

**July 8, 2016**

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**1. Bridging the Divide:** VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy joined a panel of mental health experts at the National Press Club this week to discuss the public's perception—and employer perceptions—of military veterans transitioning back into their communities and workforce. The panel focused on the results of two surveys conducted recently by the George W. Bush Institute and the global public relations and marketing firm, Edelman. Survey results indicated 40 percent of Americans believe half of all veterans are experiencing mental health challenges, where in fact it's one in five veterans, which matches the civilian sector. Also troubling was 92 percent of employers believe veterans need access to mental health care programs, and that the great majority of Americans and employers perceive veterans as heroes, but not as strategic assets, which is a disconnect between the civilian population and those who serve, according to Duffy. "We understand that in times of war there are heroes, but just because you went to war doesn't mean that you came back a hero," he said. "By calling everybody a hero, it devalues the term, plus it puts everyone on a pedestal when you're just trying to successfully transition back into the community." Read both surveys

at: <http://www.bushcenter.org/publications/resources-reports/reports/infographic-confronting-invisible-wounds.html> and <http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2016-veterans-wellbeing-survey>.

**2. Commission on Care Releases Final Report:** On Wednesday, the Commission on

Care, created by Congress to recommend ways to improve the VA health care system, issued its final report which includes 18 recommendations on how VA delivers care to veterans, the governance and workforce of the VA health care system and which veterans are eligible for VA health care. VFW National Commander John A. Biedrzycki Jr. thanked the commission for their hard work and offered the VFW's support for most of their recommendations and expressed the VFW's concerns with one recommendation that would create another layer of bureaucracy to manage the day-to-day operations of the VA health care system. To read the VFW's press release, visit: <https://www.vfw.org/News-and-Events/Articles/2016-Articles/VFW-Statement-on-Commission-on-Care-Report/>. To read the commission's final report, visit: <https://commissiononcare.sites.usa.gov/>.

**3. VA Releases Results From Largest Veteran Suicide Study:** On Thursday, VA released preliminary findings from the country's largest study on veteran suicide. Over the past year, VA has worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Defense to gather and analyze mortality records for 55 million veterans from every state and U.S. territory, dating from 1979-2014. A study in 2010, which used data from 20 states, estimated the number of veteran deaths by suicide averaged 22 per day. The latest study estimates the number of veteran deaths by suicide averaged 20 per day in 2014. The report validates previous findings that veterans who use VA health care are at lower risk of suicide compared to veterans who do not use VA care. VA plans to release the entire study by the end of this month. The VFW is alarmed by this report's findings and will do what is necessary to ensure veterans who contemplate taking their own lives have the care and support they need to cope with their mental health care issues. To read the preliminary findings, visit: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2801>.

**4. House Votes to Protect Veterans Preference:** On Thursday, the House of Representatives approved language which would ban the use of federal funds to change hiring preference for veterans. The amendment, part of a larger appropriations bill for several federal agencies, now goes to the Senate for consideration. This ban would protect veterans from a Senate proposal that the VFW adamantly opposes which would allow veterans preference to be used only one time. To read the VFW's statement opposing the Senate bill, go to <http://www.vfw.org/News-and-Events/Articles/2016-Articles/VFW-Opposes-Veterans-Preference-Restriction/>. To see how your member of Congress voted on this amendment, go to: <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2016/roll395.xml>. Continue to follow the VFW Action Corps for more updates on this issue.

**5. Online Health Care Application:** Last week, VA launched a new and easier way for veterans to enroll in VA health care through the vets.gov website. The new

application was developed in response to concerns with the current Veterans Online Application—a fillable PDF that can only be opened with devices that can read Adobe documents. The new application is an HTML form that can be viewed with any web browser, including mobile devices. If you would like to enroll in VA health care using the new application, visit: <https://www.vets.gov/healthcare/apply/>. To learn about other ways to enroll in VA health care, visit: <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/>.

**6. Arlington National Cemetery's Future:** The VFW attended a discussion this week about the future of Arlington National Cemetery. Currently, only one percent of those eligible choose to be buried or inured at Arlington, with the rest being interred at the VA's 134 national cemeteries or in state veterans cemeteries or elsewhere. Even so, based on its current pace, Arlington will run out of space sometime between the years 2050 and 2070, a timeframe that takes into consideration the 90,000 current available spaces, the 27,000 additional spaces from its millennium project, and the 45,000 to 50,000 spaces to be gained from a southern expansion into where the Navy Annex once stood. The question the Arlington advisory committee is pondering is whether changes could or should be made to eligibility requirements to extend the cemetery's lifespan. Right now, all active-duty deaths are eligible, as well as military retirees, those with qualifying medals, and those with honorable discharges. The VFW will report more as this discussion continues.

**7. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains of Marine Corps Pvt. Robert J. Carter, 19, of Oklahoma City, who will be buried July 13 in Arlington National Cemetery. In November 1943, Carter was assigned to Company G, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Carter died on Nov. 20, 1943. Learn more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/831327/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-carter/>.