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1. VFW Remembers 9/11: The 18th anniversary of the terrorist attacks that changed America forever was marked Wednesday by VFW Posts across the nation and world. For most, the memories of what happened are still as vivid and raw as they were then, but the heroism that emerged from the rubble of ground zero, the Pentagon, and in the air above a rural Pennsylvania field, should inspire Americans for generations to come as they remember 9/11 and the near 3,000 innocent lives lost – working at their desks, fighting their attackers in the air, or as emergency responders answering a call unlike any since Pearl Harbor. The VFW hopes all Americans paused and remembered those we lost and those who continue to sacrifice in the defense of freedom.

2. VFW Statement on New Southern Border Initiative: The Defense Department [announced plans](#) last week to divert \$3.6 billion in military construction funds to build or replace 175 miles of southern border fencing. The reprogramming will significantly delay the start or completion of 127 military construction projects, half of which are overseas. The VFW is monitoring the issue closely, as its senior leaders are well attuned to the housing and associated quality of life construction project needs of the military community, to include the impact that the decision may have on some 3,000 active-duty military personnel and 2,000 National Guardsmen currently deployed to the southern border in support of Department of Homeland Security officials. In a statement, VFW National Commander William J. “Doc” Schmitz said, “The VFW is concerned by the administration’s decision to target projects that directly impact the quality of life of our servicemen and women. We understand that hard decisions must be made to protect our citizens, but redirecting military quality of life program funding impacts morale – and in the military, morale means everything. We look forward to a serious discussion in Washington about how best to support two federal departments who share the ultimate mission of protecting the sovereignty of our nation and her citizens.” [Read more.](#)

3. VFW Statement on *Wolfe v. Wilkie*: The VFW is applauding the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, who in a 2-1 decision Monday, correctly ruled for the plaintiffs in [Wolfe v.](#)

[Wilkie](#). The class action lawsuit was the result of the Department of Veterans Affairs failing to fully reimburse veterans for the emergency room care they received from non-VA facilities, an issue the VFW had thought solved in 2016 when the same court ruled in favor of *Staab v. Shulkin*. But a [report released last month](#) by the VA Office of Inspector General found that the non-VA emergency room claims of some 17,400 veterans were denied or rejected primarily due to a VA work culture that favored speed over accuracy, a number that accounts for nearly a third of the 60,800 claims examined during the IG's six-month nationwide audit in 2017. "The first thing the VA tells people to do when calling is to hang up and dial 911 if it's an emergency," said VFW National Commander William J. "Doc" Schmitz. "So the VA must reimburse the actual cost of emergency medical care, regardless of whether the veteran has secondary insurance or not," he said. "VA Secretary Robert Wilkie must make these veterans financially whole again, correct its policies and practices regarding non-VA emergency room billing immediately, and fully adopt the IG report's 11 recommendations to improve the accuracy of the non-VA emergency room claims processing."

4. VFW Fall Legislative Conference: This past week, VFW National Legislative Committee members from nearly every state convened in Washington, D.C. to meet with their members of Congress and advocate for the VFW's [2019 Legislative Priority Goals](#). Committee members were focused on the elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset, which is currently in the House version of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020*. Committee members also focused their efforts on gaining support for health care for veterans, especially those who served near burn pits, removing the 12-year limit on utilizing the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program, women veteran health care, and transition assistance.

5. A Day to Change Direction: Tomorrow, Sept. 14, 2019, will be the Fourth Annual [A Day to Change Direction](#). The VFW and [Give An Hour](#) will be teaming up again for a national day of service and action to change the dialogue on mental health for veterans and their communities. VFW Posts across the country will be hosting events for this day. They hope to educate their communities on the [Five Signs of Emotional Suffering](#) and [Healthy Habits of Emotional Well-being](#). The VFW wants to use this opportunity to encourage everyone to check in with themselves as well as others in their communities. [Make a pledge](#) to participate in A Day to Change Direction.

6. Senate Passes Veterans COLA and TSA Pre-Check Bills: Yesterday, the Senate passed the VFW-supported [H.R. 1200](#), *Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019*, which would authorize a cost-of-living increase for certain VA benefits, equal to the same increase granted for Social Security benefits. H.R. 1200 was passed by the House earlier this year and now heads to the president's desk. The Senate also passed [S. 1881](#), *Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act*, which would make Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Pre✓[®] available for certain severely disabled veterans at no cost. TSA Pre✓[®] is already offered to active duty, reserves, and National Guard service members at no cost. S. 1881 now heads to the House.

7. Senate Confirms Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs: With an 81-11 vote, the Senate has confirmed VFW member and Marine Corps veteran James Byrne as Deputy Secretary of

Veterans Affairs. Byrne has more than 20 years of public service experience, including service as a deployed Marine infantry officer and a U.S. Department of Justice international narcotics prosecutor. [Watch his confirmation hearing](#), which starts at the 18:30 mark.

8. Defense Leadership Changes: On Thursday, the Senate Committee on Armed Services held a joint confirmation hearing for the Honorable [Ryan D. McCarthy](#) to be the 24th Secretary of the Army and for the Honorable [Barbara M. Barrett](#) to be the 25th Secretary of the U.S. Air Force. Both are avid supporters of the National Defense Strategy and will continue to ensure that soldiers and their families have the resources they need to guarantee quality health care and safe housing. Ryan McCarthy is a U.S. Army Ranger and combat veteran who served in the 75th Ranger Regiment from 1997 to 2002 and was the 33rd Under Secretary of the Army. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from Virginia Military Institute and a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Maryland Robert H. Smith School of Business. Barbara Barrett is a pilot, former ambassador to Finland, and served as a member of the Aerospace Corporation's Board of Trustees. She also was a senior advisor to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, CEO of the American Management Association, deputy administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, and vice chairman of the U.S. Civil Aeronautics Board. She earned a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and a law degree from Arizona State University. [Watch their confirmation hearing](#), which starts at the 16:00 mark.

9. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of seven servicemen who were formerly missing and unaccounted-for from World War II and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Lawrence E. Woods**, of Texas, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Woods](#).

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class James C. Webb**, of Oklahoma, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Webb](#).

-- **Navy Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Arnold M. Nielsen**, of California, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Nielsen](#).

-- **Navy Chief Water Tender Francis D. Day**, of New Jersey, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Day](#).

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. R.L. Tyler**, of Texas, was a member of Headquarters Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group, when taken prisoner after the fall of Bataan in the Philippines on April 9, 1942. He reportedly died July 18-19, 1942, and was buried in a common grave at the Cabanatuan prisoner of war camp. [Read about Tyler](#).

-- **Army Cpl. Joe T. Avant**, of Mississippi, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, 31st Regimental Combat Team, engaged in intense

fighting near the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. He was reported missing and unaccounted-for on Nov. 30, 1950. [Read about Avant.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Autrey J. Betar**, of Texas, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, 31st Regimental Combat Team, engaged in intense fighting near the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. He was reported missing and unaccounted-for on Dec. 2, 1950. [Read about Betar.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <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.

To view this week's and previous editions, visit: <http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>.