

From: [Teresa Morris](#)
To: [Luis Casillas](#)
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1. House VA Committee Discusses Claims on Appeal: On Tuesday, the VFW submitted testimony before the House VA Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs regarding timely decisions for veterans who have a disability claim at the appeal level. Current data shows about 250,845 appeals are pending in VA regional offices, pension centers and at the Appeals Management Center. Some have been at these levels for the last 18 months without any significant change. VFW testified that the focus from Members of Congress and others has been solely on the "original disability claims" backlog, so appeals have not been given the same attention and have simultaneously grown. In our written testimony we commented that the inattention to appeals cases, pressure to move other work, and under staffing of appeals operations has created inefficiencies that are now out of control. Subcommittee Chairman, Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) spoke about ways to improve overall efficiency and whether Congress needs to make legislative/law changes. Ranking Member Dina Titus (D-NV) asked the witnesses from VA if they are ready for the onslaught of appeals with the current changes being made and the draw-down of the current conflicts. She also asked VA about staffing levels and priorities at the Board level.

For our complete testimony, visit our website at <http://www.vfw.org/VFW-in-DC/Congressional-Testimony/>

To watch the recorded webcast of the hearing, visit the House VA Committee at: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/why-are-veterans-waiting-years-on-appeal-a-review-of-the-post-decision-process-for-appealed>

2. House Discusses Veterans' Higher Education Initiatives: On Thursday, your VFW attended a hearing by the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity entitled, "The Value of Education for Veterans at Public, Private and For-Profit Colleges and Universities." Subcommittee Chairman Bill Flores, R-Texas, opened by stressing the importance of administering veterans' education programs effectively to ensure that veterans are able to maximize their opportunities and that tax dollars are being well spent. VFW partner Student Veterans of America testified on behalf of the veterans' service community, highlighting many of the concerns expressed by the VFW over the last year. To learn more about the hearing and to view an archived webcast, click here:

<http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/%E2%80%9Cthe-value-of-education-for-veterans-at-public-private-and-for-profit-colleges-and>

3. House Passes NDAA: Late last Friday, the House approved (315-108) their version of the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act. The bill, HR 1960, authorizes \$544.4 billion for DOD, Department of Energy and \$85.8 billion for overseas contingency operations. Among the key provisions were several changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) with regard to sexual assaults in the military. One would strip commanders of their authority to dismiss or reduce guilty verdicts in sexual assault cases and another would lift the five-year statute of limitations on assaults thereby allowing prosecution of these cases at any time. The bill would also provide guidelines to commanders on the temporary reassignment or removal of someone who has been accused of committing a sexual assault and requires victim's counsels to be specially trained to provide legal assistance to victims.

VFW-supported provisions included:

- No increase in enrollment fees for Tricare healthcare or copayments for prescriptions.
- A 1.8 percent military pay raise.
- An amendment preventing service chiefs from ending Military Tuition Assistance programs.
- Allowing Space-A-Travel for 100% disabled veterans.
- Requiring DOD and VA to create a comprehensive plan regarding the care and treatment of service members with urotrauma.
- Requires DOD and VA to implement an integrated health record by October 1, 2016 and to make all health records within AHLTA and Vista available to healthcare providers in both Departments.

The bill now moves to the Senate for debate. Check back here for updates as we will continue to monitor any action on the bill as it moves through Congress.

For the House Roll Call Vote click here: <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2013/roll244.xml>

For more about the bill visit the House Armed Services website:

http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/press-releases?ContentRecord_id=14ba2e7d-358d-474e-99af-ad0c21adda8a

For the Senate Armed Services bill, click here: <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/>

4. VFW Joins Volunteers of America for Panel Discussion: On Tuesday the VFW was on hand at the National Press Club for a panel discussion on the invisible wounds of war hosted by Volunteers of America. The panel, moderated by Fox News host Chris Wallace featured former Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind.; Kelly Caffarelli, president of the Home Depot Foundation; Koby Langley, a senior advisor for the Corporation for National Service; and Dr. Jonathan Sherin, vice president for military communities with Volunteers of America. Much of the discussion centered on ways to help veterans suffering from invisible wounds achieve normalcy as they return to a civilian society that is largely inexperienced with military culture. To learn more about the panel, click here: <http://thevfw.blogspot.com/2013/06/vfw-joins-volunteers-of-america-for.html>

5. Department of Labor Introduces Website for Women Veterans: Labor Department officials launched a new website this week devoted to issues and challenges affecting women veterans. The site is a collaborative effort between the Labor Department and the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) and the Women's Bureau. The site highlights potential challenges that may affect the economic security of women veterans and also contains links with information on employment opportunities, education and health care options and data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other government agencies. The website link is <http://www.dol.gov/vets/womenveterans/>

6. Two MIAs Identified: The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to two American servicemen who had been missing-in-action since World

War II and the Korean War. They are:

· Army Air Force Staff Sgt. James M. McKain, of Philadelphia, Pa.. On May 7, 1944, McKain was aboard a B-24D Liberator that departed New Guinea on a bombing mission. Due to mechanical troubles, the B-24D was delayed in departing the airbase and was unable to join the formation after takeoff. Neither McKain, nor the other nine crewmen were seen after taking off.

· Army Cpl. Marvin E. Omans, 20, of Clinton, Mo. In late November 1950, Omans and elements of the 31st Regimental Combat Team, were deployed along the east side of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea when they were attacked by overwhelming enemy forces. Task Force Faith began a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position south of the reservoir. Omans would be reported missing.

Read more about their individual recovery stories at

http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/.

7. Pancakes for Patriots: Plans continue to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Korean War armistice in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, July 27. The event will be broadcast live and VFW Posts nationwide are encouraged to join in the commemoration by hosting “Pancakes for Patriots”-type events to honor and help educate local communities about the service and sacrifices made by so many of our VFW members and their families. The Korean War Commemoration Committee is especially interested in VFW Posts hosting such events in the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C.; the Hampton Roads area of Virginia; La Crosse, Wis.; and in San Antonio, Austin, Nashville, Louisville, Birmingham, Tucson and Minneapolis. Read more about the “Pancakes for Patriots” opportunity on the VFW Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/VFWFans>.

As always, we want to share your advocacy stories on the VFW Capitol Hill blog. To share your stories, either fill out our online form by clicking here, <http://www.vfw.org/Forms/Capitol-Hill-Blog-Submissions/>, or simply email photos and stories directly to vfwac@vfw.org.

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