



Veterans-For-Change Newsletter

A Voice of the Veterans

Week Ending Sunday, May 24, 2020

Volume 11, Issue 20



This-N-That

Good evening Jim,

I apologize for having missed the pasting of last weekends newsletter, but health issues prevented me from getting much work done and I've a great respect for all those who are either going through and having completed chemo therapy. It certainly does have a way of draining you of all energy along with all it's side effects can keep you down for sometime.

From what I learned through a conversation it appears WLA VA now has a "tent city" which might be a

temporary fix, but still no word on when they would even remotely think about removing all Brentwood elitist and converting those buildings into mini apartment, developing clinics and begin construction on the renovation of the vacant buildings as well as developing the surrounding land to add more facilities for homeless.

Even barracks type buildings could just as easily work, take less of a foot print and would at least show serious signs that the VA is keeping their word.

We can do more, we should do more, so I am pleading with everyone who reads this to take the time to call your Congressman and both Senators and politely demand immediate action nationwide but most importantly WLA First.

Together we can resolve this nightmare!, Let's bring them all home!

If you have any ideas or thoughts, please do share them with us and we will certainly look at them and see if we can merge some or all of it into the new look.

On behalf of our Volunteers nationwide and myself, we wish you and your family good health!

Respectfully,

Jim Davis

Founder

Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org



House Stimulus Bill Does Not Include Waiver of Pharmacy Home Delivery Co-pay

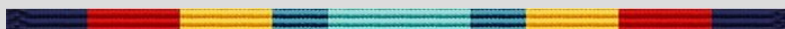
As NewsBytes goes to press, the House is expected to pass another coronavirus response bill (H.R.6800) - estimated to cost three trillion dollars - with little to no help from Republicans. The House bill does not include a co-pay waiver for pharmacy home delivery, which the FRA and other MSO/VSO groups had asked to be included. The bill does provide enhanced benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs such as:

- No co-pays for veterans for COVID-19 preventative services at VA medical facilities.
- Streamlining voucher processing for homeless veterans during the pandemic.
- Extending deadlines to veterans who are filing claims and appeals for VA benefits during the pandemic.
- Allowing active duty service members to terminate cable, internet and telephone contracts without penalty due to stop movement orders.
- Suspending VA debt collection until 60 days past the

end of the pandemic.

- Requiring the Defense Department to report to Congress on active duty suicides during the pandemic 90 days after the end of the pandemic.

Critics of the bill claim the legislation is a nonstarter because it came too early, is too expensive and includes too many measures unrelated to the virus. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.) has declared the bill will be dead on arrival when it gets to the Senate. The Senate is expected to introduce their own coronavirus response bill soon. The FRA will continue to urge the Senate to include the pharmacy co-pay waiver for home delivery during the pandemic. You are urged to use the FRA Action Center [online](#) to ask their Senators to support this pharmacy co-pay provision.



3D Mammograms Will Be Covered by TRICARE Starting This Month

TRICARE is expanding its breast cancer screening coverage this month. Starting May 29, 2020, TRICARE will cover Digital Breast Tomosynthesis — known as 3D mammography or DBT — under its provisional coverage program. “We are extremely happy to see TRICARE step up and ensure our women veterans

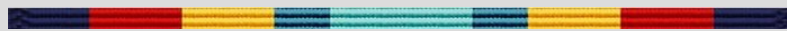
have access to the best preventative breast cancer screening measures,” said VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz. “Breast cancer remains very challenging to conquer but this is a major victory for our women veterans in hopes of one day defeating this deadly disease.” All women over the age of 40 are eligible for coverage. Annual coverage will also be available to women 30 and older who are deemed a high risk for developing breast cancer. TRICARE users are eligible for a reimbursement if they received a 3D mammogram between Jan. 1, 2020, and May 29, 2020. [Read more.](#)



A Week to Change Direction is Virtual This Year

VFW-partner, [Give An Hour](#), will be marking Mental Health Awareness Month by holding A Week to Change Direction virtually from May 18 – 24, 2020. This is a global event asking people to flood social

media with posts showing how you are taking care of your emotional health and maintaining healthy habits using #Change Direction. The VFW urges everyone to learn more about mental health and to take part in changing the stigma around mental health care. [Learn more.](#)



Expand Service Members' Legal Protections During COVID-19

Key legislators on the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees are backing recently introduced legislation (S.3637/H.R.6767), sponsored by SVAC Ranking Member Sen. Jon Tester (Mont.), and Rep. Mike Levin (Calif.) respectively. The bill would expand the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) to provide additional legal protections for service members impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SCRA provides legal protection to service members to prevent them from being taken advantage of while on active duty or deployed. The act can postpone or suspend financial or civil obligations, including preventing foreclosures, evictions, or repossession of a vehicle under certain circumstances. This legislation expands SCRA protections to service members who were previously issued orders to change

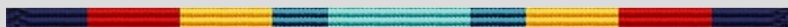
duty stations but, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, received a stop movement order and may have a housing or car lease in two different locations.

"Service members are prepared to sacrifice for our country, but they should never suffer significant personal financial losses as a result of following orders," said Rep. Levin. "While I appreciate the Defense Department's efforts to keep service members safe during this pandemic, it's unacceptable that some military families have been forced to pay for a second home that they can't even move into due to the stop movement order. I'm glad to introduce bipartisan legislation to rectify this situation."

"When our military families are called upon to relocate to posts around the world in service to this nation, we have a responsibility to ensure their transitions are as smooth as possible," said Ranking Member Tester.

"For service members facing two housing payments because they followed the military's stop movement orders in response to the pandemic, this means we've got to provide them with legal and consumer protections."

Use the FRA [Action Center](#) online to weigh in on this issue.



Links to Other Stories

1. VA works with communities nationwide to meet critical need for blood
2. VA joins XPRIZE Pandemic Alliance to combat COVID-19 and future outbreaks
3. VA establishes the department's first history

office

4. Joint Statement from DHS and VA on Continued Collaboration Throughout COVID-19 Pandemic
5. Long Island man, 100, dies from coronavirus, a century after Spanish flu took his twin brother
6. VA health app now

available
to
Veterans
across
all
mobile
and
web
platforms

7. Can
community
engagement
prevent
Veteran
suicides?

8. Amid
COVID-
19,
seasonal
influenza
still
a
threat
to
force
readiness



VA lead facilities reintroduce health

care services while ensuring safe environment

WASHINGTON – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert Wilkie announced the department will begin to reintroduce health care services in select VA facilities May 18, as states reopen from COVID-19 shutdowns.

Each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) has selected Lead Sites to be the first to implement a phased approach to reintroducing select health care services while ensuring a safe environment. The lessons learned from these initial sites will help to inform how other facilities plan for expanding services in their facilities.

Lead Sites introducing select services include:

VISN 1-- White River Junction VA Medical Center (VAMC), VT

VISN 2 -- Syracuse VAMC, NY

VISN 4 -- Erie VAMC, PA

VISN 5 -- Hershel “Woody” Williams VAMC, WV

VISN 6 -- Salem VA Healthcare System (HCS), VA

VISN 7 -- Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, SC

VISN 8 -- West Palm Beach VAMC, FL

VISN 9 -- James H. Quillen VA HCS, TN

VISN 10 -- Louis Stokes Cleveland VAMC, OH

VISN 12 -- Tomah VAMC, WI
VISN 12 -- William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans
Hospital Madison VAMC, WI
VISN 15 -- Kansas City VAMC, MO
VISN 16 -- Central Arkansas Veterans HCS, AR
VISN 17 -- South Texas VA HCS, TX
VISN 19 -- Fort Harrison VAMC, MT
VISN 20 -- Puget Sound VAMC, WA
VISN 20 -- Boise VAMC, ID
VISN 21 -- VA Southern Nevada HCS, NV
VISN 22 -- VA Southern Arizona HCS, AZ
VISN 23 -- Fargo HCS, ND

Veterans should contact their VA medical facility or provider for information about the expansion of services at any of these sites.

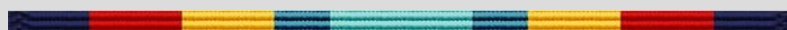
“The safety of Veterans and staff is the highest priority when we consider how we provide health care services and procedures during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA will take into account guidance from various agencies including federal, state and local government as we gradually expand health care services.”

As a high reliability organization, safety is always paramount and will continue to guide our decision making. VA facilities may not be the first to reopen a full spectrum of care but in reintroducing services,

VISNs and VA medical centers will consider unique circumstances of their state and local markets, environmental safety preparedness and clinical risk assessments.

VA has developed a risk-based framework to prioritize non-urgent procedures in addition to the urgent procedures currently being performed. Evaluation of such factors as patient health, staff safety and resource considerations will guide expansion, scheduling decisions and which services VA will reintroduce. VA will continue to track capacity needs for in-patient beds and other resources.

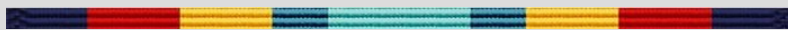
Rigorous safety measures including employee and Veteran COVID-19 screening, physical distancing and appropriate personal protective attire such as face coverings, will remain in place at all facilities. Additionally, VA will continue to maximize the personalized virtual care options of telehealth, phone consults and wellness checks, as these services have been a valuable link to Veterans during this challenging time.



Legislators Letter Urges HASC to Delay Cuts to Military Medical Staff

Reps. Kathy Castor (Fla.) and Bill Posey (Fla.) are urging their fellow legislators to sign onto a letter to the House Armed Services Committee urging them to add language to the House version of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) not to authorize a planned reduction in military medical staff. These cuts were based on military medical end strength requirements conducted before the coronavirus emergency. The pandemic requires that medical readiness be reassessed and updated with lessons learned based on our nation's response to the coronavirus emergency. The letter notes that many had concerns about the planned downsizing of Military Treatment Facilities (MTF) before the COVID-19 emergency.

You are strongly urged to use the FRA [Action Center](#) to ask their legislators to oppose these proposed cuts in military medical staff.



FRA Supports Repeal of 180-Day Delay for Retirees Applying for DoD GS-13 and Below

The FRA supports an amendment in the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), sponsored by Rep. Rob Bishop (Utah), that authorizes

military retirees to transition to DoD GS13 and lower positions directly after retirement. The current law requires a 180-day waiting period after retirement before a military retiree can be appointed into the Civil Service within the Department of Defense (DoD). This time restriction forces many who wish to continue national service toward other careers. The waiting period has resulted in a talent management problem for hiring officials. They are grappling with an antiquated hiring process that often takes months to hire a qualified candidate with a current security clearance.

The intent of the 180-day rule is to prevent senior military officers in positions of influence from creating GS positions for themselves upon retirement. However, the current scope of the 180-day rule severely restricts the ability of federal hiring authorities to hire highly qualified individuals for GS13 and below positions that require current military certifications and experience. This issue has become severe at many of our nation's depots and organizations that require diverse experience. Changes to the 180-day rule (GS-13 and below) will support efforts to improve the quality of the talent pool competing for GS positions and increase the readiness of the force-both major concerns for our military leaders.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important now to get these retirees back to work where they are desperately needed. Many defense programs are slowed and unavailable for the warfighters until we get the personnel in place. Members are strongly urged to use the FRA [Action Center](#) to urge their U.S. Representative to support this amendment.



GAO Doubtful of the Benefits of Merging Military Retail System

The Department of Defense says merging separate retail operations across the services into a single agency will save the taxpayer \$700 million to \$1 billion in the next five years. But the Government Accountability Office is not convinced. A recent GAO report indicates that the DoD task force set up to study consolidation may have overestimated the savings and underestimated the costs, in part, by not considering relocation costs.

The FRA opposes consolidation or closure of military exchanges and wants to ensure adequate funding for the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). The FRA and several other organizations signed onto a letter in February 2019 that was sent to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Armed

Services Committees. The letter addressed the proposals of merging the various elements of the defense resale system, which could pose a threat to its continued viability, and requested further study and oversight by Congress.

In January 2019, a task force convened by the DoD Chief Management Officer recommended consolidating the exchanges and the commissaries. While the military service branches concurred with this recommendation, they did express concerns that consolidation would take longer and cost more than anticipated, while failing to result in promised efficiencies. The FRA is concerned that if these predictions are accurate, the defense resale system may be unable to provide the services - low cost groceries and support for MWR programs - relied on by service members, their families, retirees and survivors.



Below are links to all currently active pre-written E-Mails to many pieces of legislation. We ask that you go to each one, and send the pre-written E-Mails, and to

also call your Reps or Senators and ask for their support on a weekly basis!

You don't need to be Active Duty or a Veteran, in fact we ask all Veteran friends to also help!

1. Urge Congress to Pass the Retired Pay Restoration Act
2. S. 2966, the Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act of 2019
3. S. 1003, VET OPP Act to Reform

VA
Employment
Programs

4. H.R.
4574
-
Pass
the
Veterans'
Right
to
Breathe
Act
Now!
5. S.
2810,
the
Veterans
Hearing
Benefits
Act
of
2019
6. Support
H.R.4985,
the
Veterans
Residential
Care
Choice
Act
7. New

Concurrent
Receipt
Bills
Introduced!

8. STOP
Downsizing
of
Military
Treatment
facilities
9. Support
H.R.
5610
and
S.
3444
to
add
Agent
Orange
Presumptives
10. Temporarily
Waive
TRICARE
Mail
Order
Campaign
11. Need
Your
Help
on
Recovery

Rebate
Checks

12. Put
In
Stimulus
Bill
a
Waiver
of
Mail
Order
Copays
During
Pandemic

13. Ensure
Service
Members
and
Their
Families
Have
Safe
Quality
Housing

14. H.R.
6591
-
Support
Veterans
in
Need
of
Emergency

Care
During
the
COVID-
19
Pandemic

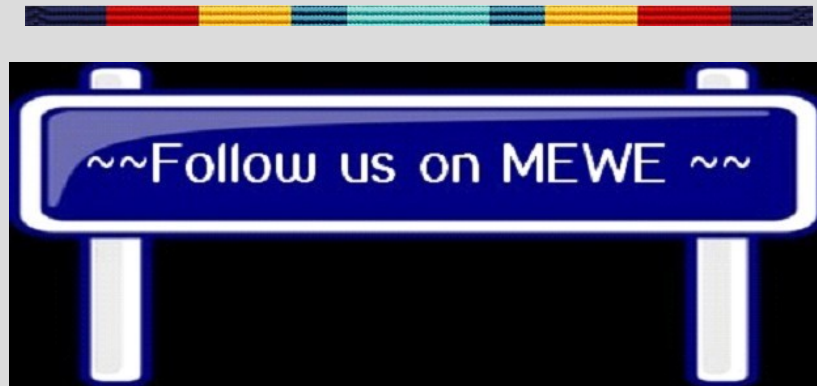
15. Don't
Cut
Military
Medical
Staff
During
Pandemic!



Senate Passes National Suicide Hotline Bill

On Wednesday, the Senate passed S. 2661, the [National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020](#). This legislation would designate 9.8.8 as the telephone number for the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. The existing hotline, which can be reached by dialing 1.800.273.8255, is operated by the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) and through the [Veterans Crisis Line](#). Both hotlines offer confidential support from qualified responders 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many of the responders with the Veterans Crisis Line are veterans themselves. The VFW thanks Senator Cory Gardner

(R-CO) and all original cosponsors for introducing this important legislation. [Learn more.](#)



Follow us on MEWE! The support staff at MEWE is responsive, open to suggestions and works very hard to protect your personal information.

We hope you will join us on this new site.

VETERANS-FOR-CHANGE

www.mewe.com/join/Veterans-for-change

HOMELESS HEROES PROGRAM OF VETERANS-FOR-CHANGE

AMVETS GROUP

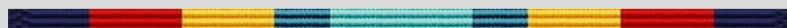
VETERANS SOCIAL GROUP

{USAVET} SUPPORTING GOD & ALL WHO SERVED OUR GREAT NATION



DHA Eliminates Fees for TRICARE Telehealth During Pandemic

The Defense Health Agency has announced that effective immediately co-pays and cost-shares for TRICARE Telehealth be eliminated during the pandemic. The DHA has also temporarily relaxed licensure requirements across state lines for health care providers, which will give beneficiaries access to more providers. The DHA claims this is in line with many states that have relaxed licensure requirements to allow providers to practice across state lines. Previously, providers had to be licensed to practice in their own state, as well as in the state where the patient was located. This will especially help families who live in more rural areas with limited access to health care providers.



Report Claims Service Members on Guam were Exposed to Agent Orange

The National Veterans Legal Services Program and the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School have recently released a study that indicates that

veterans who served on the island of Guam between 1962 and 1975 were likely exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides containing dioxins and may have valid claims to service-related disabilities.

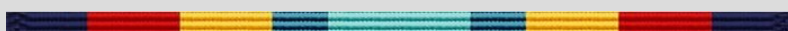
The FRA and several other organizations have dispatched a letter to key lawmakers of the Senate and House Armed Services Committee urging them to add a provision to the upcoming National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to authorize the National Academy of Medicine to perform an independent study to determine if Agent Orange was or was not used in Guam. Please go to the FRA [Action Center](#) to ask their legislators to support this important provision.



Is Your ID Card About to Expire?

Is your ID card expiring soon? The Department of Defense is temporarily allowing Common Access Card (CAC) holders to renew an unexpired card's credentials online using the ID Card Office Online. Uniformed Services ID cardholders can continue to present a card that expired on or after Jan. 1, 2020 to get care and fill prescriptions.

To learn more, [read the article](#).



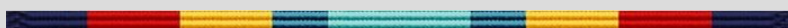
Memorial Day Observances

As noted in last week's NewsBytes, the Department of Veteran Affairs' National Cemetery Administration announced it will commemorate Memorial Day this year with solemn wreath laying ceremonies. Another offering is a new online memorial feature that allows the public to pay tribute to veterans interred in VA national cemeteries across the country.

Each VA national cemetery will conduct a brief wreath laying ceremony, accompanied by a moment of silence and the playing of Taps. In keeping with The Center for Disease Control guidelines that limit large gatherings, these particular ceremonies will not be open to the public.

Other public events typically associated with Memorial Day at national cemeteries, including group placement of flags at grave sites, will not take place. However, all VA national cemeteries will be open Memorial Day weekend from dawn to dusk for public visitation.

Shipmates and all Americans are reminded, on Memorial Day and every day that "freedom is not free." In observance of Memorial Day, the FRA National Headquarters will be closed Monday, May 25, 2020.



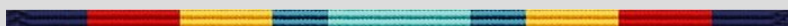


CLICK HERE TO FOLLOW US ON TWITTER!



TRICARE to Now Cover Telehealth Visits During COVID-19 Pandemic

On Tuesday, it was announced that TRICARE will now cover telehealth visits by telephone and eliminate patient copays and cost shares for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes became effective on Thursday. Officials have also temporarily relaxed licensure requirements across state lines for health care providers, which will give military families access to more providers. This is in line with many states that have relaxed licensure requirements to allow providers to practice across state lines. This will especially help families in rural areas who may have limited numbers of health care providers. [Read more.](#)



VA Will Limit National Cemetery Activities on Memorial Day

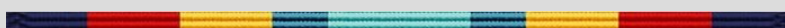
The Department of Veteran Affairs' National Cemetery

Administration announced it will commemorate Memorial Day this year with solemn wreath laying ceremonies. Another offering is the new online memorial feature that will allow the public to pay tribute to veterans interred in VA national cemeteries across the country.

"This year, by necessity, will be different from past Memorial Day observances," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "While the department can't hold large public ceremonies, VA will still honor veterans and service members with the solemn dignity and respect they have earned through their service and sacrifice."

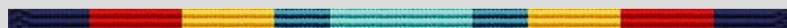
Each VA national cemetery will conduct a brief wreath laying ceremony, accompanied by a moment of silence and the playing of Taps. In keeping with The Center for Disease Control guidelines to limit large gatherings, the ceremonies will not be open to the public.

Other public events held at national cemeteries typically associated with Memorial Day will not take place, including group placement of flags at gravesites. However, all the VA national cemeteries will be open Memorial Day weekend from dawn to dusk for public visitation.



GAO Seeking Input from Military Domestic Violence Survivors

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) is looking to speak with individuals who are survivors of abuse, to include neglect, physical, emotional, or sexual violence, while in a military relationship over the past six years. The survivors must have been either active duty, married to a service member, or an intimate partner of one. This effort is in response to the House Armed Services Committee ordering a report to Congress on the military services' efforts to prevent and respond to domestic violence in the ranks. GAO staff are interested in knowing of any barriers to access to resources and services the survivors may have faced following the abuse or after reporting it. Those who schedule a confidential conversation can select to speak to a male or female staff member during the interview. [Learn more.](#)



TRICARE FAQs: COVID-19 and Pregnancy

Now more than ever, you may have questions about your TRICARE benefit. You can find answers on the TRICARE Coronavirus FAQs page. You'll find a categorized list of questions posed by beneficiaries like

you. And TRICARE doctors and policy experts answer your questions. The following are some of the most frequently asked questions about COVID-19 and pregnancy.

To learn more, [read the article](#).



New Helpline Operational for Survivor Education Benefits

On Monday, VA announced that it opened a new helpline specifically for surviving family members who have questions relating to their education benefits. Military surviving dependents have access to two possible education benefits, [Dependents Education Assistance](#) or the [Marine Gunnery Sgt. John D. Fry Scholarship](#). This new helpline can assist with both programs as well as other VA survivor benefits. You can call the helpline at 888.442.4551 and select Option 5 from the menu. [Learn more](#).



Appointments, Immunity, and Scams: COVID-19 Myths vs. Facts

Are you wondering how to access health care during COVID-19? Do you have questions about developing


immunity, or how to respond to TRICARE scams? Get help using TRICARE resources, FAQs, and read these "myths vs. facts."

To learn more, [read the article](#).



TAPS to Host First Virtual National Military Survivor Seminar

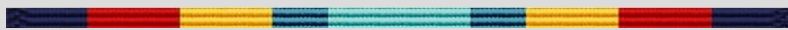
This week, leading up to Memorial Day, the [Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors](#) (TAPS) will be presenting a VIRTUAL National Military Survivor Seminar and Family Program as an online event available to everyone, at no cost. Historically, VFW members have supported this event by being Good Grief Camp mentors or volunteers through the week. The VFW encourages you to check out their exciting program of sessions, care groups, informational seminars, family programming, opportunities to memorialize our military survivors' loved ones, and special celebrity appearances. The program will begin on Tuesday, May 19, and go through Memorial Day. TAPS supports the spouses, children, parents, siblings, and battle buddies of those who have served and died. [Learn more](#).



TRICARE Revises Telehealth Policy to Respond to COVID-19

To improve virtual access to health care during COVID-19, TRICARE recently revised its policy on telehealth services. This temporarily allows you access to care more easily during the constraints of the pandemic. These changes will remain for the duration of the stateside public health emergency. They may be in place overseas beyond the U.S. national emergency end date, based on local conditions.

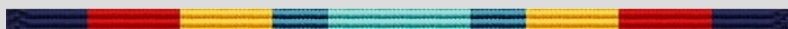
To learn more, [read the article](#).



VFW Pays Its Respects to the Fallen During Memorial Day

In recognition of Memorial Day, the VFW honors the legacy of the men and women who served in our nation's military and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of freedom. While many Americans signal Memorial Day as the start of the summer, the less than one percent who have donned the uniform, and military families worldwide, understand the true meaning and significance of this sacred day. "Comrades, many of you have walked the hallowed grounds of our national veterans' cemeteries solemnly laying eyes on the headstones of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines

and Coast Guardsmen who honorably served and placed the freedom of their nation before their very own safety,” said VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz. “We have lost hundreds of thousands of men and women since the founding of our nation in 1775, and unfortunately, as the global fight on terror continues today, we will lose more protectors of freedom.” This Memorial Day will be different considering the physical distancing and stay-at-home orders issued across the nation because of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. While many Americans will be unable to physically visit loved ones or traditionally gather to memorialize their sacrifice, the VFW encourages the nation to make this Memorial Day as significant as any other in our nation’s history. “On this Memorial Day, like all others before, I’m asking all Americans to spend this day solely on reflecting and remembering the service men and women we have lost over the course of history,” said Schmitz. “Today, and every day, we honor and salute every man and woman -- and the remarkable families of these heroes -- who gave their lives for our nation. Hence, Memorial Day will forever be a day that means everything to the VFW because our warriors decided we meant everything to them.”



National Geographic Pays Tribute to the

75th Anniversary of V-E Day

On May 21, National Geographic will feature a full day of World War II programming underscored by two primetime original premieres, beginning at 8 p.m. EST. The specials combine thousands of hours of research, interviews, and original footage that give viewers an intimate account of the epic war told through historians as well as those who experienced the war firsthand. The first special, at 8 p.m. EST, is titled “WWII In Europe: Voices From The Front,” narrated by ABC News’ Bob Woodruff, featuring first-person accounts from some of the last surviving veterans of WWII. The second special, at 9 p.m. EST, is titled “Heroes Of The Sky: The Mighty Eighth Air Force.” This special introduces viewers to the courageous men of the legendary Eighth Air Force of the United States. For more information visit natgeotv.com or nationalgeographic.com.



GAO Report Finds Women More Likely to Leave the Military Than Men

This month, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report, [Female Active-Duty Personnel - Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts](#). This report was in

response to congressional concern over recruitment and retention of female service members. The report found that women were 28% more likely to separate from the military than men, and that female enlisted promotion rates are lower than their male counterparts. GAO found that there are six main reasons women leave the military: work schedules, organizational culture, family planning, dependent care, deployments, and sexual assault. The authors of the report noted that it was not just sexual assault, but the way the military handled the assault that contributed to some women leaving service. The report found that while the services have female recruitment and retention listed as priorities, they have failed to develop plans that include goals, performance measures, and timeframes to guide their efforts. DOD concurred with the recommendations.



Memorial Day Ceremonies in D.C. Virtual This Year

This year, the normal ceremonies commemorating Memorial Day will be held virtually. The 152nd National Memorial Day Observance to honor America's fallen military service members at Arlington National Cemetery will be [live streamed](#) Monday, May 25. The U.S. Army Military District of Washington will conduct a

Presidential Armed Forces Full Honor Wreath-Laying Ceremony at 9 a.m. EST at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, hosted by Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper. Also, on Monday, Friends of the National World War II Memorial will host a virtual Memorial Day observance on their [Facebook page](#), beginning at 9 a.m., and a private wreath-laying ceremony will follow at 9:30 a.m. The National Memorial Day Concert will not be held in person this year. However, there will be a special presentation with new performances and tributes, including a special tribute to all the men and women in uniform who are fighting against COVID-19. The 2020 National Memorial Day concert will be live on your local PBS station, on Sunday, May 24, at 8 p.m. EST, as well as PBS.org, YouTube, and Facebook. You can also enjoy The National Memorial Day Parade: America Stands Tall, an original television special featuring the story of our shared history, that will air on American Forces Network on Monday, May 25, at 2 p.m. EST, and on ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC affiliate stations nationwide.



A Begins to Reopen Selected Medical Centers

This week, VA reopened 20 medical centers as part of a three-phase timeline. The speed of the phases will

depend upon the VA medical center's ability to minimize and control exposure to COVID-19. Even though these VA medical centers are not fully open, certain non-emergency in-person appointments and some elective procedures may be permitted. Physical distancing, mandatory face masks, screening processes, and other rigorous safety measures remain in place for now. Telework, telemedicine, phone consults, and wellness checks will continue whenever possible. VA continues to strongly suggest that a veteran contact their local VA medical center before arriving at a facility. The initial sites will indicate how other VA medical centers reopen in the coming weeks and months. [Read more.](#)



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**Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs'
Chairman Pens Letter to Veterans**

This week, Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) wrote a letter to America's veterans thanking them for their courage, commitment, and sacrifice. He also calls on veterans to share their stories, continue serving those around you, and reach out to fellow veterans during this unprecedented time to check-in. The VFW appreciates the chairman's commitment, and looks forward to working with him to fulfill our promise to take care of our service members, veterans, and their families.

[Read the letter.](#)



HVAC Women Veterans Task Force Holds Online Forum

On Tuesday, members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Women Veterans Task Force, VA, women veterans, and VSOs discussed the mental health and wellness of women veterans and the impact of COVID-19. VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Tammy Barlet, a Coast Guard veteran, said department officials are behind in providing data on women's usage, complaint rates at medical facilities, and communication with VSOs. "This is the time to over-communicate, not go radio silent," she said. Telemedicine, women veteran peer specialists, sexual harassment, inconsistent services at different locations, and VA outreach were other

critical issues discussed. [Watch the forum.](#)



Legislation Introduced to Expand Survivors' Benefits

On Tuesday, Rep. TJ Cox (D-CA) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 6933, the [Caring for Survivors Act of 2020](#). This important legislation would increase Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments to an amount equal to 55 percent of the permanent and total disability monthly compensation rate, and would make survivors eligible for DIC after a veteran has consistently held a permanent and total disability rating for five years. This idea was put forth in the [Independent Budget Report](#), co-authored by the VFW, Disabled American Veterans, and Paralyzed Veterans of America. The VFW thanks Rep. Cox and all cosponsors for their efforts to expand survivors' benefits. [Learn more.](#)



MIA Update



The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced seven new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Thomas F. Johnson, 18, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Johnson died on the fourth day of battle, Nov. 23, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Johnson.](#)

Army Pvt. Charles Andrews, 25, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th

Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Brandenburg, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was declared missing in action on Dec. 4, 1944. Andrews could not be recovered because of the on-going fighting, and his status was changed to killed in action on Jan. 29, 1945. Interment services are pending. [Read about Andrews.](#)

Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Howard E. Miller, 22, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Miller died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Miller.](#)

Army Cpl. R.B. Cherry, 19, was a member of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 27, 1950, near Anju, North Korea. Using information provided by returned POWs after the war, it was determined that Cherry had been a POW in

Camp 5 and died of pneumonia sometime in the winter of 1950. His remains were reportedly buried in a cemetery near the camp and were not recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cherry.](#)

Army Sgt. William E. Cavender, 20, was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cavender.](#)

Marine Corps Pfc. Mervin D. Galland, 24, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Galland died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. He was reported to have been buried in Row D of the East Division Cemetery, later renamed Cemetery 33. Interment services are pending. [Read about Galland.](#)

Navy Fireman 1st Class Louis J. Tushla, 25, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Tushla. Interment services are pending. [Read about Tushla.](#)



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