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**VFW Washington Weekly
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1. VFW Testifies on Education/Employment Bills: On Wednesday, the VFW testified before the House VA Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity on an array of pending legislation. We presented our views on several bills focused on issues like educational opportunities for unemployed veterans, foreclosure protections for military families, and civilian professional licensing and credentialing for military-trained veterans. The VFW offered its support for each of the bills up for discussion during the hearing. The subcommittee has scheduled a tentative mark-up of the pending legislation for June 28. We will continue to work with the committee as the bills move through the process and look forward to their passage by the full committee. To view an archived webcast of the hearing and to read our testimony along with the prepared remarks of all witnesses, visit our blog at: <http://thefvw.blogspot.com/2013/06/watch-live-vfw-to-testify-before-house.html>.

2. House VA Subcommittee Reviews Vet Bills: Today, the House VA Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs held a hearing on several bills aimed at updating the disability claims process. VFW has consistently made the disability claims process a legislative priority for more than decade. Congress has recently voiced their concern on how VA is handling the influx in claims with a variety of legislation intent on fixing the process. VFW believes that several of the bills, although well-intended may not produce a positive outcome in reducing the claims backlog. Other bills considered included HR 1494, the Blue Water Navy Ship Accountability Act and HR 1288, the WWII Merchant Mariner Service Act. We will continue to monitor the bills discussed today as they move through the process. To view the recorded webcast or read witnesses testimony, click here: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/legislative-hearing-on-hr-1288-hr-1494hr-1623-hr-1809-hr-2086-hr-2138-hr-2189-hr-2341-hr>.

3. VA Committee Discusses Medical Facility Leasing: The House VA Committee discussed VA's Capital Investment plans in a hearing entitled "Assessing VA's Capital Investment Options to Provide Veterans' Care." The hearing was prompted by a recent ruling by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in which it was decided that VA's budgetary mechanism for major medical leases requires a change to properly account for their lease authorizations. According to CBO, Deputy Director, Robert A. Sunshine, VA would have to show within its budget request funding for the length of the lease in the budget year that the lease was negotiated or entered into. As background, VA has used leasing as an economical way of providing care for veterans at facilities -- many of which are Community Based Outpatient Clinics in rural areas where larger medical centers are not found. Currently VA has 27 leases planned, some which cover a 10-20 cycle. Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Robert A. Petzel explained that the ruling puts VA in a tough spot with regards to balancing resources in a single budget cycle. Challenges with budgeting for major medical leases in a given budget cycle and providing funding for a 20-year lease agreement would be almost impossible. Committee members questioned the decision by CBO and promised to look more deeply into solutions. They mentioned looking at service contracts and possibly more fee based services so that veterans continue to receive the care and services in a timely manner. As a partner in the Independent Budget, the VFW has vocalized its concerns on this issue over the last few months. For the recorded webcast and all testimony provided, visit the House VA website at:

<http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/assessing-va%E2%80%99s-capital-investment-options-to-provide-veterans%E2%80%99-care>.

4. VFW Discuss Women Vets' Employment with Labor Department: Last week your VFW was on hand at the Department of Labor for a listening session on women veterans' employment issues. The meeting, which was hosted by Labor's new Women Veteran Initiative, brought together women veterans, government leaders, private industry and veterans' advocates to discuss the unique employment hurdles faced by women veterans and potential solutions. The Bureau of Labor statistics also explained how federal employment initiatives had yielded results for unemployed male veterans, but female veterans still faced significant barriers to post-military employment. To learn more about the listening session and some of the issues VFW seeks to address for unemployed women veterans, click here: <http://thefvw.blogspot.com/2013/06/vfw-joins-labor-to-discuss-women.html>.

5. Army to Cut 10 Brigades: Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno identified 10 installations this week that will lose one brigade each by 2017. This reduction in force is in addition to the two brigades previously announced to stand down in Europe. The announcement follows earlier decisions to reduce the size of the Army by 80,000 soldiers and the Marines by 20,000. The 10 stateside Army installations are Forts Bliss, Bragg, Campbell, Carson, Drum, Hood, Knox, Lewis, Riley and Stewart. Depending on requirements, an Army brigade can number between 2,500 and 4,000 soldiers. The planned reduction in the number of brigades also allows the Army to cancel \$400 million in military construction contracts out of \$700 million in planned projects.

6. National PTSD Awareness Day: Thursday, June 27th was National PTSD Awareness Day. National organizations and the U.S. Senate highlighted the need to take steps to raise awareness and education about PTSD. The VA, in observance of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) awareness month (June) invites the public to participate in its "Take the Step" campaign. VA's campaign will highlight different topics so visitors can "Take the Step" to: know more about PTSD; challenge their beliefs; explore the treatment options available; and reach out to make a difference. VA continues to provide effective PTSD treatment for veterans and conducts extensive research on PTSD, including prevention of stress disorders. Veterans are encouraged to use VA's PTSD resources so they are able to recognize symptoms and seek help. We encourage all veterans to share what they learn with someone they know to build awareness and support systems. For more about the campaign or for VA services with regards to PTSD, click here: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2455>.

7. Vietnam MIA Recovered: The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to Army Spc. 5 John L. Burgess, 21, of Sutton Bay, Mich. On June 30, 1970, while on a command and control mission, a UH-1H Iroquois helicopter was struck by enemy fire and crashed in Binh Phuoc Province, South Vietnam. Of the five-man crew, only one survived the crash. Read more at http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/.

8. POW/MIA Day Posters Now Available: Order your 2013 POW/MIA Recognition Day posters from the Defense POW/MIA Office before they run out. Each full-color poster measures 11x16-inches, and shipping is free. Limit is 20 posters per order. Place your order: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/pow_day/.

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 vwac@vfw.org.

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

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