



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

# WASHINGTON WEEKLY

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## Afghan Veteran to Receive Medal of Honor

Former Army Staff Sgt. Clinton L. Romesha is scheduled to receive the Medal of Honor on Monday for heroism under fire at the battle of Combat Outpost Keating on Oct. 3, 2009, when some 300 insurgents surrounded a small, forward deployed outpost of about 50 Americans. Romesha, who currently resides in Minot, N.D., was assigned to Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. He will be just the fourth living, and 11th overall, recipient of the Medal of Honor from America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. On Sunday night, CNN will air an encore of its special, *An American Hero: The Uncommon Valor of Clint Romesha* on Sunday evening at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. eastern. [View](#) a preview of the special. [Read more](#) about Staff Sgt. Romesha.

## DOD Budget Cuts

This week, the Defense Department and the services released details on how they plan to meet the mandatory sequester, which, barring a last-minute agreement by Congress, is scheduled to automatically kick in on March 1. Sequestration would force the Pentagon to cut \$52 billion more from its budget by the end of the current fiscal year, Sept. 30—just seven months away. The automatic sequestration cuts would be in addition to the \$487 billion reduction in defense spending over the next 10 years, as mandated by the Budget Control Act passed in 2011. Planned reductions include:

- Slashing noncombat flying, sailing and driving hours, to include possibly cancelling all, or part of, the airshow seasons of the Navy's Blue Angels and the Air Force's Thunderbirds.
- A three-week furlough of almost 800,000 DOD civilians.
- A hiring freeze and cut-back on installation and facility maintenance.
- Cancelling the deployment of a second carrier strike force into the Persian Gulf.
- Requesting a 1 percent military pay raise for fiscal year 2014 instead of the planned 1.7

percent.

- Requesting another base realignment and closure round.
- Possibly increasing military dependent and retiree Tricare health program fees.
- Changing the current military retirement system for future generations.

Further complicating the issue, Congress has yet to pass a current year defense budget, which means the Pentagon is operating under a continuing resolution at last year's spending levels, which also prevents them from reprogramming monies from one account to another. As expected, the Pentagon is planning for the worst. DOD is guaranteeing that deployed forces will be protected, but forces in garrison and not "on deck" to deploy will be impacted. [Read more.](#)

### **FY 2014 Independent Budget Released**

This week, the VFW and its partners—AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America—released their 27th edition of *The Independent Budget*, a comprehensive budget and policy document, written by veterans for veterans, that details funding requirements for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Recommendations for FY 2014 include:

- \$58.8 billion total for healthcare—\$1.3 billion more than what the Administration recommended (\$57.5 billion) in their advance appropriation last year.
- \$2.4 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration—approximately \$226 million more than the expected FY 2013 appropriated level.
- \$2.25 billion for all construction programs—approximately \$900 million more than the expected FY 2013 appropriated level, and well below the true funding needs of construction projects.
- \$611 million for medical and prosthetic research, approximately \$28 million more than the expected FY 2013 appropriated level.

[View](#) the full document. [Read](#) the press release.

### **The VFW Reacts to VA Suicide Report**

Last week, VA released its first report on veterans' suicide since 2010. The new report estimated that 22 veterans commit suicide each day—a 22-percent jump from 2010. The VFW was saddened by the VA's report on suicide, but we hope it serves as a wake-up call for the nation on how we address military mental health through reduced stigma in both the military and the public, as well as leveraging peer mentorship for veterans. It is unacceptable that our nation loses more heroes on the homefront than we lose on the battlefield. Read the full reaction on the [VFW Hill Blog](#).

### **House VA Committee Hearings**

The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing this week regarding the deadly Legionnaires' breakout at the VA Healthcare System in Pittsburgh. Legionnaires' disease is a severe form of pneumonia caused by bacteria known as legionella. A months-long investigation by the subcommittee revealed that VA officials learned of problems with their water system as early as December 2011, yet waited nearly a year to disclose and address those issues. Subcommittee Chairman Mike Coffman (R-CO) condemned VA officials for a culture of complacency that led to the death of five veterans, and ordered VA to strengthen the weaknesses in its infection control program. To learn more about the hearing and to view a webcast, [click here](#).

## **The Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs**

The Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held its first oversight hearing of 2013 on VA's use of the 100-percent temporary disability rating. Veterans receive the temporary rating when medical evidence shows that a surgery or treatment for serious illness requires a substantial recovery period that may prevent them from working, or when the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities allows the award of a 100-percent evaluation for a period of time. A recent VA Office of Inspector General (IG) report detailed VA's failure to process and monitor those claims, resulting in a \$943 million overpayment to veterans. The IG also found that VA had not set up proper controls or scheduled future medical examinations as required. All seven IG recommendations, including one requiring VBA to review all temporary 100-percent ratings to ensure a future examination date is entered in the Veteran's electronic record, are being implemented. For more information on the hearings or to view the recorded webcast, [click here](#).

## **Senate Introduces Stolen Valor Act**

Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Dean Heller (R-NV) introduced Stolen Valor Act legislation this week as a companion bill to what Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV) introduced in the House last month. Both H.R. 253 and its companion, S. 210, would make it a crime to knowingly benefit from lying about receiving a military valor medal or combat badge. Violators could face a fine and up to one-year imprisonment. The VFW strongly supports both bills. To read more, [visit our blog](#).

## **NY Times Seeks Student-Veteran Stories**

*The New York Times* "At War" Blog is asking student-veterans to share their experiences on campus as a follow-up to last Sunday's story on how schools are improving resources for veterans on their campuses. If you are a student-veteran, share your experiences on a variety of issues like war, deployment, training and the transition to civilian life. Please limit submissions to 700 words. [Learn more](#).

## **Three Korean War MIAs Identified**

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office recently announced the identification of remains belong to three soldiers who have been unaccounted-for since the Korean War. Identified are:

- Cpl. Robert W. Scott, 19, of Detroit. In late November 1950, Scott and elements of the 31st Regimental Combat Team were deployed along the eastern banks of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea when they were attacked by a vastly superior number of enemy forces. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950.
- Cpl. Robert G. Archer, 19, of Brazil, Ind., also a member of the 31st Regimental Combat Team. On Nov. 29, 1950, his unit began a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position south of the Chosin Reservoir. It was later learned he had been captured but died of malnutrition and lack of medical care.
- Pfc. Weldon A. Davis, 24, of Tioga, Texas. In late November 1950, elements of the 2nd Infantry Division suffered extensive casualties fighting the Chinese south of the Ch'ongch'on River in North Korea. It was later learned Davis had been captured but had died of malnutrition and pneumonia.

[Read more](#).

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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