Fixing the VA Tops VFW Legislative Agenda

House VA chairman to receive Congressional Award, Fox News reporter to receive Media Award

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WASHINGTON — More than 500 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. are arriving in the nation's capital this weekend to urge their members of Congress to transform the Department of Veterans Affairs so that it can more efficiently and effectively serve America's veterans.

"The Phoenix crisis proved that maintaining the status quo is not an option," said VFW National Commander John A. Biedrzycki Jr. "The VFW remains fully committed to working with Congress and the VA to change the way VA delivers health care, to include finding the best way to leverage what the VA provides with what public or private practitioners out in the community can offer, with the end goal being the delivery of the highest quality integrated care so that no veterans are ever stranded in line again."

Biedrzycki, who discussed some of his organization's issues and concerns with President Obama on Wednesday, is scheduled to present the VFW's legislative positions at 10 a.m., Wednesday, in testimony before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees in room G-50 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building. That evening he will also present House VA Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) with the VFW's 2016 Congressional Award, and Fox News national security correspondent Jennifer Griffin with the VFW's 2016 News Media Award.

The VFW Congressional Award has been presented annually since 1964 to one sitting member of the House or Senate for significant legislative contributions on behalf of those who have worn the uniform. Chairman Miller was selected because he is holding the VA to task, while ensuring it is properly resourced. "The VFW has no doubt that under his leadership, the House Veterans Affairs Committee will continue to do what's right, to ask

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the tough questions, and to demand that the VA do what it was created to do — and that's to properly care for America's veterans," said the VFW national commander.

The VFW News Media Award has been presented annually since 1978 to an individual or organization for their outstanding contributions to help America better understand its institutions and way of life. Ms. Griffin is an established reporter with solid overseas credentials covering issues ranging from apartheid in South Africa to Middle Eastern affairs in Jerusalem. Since her arrival at the Pentagon in 2007, "she has helped to explain the department's challenges and concerns in terms America can understand," said Biedrzycki, "from our military's fight against enemies abroad to their budget battles here at home."

Other legislative conference highlights include:

- Hosting a Wounded Warrior Dinner tonight for wounded troops and their families from the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at nearby Bethesda, Md.
- Awarding a $30,000 scholarship Monday evening at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Va., to the winner of the annual VFW Voice of Democracy program, a patriotic-themed contest that this year judged nearly 36,000 high school student entries. The winner will be joined onstage by Shane Indigo Stafford, a 12-year-old 6th grader from the Journey Education School in Las Vegas, who bested more than 130,000 other middle school students to win a $5,000 scholarship in the VFW's annual Patriot's Pen contest.
- The second annual VFW-Student Veterans of America Legislative Fellowship Program. The 10 selected Fellows will be paired with a VFW mentor and accompany their respective VFW state delegations around Capitol Hill for in-person meetings with their members of Congress and their staffs. The student veterans will also receive briefings from the VA Department of Labor on ongoing policy initiatives, as well as briefings on ways to work constructively with the media when advocating for veterans' policy initiatives. The 10 selected Fellows for the Class of 2016 are: Michael Aavang, Marine Corps veteran, Hillsdale College, Mich.; Robert Davis, Navy veteran, North Lake College, Texas; Stephen Hudson, Marine Corps veteran, Southeast Missouri State University; Paulo Iparraguirre, Navy veteran, California State University Northridge; Robert Janice, Marine Corps veteran, Arizona State University; Rebekah Lloyd, Army veteran, Regent University, Va.; Deanna Parker, Marine Corps veteran, Marywood University, Pa.; Charles Pegg, Army veteran, University of North Dakota; Daniel Snedden, Army veteran, North Carolina State University; and Benjamin Wocken, Air Force veteran, University of Missouri-Columbia.

The VFW will stream live video of the 2016 Voice of Democracy Parade of Winners beginning at 6 p.m. (EST), Monday, and video of the VFW national commander's congressional testimony will begin streaming Wednesday at 2 p.m. (EST). Visit http:http://www.vfw.org/VFWDC2016 to access the stream directly or use the "on-demand"

feature to watch at any time. Veterans and supporters can also follow the VFW on the web at www.vfw.org, as well as on social media. Look for **#VFWDC2016** on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.