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1. Senate Hearing on Electronic Health Care Records: On Wednesday, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs held a hearing to discuss progress on the exchange of health care record data between VA and DOD. Subcommittee members were concerned that the data currently exchanged is not presented in a way doctors are able to use. VA and DOD estimate that they will achieve complete interoperability by the end of Fiscal Year 2018. To view a video of the hearing, visit: <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/hearings/hearing-to-review-the-va-electronic-health-record-network-vista>.

2. House Committee Holds TBI Hearing: On Wednesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a hearing on inadequate examinations for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) claims. In 2008, VA issued a directive stating that any veteran who files a disability claim for TBI, and who hadn't been previously diagnosed with TBI, must have the initial examination performed by either a psychiatrist, physiatrist, neurologist or neurosurgeon. A later report found that 24,000 veterans' initial exams did not meet the directive's guidelines. On May 16, 2016, VA sent letters to all affected veterans, giving them one year to contact VA for reexamination. Hearing participants discussed what caused the failures and whether or not the single letter is sufficient notification to these veterans. To watch the full hearing, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qyes33Dpch4>. The hearing starts at the 28:47 mark.

3. Flurry of Activity as Congress Leaves for Long Recess: This week, Congress advanced a number of veterans' bills before leaving town for a seven-week break. Congress passed H.R. 5588, the *Veterans' Compensation COLA Act of 2016*, which authorizes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for veteran benefits tied to COLA increases for Social Security. The Social Security Administration typically announces COLA changes in October. Congress also passed S. 524, the *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016*, which aims to address the abuse of opioids

throughout the country. S. 524 includes a number of provisions to curb the use of opioids to treat veterans with chronic pain and mental health conditions. It will also establish an Office of Patient Advocacy, which will oversee local medical facility patient advocates to ensure they fulfill their duties. Both bills await the president's signature.

The Senate also passed S. 1555, the *Filipino Veterans of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2015*, which recognizes Filipino veterans for their support of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. However, the Senate failed to act on S. 2921, the *Veterans First Act*, which would expand caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras, increase accountability of VA employees, and make needed improvements to the Choice Program. The *Veterans First Act*, which the VFW supports, failed to pass due to a disagreement on how to offset the cost of the bill.

4. VFW and SVA Launch 2017 Legislative Fellowship Program: The application process for the 2017 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship opened on Thursday. First held in 2015, the program mentors 10 student veterans as they research policy areas affecting veterans and the military. Once their research is completed, the fellows will advocate for legislative and regulatory fixes related to their selected issues. Part of that advocacy includes attending the VFW's National Legislative Conference in March where fellows will join more than 500 VFW members in promoting the VFW's legislative agenda by meeting with members of Congress. Last year, fellows also briefed staffers from the White House and both the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees. The program, with all travel expenses covered, is for VFW members who attend a college or university with a Student Veterans of America chapter. For more information, including the topics for research and the application link, click here: <http://www.vfw.org/studentfellowship/>.

5. U.S. to Keep 8,400 Troops in Afghanistan: The president announced this week that 8,400 U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan through next January. He had planned to reduce the number of Americans from the current 9,800 to 5,500 by the end of 2016. He said their mission will remain the same—to train and advise Afghan forces, as well as support counterterrorism efforts. Afghanistan is still dangerous, as witnessed by the deaths of 38 Americans in the country since combat operations stopped in December 2014, Obama said, while calling the United States a leader, but just one nation among many seeking a safe and stable Afghanistan. There are 41 allies and partners working in the country, fielding more than 6,000 troops of their own, as well as Afghanistan's own security forces of more than 320,000 members. Read more at: <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/827640/obama-8400-us-troops-to-remain-in-afghanistan-through-january-2017?source=GovDelivery>.

6. Korean War Armistice Commemoration: The Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation and the Korean War Veterans Association are inviting all Korean War veterans and families to attend a commemoration in recognition of the 63rd signing of the Korean War Armistice at 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, July 27, at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. RSVP your attendance to Jim Fisher at 703-740-7596 or jrfisher1121@verizon.net.

7. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains of three soldiers who had been missing in action since the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Master Sgt. Charles J. Brown**, who died fighting in North Korea on Nov. 2, 1950. He was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment. The date and location of his burial has yet to be announced.

-- **Army Sgt. Harold L. Curtis**, 18, was declared missing in action while fighting on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea on Dec. 12, 1950. He was assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment. The date and location of his burial has yet to be announced.

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Lawrence Smith**, who died fighting in South Korea on Feb. 12, 1951. He was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment. The date and location of his burial has yet to be announced.

To sign up new veterans' advocates, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm>.