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**To:** Luis Casillas  
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**VFW WASHINGTON WEEKLY**  
**February 21, 2014**

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**1. Comprehensive Veterans' Bill Needs Your Help:** VFW-supported legislation, the Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 is scheduled for a vote on Tuesday, February 25. The bill, S. 1982, introduced by Senate VA Committee Chairman, Bernie Sanders (I-VT) is the most comprehensive veterans' legislation to be introduced in decades. We need all of our members and advocates to call their senators and urge them to vote YES today! The bill needs 60 votes to move to the Senate floor for debate. Some of the noteworthy provisions include an extension of caregiver benefits to all generations, advance appropriations for VA's compensation, education and pension accounts, improved services for military sexual assault victims and in-state tuition rates for Post-9/11 GI bill users. To take action today, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/issues/alert/?alertid=63063196>

**2. Advocates Needed for Advance Appropriations Push:** On Tuesday, Feb. 25, the VFW will be joining DAV and other veteran and military service organizations at a Capitol Hill press conference to highlight the need to pass Advance Appropriations legislation. Sens. Mark Begich (D-AK) and John Boozman (R-AR) are planning to introduce an amendment to S. 1982 that would provide advance funding for all VA accounts. Only VA's medical care accounts are currently covered by advance appropriations. Providing such funding to all VA accounts will eliminate the financial impact of government shutdowns on disability compensation and survivor pay. We are asking all of our Washington metropolitan area VFW members and advocates to join "Operation Keep the Promise" at noon, Tuesday, Feb. 25, outside the U.S. Capitol in the House Triangle press area. We have put together several social media tools to spread the word and put pressure on Congress to pass this critical funding. We encourage all to use the social media tools provided below and take action on Tuesday.

Thunderclap: <https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/8976-operation-keep-the-promise?locale=en>  
Phone2Action: 1-888-770-4405  
Twitter - Hashtag: #keepthepromise

**3. Military Compensation Commission Update:** VFW Washington Office Executive Director Bob Wallace met Thursday with the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, which is charged with examining how our troops are compensated while in uniform, in retirement, and as veterans, and their reach includes those programs operated by the VA and Department of Labor. Among the compensation and Quality of Life programs under review are the 20-year retirement system; military pay and the tax-exempt status of allowances; concurrent receipt of retiree and disability pay; education; military healthcare costs and eligibility; military exchanges, commissaries and schools; and transition and employment assistance programs, among many others. Also under discussion is a joint military medical command, which the VFW supports with Resolution 417, which was approved by delegates attending last year's 114th VFW National Convention in Louisville. The VFW testified before the Commission in November and remains wary of their overall intent, but is appreciative of the continued two-way conversation. The Commission is required to issue their report to the White House in February 2015. For more information or to leave a public comment on their website, go to <http://www.mcrmc.gov/>.

**4. More Secure VA ID Cards Coming:** The VA has announced the phased roll out of newly designed, more secure Veteran Health Identification Cards (VHIC). Similar to a typical health insurance card, the VHIC will display the veteran's member ID, a new unique identifier, as well as a plan ID, reflecting the veteran's enrollment in VA healthcare. The new card replaces the Veteran Identification Card (VIC), which was introduced in 2004. As part of a phased rollout, starting this month, the card will only be offered to newly enrolled and other veterans who have not yet been issued a VIC. In April, VA will begin a three-month effort to automatically issue the more secure VHIC to current VIC cardholders. VA recommends Veterans safeguard their VIC as they would a credit card, and cut up or shred the card once it is replaced. Enrolled veterans can get more information about the VHIC by visiting their VA medical facility enrollment coordinator or the website [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic), calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visiting their local VA health care facility. Veterans not enrolled in the VA healthcare system can apply for enrollment at any time by visiting [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll), calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visiting their local VA health care facility.

**5. SSA to Expedite Disability Process for Veterans:** The Social Security Administration unveiled a new initiative this week to expedite disability claims by veterans with a VA disability compensation rating of 100% Permanent & Total (P&T). Under the new process, which is set to launch in mid-March, Social Security will treat these veterans' applications as high priority and issue expedited decisions, similar to the way the agency currently handles disability claims from Wounded Warriors. In order to receive the expedited service, veterans must tell Social Security they have a VA disability compensation rating of 100% P&T, and show proof of their disability rating with their VA Notification Letter. The VA rating only expedites Social Security disability claims

processing and does not guarantee an approval for Social Security disability benefits. These veterans must still meet the strict eligibility requirements for a disability allowance. For information about this service, please visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/pgm/disability-pt.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pgm/disability-pt.htm). For more about Social Security's handling of Wounded Warrior's disability claims, please visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors).

**6. VFW Joins Bush Summit on Empowering Veterans:**

On Wednesday, your VFW was at the George W. Bush Institute in Dallas for the institute's first summit on "Empowering Our Nation's Warriors," hosted by former President George W. Bush. The summit brought together leaders from the nonprofit world, as well as government, education and private sector to discuss the issues facing America's newest generation of veterans. Also participating was Dr. Jill Biden, who discussed the White House's Joining Forces initiative. VFW partners Student Veterans of America also discussed the veterans' experience in higher education. For highlights, including video from the summit, click here: <http://thevfw.blogspot.com/2014/02/vfw-joins-bush-summit-on-empowering.html>.

**7. Tricare Pharmacy Update:** The VFW received an update from Express Scripts, the pharmacy contractor for TRICARE, about the TRICARE for Life one-year mandatory home delivery pilot program. The only medications that are required for home delivery under the program are name brand maintenance medications. Generic maintenance medications and all short-term medications can still be filled at local retail pharmacies. Other key exceptions to mandatory program participation include veterans residing overseas, in nursing homes, and veterans with other health insurance plans in addition to TFL. Other exemptions and one-time overrides may be granted by Express Scripts on a case-by-case basis. To request a waiver, call Express Scripts at 1-877-363-1303. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/TRICAREForLife/>.

**8. Military Family Survey:** Blue Star Families has asked VFW to help distribute their 2014 Military Family Lifestyle Survey to active-duty, Guard, Reserve and veteran families. The survey is now available online at <http://tiny.cc/2014VFW>. The data collected provides real-time feedback from military families on issues ranging from operations tempo to pay and benefits, stress, caregiving and employment.

**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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).**

**To sign up new veterans' advocates to receive the Washington Weekly every Friday, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm>.**

If you no longer wish to receive e-mail from us, please click [here](#).

