

**VFW WASHINGTON WEEKLY**  
**October 7, 2011**  
**10th Anniversary of War in Afghanistan**

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**1. Afghanistan, 10 Years Later:** America's longest war started 10 years ago today to retaliate against Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network for the 9/11 attacks. A decade later, bin Laden is dead along with most of his foreign fighters, but a threat still exists from the Taliban, who ceased power in their country following the 1989 exit of the Soviet Union, and who provided a safe haven for al-Qaeda to operate. U.S. troop strength is at its highest at 98,000, though about 30,000 are scheduled to redeploy by next summer. The challenge for U.S. and coalition forces now is to continue to degrade the Taliban while helping the Afghan government to build national confidence and unity. The Pew Research Center this week released the results of a new national survey, entitled "The Military-Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era." It portrays post-9/11 veterans as proud of their service but convinced the American public has little understanding of the problems and challenges wartime service creates for military members and their families. Read the survey [here](#).

**2. House VA Committee Hearings:** The House VA Committee held two hearings this week.

- The *Subcommittee on Health* discussed the lack of coordination between the VA's Federal Recovery Coordination Program and DOD's Recovery Coordination Program when making critical decisions for seriously disabled veterans and their families. A March 2011 GAO report found that both programs seem to be operating independently, which creates confusion about roles and responsibilities. During testimony, veterans' organizations identified three areas in need of improvement: continuity of care, care coordination, and program awareness. The VFW believes that our severely wounded warriors should have the best possible care without needless duplication and failures to coordinate efforts. For the GAO report click, go to <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11250.pdf>.
- The *Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs* reviewed the progress made at Arlington National Cemetery to ensure the recommendations made by the Army IG were being followed, as it pertains to management, contracting, IT development, and recordkeeping. The Army is moving out smartly to restore Arlington's reputation. Only with Congress, the VFW will continue to monitor their progress, as well.

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

**3. Stop Loss Back Pay Deadline:** After a half dozen extensions, Oct. 21 will be the last chance to apply for Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay. The reimbursement is \$500 for each month or

partial month served in a Stop Loss status between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009. The average benefit has been more than \$3,500, but you won't get paid unless you apply. Click [here](#) for details.

**4. TRICARE Fee Increase:** Annual TRICARE Prime fees for new working-age military retirees increased by 13 percent on Oct. 1. The new single rate is \$260 and family rate is \$520. Survivors of active duty deceased sponsors and medically retired service members and their dependents are exempt from the increase, and retirees enrolled in the program before Oct. 1 will not pay the new rate until next year Oct. 1, 2012. More "modest annual increases" are planned in the future, said a Pentagon spokeswoman.

**5. One Million Thanks Yous:** From the first shots of the Revolutionary War to the men and women serving today, the nation owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to our veterans. Join the National WWII Museum in New Orleans this Veterans Day to raise one million voices to say "*Thank you for my freedom.*" Click [here](#) for details.

**6. Four Korea, Vietnam MIAs Recovered:** The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of remains of four soldiers lost during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. They are:

- Army Cpl. Edward M. Pedregon of El Paso, Texas. In late November 1950, Pedregon and his Heavy Mortar Company of the 31<sup>st</sup> Regimental Combat Team were overrun by Chinese forces near the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. Pedregon was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950. Read more [here](#).
- Army Master Sgt. Charles V. Newton of Canadian, Texas; Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Douglas E. Dahill of Lima, Ohio; and Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Charles F. Prevedel of St. Louis, Mo.. On April 17, 1969, the men and three Vietnamese soldiers were on a long-range reconnaissance patrol when they were ambushed near the Laotian border. Search and rescue teams reached the site the next day but over the next week found no signs of the men. Read more [here](#).