



VFW VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

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Iraq War Ends

The Iraq War ended yesterday, but about 4,000 troops are still set to redeploy before the end of the year. More than 1.5 million American service members have served in-theater since March 2003, many of whom will carry visible and invisible scars of war for a lifetime. The end of the Iraq War fulfills a campaign promise by President Obama, but with almost 100,000 troops still stationed in Afghanistan, the war on terrorism is far from finished. This means VFW's veterans' service, legislative and grassroots troop support programs are even more important. [Read more.](#)

NDAA Conference Update

This week, House and Senate conferees agreed to provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012, or NDAA. The bill will provide \$530 billion for the Defense Department and \$115.5 billion for the war in Afghanistan and end of operations in Iraq. The VFW is staunchly against any TRICARE fee increases and was instrumental in defeating a Senate proposal to tie increases to the percentage of medical inflation, but the NDAA does include a provision to link future increases to future cost-of-living allowances. One controversial measure the VFW was happy to see dropped from the bill was the requirement to evaluate changing the current military retirement system. Other key provisions in the final bill include:

- A 1.6 percent across-the-board increase in pay, and an average 2 percent increase in housing allowances.
- Increases in incentive and imminent danger pays.
- Changes in DOD requirements for retaining Military Sexual Trauma records.
- Mental health assessments for Reserve Components during training.

- Elevating the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to a permanent member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (which accomplishes VFW Resolution #435).
- Requiring DOD to report to Congress on health risks associated with future usage of open-air burn pits.

Other VFW-supported items were stripped from the Conference Report because of House and/or Senate disagreements, including repealing the SBP/DIC offset and creating a Cold War Service Medal. [See](#) how your members voted. Get a [complete summary](#) of the NDAA conference report.

House Subcommittee Discusses VOW Act

The House VA Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held an oversight hearing on the implementation of the recently passed VOW to Hire Heroes Act. VFW was a strong supporter and was instrumental in getting the comprehensive jobs bill passed last month. Committee members remarked on the complexity of the bill and that many of the provisions will have to be collaborated between VA and the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Services. Subcommittee Chairman Marlin Stutzman (R-Ind.) told VA and DOL representatives that he will hold more hearings to examine the progress being made. So that veterans can find employment and the right career for their skills, VFW will continue to closely monitor the law and how each department administers the benefits.

Compensated Work Therapy Program Reviewed

This week, the House VA Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations reviewed VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program (CWT). CWT is part of the Vocational Rehabilitation service and is designed to provide veterans with PTSD, TBI and other head injuries with skills training, job development, placement services and employment support. Dr. Anthony Campinell, the director of the Therapeutic and Supported Employment Programs for VHA, stressed that CWT serves as a complement to other employment services available within VBA, the Department of Labor and/or state employment agencies. More than 41,000 veterans received CWT services at 187 locations in FY2011. For more information on hearings or the recorded webcast, visit the House VA committee [website](#).

VFW Helps Close USERRA Loophole

With the help and support of VFW's legislative advocates, Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) introduced a bill this week to close a loophole that exempts Transportation Security Administration officials from granting USERRA protections to their Guard and Reserve employees. When TSA was created after 9/11, Congress exempted TSA administrators from a series of labor protections, including USERRA, in an effort to quickly deploy the new homeland security force. More than 10 years after the creation of TSA, the VFW believes it is time to close this loophole to protect service members and veterans that may choose to work for TSA. [Learn more](#) about the bill.

VFW Joins CBS, Google to Film Holiday Troops Messages

This week, VFW's Washington office joined CBS and Google to film holiday messages from members of Congress to our troops. This project is part of a larger partnership between CBS, Google and the VFW. [See who stopped by](#) the VFW Washington office and [view their greetings](#).

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