



**NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.**



January 16, 2015

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### **The Independent Budget Policy Book Released**

On Thursday, January 15, the *Independent Budget*, a partnership between AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the VFW, released its 114th Congress Policy Recommendations Book. Inside you will find recommendations for improving access and quality of health care, timely and accurate disability claims processing, employment and education benefits, construction issues, and burial benefits. To see these recommendations [click here](#).

### **The VFW to Testify at Upcoming Hearings**

On Wednesday, January 21, at 10:30 a.m., the VFW's National Legislative Director will testify before the full House Veterans Affairs Committee. The first hearing of the year, "Building a Better VA: Assessing Ongoing Major Construction Management Problems Within the Department," will look at what is causing delays and cost overruns for many of the VA's major construction projects, and what should be done to complete these projects on time and on budget.

The following day, Thursday, January 22, at 10:30 a.m., VFW Deputy National Director of Veterans Service Jerry Manar will provide testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs during a hearing entitled, "Veterans Dilemma: Navigating the Appeals System of Veterans Claims." Jerry will highlight what the VFW views as the overarching issues within the appeals process and provide recommendations that will improve the process.

Information on both of these hearings will be made available on the day of the hearing on the House Veterans Affairs [website](#).

### **SAV Act Receives Unanimous Support in the House and Consideration in the Senate**

H.R. 203, the *Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act*, a bill that the VFW helped shape and strongly supports, passed unanimously in the House this week with a vote of 403 to 0. This critical legislation would begin to address the crisis of veterans' suicide by allowing the VA to hire more psychiatrists, collaborate with local non-profit mental health organizations, and expand its successful peer support networks. The *SAV Act* passed the House last Congress, but was stalled in the Senate due to procedural difficulties, despite broad bipartisan support. The VFW continues to work closely with the bill's Senate sponsors, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) along with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) Chairman Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) to ensure its swift

passage in the Senate. Check back for updates and be on the lookout for Action Alerts as the *SAV Act* moves through the legislative process. SVAC is scheduled to hold a markup on Wednesday, January 21, 2015, to consider Committee action on this important bill. The Committee's markup will be [streamed live](#).

### **TRICARE Will No Longer Provide Certificates of Coverage**

Due to changes made by the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)*, insurers cannot deny coverage based on preexisting conditions. Thus, veterans who lose TRICARE coverage will no longer be required to prove they were covered for their existing malaises when applying for health insurance coverage after leaving TRICARE coverage. Beneficiaries will continue to receive notice that their TRICARE coverage is ending. [Read more](#).

### **VA Publishes GI Bill Feedback System Report**

Last year, the GI Bill Feedback System was launched to help the VA and its agency partners weed out fraud and abuse within educational institutions that serve student veterans. The VFW was a strong proponent of the system, which allows veterans, service members and eligible dependents who use GI Bill benefits, military Tuition Assistance, or other federal aid, the ability to report fraud, waste and abuse securely online. A recently published report showed that the system received 2,254 complaints between January 30, 2014, and November 4, 2014, of which 1,434 were considered "Principles of Excellence" complaints relating to serious violations such as failure to disclose important information and deceptive recruiting practices. The most serious complaints prompted VA to investigate 42 educational programs, and it has withdrawn approval for two programs so far. [Read](#) the report and find out which programs received complaints. Student veterans who wish to file complaints through the system can find information [here](#).

### **POW/MIA Mission Merger Moves Forward**

The Pentagon announced interim leadership to guide the reorganization of the three largest military organizations involved in the POW/MIA accounting mission. Navy Rear Adm. Michael Franken will be the agency's interim director. Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command's current commander, will serve as deputy director, and Army Lt. Gen. Michael Linnington, the military deputy to the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, will be the agency's senior DOD adviser. The decision to merge was made last year by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel after the accounting community came under intense congressional scrutiny. Being merged are the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, and the Air Force Life Science Equipment Laboratory. The consolidation encompasses all field and headquarters-related activities, to include policy guidance, archival research and analysis, worldwide investigations and recovery operations, among others. "Mission accomplishment is what's important to the VFW," said VFW National Commander John Stroud, "and we look forward to working with the new leadership to help keep America's promise to our military and all their families that we will not leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield."

### **MIAs From Three Wars Identified**

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of remains belonging to one Marine and two soldiers who had been missing in action from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Identified are:

- **Marine Corps Pvt. Jack M. Redman**, 20, from Watseka, Ill., was lost on Nov. 20, 1943, during the Battle of Tarawa. He was assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. He will be buried with full military honors on a date/location yet to be announced.
- **Army Sgt. Joseph M. Snock Jr.**, 21, from Westmoreland, Pa., was lost on Nov. 30, 1950, in North Korea, where it would be learned he died as a prisoner of war. He was assigned to Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment. He will be buried with full military honors on a date/location yet to be announced.

- **Army Sgt. 1st Class James W. Holt**, 26, of Hot Springs, Ark., was lost Feb. 7, 1968, in Vietnam. He was assigned to Company C, 5th Special Forces Group. He will be buried with full military honors on a date/location yet to be announced.

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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).

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