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1. Government Shutdown Looming: Except for military and emergency services, the federal government will shut down unless Congress passes a continuing resolution by midnight tonight. Whether Congress will be able to put political differences aside is uncertain. Also uncertain is whether a new shutdown would replicate the 16-day shutdown in 2013. The VFW, along with other organizations, have worked tirelessly to shield VA from future shutdowns. That means health care facilities will remain open, new appointments will still be made, disability and compensation payments will be paid, and veterans will still be buried. More information will be known as the day and weekend unfolds.

2. Senate Hearing on State of VA: On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing to discuss VA's implementation of recent legislation enacted into law. VA reported that 13 provisions of the Forever GI Bill have been implemented and that it is working to ensure veterans impacted by GI Bill changes are properly informed about their new benefits. VA also reported that three percent of veterans offered the opportunity to participate in the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) have elected to participate. VA claims that 75 percent of veterans who have participated in the RAMP pilot program, which is designed to expedite the claims appeals process, have received favorable rating decisions. Committee members sparred over different community care proposals being considered by the Senate. Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin agreed to send the committee official feedback on the different proposals. The VFW, along with 25 other veterans organizations, supports S. 2193, the Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2017, which would improve VA community care and internal care, and finally expand the caregiver program to veterans of all eras. [Watch the hearing](#), which starts at the 18-minute mark.

3. House Holds Veteran Homelessness Hearing: The House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittees on Health and Economic Opportunity held a hearing on Thursday aimed at discussing the current situation of veteran homelessness and the way forward. Since 2009, the rate of veteran homelessness has been reduced by nearly 50 percent. With three states and 57 communities virtually ending veteran homelessness within their borders, efforts between VA, the Department of Labor, and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have clearly been successful. Subcommittee members asked questions regarding the success of VA's Housing First plan and the holistic nature of case workers for programs such as HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH). Witnesses agreed that such programs are highly successful in working toward a "functional zero" and in assuring veterans who overcome homelessness do not become homeless again. Also in question was VA's intent to divert funding from the HUD-VASH program. VA assured the subcommittees that its intent was never to cut all funding to the program, but to assure more funding would be available where and when necessary. [Read the VFW's testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#).

4. Aurora Hospital Hearing: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing on the status of the Denver Replacement Medical Center in Aurora, Colo. The hospital project is behind schedule and a billion dollars over the original budget. The replacement hospital is scheduled to complete construction later this month and be open for service sometime this summer. Representative Mike Coffman has taken deep personal interest in this project as it affects his constituents directly, and rigorously questioned representatives from VA and the Army Corps of Engineers about the troubled hospital project. In 2015 the true nature of the problems with the hospital came to light and Congress stepped in to take corrective actions. The Aurora hospital project is just the latest example of VA's lack of transparency and not engaging with community stakeholders when building facilities like Aurora. VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Patrick Murray submitted testimony expressing that the VFW is glad this project is finally near completion, but is calling for better transparency and coordination in future projects. [Read the VFW's testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#).

5. National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service: On Thursday, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles attended the inaugural meeting of the newly established National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service. The result of the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act, the 11-member commission is tasked with reviewing the current military selective service (military draft), and providing recommendations to Congress and the Administration concerning ways to increase interest and public participation in military and public service among young Americans. The commission is comprised of former and current senior government officials, including Congressman Joseph Heck; Deborah Wada, former assistant secretary of the Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs; Mr. Edward Allard, former C.O.O. of the Selective Service System; and the Honorable Janine Davidson, former under secretary of the Navy. Learn more about the [commission and its mission](#).

6. VFW National Home for Children: Past residents are sharing their stories of how the VFW National Home for Children impacted their lives. One story about a woman named Robyn details how her grandfather's military service gave her a new chance at life. Robyn explains, "I was imagining us homeless. We didn't really have any family here at the time, so I didn't have any help. I was embarrassed because I couldn't take care of the kids." [Watch Robyn's video and hear](#)

[more stories](#). If you know a military or veteran family that needs help, have them call the VFW National Home Military and Veteran Family Helpline at (800) 313-4200.

7. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identification and burial updates of eight American servicemen who had been missing in action from WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Stanley F. Stegnerski**, 25, of Chester, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Jan. 22 in Millsboro, Del. Stegnerski was a P-51D pilot flying out of Royal Air Force Base 244 at East Wretham, Norfolk, England. On Nov. 21, 1944, Stegnerski was flying a bomber escort mission when the American aircraft were attacked by German fighters over Merseberg, Germany. Stegnerski's group closed in on a group of 20 German fighters and opened fire. He was last seen by his wingman as they prepared to attack the German Focke-Wulf fighters. A German shoot-down report noted a P-51 Mustang with a tail number similar to Stegnerski's had crashed on Nov. 21, 1944. The unidentified remains were buried in Grafentonna. Based on this information, and no information concerning Stegnerski as a prisoner of war, the Secretary of War declared him deceased on Nov. 22, 1945. [Read about Stegnerski](#).

-- **Army Pfc. James J. Leonard, Jr.**, 22, of San Francisco, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Jan. 23 in his hometown. Leonard was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In the early hours of July 20, 1950, Leonard's regiment arrived east of Yongdong, South Korea, and began preparing to assume the defense of the city. North Korean forces began attacking their positions on July 23 and took control of Yongdong by July 25. Leonard was reported as killed in action on July 25, 1950. [Read about Leonard](#).

-- **Navy Reserve Chief Water Tender Paul R. Wright**, 41, of Meadville, Mo., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Jan. 25 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Wright was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Wright was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. [Read about Wright](#).

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class John E. Savidge**, 20, of Linden, N.J., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Jan. 26 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Savidge was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Savidge was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. [Read about Savidge](#).

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Ewart T. Sconiers**, 27, of DeFuniak Springs, Fla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Jan. 27 in his hometown. Sconiers served as a bombardier on the B-17F Flying Fortress with the 414th Bombardment Squadron, 97th Bombardment Group. On Oct. 21, 1942, his plane was severely damaged during a mission to bomb the German U-boat pens at Lorient, France. The crew parachuted safely and were rescued from the water, only to be turned over to German forces as prisoners of war. Sconiers was transferred to Stalag Luft II in present-day Zagan, Poland, where he remained until 1944. He was admitted to the camp hospital in January 1944 after a fall on ice. He was subsequently transferred to the reserve hospital in Luben, Germany (present-day Lubin, Poland), where he died on Jan. 24, 1944. He was buried by fellow prisoners in the POW section of the municipal cemetery in Luben/Schleswig on Jan. 27, 1944. [Read about Sconiers](#).

-- **Army Cpl. William C. McDowell** was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. McDowell was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about McDowell.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Chester E. Seaton** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Seaton was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Seaton.](#)

-- **Air Force Col. Edgar F. Davis** was a navigator aboard an RF-4C Phantom fighter-bomber aircraft, assigned to the 11th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. On Sept. 17, 1968, Davis was on a night photo-reconnaissance mission over Laos when he and his pilot were shot down by anti-aircraft artillery fire. While the pilot ejected and was rescued, no contact was received from Davis. After search and rescue efforts were suspended after failing to locate Davis or the wreckage, Davis was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Davis.](#)

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.