



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

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The VFW Calls on Elected Leaders to End Budget Impasse

If a federal budget isn't approved soon, more than 4 million disabled veterans, survivors and student-veterans will not be receiving VA checks at the end of the month. The failure of Congress to compromise on a budget also forced the VA to close its 56 regional offices this week, and furlough more than 7,000 employees, the majority of whom were responsible for processing VA claims. In an opinion editorial, VFW National Commander Bill Thien said he was disgusted with the partisan bickering and government paralysis caused by a White House and Congress that will not budge from their ideological extremes in order to properly take care of America's true heroes. "We need leadership, not more rhetoric, and if the government is unable to take care of veterans, then the government should quit creating us," he said. [Read the Chief's OpEd.](#)

VFW Service Officers Continue Working Claims

While ROs across the country have closed their doors to veterans, VFW Service Officers around the country are still hard at work processing veterans' claims. Some service officers have set up temporary offices at posts. If you need help with a claim, contact your service officer and/or check with your posts. Our service officers can still turn claims into VA. [Find or contact a VFW Service Officer.](#)

President Signs Military Death Benefit Bill

After a firestorm of heated language from the VFW, veterans and military organizations as well as the public, the President signed legislation to reinstate military death and funeral benefits, just hours after the Senate cleared the measure. Funds provided by the bill, HJ Res 91, will be available until December 15 or until an appropriations law is enacted, whichever comes first. The legislation passed the House 425-0 on Wednesday, and is the first targeted stopgap measure to be sent to the president's desk since the government shutdown began. For details on the bill, [click here.](#)

VA Secretary Discusses Shutdown with Committee

On Wednesday, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki testified before the House VA Committee on the effects of the current government shutdown on benefits and services for veterans. The VFW provided written testimony for the hearing stating our deep concern that services to veterans are being harmed every day that the shutdown continues. Shinseki tried to clarify how many employees are furloughed, or will be furloughed, when their current funding runs out before the end of the month. He also stressed that critical payments to veterans and survivors will be impacted as well as the processing of disability claims for compensation, pension, education, vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits. Once mandatory funds are depleted at the end of this month, nearly 5,600 veterans a day will not receive a decision on their disability claims and VA regional offices will be closed. The VFW urged Congress to pass a full-year Fiscal Year 2014 appropriations bill without delay, and to clear legislation (H.R. 813 and S. 932) that will ensure veteran programs and services are not disrupted in the future.

To call on Congress to end the shutdown today, [click here](#) for our alert. Or for phone numbers to DC and District offices for elected officials, [click here](#).

To read our testimony or watch the recorded webcast of the hearing, visit the [house VA website](#). For an updated guide to VA's contingency plan during the shutdown, [go here](#).

The VFW, SVA Fill GI Bill Void During Government Shutdown

As a result of the ongoing shutdown, the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill hotline, 1-888-GIBILL-1, remains offline, meaning veterans have very few places to turn for reliable information on accessing their earned GI Bill benefits. To counter the lack of customer service, the VFW and Student Veterans of America (SVA) are once again informing veterans that the "1 Student Veteran" program is fully open for business. Those with questions regarding GI Bill or other benefits should email 1studentveteran@vfw.org, for timely assistance. Veterans who [send a message](#) will receive a reply within 24 hours or the next business day from a VFW staff member who specializes in student-veteran issues.

House VA Committee Examines Pain Management for Vets

On Thursday, the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a hearing to examine the rising use of opiate painkillers to treat veterans. The committee expressed concern over the skyrocketing rate of prescriptions for these highly addictive medications, and the sense that there is a need for greater care coordination in pain management across VA. Emotional testimony was heard from the widows of two current-era veterans who recently died from overdoses of VA prescribed opiates, as well as two recently medically retired servicemen who continue to struggle with issues surrounding pain and addiction. VA representatives acknowledged the potential harm caused by opiate painkillers and stated that they are developing new alternative pain management programs which will soon be instituted across the department. The new approach, known as the Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program (CPRP) and based out of the Tampa VA Hospital, focuses on exercise, occupational therapy, pool therapy, relaxation training, acupuncture and massage, with the goal of eliminating dependency on opiate painkillers. Although the CPRP currently accepts referrals from all 50 states, it is the goal of the VA to establish a similar program in every VISN. Subcommittee Chairman Dan Benishek closed by noting that further hearings on this issue will be held in the future to monitor progress. The VFW will continue to keep you updated. For details on the hearing, [click here](#).

Three WWII MIAs Recovered

The Defense POW/MIA Office has announced the identification of remains belonging to two Marines and an Army Air Force pilot who had been missing since World War II. Recovered are:

- Marine Corps Capt. Henry S. White, 23, of Kansas City, Mo., and Staff Sgt. Thomas L. Meek, 19, of Lisbon, La. On July 21, 1943, White and Meek were crewmembers aboard

an SBD-4 Dauntless dive-bomber that departed Turtle Bay Airfield on Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides, on a night training mission and failed to return. The aircraft reportedly crashed into a coral cliff on nearby Mavea Island. A September 1947 investigation of the crash site recovered no remains. In 2012, a Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command team excavated the site and did recover remains and non-biological evidence that correlated circumstantially to White and Meek. Since no individual identification was possible, both will be buried in a single casket on Oct. 18 at Arlington National Cemetery.

- Army Air Force 1st Lt. Robert G. Fenstermacher, 23, of Scranton, Pa. On Dec. 26, 1944, Fenstermacher was piloting a P-47D Thunderbolt on an armed-reconnaissance mission when his aircraft crashed near Petergensfeld, Belgium. An American officer witnessed the crash and was able to recover Fenstermacher's identification tags from the burning wreckage, but no remains or aircraft wreckage were recovered at the time. In 2012, a group of local historians excavating a private yard recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage consistent with a P-47D, which were turned over to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. He is scheduled to be buried on Oct. 18 in his hometown.

A military website link to the above recovery stories has been temporarily shut down due to the government shutdown.

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

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