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This week's issue is being delivered early in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday.

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**1. Latest VA Fix Isn't:** The VFW is adamantly opposed to the latest congressional attempt to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs. The “fix,” as introduced Tuesday by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), “throws out the idea of acceptable patient wait times and eliminates the requirement of the veteran to ask for VA permission to use civilian medical providers,” according to his [press release](#). The “fix” would also erode the VA health care system by charging veterans for care related to their service-connected wounds, illnesses or injuries. The VFW has conducted [multiple surveys](#) that reflect more than 80 percent of veterans who are eligible for VA care choose to use their earned VA care, despite the overwhelming majority having other options, such as employer-sponsored health insurance, the military's TRICARE plan, or Medicare. Veterans appreciate options, and ultimately they choose whichever health plan best fits their individual circumstances. Having unregulated choice, however, puts the onus on veterans to find their own care — and that needs to be a decision between doctors and their patients, not Washington. A more detailed VFW press release and call to action will be posted on Monday.

**2. NDAA Update:** Following several weeks of negotiations with the House, the Senate unanimously approved the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2018 (FY18). In recent months, the VFW has placed significant pressure on Congress to preserve or extend the benefits granted to members of the military, retirees, veterans and their families, such as pay and allowances; TRICARE reform; the Survivor Benefits Plan; the declassification of documents related to toxic exposure; military sexual assault; and benefit parity for certain members of the National Guard and Reserve. The VFW is glad the final bill includes provisions important to VFW members. Specifically, the final bill does not impact the grandfathering of TRICARE enrollment and copayment costs for current retirees. The final bill authorizes more than \$692 billion for ongoing and planned defense programs, including \$65.7 billion for overseas contingency operations. Despite the bill's passage, DOD is still operating on a continuing

resolution which prohibits its ability to use funds authorized by the NDAA. Authorized spending levels in the NDAA are well above the \$549 billion sequestration spending cap on defense spending for FY18, which requires Congress to strike a budget deal to adjust the outdated caps that were set in 2010 and fails to account for the changing needs of America's military.

**3. Recent GI Bill Changes:** In recent months there have been substantial changes and additions to the GI Bill benefit. One VFW-supported change is the removal of the 15-year use it or lose it cap. The 15-year time limitation to use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits was eliminated for veterans who left active duty on or after Jan. 1, 2013. Additionally, children who became eligible for the Fry Scholarship on or after Jan. 1, 2013, and all Fry Scholarship-eligible spouses now have the 15-year cap removed as well. The VFW worked tirelessly with Congress and our VSO partners to ensure veterans who were precluded from fully utilizing this important benefit are able to accomplish their post-military educational goals. [Learn more about recent GI Bill changes.](#)

**4. VA Women Veterans Summit Webinars:** In August, Hurricane Harvey forced the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to cancel a majority of the events scheduled for their National Women Veterans Summit held in Houston. Consequently, VA has hosted webinars for discussions and panels that were cancelled. The webinars are available to watch from VA's website. Topics covered include employment, health care, military sexual trauma, local and federal resources and more. [Watch the webinars.](#)

**5. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identification of remains and burial updates of three American servicemen who had been missing in action from World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Donald E. Underwood**, 23, of River Rouge, Mich., whose identification was previously announced, will be honored next to his mother's grave in Flat Rock, Mich., on Nov. 25, followed by a burial at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C., on Nov. 28. Underwood was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, (Heavy), 30th Bombardment Group. On Jan. 21, 1944, Underwood's B-24J Liberator was unable to gain altitude and crashed into the water shortly after taking off from Hawkins Field, Helen Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. All 10 members onboard, including Underwood, were killed. [Read about Underwood.](#)

-- **Navy Reserve Radioman 2nd Class Julius H.O. Pieper** was a member of Landing Ship Tank Number 523 (LST-523) off the coast of Normandy, France, on June 19, 1944. The ship struck an underwater mine and sank, killing Pieper. Pieper's twin brother, Radioman 2nd Class Ludwig J. Pieper, was also killed in the attack, but his remains were recovered after the incident and buried at the Normandy American Cemetery in France. Interment services are pending. [Read about Pieper.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Ollie E. Shepard** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st 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. Shepard was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 3, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shepard.](#)

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](mailto:yfwac@vfw.org).