enemies will not forgive, forget or stop. The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States fully supports our nation's law enforcement officials who will bring those responsible for this senseless and cowardly act to justice."

## **Drone Medal Cancelled**

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel cancelled the highly unpopular Distinguished Warfare Medal. Instead, the Pentagon will create a new device to affix to existing medals to properly recognize drone operators, cyber warriors and others who are making a tremendous real-time impact on battlefields far away. The VFW, which immediately began an intense media and grassroots lobbying effort against the 9th-place ranking of the new medal on the military order of precedence, is appreciative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their review, and commends Secretary Hagel for taking on the issue so early in his tenure. VFW National Commander John Hamilton called it the right decision, which will clearly keep medals that can only be earned in combat in their high order of precedence, while providing proper recognition to all who support our warfighters regardless of their distance from the fight.

## **The VFW Testifies on Veterans Bills**

This week, the VFW testified before the House VA Subcommittee of Disability and Memorial Affairs on an array of veterans' bills designed to enhance and improve benefits. VFW-supported bills included:

- **H.R. 570**, a bill to provide an automatic COLA (tied to social security and CPI) increase

thereby ending the need for Congress to introduce a bill each fiscal year.

- **H.R. 671**, the *Ruth Moore Act of 2013*, legislation that would relax evidential standards and make it easier for military sexual assault victims to receive VA disability benefits.
- **H.R. 679**, the *Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act*, legislation that would recognize those men and women who choose to serve our nation in the Reserve component as veterans.

For more information, including our entire testimony, or to view the recorded webcast, [visit our blog](#).

### **The VFW Leads Discussion on Veterans Education**

On Tuesday, the VFW led a panel discussion alongside veterans' education stakeholders to address the many challenges facing today's student veterans. The panel, sponsored by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), was a part of the 8th annual Ohio College Presidents Conference comprised of college presidents from across Ohio. The VFW was asked to focus on the unique education needs facing service members and veterans as they transition from battlefield to classroom. The VFW has been on the forefront of fighting and preserving veterans' education benefits. For complete coverage of the event or to join the conversation, [visit our blog](#).

### **The VFW Hosts Twitter Chat**

This week, the VFW hosted its first Twitter chat to discuss the VFW's legislative priority goals. Veterans asked questions related to the disability claims backlog, education, employment, TRICARE and a variety of other veterans' issues, and the VFW responding in real time. [View](#) a summary of the Twitter chat.

### **Senate Armed Services Talks Personnel Issues**

On the heels of last week's DOD 2014 budget release, the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel held a hearing on key personnel proposals. The Pentagon's plans to increase healthcare fees for retirees and their families were met with questions by some new members of the committee and support by others. Military pay, family readiness, DOD-VA Integrated Evaluation System (IDES) and caregiver family support were some of the issues discussed by panelists. While Senators expressed skepticism over Tricare fee hikes and disappointment over the caps to military pay raises proposed by DOD, they acknowledged that the Pentagon will be forced to make tough choices with lower-than-expected funding levels. Representatives from The Military Coalition, a consortium of prominent uniformed services and veterans organizations, including the VFW, voiced its strong opposition to proposals to cut pay and benefits, arguing that military compensation and benefits must remain strong to ensure we continue to recruit and retain top-quality personnel. [Read](#) testimony or [view](#) the recorded webcast.

### **Senate VA Holds Budget Hearing**

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held their FY 2014 VA Budget hearing this week. Among the items discussed by Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and committee members was a proposal that would change the annual cost-of-living index to a chained CPI—something the VFW adamantly opposes. Committee members also discussed the disability claims backlog progress, mental health and suicide prevention programs, and VA construction projects. Chairman Sanders remarked that this is the "4th year in a row the President's request has been out of touch with the realities of what is needed to adequately fund and maintain VA's aging infrastructure." The VFW is responsible for the construction portion of the Independent Budget (IB), and we have voiced our concerns about the decades of underfunding of major construction accounts, which has led to a backlog of about

\$25 billion. [View](#) the recorded webcast of the hearing. [Read](#) the full Independent Budget.

### **Senate Military Construction and VA Appropriations Hearing**

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs held its first hearing of the year on VA funding for FY 2014 and Advanced Appropriations for FY 2015. Chairman Tim Johnson (D-SD) remarked that the VA Inspector General's office was also asked to testify to offer their insight on how VA manages resources while delivering quality care and services to veterans. The hearing focused on many areas already discussed during recent budget hearings, including the VA disability claims backlog, mental health access and concerns about progress regarding the VA-DOD electronic medical record. The VFW will continue to monitor the appropriations process and advocate for proper funding for VA.

### **Help Complete Your Health Record**

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, seven out of 10 veterans and service members obtain services from private healthcare providers, which makes it difficult for the VA and Defense Department to maintain a complete record of a patient's healthcare. That's why VA and DOD actively participate in the eHealth Exchange. Formerly known as the Nationwide Health Information Network, the eHealth Exchange is a partnership between 38 public and private organizations that, with a patient's permission, securely share health information. With the recent addition of the Idaho Health Information Exchange, VA is currently exchanging data with 14 regional private sector partners. As the eHealth Exchange network continues to grow, VA and DOD plan to expand their health information sharing programs into additional regions of the U.S. [Learn more.](#)

### **Three MIAs Identified**

The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to three Army personnel from World War II and the Korean War. Returned home are:

- Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Ray E. Thompson, of Portland, Ore. On May 7, 1944, Thompson was a crewmember of a B-24D Liberator that departed Nadzab, New Guinea, on a bombing mission. Due to mechanical troubles, the aircraft departed late and was unable to join the formation after takeoff. Neither the aircraft nor 10-man crew were seen again.
- Army Master Sgt. Earnest W. Grainger, 28, of Conway, S.C. In early July 1950, Grainger, and elements of the 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, were deployed along the Kum River in western South Korea when North Korean forces struck and overran their positions. During this attack, Grainger was reported missing near the town of Chochiwon.
- Army Lt. Col. Don C. Faith, Jr., 35, of Washington, Ind. In late 1950, Faith's 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, which was attached to the 31st Regimental Combat Team, was advancing along the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea when Chinese forces encircled and attempted to overrun their positions. As the battle continued, the 31st RCT, which came to be known as "Task Force Faith," was forced to withdraw to a more defensible position. Faith would be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

[Read more](#) about their individual stories.

As always, we want to share your advocacy stories on the VFW Capitol Hill blog. To share your stories, either [fill out our online form](#) or simply email photos and stories directly to [vfwac@vfw.org](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).

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