



**NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.**

# WASHINGTON WEEKLY



July 20, 2012

## **VFW National Convention Begins Saturday**

The 113th VFW National Convention is set to begin tomorrow through July 25 in Reno, Nevada. Included in the packed business schedule will be an opportunity for delegates to hear from President Obama on Monday and Republican challenger Gov. Mitt Romney on Tuesday. National recognition awards will also be presented to the Montford Point Marine Association, the Army's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, war correspondent and author Joe Galloway, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond Odierno, "Kids Thank a Veteran" director Cherie Reid, and to women's aviation and space pioneer Wally Funk. The business sessions will stream live on the VFW's website beginning Sunday at 8:30 a.m. Pacific (11 a.m. Eastern). [Read more.](#)

## **Join the Legislative Staff in Reno**

Next week, the VFW legislative staff will be in Reno for the 113th National Convention. If you are attending the convention, please stop by our booth where we will have information and resources available regarding our work to improve military quality of life and veterans benefits on Capitol Hill. We will also host a legislative workshop on Sunday, July 22 at 10 am. This year's workshop will focus on ways you can help us advocate for veterans' issues in your community during this critical election year. [Check](#) the convention schedule and our blog for more information.

## **Senate Package Includes Lejeune Support**

This week, the Senate moved forward on a veterans' benefits omnibus bill that provides care to veterans and family members exposed to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Language for the bill was agreed upon in late June by legislators in both the House and Senate. The bill will now go back to the House for final passage, and Chairman Jeff Miller has indicated he intends to secure House passage next week. The bill includes more than 50 provisions to better serve veterans; many of which the VFW has testified in support of over the last two years.

Some of the highlights of the bill include:

- Extending hospital care and medical services coverage for certain illnesses and conditions to eligible veterans and family members who served on active duty or lived at Camp Lejeune.
- Authorizing VA to waive co-payments for telehealth and enhancing VA's teleconsultation and telemedicine capabilities
- Protecting veterans from sexual assault at VA facilities
- Expanding services for veterans suffering from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Allowing veterans with service dogs access to all VA facilities
- Reauthorizing certain homeless veterans programs

The bill also includes provisions designed to streamline disability claims processing by clarifying VA's duty to assist veterans in obtaining private medical records and allowing VA to contact veterans electronically to adjudicate claims. We will continue to update you as the 2012 veterans' benefits omnibus package moves through Congress. [Click here](#) for more information and updates.

### **VFW Testifies on VA Claims Process**

VFW was asked to testify before the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations regarding the VA's ongoing efforts to eliminate the veterans' disability claims backlog. VFW, alongside DAV and VA Undersecretary for Benefits General Allison Hickey, discussed the claims process and the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) which focuses on a paperless IT system. VBMS is the system being deployed by VA to begin reaching its goal of eliminating the backlog and providing quality decisions. VFW testified that the new program should be fully tested to identify shortcomings, but that VA must walk a fine line between rolling out the program too soon and delaying too long while seeking to fix all the problems. Members of the committee stressed their frustration with the process saying that too many veterans are still waiting for their claims to be adjudicated with little progress being made in the claims backlog numbers. For more information and the recorded webcast, [click here](#).

### **House Committee Discusses MST within VBA**

Late Wednesday, The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs held a hearing to examine the disability claims process for victims of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). The hearing centered on what benefits are being provided by VA to the victims of MST and how the disability claims process can be improved for those suffering from the after effects of a traumatic event. According to recent reports and VA data, 704 MST disability claims were approved and 726 were denied between October 2011 and February 2012. Witnesses spoke about VA's rate of denial for MST claims and that percentages for MST related disabilities are not in line with PTSD claims. The evidence presented showed a clear gender bias between granting of presumption for MST between men (around 70%) and women (around 30%) that the VFW believes must be addressed. Members of the committee asked if VBA has conducted its own internal review of cases that have been denied for PTSD where MST is a factor. All agreed that more needs to be done to address conditions related to MST and to identify better ways to treat and properly compensate veterans for those conditions.

For more information on testimony given or to view the recorded webcast, [click here](#).

Was this *Washington Weekly* forwarded to you by a friend? [Sign up](#) to get your own free issue each week.

—





[Unsubscribe](#) | [Tell A Friend](#)  
© 2001 - 2012. All rights reserved.