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1. VFW Praises Two-Year Sequestration Alleviating Budget Deal: In a bipartisan deal passed early Friday morning, Congress voted to increase sequestration spending caps for fiscal years (FY) 2018 and 2019, keep the government open, and ease the impact of sequestration on our service members, veterans, and their families. The VFW has long called for an end to sequestration which has caused dangerous budget cuts harmful to the military and VA. The VFW is glad Congress recognizes that arbitrary caps set in 2011 no longer reflect the reality of today's demands on our military and VA's obligation to provide care to those who have served. This action by Congress raises those caps by nearly \$300 billion for both defense and non-defense spending over FY18 and FY19. The VFW applauds the actions of Congress, but continues our call for the permanent repeal of sequestration, which has only been delayed for two more years. [Read the VFW's statement.](#)

2. VFW Meets with DHA Director: On Thursday, VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace met with VADM Raquel Bono, director of the Defense Health Agency (DHA). The two discussed how VFW and DHA can increase collaboration on issues impacting TRICARE beneficiaries. Also included in the discussion were VFW's concerns regarding the sunset of TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan, which will occur Dec. 31, 2018, and how to ensure beneficiaries transitioning to the new Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) receive consistent, quality care. Eligible retirees and active-duty family members will also be eligible to obtain vision care through FEDVIP. In order to have dental or vision coverage in 2019, interested individuals must enroll during the open season — Nov. 12 - Dec. 10, 2018. There are 10 dental and four vision carriers from which to choose. [Read more or sign up for updates on the program.](#)

3. House Hearing on VA Caregiver Program: The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing on Tuesday to discuss VA's Caregiver Program. Committee members focused on improvements made to the current caregiver program, as well as how to fairly and effectively expand the program to veterans who served before Sept. 11, 2001. Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin testified in support of expanding the program and explained that VA views the program as not only the morally correct thing to do, but that expansion may save taxpayer dollars in the long run. The VFW submitted a statement for the record, which urges support for expanding the program and reiterates that this would avoid VA expenditures on more costly inpatient nursing home care. The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has advanced a bill which would expand this important program, but the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has yet to do so, despite showing public support for expansion. [Watch the hearing](#) or [read the VFW's testimony](#).

4. VFW Endorses Veterans Financial Protection Legislation: This week, the VFW formally endorsed H.R. 506, the [Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2018](#). This legislation is the latest effort to close an existing loophole that allows individuals and businesses to target veterans seeking to file disability compensation, pension, and aid and attendance claims, and charge them exorbitant fees for little to no actual assistance. As this practice is illegal, the legislation would close the current loophole in federal law and finally give prosecutors the ability to punish those found guilty. Penalties include fines, imprisonment up to five years, or both, for any person who knowingly engages in any scheme or artifice meant to defraud an individual of veterans' benefits, or in connection with obtaining benefits for that individual. [Read more](#).

5. VFW-Supported Bill to Improve TAP Introduced: On Tuesday, Representative Stephanie Murphy (D-Fla.) introduced a bipartisan bill to help service members transitioning from the military to civilian life. *The Better Access to Technical Training, Learning, and Entrepreneurship (BATTLE) for Servicemembers Act* will better prepare transitioning service members for paths in education, career technical training, or starting their own businesses. Murphy said, "As a nation, it's our responsibility to help our servicemembers succeed, whether on the battlefield or in the workforce." The VFW strongly supports this effort to set up transitioning troops for success once they leave the service. We are thankful for Congresswoman Murphy's continuing efforts in making sure service members successfully transition back to civilian life. [Read the press release](#).

6. TRICARE Webinar: TRICARE will hold a webinar on Feb. 12 to discuss changes to the TRICARE program that took effect Jan. 1, 2018. The webinar will feature subject matter experts from the Defense Health Agency who will provide information on changes to the new Select plan, health plan costs, enrollment requirements, regions and contractors, accessing urgent care, and other topics. The webinar is scheduled from 1-2 p.m. Eastern Time. Interested individuals can [register here](#) or dial in by calling (213) 929-4232 and entering attendee code: 270-539-237.

7. DOD Releases Service Academy Report: On Wednesday, the Department of Defense (DOD) released its *Annual Report on Sexual Violence and Harassment at the Military Service Academies* for the academic program year 2016-2017. This year's report shows that the three academies received 112 reports of sexual assault involving cadets or midshipmen in academic program year 2016-2017 — an increase from 86 reports the previous year. Most of the reporting

increase occurred at the U.S. Military Academy, which DOD attributes to a change in reporting policy and the relocation of its victim assistance office. Additionally, the Air Force Academy's victim assistance efforts during the past academic program year did not comply with policy, which DOD says Air Force Academy leadership has taken action to rectify. Recent DOD efforts on sexual harassment and assault have focused on promoting empirically proven prevention, enhancing a culture of respect, and improving reporting. [Read the full report.](#)

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

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Charles R. Ogle**, 20, of Mountain View, Mo., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Feb. 12 in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St. Louis. Ogle was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Ogle was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. [Read about Ogle.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Alfred G. Bensinger, Jr.**, of Oklahoma City, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Feb. 16 in the Fort Sill National Cemetery, Fort Sill, Okla. Bensinger was a member of Company D, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. On Nov. 25, 1950, while operating in the Ch'ongch'on River area in northwestern North Korea, his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Withdrawal orders were issued on Nov. 29 and Bensinger's unit provided security for the division. Bensinger was captured during the withdrawal. It was later reported by returning American POWs that Bensinger died at a POW transient camp known as the Hofong Camp, a sub-camp of the Pukchin-Tarigol Main Camp Cluster in mid-January 1951. [Read about Bensinger.](#)

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

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

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 vfwac@vfw.org.