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**1. Blue Water Navy Bill Update:** VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence met yesterday afternoon with Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), who earlier this week blocked the passage of H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018*, because he believes it costs too much. “If we can afford to send our military to war, it’s unacceptable that we cannot afford to take care of them when they return home wounded, ill or injured,” said Lawrence, who called the meeting very productive. “I met with Senator Enzi to make it clear that VFW members expect the Blue Water Navy to pass before the end of the year. The senator assured me that he wants to provide Blue Water Navy veterans the benefits they have earned and is working with his colleagues, including Senate VA Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson, to get this bill passed. I told him the VFW will work with him to make it happen, but we will hold him accountable if it does not,” he said. “We also met with key staff for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) to let them know that the VFW wants the Senate to pass H.R. 299 now!” The VFW is asking all members and advocates to join in our Call to Action to get the Blue Water Navy Bill passed into law. [Contact your senators here.](#)

**2. House Passes Veterans Minibus:** This week, the House and Senate grouped together numerous veterans’ bills in a miniature omnibus package in order to pass as many noncontroversial proposals as possible before the end of the current Congress. Typically, at the end of each congressional term the House and Senate will try to wrap up and pass as many proposals as they can before the official end of the session. This year’s bill would add improvements for homelessness programs, transition assistance, veteran-owned small businesses, student veterans, and many other beneficial proposals. Included in this package is the VFW-supported *SIT-REP Act* which would protect student veterans from penalties due to delayed GI Bill payments. The VFW is glad to see Congress is still working to improve benefits for veterans right up to the holidays, and we hope when they return from their break after the new year they are ready to continue right where they left off, working for veterans.

**3. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Examines VA Appeals Reform:** The VFW attended a hearing on Wednesday of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs to examine if VA is ready to implement the *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*. Implementation of the new law is set for February 2019 and aims to modernize the claims and appeals process by providing veterans multiple review options and shorter time for claim resolution. Recent problems with the rollout of the Forever GI Bill this fall prompted lawmakers to press VA on its IT capabilities related to these changes. "We're updating two critical VA systems, and we have actually had boots on the ground working very hard long before this bill passed," said Lloyd Thrower, VA's deputy chief information officer. The VFW submitted a statement expressing further concerns regarding VA's IT platforms, as well as their poorly executed "Informal Conference" option for Higher Level Review (HLR) claims. The VFW will continue to monitor the implementation of this law. [Watch the hearing](#), learn more about [changes to claims appeals](#), and read the [VFW's testimony](#).

**4. DHA Executive Council Meeting:** On Thursday, the VFW participated in the quarterly Defense Health Agency (DHA) MSO/VSO Executive Council meeting led by DHA Deputy Director Guy Kiyokawa. The briefing included an overview and update of the TRICARE implementation in the East and West service regions by the presidents of both Humana Military and Health Net Federal Services, a discussion regarding FEDVIP implementation led by staff from the Office of Personnel Management, priorities that DHA has for this upcoming year, an update regarding Military Health System reform and integration, as well as a year-in-review for the agency.

**5. TRICARE and FEDVIP Open Season Extended:** The Defense Health Agency (DHA) announced this week that eligible beneficiaries who missed the deadline to enroll in FEDVIP or make changes to their existing TRICARE plan now have until Dec. 31 to do so. [Learn more](#) about how to take advantage of the TRICARE extension. [Learn more](#) about how to take advantage of the FEDVIP extension.

**6. VA to Develop New Patient Safety Innovations:** VA announced 10 Patient Safety Centers of Inquiry (PSCI) will receive funding to further research for innovative ways to improve patient safety. The PSCI program was developed in 1999 and has resulted in many current patient safety standards such as protocols to decrease patients falling, reducing infections, suicide prevention, moderate sedation techniques for non-anesthesiologists, and a cancer care tracking system. Currently, the program is headquartered in Ann Arbor, Mich., where the facility will spend the next three years focusing on the appropriate use of catheters and peripherally inserted central catheter lines. The nine other facilities awarded funding for this initiative will focus on improving outcomes, with a specific focus on medication safety, for patients going back and forth between VA and non-VA care; preventing diagnostic errors by improving timely follow-ups for abnormal test results; creating automated risk-adjusted metrics that are adaptable to the diverse care settings across VA's health system; transitions for elderly veterans and those with complex conditions with a focus on testing 30-day readmissions and patient satisfaction; identifying patients at high risk for adverse opioid events and monitoring opioid use to provide guidance on tapering opioid prescriptions and providing support networks for patients with opioid use disorders; prevention of adverse events related to mobility/immobility; practical solutions to reduce suicide among veterans not receiving VA care; and to test evidence-based

programs to decrease suicide risk following psychiatric discharges. [Read more](#) about this initiative.

**7. Another New Study Finds VA Outperforms non-VA Care:** A newly published study researched by Dartmouth College found VA mostly outperforms non-VA health care systems and facilities in their same regions when comparing mortality rates and patient safety. Researchers conducting the study compared data from VA hospitals against non-VA proximate facilities in 121 regions. In 14 out of 15 measures, or over 93 percent, results show VA performed significantly better. The study was initiated after Dr. William Weeks, a former VA employee who now works as a professor at Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice, was skeptical of multiple previous studies with results concluding VA hospitals outperform other medical systems. Dr. Weeks told reporters he felt compelled to further study the issue to compare data at a regional level compared to previous studies which focused on national level data. He also said that he wanted to research the regional perspective for veterans who might have the option to use their local VA facility or a non-VA facility nearby. [Read more](#) about the study.

**8. Bells of Balangiga Returned:** On Tuesday, three bells taken as war trophies over a century ago from the Philippines were returned to the village of Balangiga. In 1901, U.S. soldiers took the three bells following a fierce battle in the village, where they were reportedly used to signal an ambush that killed 48 U.S. service members. Since 1904, two of the bells have been located at F.E. Warren Air Base in Wyoming, while the third was located at the 2nd Infantry Division museum at Camp Red Cloud, South Korea. After many years of lobbying by both the Philippine government and the VFW, Congress included a provision in the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018* which authorized the transfer of the bells back to Balangiga. The VFW would like to extend our gratitude to Secretary of Defense James Mattis and to the members of Congress that made this transfer possible.

**9. MIA Update:** This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced 13 new identifications. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Capt. James R. Bauder** was an F-4B pilot assigned to Fighter Squadron Twenty One, USS Coral Sea, in South East Asia. On Sept. 21, 1966, during a night reconnaissance mission over North Vietnam, contact with Bauder's aircraft was lost and his plane did not return to the ship. An extensive search was conducted with negative results. Based on this information, Bauder was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bauder.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Karl L. Dye** was a member of Battery B, 52nd Field Artillery Battalion, 24th Infantry Division, engaged in combat operations against North Korean forces, near Taejon, South Korea. In July 1950, he was seriously wounded by an enemy mortar shell and placed in an ambulance. The ambulance allegedly encountered an enemy roadblock. Dye was reported missing in action on July 16, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dye.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Allen R. Turner** was a C-109 pilot assigned to the 1330 Army Air Force Base Unit, Air Transport Command. On July 17, 1945, during a routine flight from Jorhat, India, to Hsinching, China, over "The Hump," his aircraft crashed in a remote area. All four passengers were declared deceased after an extensive search effort failed to identify the crash site. Interment services are pending. [Read about Turner.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Marvin E. Dickson** was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. On Nov. 13, 1944, while attempting to reestablish broken telephone communications lines between headquarters and outposts in the Hürtgen Forest in Germany, he and three others were attacked. Surviving members could not confirm Dickson's death, nor provide the location to where he was killed. He was listed as missing in action and on Nov. 14 his status was amended to killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dickson.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class John C. Auld** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Auld. Interment services are pending. [Read about Auld.](#)

-- **Navy Water Tender 1st Class Edwin B. McCabe** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including McCabe. Interment services are pending. [Read about McCabe.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Roman W. Sadlowski** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Sadlowski. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sadlowski.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Kenneth L. Jayne** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Jayne. Interment services are pending. [Read about Jayne.](#)

-- **Navy Signalman 3rd Class Charles E. Nix** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Nix. Interment services are pending. [Read about Nix.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Camillus M. O'Grady** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including O'Grady. Interment services are pending. [Read about O'Grady.](#)

-- **Navy Ensign William M. Finnegan** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Finnegan. Interment services are pending. [Read about Finnegan.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Harold W. Roesch** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize.

The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Roesch. Interment services are pending. [Read about Roesch.](#)

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Fred M. Jones** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Jones. Interment services are pending. [Read about Jones.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm>.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to [yfwac@vfw.org](mailto:yfwac@vfw.org).