

VFW Washington Weekly
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1. Stop-Loss Vets to Lose Retroactive Payments: Approximately 145,000 servicemembers who were stop-lossed between September 2001 and September 2008 are eligible to receive \$500 for every month they were kept beyond their initial separation date. The problem is only about 20 percent, or 30,000 claims, have been paid, and the program ends Oct. 21. The VFW is asking its members, Posts and friends to spread the word. For more information about the program and to apply for retroactive stop-loss pay, go to www.defense.gov/stoploss.

2. VA to Investigate Life Insurance Practices: The VA is investigating what may be a legal yet shameful life insurance industry practice of putting veterans' death benefits into corporate accounts instead of making lump sum payments to survivors. Prudential Financial Inc. and MetLife Inc. are among the companies to be investigated, according to Bloomberg Markets magazine. Another industry practice to be investigated is the payment of uncompetitive interest rates to survivors. In 2008, for example, Prudential paid survivors 1 percent interest on their accounts, while it earned a 4.8 percent return on its corporate funds, according to Bloomberg. Such accounts are not FDIC protected. House VA Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) said he was "outraged" that insurance practices appear to result in "corporations retaining the assets in corporate accounts, profiting from the interest, and failing to pass accrued interest to surviving families."

3. Arlington National Cemetery Hearing: Senate Homeland Security Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight Chairwoman Claire McCaskill (D-MO) used in her opening statement parts of VFW-submitted testimony to describe the mismanagement of Arlington National Cemetery as "a national disgrace." Witnesses included the former cemetery superintendent and his deputy, as well as two civilian deputy assistant secretaries of the Army and the newly-appointed director of Army National Cemeteries. The intent of the hearing was to uncover potential fraud, waste and abuse in the cemetery's failed effort to electronically upgrade its paper-based burial filing system. The Army Inspector General revealed in June that \$5.5 million had been spent on numerous IT projects that never materialized. At the hearing, it was mentioned that the amount spent may have exceeded \$8 million, and that the number of unmarked or improperly marked gravesites could number upwards of 6,000. The IG report disclosed only 211 known sites. In testimony submitted for the record, the VFW said failure at Arlington National Cemetery does not rest solely on the shoulders of the former superintendent and his deputy, both of whom retired earlier this month. The failure was allowed to occur by a hands-off attitude by those more senior in the chain-of-command, who may have regarded their oversight responsibility more as an additional duty than a primary mission. To view video of the hearing and read witness testimonies, go to http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_id=cc2f65d4-3908-4934-aba3-9c559c8d0822.

4. VA Funding Clears House: By a vote of 411-6, the House placed its stamp of approval on \$141.1 billion in funding for FY 2011 Military Construction and VA programs. Included in the bill were funding increases to help pay new medical claims for the three new presumptions added to the list of illnesses associated with Agent Orange exposure-B-cell leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease-among many other improvements. The Senate has yet to complete final action on its version of the spending bill. Some of the VFW-supported programs in the bill include:

- \$50.6 billion in advance appropriations for FY 2012
- \$18.7 billion for military construction, which includes family housing and base realignment and closure programs
- \$5.2 billion for mental health services
- \$4.2 billion for homeless veterans programs
- \$2.6 billion to hire and train more than 4,000 additional claims processors
- \$590 million for medical research
- \$250 million for improved access to veterans in rural areas

For more provisions, visit the House Appropriations Committee website at <http://appropriations.house.gov/>

5. House VA Committee Hearings:

- **Tuesday** - The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing on Gulf War Illness. Some 300,000 veterans have sought care at VA for illnesses related to Gulf War service. Witnesses discussed the difficulties in getting diagnosed correctly and linking their symptoms to service. Committee members agreed that more research and studies on cause and effect need to be funded through VA. VA officials testified to what they called a "causal" link to many of the symptoms exhibited by those serving in the Gulf War Theater. Subcommittee Chairman Harry Mitchell (D-AZ) emphasized that VA needs to take action now to implement a plan and provide answers to all Gulf War veterans suffering from undiagnosed illness.
- **Thursday** - The Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing on licensure and credentialing. The VFW presented testimony to recommend exploring how military skills and certifications can be applied to industry licensing requirements. The goal would be to break down barriers to employment for veterans, and help them find meaningful careers.

For more information on any of the hearing visit the House VA Committee website at <http://veterans.house.gov/>.

6. Help VFW Win the Pepsi Refresh Grant: There are only two days left to cast your vote for the VFW Foundation in their bid to receive a \$250,000 grant through the "Return the Favor" contest by Pepsi Refresh Grants. You can vote today and tomorrow by going to <http://www.refresheverything.com/ReturnTheFatoday>. 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!