

VFW WASHINGTON WEEKLY
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1. NDAA Update: Late Thursday night, the Senate passed their version of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2012. A key development included Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) withdrawing an amendment to allow TRICARE to increase annual rates by the rate of medical inflation -- a drastic change in current policy that would have encouraged disproportionate cost-shifting to beneficiaries. The Senate-passed bill must now be reconciled with the House version before it can be sent to the President for his signature. VFW will continue to advocate for military personnel and retirees as the House/Senate Conference makes its final decisions. For more on the NDAA and our views on its passage visit the VFW blog at: <http://www.vfwonthehill.org/2011/12/vfw-protects-tricare-recipients-as.html>

2. TRICARE Data Breach: Pentagon contractor SAIC lost backup data tapes that contained personal information on almost 4.9 million TRICARE patients who were treated at San Antonio military facilities going back to 1992. TRICARE officials said the tapes included Social Security numbers, addresses, birth dates and some health information, but no credit card or bank account numbers. TRICARE believes the risk of compromise to be low due to the sophistication of the software, but as a precaution, SAIC will provide one year of credit monitoring and restoration services to patients who express concern about their credit. Concerned patients can call the SAIC Incident Response Call Center toll-free at 855-366-0140, or international callers can call collect to 952-556-8312. The call center is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Eastern). Read more at <http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/news.aspx?fid=738>.

3. TSGLI Now Covers Genitourinary Injuries: Service members who suffer severe injuries to the genitourinary organs are now eligible for Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection, or TSGLI. TSGLI provides a one-time payment of up to \$100,000 to service members who sustain certain severe traumatic injuries resulting in a range of losses, including amputations; limb salvage; paralysis; burns; loss of sight, and other traumatic losses. Genitourinary injuries were added because military doctors reported seeing an increase in these types of injuries due to the proliferation of improvised explosive devices. The first payments for genitourinary losses are being made today, and the eligibility is retroactive to injuries incurred on or after Oct. 7, 2001. The VFW was the lone veterans' service organization to back TSGLI legislation back in 2005, when it went from bill to law in 28 days. For more information, go to <http://www.insurance.va.gov/sgliSite/TSGLI/TSGLI.htm>.

4. Veteran/Military Bills Passed: Several VFW-supported bills cleared the House and Senate

this week. They include:

* S. 1025 would allow the National Guard Bureau Chief to serve as a full voting member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The bill passed as standalone legislation and was inserted into the Senate NDAA. Its passage would accomplish VFW Resolution #435.

* H.R. 2192 would extend bankruptcy exemptions for members of the National Guard and Reserve.

* H.R. 1801 would require the Transportation Security Administration to develop expedited screening procedures for military members traveling in uniform or on special orders. It would also allow family members to obtain passes to accompany their loved ones all the way to their departure gate, or to meet them upon their arrival.

For more on any of the bills type the bill number in the search box at:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>

5. Senate VA Committee Discusses Mental Health Programs: The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing this week on VA mental health programs. Witnesses were asked to comment on data collected from a survey of mental health providers that showed wide discrepancies in wait times for care at VA facilities across the country. The survey reported that 70 percent of providers said they did not have adequate staff or space to meet the mental health care needs of veterans. Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D-WA) questioned top VA mental health officials on causes and efforts to address this problem. For testimony or the recorded webcast of the hearing, visit the Senate VA Committee website at: <http://veterans.senate.gov/>.

6. House Discusses Veteran Contracting Shortfalls: The VFW was on hand this week as the House VA Subcommittees on Oversight & Investigations and Economic Opportunity held a joint hearing to review VA's Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business, or SDVOSB, certification process. During the hearing, GAO representatives testified about investigating companies for fraudulently posing as SDVOSBs to attain government contracts. Many at the hearing expressed views that VA is falling short in their efforts to ensure veteran business owners receive the opportunities to which they are entitled. VFW will continue to work with the House VA subcommittee on ways to ensure veteran entrepreneurs receive those opportunities. For more about the hearing, go to www.veterans.house.gov. For the GAO Report, go to <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-205T>.

7. TRICARE Young Adult Enrollment: Eligible dependents can now enroll in TRICARE Young Adult (TYA), with coverage beginning Jan. 1. TYA will provide beneficiaries TRICARE Prime coverage for a monthly premium of \$201 per dependent under age 26, who is unmarried and not eligible for any employer-sponsored health care coverage. For more information about TYA or the other nine TRICARE programs, go to: <http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/overview/LearnAboutPlansAndCosts/TRICAREYoungAdult>.

8. Five MIAs Return Home: The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of remains belonging to four airmen and one soldier who had been missing in action from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Returned are:

* Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. John J. Bono, 28, of Denver. On Sept. 13, 1944, Bono and eight other crewmembers were on a B-17G Flying Fortress that crashed near Neustaedt-on-the-Werra,

Germany. Only one crewman successfully parachuted out of the aircraft before it crashed.

* Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Stephen L. Pascal, 20, of Hollywood, Calif. On April 7, 1945, Pascal was flying a photo reconnaissance mission between Gottingen and Alfeld, Germany, when his P-38 Lightning aircraft went missing.

* Army Cpl. Theodore A. Reynolds, 19, of Syracuse, N.Y. In November 1950, Reynolds, who was serving in the Company B, 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion attached to the 8th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division, went missing during a battle near Unsan, North Korea.

* Army Lt. Col. Glenn McElroy, 35, of Sidney, Ill., and Capt. John M. Nash, 28, of Tipton, Ind. On March 15, 1966, the men were flying an OV-1A Mohawk aircraft that failed to return from a reconnaissance mission over southern Laos in Savannakhet Province.