



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

WASHINGTON WEEKLY

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POW/MIA Recognition Day

The VFW Washington Office joined Deputy Defense Secretary Dr. Ashton Carter, Vice Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. James Winnefield, and guest speaker and former U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel from Nebraska for National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Today is the day to remember the 140,000 former POWs who served and suffered, and to reinforce America's commitment to the fullest possible accounting of 83,000 missing servicemen and civilians who have yet to return home from their wars: 73,000 from World War II, 8,000 from Korea, 1,660 from the Vietnam War, 125 from the Cold War, two Navy pilots from the first Gulf War, three civilians from Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl in Afghanistan. Also joining the deputy secretary were representatives from the MIA family organizations who continue to burn the candle of hope that one day their loved ones will finally return home from their wars. [Learn more](#) about America's Full Accounting Mission.

VFW Urges Senate to Pass Vets Jobs Bill

This week, due to budgetary rules, the Senate failed to pass the Veterans Job Corps bill on a procedural point of order vote (58-40). With unemployment for veterans at record high levels, the VFW is asking its advocates to contact their Senators and urge them to put together a quality veterans' job bill before the end of the year. For more about the Veterans Jobs Corps Bill and to take action, visit our [Capitol Hill blog](#).

House Passes Veterans Bills

Late Wednesday, the House passed several veterans bills designed to protect fiduciaries from fraud, extend funding for medical facility construction, increase housing options and streamline state requirements for veterans with emergency medical training. The bills passed include:

- **H.R.6375**, The VA Major Construction Authorization and Expiring Authorities Extension Act, provides funding for medical facility construction and leasing authorities within VA. Several of the projects were set to expire at the end of the month.

- **H.R. 5948**, The Veterans Fiduciary Reform and Honoring Noble Service Act, puts protections in place for veterans under VA's fiduciary program.
- **H.R. 4124**, The Veterans Emergency Medical Technician Support Act, provides grants to states to streamline requirements and procedures for veterans with emergency medical training to become civilian EMT's.
- **H.R. 6361** excludes VA aid and attendance compensation from being considered as income for HUD programs under the U.S. Housing Act of 1937.

For more information on the bills, [click here](#) and type the bill # into the box.

Defense Budget Issues

The VFW Washington Office joined members of industry and the press at a panel discussion yesterday at the Newseum. Featured panelists were: Deputy Defense Secretary Dr. Ashton Carter, Senate Armed Forces Committee member Lindsey Graham (R-SC), House Budget Committee Ranking Member Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), plus senior fellows from the American Enterprise Institute and Brookings Institution. The centerpiece of all conversation was the potential impact sequestration would have on military readiness, personnel programs, the defense industry and America's leadership role around the world. Sequestration refers to a mechanism in last year's law that raised the debt ceiling and would trigger an additional \$500 billion across-the-board defense spending cut over the next decade, in addition to \$487 billion in defense cuts already programmed, unless Congress identifies equivalent savings by January. Carter said he'd be open to Congress enacting a delay in the January deadline to allow more time for a solution.

Military Absentee Voting

The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act of 2009 removed many obstacles to voting by mandating all absentee paper ballots be mailed at least 45 days in advance, making electronic ballots available for downloading, eliminating the notarized or witnessed ballot requirement and expanding the acceptance of Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots. However, 22 states still fail to comply with all four requirements of the MOVE Act. Tomorrow, Sept. 22, is the 45-day deadline for absentee paper ballots to be mailed and returned in time to be counted. If you know of military or American civilians stationed overseas, please urge them to register to vote immediately with their respective state voting offices.

Field Report: VFW Leaders Meet with Connecticut Congressional Delegation

VFW National Legislative Committee members Bob Hunter from Connecticut and Christian Kulikoski from Massachusetts met with several Representatives and Senators as part of VFW's Fall Conference on Capitol Hill, telling the 112th Congress to "Finish Strong For Veterans." Hunter and Kulikoski spent the day highlighting the VFW's priorities and outstanding issues to members of the Connecticut congressional delegation. Both committee members discussed the alarming 18-percent rise in veteran suicides over the past year, and all members of the Connecticut delegation agreed that more effort must be directed to curbing the losses of our comrades when they return home. To learn more about their visits, visit the [VFW Capitol Hill blog](#). To submit your Field Reports for consideration on the VFW Capitol Hill blog, simply fill out this [form](#) or send photos and stories directly to vfwac@vfw.org.

House VA Committee Hearings

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee had a busy week of hearings, beginning with a full committee hearing to discuss VA's Performance and Accountability

Report. W. Scott Gould, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, was the Committee's only witness. Mr. Gould discussed VA's progress regarding their mental health program, including the status of new hires, backlog of claims, the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) and ending veteran homelessness by 2015. Committee members praised VA on the success of the VRAP program and the drop in the number of homeless veterans, but challenged them on increases in disability claims and vacancies in mental health. Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) asked why the Committee had not received a response from VA about several lavish conferences held earlier this summer. Several other committee members took issue with VA's lack of transparency and accountability during today's tough economic environment.

On Thursday, the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing on the recent re-design of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is designed to help prepare separating service members for the transition from military to civilian employment. The committee has made TAP a primary focus this year in an effort to lower the veteran unemployment rate, and the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act* made it a mandatory program for all transitioning service members. Witnesses included representatives from VA, Department of Labor VETS, DoD, Small Business Administration and all five branches of the military. Most of the hearing centered on the new 2.0 TAP model and whether it should be one-size-fits-all or tailored to the individual service member's post-discharge goals.

On Friday, the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a hearing to examine a reinstated pilot program within the Texas Veterans Commission. Several Representatives from Texas, including Eliseo "Al" Cantu, former VFW Council Member and current Chairman of the Texas Veterans Commission, were on hand to discuss the "Strike Force Team" and "Claims Processing Assistance Teams." Both were put in place to help reduce the backlog of veterans' disability claims. The goal of the program, with funding provided by the State for one year, is to reduce the current backlog of claims in Texas by 17,000. Committee members acknowledged that, although the project is in its early stages, it has had success and could be a model for pilots around the country. Representative Bill Flores (R-TX), a guest of the committee who made opening remarks, reminded everyone that "behind every claim number is the face of a veteran." He also commented that Texas has become recognized for aggressively leading the way on veterans' issues through the Texas Veterans Commission programs. For more on any of the hearings held this week or to watch the recorded webcasts, [click here](#).

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