

**VFW Washington Weekly**  
**July 16, 2010**

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**1. Rules Ease for PTSD Claims:** Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki announced Monday that the VA will no longer require corroboration of a PTSD stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, if a VA doctor confirms a diagnosis of PTSD and the stressful experience recalled by the veteran adequately supports that diagnosis. The VFW believes this decision will enable more veterans to seek the care that they deserve and have earned. "To no longer require veterans to relive their nightmares in great detail is a very positive step forward for veterans of all generations," said VFW National Commander Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., "and we hope the VA will also begin honoring PTSD diagnoses by civilian mental health professionals as this new regulation moves forward." Read the VFW press release at <http://www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=news.newsDtl&did=5534>.

**2. Military Commission Guilty Plea:** The Defense Department announced that Ibrahim Ahmed Mahmoud al Qosi pled guilty earlier this month to providing material support for terrorism and to conspiracy. The plea was at a military commission hearing at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. His sentence will be determined in August. Military commissions have historically been used to prosecute enemy combatants who violate the laws of war, yet those at Guantanamo have been stalled for years by legal challenges and changes to the rules for prosecuting prisoners. The detention facility currently holds 181 prisoners. U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder designated al Qosi, from the Sudan, as one of only a handful of detainees who would face trial before a military commission instead of a civilian court. The next detainee scheduled is Omar Khadr, a Canadian accused of killing an American soldier with a grenade. Since 9/11, only four detainees (excluding al Qosi) have been prosecuted by military commission, whereas hundreds have been brought to trial before civilian courts.

**3. Senate Reviews Disability Claims Process:** Senate VA Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-HI) held a hearing Wednesday to discuss S. 3517, The Claims Processing Improvement Act of 2010, and the VA disability claims process. In joint testimony, the four VSO coauthors of the Independent Budget --- AMVETS, DAV, PVA and VFW --- discussed areas in the legislation that we believe would not benefit veterans, especially a proposed pilot program for evaluating orthopedic conditions that could result in veterans receiving different levels of compensation for identical disabilities. The VFW has long opposed creating separate classes of veterans and continues to do so now. Other sections of the bill also presented problems, which were discussed in the Independent Budget testimony, this along with a video recording of the hearing can be viewed on the Senate VA Committee website at <http://veterans.senate.gov/>.

**4. House VA Committee Hearings:**

\* **Wednesday** -- The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing to discuss VA's suicide prevention outreach efforts. A mother of a veteran who recently committed suicide spoke about the devastation of losing her son. She testified about her concerns with the stigma of receiving mental health care, and suggested VA partner with civilian organizations on this issue, and invest in a large media campaign. Committee members all agreed that they must work together with VA and other stakeholders to ensure any struggling veteran gets the help they deserve.

\* **Thursday** -- The Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity approved five bills designed to expand training and education for those returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. VFW-

supported bills included:

- HR 929 which would authorize \$10 million annually through FY 2016 for programs developed jointly by VA and the Labor Department to help eligible veterans' gain critical skills for the current job market.
- HR 5360, the Blinded Veterans Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2010, would update the standard of visual acuity required for eligibility for specially adapted housing assistance provided through the VA. It would also increase from \$12,000 to \$13,756 funds available for those disabled veterans living temporarily in a home owned by a family member.
- HR 5484 would establish an annual VA award program to recognize businesses for their contributions to veterans' employment.

For more information on any of the hearing visit the House VA website at:

<http://veterans.house.gov/>

**5. Help VFW Win the Pepsi Refresh Grant:** The VFW Foundation received a second opportunity to try to win a \$250,000 grant through the "Return the Favor" contest by Pepsi Refresh Grants. You can vote for the entire month of July by going to <http://www.refresheverything.com/ReturnTheFavor>. Your vote will help VFW provide financial assistance to military families in need. The grant will enable VFW help thousands of military families through emergency financial situations, fund military unit "homecoming" and "sendoff" events, and help allow free phone calls to troops in the field to their loved ones at home. The \$250,000 grant will go a long ways towards helping the Foundation continue providing these free programs for our servicemembers and their families. Please "Return the Favor" and vote for the VFW, and encourage your friends, family and neighbors to do so, too. Remember we need your vote to win!

**6. Video Sought of Great Americans:** Matt Daniels, founder of the website Great Americans, is seeking video to post online to recognize the service and sacrifice of military, firefighters, police, first responders and medical professionals, as well as NASA, homeland security and other Americans who have been documented on video doing extraordinary deeds. He is also seeking stories on the ripple effect that often occurs to all parties involved in such lifechanging moments. Go to [www.greatamericans.com](http://www.greatamericans.com) to view previous stories and for information on how to submit.