



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.



January 9, 2014

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The 114th Congress Begins

On January 6, the 114th Congress was sworn into office. Committee leadership positions have been selected and hearings have been scheduled. The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee has new leadership in both parties. Senator Johnny Isakson is now the Chairman of the committee and Senator Richard Blumenthal is the Ranking Member. In the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Congressman Jeff Miller remains the Chairman and Congresswoman Corrine Brown has been promoted to Ranking Member. See who else is on the committees: [Senate Committee](#), [House Committee](#).

The House VA Committee has already scheduled three hearings. One will address legislation, including a reintroduction of the suicide prevention bill (*SAV Act*) that failed to pass at the end of the year. The other two hearings will address major construction projects and the growing appeals backlog. The VFW will testify at each of these hearings. We will provide an update as the dates draw closer.

SAV Act Reintroduced in House and Senate

The Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act, a bill that the VFW strongly supported last Congress, has been reintroduced in both the House and the Senate. This critical legislation would begin to address the crisis of veterans' suicide by allowing VA to hire more psychiatrists, collaborate with local non-profit mental health organizations, and expand successful peer support networks. Taken up late last year, the *SAV Act* failed to pass due to Senate procedural difficulties, despite broad bipartisan support. The VFW will work closely with the bill's sponsors, Representative Tim Walz (D-MN) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) to ensure that the *SAV Act* remains a top priority for the 114th Congress. Check back for updates and be on the lookout for Action Alerts as this important bill moves through the legislative process. [Watch](#) Senator Blumenthal's press conference on the *SAV Act*.

Military Infrastructure Changes

This week, the Pentagon announced a decision to return 15 European sites and installations to their host countries, as well as the transfer of some existing operations elsewhere within the theater. Most notable will be the transfer of American operations from three Royal Air Force bases; the closure of six commissaries in Germany with only one new replacement; in Italy, to convert the Vicenza Health Center to an outpatient, specialty-care only facility; and in the Azores, to reduce active duty, civilian personnel and contractors by two-thirds. Congress must approve any stateside base realignment or closure actions,

but the Defense Department has the authority to make such unilateral decisions overseas. The Pentagon is expected to request a stateside Base Realignment and Closure Commission as part of their FY 2016 budget submission next month. [Read more.](#)

Three MIAs Recovered

The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to three American servicemen who had been missing in action from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Recovered are:

- **Army Air Forces Maj. Peyton S. Mathis Jr.**, 28, of Montgomery, Ala. On June 5, 1944, Mathis was piloting a P-38J Lightning when the aircraft lost power while attempting to land at Kukum Air Field on Guadalcanal Island in the Solomon Islands. A rescue team located the crash site but was unable to recover Mathis because the aircraft was submerged in a dense jungle swamp. He will be buried with full military honors on a date and location yet to be determined.
- **Army Cpl. Francis D. Knobel**, 20, of La Crosse, Wis., was assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, when he was lost Dec. 12, 1950, in North Korea. He will be buried with full military honors on a date and location yet to be determined.
- **Air Force Col. William E. Cooper**, 45, of Albany, Ga., was assigned to the 469th Tactical Squadron, 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, when his F-105D Thunderchief was shot down while on a strike mission on a highway-railroad bridge north of Hanoi, North Vietnam, on April 24, 1966. He will be buried with full military honors on a date and location yet to be determined.

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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