



Legislative Bulletin #4

Greetings to everyone. We have turned the corner into another year and with that brings the beginning of a new Legislation session which will last 105 days. Our elected legislators are hopefully working to maintain and protect veterans and their right to maintain what is needed for optimum health, welfare, and safety. There is so much information out right now that I couldn't possibly fit it all into this bulletin but I will share some links for those following and who are highly interested.

In keeping in step with our National Ambassador, I am going to be sharing some important information.

MAJOR LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES IN 2021: National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2021 (H.R. 6395): Congress passed the override of President Trump's veto of the NDAA on the 11th hour on December 31, 2020. It included the addition of the three presumptive diseases (bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and parkinsonism) due to exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (H.R. 7105): On January 5, 2021, President Trump signed into law this comprehensive veterans' legislation. It is the culmination of more than two years of bipartisan work, with input from our veteran service organizations, dozens of Senators and Members of the House and our partners at the VA. It combines more than 34 separate bills to address veterans' needs across a wide range of benefits and services. The enactment of this veterans' legislation package satisfies a number of VFW resolutions and legislative priorities regarding women veterans' health care, disability assistance and memorial affairs and economic opportunity issues.

SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination: This VFW-supported legislative initiative is also known as the "Widow's Tax Elimination Act." This January 2021, began the first phase of the "Phase-Out of Reduction of Survivor Benefit Plan Survivor (SBP) Annuities" as directed by last year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2020. Surviving spouse SBP annuity payments issued by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service will be reduced (offset) by no more than two-thirds of the amount of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs, rather than by the entire amount of DIC, even though eligible surviving spouses will continue to receive the full amount of DIC from the VA. In accordance to the law passed by Congress, the SBP-DIC offset will be fully eliminated on January 1, 2023.

Hopefully you took the time to fully read and understand these "victories" as many veterans can still benefit from this.

Great news! The VFW Priority Goals 2021 are officially out and I have included them because they are of the utmost importance.

2021 VFW PRIORITY GOALS: The VFW Priority Goals for 2021 were published last month! It is the overarching position paper which identifies the major policy goals of the VFW that enables us to speak in a “unified” voice for our veterans and their families to effect changes that improve their quality of life. It will help guide your discussions and correspondence with our lawmakers on Capitol Hill. The goals are broken down into six major areas that affect our veterans, service members and the security of our nation: budget; health care; disability assistance and memorial affairs; education, employment and transition assistance; military quality of life; and national security, foreign affairs and POW/MIA. Following are brief overviews of the issues included in each area:

- **BUDGET:** Congress must pass and appropriate the funds needed to take care of our veterans and defense programs. NEVER reduce veteran’s benefits to pay for another veteran’s benefits. DO NOT balance the federal budget on the backs of our veterans, service members and their families.
- **HEALTH CARE:** Improve and strengthen VA health care programs for our veterans to treat health conditions (mental health, toxic exposures, etc.) associated with injuries sustained during their service, and provide gender-specific care for women and minority veterans. Preserve the integrity of the VA healthcare and TRICARE for all veterans.
- **DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS:** Improve and streamline the implementation of the modernized appeals process, extend the Persian Gulf War disability compensation eligibility beyond 2021, add hearing loss, tinnitus, TBI and other health conditions associated with toxic exposures. Increase burial allowances to account for inflation and include spouses’ information on all head stones.
- **EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSITION ASSISTANCE:** The period of moving from active duty to civilian life can be challenging for some transitioning service members. Leaving a structured life in the military and moving to an entirely different atmosphere brings with it many difficulties. Finding a new job, moving away from base, going 3 back to school, or leaving friends and comrades are just some of the issues service members face during the military to civilian transition. Open pathways and provide support in accessing transition information and resources to re-integrate veterans into civilian life and their communities.
- **MILITARY QUALITY Of LIFE:** Military families make tremendous sacrifices for America. We owe them a debt of gratitude we can never repay for all they and their families sacrifice to serve our nation. They deserve our best efforts to provide them with quality-of-life choices. They need help dealing with stress attributable to separations and a range of war-time conditions. We must ensure that we are meeting the quality of life needs of our military and their families. However, while we can never fully compensate them for their service, there are things that we can do to improve their quality of life and lighten their load.
- **NATIONAL SECURITY, FOREIGN AFFAIRS and POW/MIA:** We must bring home our missing and fallen heroes from ALL wars to provide closure to their families. In addition, we must provide necessary funding for readiness support and training, health care and quality of life programs for our volunteer force who guards our nation and protects our precious freedoms we hold dear.

Download and print the brochure: <https://vfworg-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Advocacy/PriorityGoalsBrochure.pdf?la=en&v=1&d=20210121T151925Z>

There is still so much more information for state and national that should be followed and recognized so please check the website for additional links and information. We must also stay on top of bills introduced regarding veterans here in our state and it seems there are several we should follow. Please see the website as well for information on those. I will also add links to the WDVA or Washington Department of Veterans Affairs. As I mentioned at mid-winter, these government agencies and their funding affect ALL of our programs.

In closing, I ask that you, as a veteran's advocate, continue to move forward with your work in our organization and find creative ways to stay involved as we work through COVID, but also keeping safety your number one priority. Thank you so much!

Loyally,

Liz Herrera

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