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Congress Approves New VFW Charter

VFW National Commander John Stroud is thanking the 113th Congress for their unanimous support this week to approve a change to the VFW's congressional charter that was signed 78 years ago by President Franklin D. Roosevelt when the military was comprised almost entirely of men. Prompted by VFW Resolution 301, which was passed in July by delegates attending the 115th VFW National Convention in St. Louis, the charter update consists of two wording changes—replacing men with veterans, and widows with surviving spouses—and was supported by two companion bills introduced by Senate VA Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and House VA Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL). “We didn’t change our congressional charter to be politically correct,” said Stroud, “we changed it because being an eligible service member or veteran is what’s important to our great organization, not one’s gender, and changing widows to surviving spouses is more representative of today’s military.” The bill now heads to the President for his signature.

Protect Our Service Members' Pay and Benefits

This past June, the House of Representatives passed their version of the *National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2015, H.R. 4325. This legislation rejected significant reductions to military compensation recommended by the Department of Defense. However, the Senate version of the bill, S. 2410, includes the Pentagon's proposed cuts. Reduced pay raises for the troops, increased TRICARE co-pays and reduced Basic Housing Allowance are unacceptable ways to balance the federal budget. The VFW is urging our members and advocates to contact their Senators and ask them to do the right thing and protect our service members' pay and benefits as they negotiate the final version of the NDAA. Take Action by [contacting your Senators](#).

VFW Testifies on GI Bill Approval Process

On Wednesday, the VFW testified before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, discussing legislative proposals that would improve the processes through which State Approving Agencies (SAAs) inspect and approve programs for GI Bill participation. VFW National Veterans Service Deputy Director Ryan Gallucci explained how SAAs should have statutory authority to improve new non-college degree programs at not-for-profit schools in the wake of such programs popping up at GI Bill eligible schools and operating under "deemed approved" status. Gallucci also called on Congress to institute a cap for flight programs at public schools and to change the way in which VA and SAAs are allowed to conduct compliance surveys to ensure that at-risk programs do not slip through the cracks. The VFW has led the charge on a series of

continuous reforms for student veterans, and this hearing was the latest effort to assure quality and equity in the administration of GI Bill benefits. To learn more about the hearing and to read each witness' prepared remarks, [click here](#). [Watch](#) an archived webcast of the hearing.

The VFW Testifies on Health Care Legislation

On Wednesday, the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a hearing on pending legislation. VFW Deputy Legislative Director Aleks Morosky testified in support of several key bills including the *Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act*. Aimed at improving mental health services for veterans and service members, the SAV Act was introduced by Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN) and Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) with the input and strong support of the VFW. Other important legislation was discussed in the hearing, including bills that would elevate Medal of Honor Recipients to VA Priority Group 1, increase access to alternative medicine, extend the period of post-natal care for female veterans, and expand research on illnesses associated with toxic exposures. These bills now move to the markup phase where they may be amended before being reported to the full House. For a full list of witnesses and testimony, [click here](#).

Senate VA Committee Discusses Mental Health

The Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs held an oversight hearing on mental health and suicide among veterans. The Committee heard from the mothers of two veterans who committed suicide and learned about alternative mental health care programs. Mrs. Susan Selke, mother of Marine Corporal Clay Hunt, and Mrs. Valerie Pallotta, mother of Army Private First Class Joshua Pallotta, shared stories of their children's struggles to cope with mental health conditions and gave suggestions on how VA can improve its programs to meet the needs of veterans with mental health conditions. VA testified that it has expanded mental health care programs, including joint DoD/VA programs to provide "warm handoffs" between DoD and VA mental health care services for transitioning service members. VA also informed the Committee that a growing number of veterans are taking advantage of mental health services offered through the Veterans Crisis Line and readjustment counseling services through its 300 Vet Centers. To view the hearing in its entirety, visit the [Committee's website](#).

House VA Committee Discusses VA's IT Security

The House Committee on Veterans Affairs held an oversight hearing on VA's longstanding information technology (IT) security weaknesses and its plans to address such weaknesses. The Committee heard from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and VA's Office of Inspector General (VAOIG) regarding their numerous investigations on VA's security vulnerabilities and VA's work to address GAO and VAOIG recommendations. VA testified that it has directed \$60 million to implement numerous processes and programs to ensure it is able to protect veterans' information and address IT weaknesses. Mr. Stephen Warren, VA's Chief Information Officer, assured the Committee that no causal relationship exists between alleged appointment manipulation and VA's IT issues. [View the hearing in its entirety](#).

VA Begins Second Phase of Choice Card Mailings

The Department of Veterans Affairs began mailing Veterans Choice Cards this week to veterans currently waiting more than 30 days from their preferred appointment date or what is considered medically necessary by their physicians. This follows the initial mailing earlier this month of Choice Cards to veterans who reside 40 or more miles away from a VA facility. The VA has prioritized efforts to get veterans off of waiting lists and into clinics through the Accelerated Care Initiative begun over the summer. Through this initiative, VA medical centers have increased access to care inside and outside of VA, added more clinic hours and work days, deployed mobile medical units,

and shared individual VA facility best practices throughout the organization. For more information about the Choice Program, call 1-866- 606-8198 or [click here](#).

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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